

**“Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage”:  
Byron’s Worldliness and  
His Reconstitution of Self-identity**



《哈羅德騎士遊記》：

拜倫之世界性與其自我身分之重構



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Soli Deo Gloria.

My gratitude goes to my parents, my wife, and Wenzao Ursuline University of Languages.

Soli Deo Gloria.



## Abstract

Inspired by Edward Said's arguments about "worldliness" and "exile," I attempt to explore Byron's worldliness and his reconstitutions of his self-identity in "Childe Harold's Pilgrimage." The poet portrays the hero as his alter ego, an exile of being "nomadic, decentered, and contrapuntal" (Said, *Reflections*). His wandering nourishes his "worldliness": for Said, this refers to an awareness of one's relationship with others. My discussion focuses on the poet's reconstitutions of his self-identity in the following "contexts": Chapter Two deals with the significance of Byron's/Harold's selfhood as an exile; Chapter Three, the representation, destruction, and subsistence of culture under the impact of imperialism; Chapter Four, Byron's criticism of the vanity of imperialists and his ambiguous views on imperialism; Chapter Five, Byron's incorporation of Lucretian nature and Wordsworthian nature; Chapter Six, the inconclusive ending of the poet's reconstitution of self. In short, I intend to examine the SCENE—Self, Culture, Empire, Nature, and Ending—that involves Byron's self-reconstitution and his worldview. Byron's explorations of culture, empires, nature means his construction of his self-image simultaneously; his worldliness guides his understandings of himself and of these "contexts."

Keywords: George Gordon Byron, Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, Edward Said, exile, worldliness

## 中文摘要

本書根據薩依德 (Edward Said) 所提「世界性」(worldliness) 與「流亡」(exile) 等概念，探討拜倫在《哈羅德騎士遊記》(Childe Harold's Pilgrimage) 中之「世界性」與其自我身分之重構。詩人將主角描繪成「另一自我」(alter ego)，按薩依德說法，是具有「遊牧性」(nomadic)、「去中心性」(decentered)、「對位性」(contrapuntal) 之流亡人士。其飄泊人生，滋長其「世界性」：以薩依德觀點，這是人對自身與他人關連性之覺察。本書討論詩人自我身分之重構，聚焦在下列「情境」(contexts)：第二章討論拜倫身為流亡者之意義；第三章處理在帝國主義衝擊下，文化之表現、毀滅、及存續的問題；第四章思索拜倫對帝國主義之批判、及其對帝國主義之曖昧態度；第五章詮釋拜倫對「自然」的獨特觀點，因詩人融合了「陸奎提烏思」(Lucretius) 與「華滋華斯」(William Wordsworth) 兩方特色；第六章點出詩人自我重構之「未完成性」。簡言之，本書檢視拜倫重構自我及其世界觀的幾個面向：自我 (self)、文化 (culture)、帝國 (empire)、自然 (nature)、結尾 (ending)，英文頭字語為 SCENE。拜倫對文化、帝國、自然的探求，同時也是他對自我形象的建構；其「世界性」引導他理解「自我」與這些「情境」。

關鍵詞：拜倫、《哈羅德騎士遊記》、薩依德、流亡、世界性

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# Chapter One

## Introduction

No doubt, if I had wished to pay my court

To critics, or to hail the setting sun

Of Tyranny of all kinds, my concision

Were more—but I was born for opposition.

(Byron, “Don Juan” 15.22.173-76)

“Ironic” is not a bad word to use along with “oppositional.”

For in the main . . . criticism must think of itself as life-enhancing and constitutively opposed to every form of tyranny, domination, and abuse; its social goals are non-coercive knowledge produced in the interests of human freedom.

(Said, *The World, the Text, and the Critic* 29)

### I. Byron’s artistry and its impact

#### A. Byron the poet as a critic: The cultivation of his “oppositional” capacity through sufferings in exile

Exile maddened Byron to poetry—to be precise, to ironic criticism in poetic forms. Circumstances molded his character as oppositional, and then this oppositional inclination guided his creativity (Swinburne 798). The quotation from “Don Juan” presents his playfully paradoxical penchant toward himself and others. The subjunctive mood (“had wished”) insinuates his detest of critics, but the poet himself often criticized ancients and contemporaries. In his early poetry, he recognizes that



“[t]he royal vices of our age demand / A keener weapon, and a mightier hand,” and that “Fools are my theme, let Satire be my song” (“English Bards” 39-40; 6)—this anticipates his later poetic style. He denounces inimical critics: they crush “the hopes of youth,” deceive the readers, merely condemn trivial errors, ignore “Truth and Sense,” and “dare not call their words their own” (“To a Knot of Ungenerous Critics” 7, 14-20, 69-70, 83, 84). Such a critic curses without reading the works and holds “scandal” as “his trade” (“Soliloquy of a Bard” 48-50). He cultivated his artistry under severe, hostile criticisms. His oppositional voice grew from his obsession with personal sufferings, and he even felt proud of this satirical talent in his mature years.

Among the major English arch-romantic poets, Byron exposes his selfhood most blatantly. He exiled himself from his homeland because of the social criticism of his incestuous relationship with his half-sister Augusta Leigh, feeling himself “socially not of their society” (Russell). Modeled on the poet himself, the wandering Byronic heroes—Childe Harold, the Giaour, Lara, Alp in “The Siege of Corinth,” Conrad in “Corsair,” Cain, Mazeppa, and Don Juan—are all “fatal and fated in sufferings” (“Manfred” 2.2.36) because of the bitter memory of their indelible sin; each survives with stoic endurance (Landsdown 88) as “a stranger in this breathing world” and longs “to separate / Himself from all who shared his mortal state” (“Lara” 1.315; 347-48). Childe Harold can represent Byron and all Byronic heroes: cursed with “many a retrospection” (1.866),<sup>1</sup> he bears “secret woe” (1.841), the “settled, ceaseless gloom / The fabled Hebrew Wanderer bore” (1.853-54); as an exile, he cannot flee from himself (1.857), whereas his only solace is to know that he has “experienced the worst” (1.868). The heroes’ relationship with their homelands—always disconnected, distorted, or shattered—is never restored though they do not necessarily remain hostile to humanity.

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<sup>1</sup> All quotations from Byron in this book, if the source is not specifically marked, are all taken from “Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage.”

Manfred acknowledges: “Grief should be the Instructor of the wise; / Sorrow is Knowledge” (1.1.9-10). A sufferer naturally intends to alleviate his/her pain as he gains more “knowledge,” while satire serves as a mode for Byron to pour out his injured feelings or to attack oppression.

Nourished in long-term sufferings, Byron’s oppositional voice is directed toward “[t]yranny of all kinds”: he believes that tyranny is declining like “the setting sun.” The statement that “my concision / Were more” appears mocking and tricky because his criticism often floods in his poetry. His “criticism of the government of the world . . . takes the form of Titanic cosmic self-assertion” (Russell): this is the Byronic style of the “overflow of feelings.” With this voice, Byron the critic may come to the fore more frequently and impressively than Byron the poet. History in his eyes describes only the accumulation of wealth under the reign of tyranny (4.968-71). Tyranny amounts to “the worst of treasons” (“The Two Foscari” 2.387-88), and evils “produce ten thousand tyrants / Whose delegated cruelty surpasses / The worst acts of one energetic master” (“Sardanapalus” 1.70-72). He would fight for Ireland because this country has sunk “by misfortune and tyranny” (“The Irish Avatar” 102). In “The Vision of Judgment,” he attacks the “crowning carnage, Waterloo” (38) and understates the death of George III, who “shielded tyrants” (59): “He died! his death made no great stir on earth” (65). In “Don Juan,” the narrator often remarks on many contemporary issues and figures with brilliant irony, and his witty digressions may erupt and challenge “every form of tyranny, domination, and abuse” just as Milton can freeze “[t]he blood of monarchs with his prophecies” (Dedication 82-83)—anyway, “[m]onarchs are less imperative than rhymes” (5.616) and worms “on the very loftiest kings have dined” (6.100-01), while he sticks to his “downright detestation / Of every despotism in every nation” (9.191-92). The tone of his satire may change from purely serious to carnivalesque, but his rebellious spirit persists. His oppositional voice matured not in

elegiac lyrics but in satirical criticisms toward “[t]yranny of all kinds.” His declaration indeed matches Said’s judgment of criticism as “opposed to” tyranny.

### **B. Byron’s followers: The isolated characters in modernist literature**

The image of a solitary wandering hero, with severe and discouraging comments on the contemporary world, elicits many followers in modernist literature. Said points out that “exile” has been transformed into “a potent, even enriching, motif of modern culture,” and the modern period is often presumed as “spiritually orphaned and alienated, the age of anxiety and estrangement”; modern western culture is “in large part the work of exiles, emigres, refugees” (“Reflections on Exile”). Byron’s example can hardly be ignored for the emergence of this exile-haunted culture.

Modernist works often present self-aware, introspective characters on the one hand and the downfall of universal order on the other. W. B. Yeats and T. S. Eliot, usually speaking with a tone of disillusion and frustration, regard the western culture as declining and disintegrated. Yeats exclaims that “[t]hings fall apart; the centre cannot hold; / Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world” (“The Second Coming” 3-4); the poet “[u]nder the day’s declining beam,” calls “[i]mages and memories / From ruin or from ancient trees . . .” (“The Tower” 21-23); he curses “[t]hose dying generations” because Ireland—metonymically the contemporary world—is cold to old men (“Sailing to Byzantium” 1-3). Eliot bewails that “[t]hese fragments I have shored against my ruins” (“The Waste Land” 431); “You cannot say, or guess, for you know only / A heap of broken images . . .” (“The Waste Land” 21-22). Those “broken images” symbolize a ruined world, while the restoration and redemption still seem uncertain and almost impossible. The excruciating and exhausting pains, owing to the decline of western culture and civilization, gnaw at the alienated characters, who find “no exit” in an “endgame.” The pains echo that of Byronic heroes, despite Eliot’s anti-romantic

pronouncement that poetry means “an escape from emotion” and personality (“Tradition” 764). This pronouncement resembles Byron’s denial of the similarity between himself and Childe Harold (“Preface to the First and Second Cantos”; “Addition”). Despair at the fall of the western world is a “feeling,” while the “escape from emotion,” merely a gesture to avoid the “overflow” of one’s feelings, discloses instead the Byron-like indifference.

Loneliness, weariness, and alienation afflict most of the protagonists in modernist fiction as well. James Joyce and Virginia Woolf use fragmented prose to describe this modern consciousness. *A Portrait of Artist as a Young Man* begins with fragments of memories from childhood and ends also with fragments about the hero’s intention to go to Europe. *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake* contain episodic narrations that reflect the solitary, painful, aimless consciousness of the protagonists; the stream of consciousness as a narrative technique resists the unifying, conclusive structure, paralleling the view that things fall apart. In *Mrs. Dalloway*, the tortured mind of Septimus Smith, a suffering veteran of the First World War, is displayed in fragments. In *To the Light House*, Lily Briscoe strives to combine in her painting the fragments of life after the war. The techniques of stream of consciousness, interior monologue, and fragmentary images presuppose the hopeless and helpless isolation of the protagonists; the world in such narratives is assumed to exist in ruins literally or emblematically.

Likewise, Joseph Conrad delineates the loss of humanity in “Heart of Darkness”: Marlow’s monologue-like narration in darkness symbolizes the failure of interaction in the modern world, while the racist dream to “[e]xterminate all the brutes” blurs the distinction between “the civilized” and “the barbaric” in the reign of colonialism, which is condemned in Kurtz’s last words “The horror!” Ernest Hemingway strayed on the continent like Byron, and the *ennui* felt by most of his characters resembles the mood of Byronic heroes as well, while their love of women does not bring salvation.

William Faulkner, though not devoting his fiction to the portrayals of wandering heroes, also depicts the disintegration of the traditional American South and the alienation of anguished individuals. The modernist fiction opposes “tyranny, domination, and abuse” and displays the collapse of the western world through the illustration of the broken human relationship, the episodic narrative, and the lack of any hope for redemption.

Long before the modernist writers suffered in loneliness and sighed for the disintegration of western culture, Byron had tasted the bitterness of exile and had mocked the declining tyranny “of all forms.” He has inspired Shaw, Wilde, Yeats, Joyce, and Pound; his impact on literary modernism appears in “the ubiquitous use of alter egos, fictions, masks, and personae; the experimentation with forms of discourse incorporating interruption, disruption, desiccation, and absence; and the recognition of the era as one of historical decay and metaphysical paralysis” (Strathman 365). His oppositional inclination, with the emphasis on the importance of his selfhood, is genuinely romantic and marks his creativity as “antithetical” (Ridenour, “Byron” 67). In romanticism, this emphasis tends to assume a solitary and detached figure, who usually rebels against established culture and who consequently becomes marginalized in contemporary society (Said, *Representations of the Intellectual*); this emphasis, moreover, helps shape modernity (Ridenour, “Byron” 65; Makdisi, *Romantic Imperialism* 6-7). The modernist challenge to romanticism— “highly differentiated and at times downright contradictory” (Bode 127; cf. Tzoref-Ashkenazi 281) — stems from the romantic spirit and resonates with Byron’s opposition to the other romantics. Modernists such as T. S. Eliot resisted romanticism, while Byron the misfit had done the same and shaken the western world long before they did.

## II. Tradition and Byron's individual talent

### A. Byron's veneration of tradition

This misfit, criticizing many other English romantic poets and critics, did not exclude himself from the tradition of English literature. Ironically, he isolated from his romantic peers because of his embrace of this tradition. While Wordsworth and Coleridge attempted to find a new way to write poetry, Byron remained “poetically sensitive to variations in human tradition and culture” (Knight 40). As a “rebel,” he uses “traditional concepts for his own ends” (Ridenour, “Waste” 16). In his early poetry he ranks himself among his neoclassical predecessors, all under the severe attacks of hostile critics:

Thus Pope by Curl and Dennis was destroyed,  
Thus Gray and Mason yield to furious Lloyd;  
From Dryden, Milbourne tears the palm away,  
And thus I fall, though meaner far than they.

(“Soliloquy of a Bard in the Country” 77-80)

Canonized poets, Byron suggests, are always despised by their contemporary critics, yet he determines to follow those “despised” masters, to be one of them if possible. In his mature years he playfully proclaims his poetic principle by mimicking the language of the Ten Commandments: “Thou shalt believe in Milton, Dryden, Pope; / Thou shalt not set up Wordsworth, Coleridge, Southey” (“Don Juan” 1.1633-34)—condemning the Lakers as sacrilegious and warning his readers to banish their poetry. He denounces his contemporary poets as “Pseudo-bards,” who commit “idolatry”: “Each country book-club bows the knee to Baal,” while “the poet’s sacred name” degenerates under the rule of Mammon (“English Bards” 137-38, 177-79). He determines to go over “[t]he path which Pope and Gifford trod before”; it is “[b]etter to err with Pope, than

shine with Pye”; “[t]he simple Wordsworth” is merely a “mild apostate from poetic rule” (“English Bards” 94, 102, 236-37). His veneration of tradition always coexists with his condemnation of contemporary poets. “Tradition” the sacred source inspired Byron and bestowed on him the existential meaning, while the Laker poets generally deviated from “tradition.” His “ingrained Shakespearian respect for tradition” weighed so much as to increase his “agony and tension of revolt” (Knight 39). His oppositional inclination drove him away from his peers and back to tradition.

Moreover, his inheritance of traditional values intensified his self-opposition because tradition itself contains heterogeneous and antithetical trends.

## **B. The sources of Byron’s artistry**

### **i. Miltonic Satanism: The force of alienation from society**

Russell describes Byron’s “aristocratic philosophy of rebellion” as “Satanism” (*History of Western Philosophy*), asserting Milton’s influence on this romantic poet. Bloom also judges that the canonization of *Paradise Lost* is affirmed in the strong poets of the neoclassical and romantic eras: Dryden, Pope, Blake, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, Shelley, Keats (*The Western Canon* 27). McGann argues that “Byron’s Satanism” and his villain heroes are owed to Milton (“Milton and Byron” 19). “A mind associated with the spirit of satanic revolt is exclusively defined by opposition” (Schweizer 191), which also features Byron’s personality. Byron himself was regarded as “terrific Satan” by his contemporaries (Dargan 535). Satan under the pen of Milton serves as the prototype of Byronic heroes: the fallen angel, tormented by the thought of “lost happiness and lasting pain,” endures in hell the flames of “darkness visible” which reveals unending woe and despair, but he never yields (*Paradise Lost* 1.55, 61-124). Manfred, despite his sufferings “of an immortal nature,” has neither fear for hell nor hope for salvation (“Manfred” 2.4.54; 1.1.24-26). Lara is “[a]n erring spirit from another hurl’d” (“Lara” 1.315-16). Conrad in “The Corsair,” a pirate who

fighters against men and heaven, is “[t]oo firm to yield, and far too proud to stoop” (252-55). The hero in “the Giaour” looks like a “Demon of the night” (202) and lives “[a] life of pain, an age of crime” (264) and of “[w]oe without name, or hope, or end” (276). Cain speaks “Serpent’s words,” wanders in “the vast desolate of night,” and never bows to God (“Cain” 1.35, 271, 311). Childe Harold, running through “Sin’s long labyrinth” with pride (1.37,49), behaves like “Milton’s fiend” and “passes on through the great wilderness of the world with a heart shut to all human sympathy” (Jeffrey, Francis “Review of *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage* I-II” 786). These Byronic heroes all carry some satanic features: unyielding to the authority, torn by extreme feelings, wandering physically or spiritually from their communities, and suffering to no end. Miltonic Satanism matches both Byron’s oppositional temperament and the proud alienation of Byronic heroes.

## ii. The influence of cavalier poets

On the other hand, this satanic sway, far from cutting him completely from society, is “opposed” by other traditional trends in Byron’s creativity. His lyrics belong to the tradition of the “Courtly love poetry” written by Tudor and Cavalier noblemen (Frye 54). The *sprezzatura* of “She Walks in Beauty” resembles the easy, elegant tone in Sir Philip Sidney’s *Astrophel and Stella*, Edmund Spenser’s *Amoretti*, Ben Jonson’s lyrics—such as “Song: to Celia” (“Drink to me only with thine eyes”), “It was a beauty that I saw,”—and Robert Herrick’s “The Lily in a Crystal.” Despite his profligate, aggressive sexual relationships, the poet can praise a lady with pure, sincere language like an honorable cavalier. Besides, Byron’s “Newstead Abbey” echoes Jonson’s “To Penshurst,” Carew’s “To Saxon,” and Marvel’s “Upon Appleton House”—all the cavalier country house poems celebrate the hospitality of a landlord and the warmth of social interactions. The “voices that sounded in mirth” and “the wealth and the fulness of Fame” (Byron, “Newstead Abbey” 11, 17) ring with Jonson’s praise that “Pan and



Bacchus their high feasts have made” and that even King James knew the hospitality of the Sidney family (“To Penshurst” 11, 76-80); both Byron and Jonson also lament for the loss of such a warm community (“Newstead Abbey” 15-25; “To Penshurst” 65-66). Pilgrims and strangers, Carew states, always find themselves welcome in the estate of Sir John Crofts (“To Saxom” 38-46), whereas Thomas Fairfax’s house, Marvell glorifies, exists as “Heaven’s Center, Nature’s Lap, / And Paradice’s (sic.) only Map” which guarantees the pleasure and liberty of everyone there and which can win the adoration of future visitors (“Upon Appleton House” 33-36, 97-100, 607-08). Byron hankered after such a jocund gathering in his early years, when friendship meant far more valuable than the whole world: “The wealth of Worlds shall never move me / To quit their Friendship, for a new one” (“Egotism” 51-52). His transformation to a moody, estranged wanderer is implied in “Childe Harold”: having “felt the fullness of Satiety” about carouses, the hero flees from his “Bacchanals” (1.34-47). However, Harold still mourns for his loss of family and friends in his exile (“Childe Harold” 2.900-05); the narrator of “Don Juan” pities orphans and children who lose “their parental tenderness” (17.1-32). Byron’s memory of the jovial banquet and warmth in his father’s abbey, alien to the pride and estrangement of Byronic heroes, oddly opposes his “Satanism” and corresponds to his appreciation of Dryden and Pope.

### **iii. The heritage of the Augustan literature**

In addition, Byron is treated as the most unromantic arch-romantic because of his endorsement of Augustan literature. He praises Dryden, Pope, Congreve, and Otway (“English Bards” 109-15), and calls in the preface to “The Corsair” for the revival of “the good old and now neglected heroic couplet,” the most prominent poetic mode in the neoclassical era. Besides, “Childe Harold” contains remarkable neoclassical elements: its Spenserian verse form owes to the examples of William Shenstone, James Thomson, and George Beattie; the graveyard school underlies Harold’s meditation

among ruins and tombs; the Latinate, sententiousness of the poem carries the style of Samuel Johnson; its sensibility derives from Thomas Gray, Jean Jacques Rousseau, and Alexander Pope; the buildings, sculptures, and sublime landscape glorified in the poem are typical in an eighteenth-century Grand Tour (Beatty 246). Following Pope's example, moreover, Byron also asserts that "the force of Wit" must serve as "the arrow of satiric song" to chase follies ("English Bards" 37-41), and thence satire prevails in his mature poems, culminating in "The Vision of Judgment" and "Don Juan." Byron's belief in the ally of sense and wit in poetry echoes Pope's argument that wit and judgment are "meant each other's aid, like man and wife" ("An Essay on Criticism" 83). His claim of "Truth my sole desire" ("To a Knot of Ungenerous Critics" 25) and his prayer to nature — "point to me the path of truth" ("The Prayer of Nature" 10) — allude to Pope's teaching: "In all you speak let Truth and Candour shine" ("An Essay on Criticism" 563). His preference to neoclassic poets marks him as "hardly a Romantic at all, but a survival from the eighteenth century and an enemy of much that the true Romantics thought most holy" (Bowra 179). Leavis even views him not as a Romantic but as a "belated Augustan" (153).

The heritage of the Augustan culture, as shown in Byron's case, proves to be heterogeneous and diverse.<sup>2</sup> On the one hand, Dryden and Pope, following the

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<sup>2</sup> The cultural diversity in the eighteenth century, Hoppit observes, characterized many walks of life; "pluralism and heterodoxy" predominated all levels of society that this Age of Reason "is best understood as one full of anxiety and prospects, each feeding off the other" (7, 9, 495). The way of the world in the neoclassical era—hardly stable, predictable, and ordered—was marked by contradiction, multiplicity, and instability, while some major poets like Dryden and Pope intended to quest for stability and the ultimate order in this chaotic atmosphere. Dryden glorifies the beginning of the universe from harmony ("A Song for St. Cecilia's Day" 1-2), and Pope proclaims the necessity of following nature ("An Essay on Criticism" 68) and of sticking to one's divine-ordained position in the Great Chain ("An Essay on Man" 1. 285-86)—the repeated call for harmony and order attests to the instability and disorder in the neoclassical era.

penchant of cavalier poets to communion, usually uphold the importance of social communication and the general welfare of human beings. Dryden extols the universal influence of Anne Killigrew: her birth incurs joy on heaven and earth, her presence may “atone for all,” and her guidance can show all saved people the way to heaven in the day of resurrection (“To the Pious Memory” 39-40, 67, 193-95); he hails the effects of music on various listeners in “Alexander’s Feast” and “A Song for St. Cecilia’s Day.” The emphasis on humanity, society, or universe prevails in Dryden’s discourse. Pope indicates the importance of learning in a community: “Trust not yourself: but you defects to know, / Make use of every friend—and every foe”; “That not alone what to your sense is due / All may allow, but seek your friendship too” (“An Essay on Criticism” 213-14; 564-65); warning his readers that “’Tis but a part we see, and not a whole,” he highlights the supremacy of the Great Chain of Being (“An Essay on Man” 1. 60, 237-46). Both Dryden and Pope suggest the necessity of society and highlight the relation of an individual to the environment. Hence, they composed many “occasional” poems in response to public events, and “conversation primed the writer’s pump” (Griffin 38), marked by “a conscious engagement with social issues” (Cunningham and Reich 415). Poets participated in the public sphere and expected the responses of active readers; poetry “was considered a standard means of public communications, and poems . . . were often the basis for public discussion (Hunter 13-15). This engagement with the public also underscores Byron’s poetics. His social interaction will be further discussed in Section III: Byron in his contemporary culture.

On the other hand, the neoclassical age also witnessed the emergence of the graveyard school, which features the gloomy meditation of a lonely character on mortality—a feature that also characterizes Byronic heroes. Typically, this character roams at night “with melancholy state” among graves (Parnell 23). The knowledge that “[t]he paths of glory lead but to the grave” (Gray 36) only leads one “far from the

madding crowd” (Gray 73), and in his life “Melancholy mark’d him for her own” (Gray 120). A melancholic wanderer, with his “wreck’d desponding thought,” finding himself driven “[f]rom wave to wave of fancied misery,” exists not in a cheerful community but in wilderness because he finds himself “[a]t home a stranger” (Young, “On Life, Death, and Immortality” 10-11, 82). Death the “great man-eater” haunts everyone every day, but its daily “carnival” proceeds “without a fellow” (Blair, “The Grave” 639-41). Byron absorbs these melancholic voices and sighs: “My life a short and vulgar dream: / Lost in the dull, ignoble crowd, / . . . / My fate is Lethe’s stream” (“The Adieu” 87-88, 90); “My joy was in the wilderness” and “I dived, / In my lone wandering, to the caves of Death” (“Manfred” 2.2.62, 79-80); “My memory now is but the tomb / Of joys long dead, so “death I have not feared to meet” (“The Giaour” 1000-01, 1008); “Ah! happy if in death! / He slept—Who o’er his placid slumber bends? / His foes are gone—and here he hath no friends” (“The Corsair” 999-1001). The graveyard school differs drastically from the Dryden-Pope heritage, which prefers communion to isolation. The obsession of death in loneliness, haunting the poets of the graveyard school, also predominates over Byronic heroes.

Thus, the Augustan literature presents a miscellaneous picture. As Byron struggled to follow Pope in pouring out his satires, he rendered himself as one speaking to readers from diverse backgrounds, not as one withdrawing himself from them. Yet he also excelled, like the graveyard school poets, in portraying his solitary heroes in meditation. Byron truly inherited the cultural diversity of the Augustan Age.

### **C. Byron’s self-opposition owing to his learning from tradition**

Tradition indeed inspired Byron’s oppositional creativity but trapped him in a life-long spiritual conflict. On the one hand, Miltonic Satanism and the graveyard school drove him away from human society and nurtured his sense of superiority, expressed in the lofty and alienated image of Byronic heroes. On the other hand, the legacy of

cavalier poets, Dryden, and Pope, presuming the warm and easy interactions among peers and friends, pushed him back to society. Consequently, as Harold describes, he “stood / Among them, but not of them” (3.1054-55), and in his mature years, “satire” became the most prominent mode for his “interaction” with his contemporaries. The survey of Byron’s learning from tradition illustrates Eliot’s preaching: “not only the best, but the most individual parts of his [a poet’s] work may be those in which the dead poets, his ancestors, assert their immortality most vigorously”; “No poet . . . has his complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists” (“Tradition and the Individual Talent” 761). Tradition fed his self-contradictory talent and ironically made him a misfit among the romantics.

### **III. Byron in his contemporary culture**

#### **A. The inevitability of “worldliness”: The attention to the reading community in the English romantic period**

Byron’s embrace of tradition and his rejection of the Lakers do not suggest his absolute insulation from his contemporary world. His satires and attacks of “[t]yranny of all kinds” testify to his awareness of and involvement in contemporary culture. This corresponds to “worldliness” proposed by Said: “One doesn’t just write: one writes against, or in opposition to, or in some dialectical relationship with other writers and writing, or other activity, or other objects” (*Power, Politics, and Culture*; “Interview: Edward W. Said” 35; cf. Said and Robbins, “American Intellectuals” 47). By “worldliness” Said suggests the intention to focus on things taking place in the public realm; sometimes he uses “secularism” to announce his disregard of something supposed to be transcendental (“An Interview” 3; *Power, Politics, and Culture*). It

means the engagement with the world by acknowledging its diversity and interconnectedness of various voices: cultures, histories, and political structures always intersect and influence each other. Without “worldliness,” one “can have no world from which, and to which, to speak” (Ashcroft and Ahluwalia 29). This condition may be ignored, but it always exists.<sup>3</sup>

“Worldliness” agrees with the assumption of the hermeneutical circle: a word gains meaning only in a context, and the total meaning of this context also relies on that of each individual word in it. Similarly, we may assume, an individual can find or establish the significance of his/her existence also in a context—be it culture, society, race, or nation. The engendering of meaning always depends on the part-whole relationship, and thus the significance of an individual writer may vary when evaluated in different “contexts.” A “context” or “public sphere” arises when one “writes

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<sup>3</sup> The necessity of “worldliness” was ignored in the modernist era. One stereotype about the modern has been “that of its apolitical character, its turn inward and away from the social materials associated with realism, its increased subjectification and introspective psychologization,” and “its aestheticism and its ideological commitment” to the so-called autonomous art (Jameson 45). The “apolitical character” neglects the social context, flourishing in new criticism and structuralism. By insisting on the “apolitical character,” “subjectivity also runs the risk of splitting itself off from those totalities that give its life meaning” since the claim for independence inclines to deny the “context” that may bestow meaning on one’s identity. This is a problem “that an isolated subjectivity faces in the condition of modernity” (Kaiser 15). This trend, when theoretically driven to the extreme, can lead to absurdism or nihilism: if one is absolutely severed from his/her culture, then it makes no difference whether things fall apart or not, nor is it necessary to wait for any redemption and renewal. However, modernists did not and could not compose outside their contemporary culture. Jameson argues that the influences of imperialism can be found even in modernism (Jameson 44), and the traces of imperialism “are indeed constitutive of it” (Jameson 64). In modernism there is always “something missing” in the sense of “a privation that can never be restored or made whole simply by adding back in the missing component” (Jameson 51). Imperialism drove people away from their homes, and consequently those exiles suffered from “something missing” which they longed to restore in their life—a situation reminiscent of the assumption of *gestalt*. This new art “reflexively perceives this problem [of lack, privation] and lives this formal dilemma that can be called modernism in the first place” (Jameson 51). No modernists, therefore, escaped from the context of imperialism despite their “apolitical character.”

against” other writers, and “worldliness” emerges in their continual exchanges.

Though suffering in “fracture and fragmentation” (Regier 2), romantics “sought a new wholeness in nature, in the future, or in nostalgic longings for the past because they believed perfectibility was possible and the present had been corrupted”; this craving aroused “an experience of loss, melancholy, irony, and regret” (Magill 92). The sense of loss indicates their yearning to stand inside the contemporary circle, while the consciousness of their culture pushes them to find some meanings even among ruins. Therefore, even though they underscored the importance of individual feelings and preferred meditation in isolation, they always took the reading public into consideration. The “referential dimensions of literary work” (McGann, “A point of reference” 206) also highlights the necessity of “worldliness”: the world must be referred to the readers, and the texts must be evaluated in the historical-geographical context.

Compared with the poet-reader relationship in the neoclassical age, that in the early nineteenth century became more dynamic and widespread. From the 1790s, English poets sought to play a role in the political debates; many poems “were designed to be experienced communally, recited or sung in theatres, taverns or at political meetings” and even appealed to poorly educated readers (Bainbridge, “Politics” 194-95). The conditions under which poems were received gradually became “internal to the production of poetry” (Franta 1). “Romantic poetry and poetics were shaped by their engagement with the mass public,” such as the periodical reviews, political opposition, and the law of libel (Franta 165). The public was no longer “an arena for the passive consumption of ideas” but “a kind of feedback loop” (Franta 2). Reception was central to poetic practice in the romantic era: through reflection on the idea of the reading public, poets sought to catch the social implications (Franta 4). Therefore, romantic literature developed because of the continual author-reader interactions, an indispensable sign of “worldliness.”

The understanding of romantic poetry as only self-expression, in the light of M. H. Abrams, “has obscured the emergence of an equally important conception of poetry as a process which includes the poem’s reception, dissemination, and transmission” (Franta 7). Yet Abrams does not ignore the existence of the public community. The poetic expressions of the romantic poets are “manifested in philosophy” and “related to the drastic political and social change of the age” (Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism* 11). He quotes Wordsworth, Shelley and Keats to highlight those poets’ awareness of readers: Wordsworth asserts that “Poets do not write for Poets alone, but for Men”; Shelley argues that a poet is “a nightingale,” who “sings to cheer its own solitude with sweet sound; his auditors are as men entranced by the melody of an unseen musician”; Keats declares that “I never wrote one single line of Poetry with the least shadow of public thought” (quoted in Abrams, *The Mirror* 26). With the genius as “a pure emanation of the Spirit of the Age” (Hazlitt), Wordsworth also acknowledges that the public taste can be understood by exploring the interaction of language of human mind, while revolutions of literature cannot be isolated from society (“Preface” 77). He felt anxious about readers’ indifference to his poetry, while he envied the popularity of Byron, Scott, and Bloomfield (Newlyn 593). When sending a copy of *Lyrical Ballads* to the liberal Whig Charles James Fox in 1801, Wordsworth believed that “the imagination might effect greater social change than organized military force ever could” (Mason 34); his disillusion about the French Revolution was soothed by his embracing of community as well (Mason 37). “Wordsworth wants to be an influence: he wants to affect the soul of his reader” (Murphy, “Glory” 666). His “new poetry and poetic, put forward in a revolutionary age, also has political and social parallels and implications . . .” (Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism* 395). Despite their intention to transcend to some ideal world, these romantic poets all hug the reading public: the experience of wandering lonely as a cloud, the delight of listening to the song of the



unseen skylark, and the forlorn feelings after the disappearance of a nightingale—all must be conveyed to readers and therefore acquire some significance. When evaluating the poetry of the Laker Poets, Peacock points out that they “did receive and communicate to the world some of the most extraordinary poetical impressions that ever were heard of, and ripened into models of public virtue”; they composed like “semibarbarian[s] in a civilized community” because of their nostalgia (513). Romantic poets were not cloistered from their contemporary events—even Blake the visionary artist and Keats “the most apolitical” poet composed in response to their contemporary issues (Dawson 56). In London Blake discovers “[m]ark of weakness, marks of woe” on every face, the “mind-forged manacles,” and “the chimney-sweeper’s cry” (“London” 4, 8, 9); he attacks racial discrimination in “The Little Black Boy” and exposes Christians’ hypocrisy in “The Chimney Sweeper” (both the one in the “Innocence” and that in “Experience”). The term “Romantic” presumes a dialogic relationship and a context: it designates that “literature was the ‘Socratic dialogue of our [Romantic] time,’ a means by which the individual could navigate the vague interstices between self and world while remaining an authentic being” (Magill 93). The lonely wandering romantic characters, though declaring their independence and transcendence, still lived under the impact of their contemporary culture. Their attention to the reading public highlights the inevitability of “worldliness.”

### **B. “Worldliness” exemplified in Byron’s connections with society**

Byron’s attention to the public reception of his poetry was exposed when he declared that he awoke one morning and found himself famous because of the popularity of “Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage.” “The subject of Byron’s poetry is the world”—while “[t]he grand illusion of romantic ideology is that one may escape such a world through imagination and poetry,” the “great truth of romantic work is that there is no escape, that there is only revelation” (McGann, “Romanticism” 589). He states

that “[a]n Author’s works are public property: he who purchases may judge, and publish his opinion if he pleases; and the Authors I have endeavoured to commemorate may do by me as I have done by them” (“Preface to *English Bards*”). After 1820, his poetry was composed “entirely within a context of revolutionary politics and social analysis”; his life involved “careful study, artistic production, and political involvement” (Watkins, “Byron” 96). Besides, “Where few attend, ’tis useless to indite; / Where few can read, ’tis folly sure to write” (“Soliloquy of a Bard” 11-12). In short, he expects a dialogic relationship with his readers. In Said’s words, he “articulates a consciousness of his time that he shares with the group of which historical circumstances . . . make him a part” (*Reflections*). For Bloom, “Byron never left the world, nor could he ever abandon any of the existing conceptions of it” (*Visionary* 3). Byron’s assertions support Said’s proclamations about “worldliness.”

Though detached either physically or spiritually from the Great Britain, Byron still attempted to arouse some attention from his readers there. For him, “travel produces a critique of England”; “Childe Harold” and “Don Juan” abound in his criticism of his homeland (Cooke 12). He comprehends that “Man was not formed to live alone: / I’ll be that light unmeaning thing / That smiles with all, and weeps with none” (“One Struggle More” 10-12). This attachment to society derived from the cultural heritage of the neoclassical age: Byron fully realized the idea that “the personal is the political”—while much romantic poetry “erases or sets aside its political and historical currencies,” Byron’s poems “draw upon a complex set of political, social, and world-historical mediations” (McGann, “Byron’s lyric poetry” 211). The self-exile does not split himself from his contemporary politics, culture, and society. For him, “a man must become more than a writer, for without knowledge of or entrance to the great world a writer cannot communicate on social subjects” (Clubbe, “Byron and Scott” 81). His poetry is preoccupied with “the social structure of its rhetoric”: “a writer must have

an audience and hence must operate with certain specific sets of audience expectation, need, and desire . . . . [Simultaneously] the audience's social character must be reflected back to itself so that it can 'reflect upon' that reflection . . ." (McGann, "Byron, mobility" 38). His work and his readers "always tend[ed] to preserve a clarity of presence toward each other" even when Byron worked "in lyrical forms"; throughout his career, his works "cultivate[d] direct communication" with his readers (McGann "Private poetry" 117, 120), and his response to a literary work was "bound up with an awareness of his own relationship with an audience . . ." (Stabler, *Cambridge* 115). Thus, he is eager to provide comments and footnotes lest his readers might fail to either read between lines or fully understand his intention. In "Don Juan," the narrator's interesting comments on Byron's contemporary figures and issues manifest his awareness of readers. In "Childe Harold," this awareness also emerges as Byron insists on the difference between the fictional hero and the poet himself ("Preface to the First and Second Cantos"; "Addition to the Preface"); he advises the "stern Critic" to be patient (1.949-50); comparing himself to "lightening," he complains that he lives and dies "unheard, / With a most voiceless thought, sheathing it as a sword" (3.911-13). The footnotes of this travelogue, besides, "cover anthropological, topographical, and autobiographical ground, advancing cultural understanding of areas either neglected or misrepresented by previous writers" (Coole 148). To advance cultural understanding indicates his attention to the reader's need. He yearns to be believed and to demonstrate his knowledge and feelings to his readers.

Byron's satires also presume responses from the reading public. Claiming that he cannot bear "false witness," he advises that critics, before blaming "Don Juan" as immoral, had better read it more than once (1.1643,1649-55). "The public approbation I expect, / And beg they'll take my word about the moral, / Which I with their amusement will connect" ("Don Juan" 1.1665-67); the composition of Juan's

adventures depends “on the public altogether” (“Don Juan” 1.1586-87). In his earnest expectation for the reader’s positive response, he still utters comically: “For fear some prudish readers should grow skittish, / I’ve bribed my grandmother’s review—the British” (1.1671-72). The juxtaposition of “skittish” and “British” in rhyming insinuates his prediction of the public response to “Don Juan.” In addition, through the mouth of Dante, an exile as well, Byron announces his ambition:

I am not of this people, nor this age,  
And yet my harpings will unfold a tale  
Which shall preserve these times when not a page  
Of their perturbed annals could attract  
An eye to gaze upon their civil rage,  
Did not my verse embalm full many an act

Worthless as they who wrought it . . . . (“The Prophecy of Dante” 1.143-49)

He means to needle those who neglect or belittle him. His oppositional voice emerges in the verb “embalm,” which metaphorically assumes the British empire to be a corpse. As an outcast, he intends to dissect and preserve any part of the “dead body” of the whole nation. He is confident of arousing reader’s attention with his satire, while the other writers cannot “attract / An eye to gaze upon their civil rage.” “This people” in “this age” may not accept him, yet the future generations can understand the value of his satires, which show his “worldliness” in his opposition to the other writers.

Moreover, Byron owed his outcast state to the force of public opinion: though no one challenged him face to face, he detected the threat of general hostility (Franta 38). Juan’s farewell to Spain may expose Byron’s true feeling to his homeland: “Perhaps I may revisit thee no more, / But die, as many an exiled heart hath died, / Of its own thirst to see again thy shore” (“Don Juan” 2.138-40). His exile occurred in a particular “context,” and the image of a lonely wandering hero functioned as his self-

representation to this hostile society, “a response to the indisputability of public opinion” (Franta 39). The attention to the public lay at the heart of the exile throughout his journey. He was not willing to take this image, nor did he disregard the public. He hoped that a revolution might come so that he could return to England in triumph (Erdman, “Byron and Revolt in England” 241). “This discontinuously continuous relationship with England colours Byron’s life history and also his poetics” (Stabler, *Cambridge* 1). Despite his exile, Byron’s association with English society never vanished since his satirical narratives persistently announced his presence to his readers.

### **C. Byron’s secularism versus the romantic transcendental vision**

Byron’s close attention to his readers exemplifies “worldliness” proposed by Said: it asserts one’s “being in the secular world, as opposed to being ‘otherworldly’” (“Representing the Colonized” 212). “Secularism” fundamentally contradicts the transcendental and idealist trends in romanticism. Therefore, it is no wonder that Byron the “secular” poet always opposes Wordsworth and Coleridge the visionary poets. Wordsworth speaks “like a recluse,” while Byron, “like a man of the world” (Macaulay). Their contrast manifests that “[s]omething in the essence of Romanticism seemed to call for the confrontation, if not reconciliation, of opposite and discordant personalities, as well as qualities” (Cooke 11). He denies the possibility of establishing utopia, “the green and pleasant land of some agricultural past” (Watkins, “Byron” 100). His “insight into society’s workings, on its lowest as well as on its highest levels, drew upon a vast range of experience” (Clubbe, “Byron and Scott” 82). Always viewed “as a man of the world” (Clubbe, “Byron and Scott” 68), he does not show in his mature poetry “evidence of any settled faith in a transcendental ‘idea’ realizing itself in nature and in history, driven by an inexorable will” (Thorslev 100). Even though blamed by Harold Bloom as “merely a descriptive medley, mixing travel and history” (*Visionary* 238), “Childe Harold” displays its unique “worldliness” in this “mixture” since Byron

touches the contemporary politics, society, and culture in this “medley”—a feature that also characterizes his eastern tales and “Don Juan.”

Among the arch-romantics, Byron displays most noticeably his attention to the contemporary world. Most of the English romantic poets chose to retreat to a visionary utopia or create a paradise in their poetry: Blake indulges in his biblical vision; Wordsworth wanders in nature and enjoys her blessing; Coleridge probes into German idealist philosophy and intends to cultivate his “secondary imagination”; Shelley yearns for “intellectual beauty,” a form of Platonic idealism; Keats quests for beauty with “negative capability.” They are all “exiles” from the mundane world. Yet Byron, though physically and spiritually an exile, always speaks to this world. His claim to be “born for opposition” also booms in his mockery of the “transcendental” or “other-worldly” dream of the Laker poets—it means to call for their attention to his presence in this world. Keats highlights his difference from Byron: “He describes what he sees—I describe what I imagine” (“Letter to George and Georgiana Keats” 366). The urge to compose from what he “sees” reveals his “worldliness.” He clings to “a world of fact” with “distrust of the visionary” (Barton 813). Compared with the visionary romantics, Byron appears far more “secular” by casting his eyes mostly on this world with an international perspective.

#### **D. Byron and imperialism**

This “secular” poet wandered in the heyday of imperialism, and his sufferings as an exile certainly incurred his antagonism toward imperialism, a form of tyranny. As he traveled to Spain and Portugal, he witnessed the aftermath of the invasion of the Napoleon Empire; when he stayed in Greece, he perceived the destruction of Athena’s temple at the hand of the British Empire; while he moved to Albania, he contacted Ali Pacha and the culture of the Ottoman Empire; whilst he journeyed to Rome, he pondered on the glory of the Roman Empire—all these experiences are recounted in

details in “Childe Harold.” His wandering did not drive him out of this world, but into the heart of the imperialist culture. His resistance to imperialism culminated in his participation in the Greek War of Independence—though this war meant ironically the clash between Ottoman Empire on the one hand and Russian, British, and French Empires on the other.

With the rise of Britain’s imperial power, English romantic poetry “originated not in celebration of but in opposition to the results, at home, of profit made abroad” (Fulford 178), and the romantic lyric owes to “the Orientalism that was itself made possible by Britain’s empire” (Fulford 189). English romantic writers often assumed “serious political weight in a contentious sphere of public sentiment and opinion” and “aspired to political and ethical influence indirectly” (Chandler, “Introduction” 1). This aspiration led them to confront imperialism. Byron’s oppositional voice is directed to imperialism in his travel writing. This genre, “canonized in the form of autobiographical narrative” (Pratt 171), “is thoroughly implicated in imperialist projects” (Franklin, Cynthia 83). In other words, such writing usually renders authors in the context of the imperialistic culture; they report not only their own experiences but also their involvement in such a culture. Byron’s narratives of wandering heroes reveal the impact of imperialism and the poet’s “worldliness” as well. In Said’s view, critics tend to neglect India and Australia in their discussions of Dickens on the one hand, and West Indies or the Mediterranean in those of Austen on the other (“An Interview” 4)—this neglect fails to demonstrate the “worldliness” in literary works. The consideration of the “worldliness” must expose the exotic elements, the hybridity of cultures, and the impact of imperialism.

Romanticism “was always interested in those forms of otherness, those ways of life that would eventually come to be seen as not quite right, not quite at home . . .” (Makdisi, “Worldly Romanticism” 430)—this romantic interest in exoticism emerged

with imperialism. The interest in the Near East prevailed in the romantic England; Byron “capitalized it, and owed to it a considerable measure of the acclaim which made him famous overnight” because he “caught the precise spirit of English interest in the Near East” (Brown 64). Major romantic writers had “a passing flirtation” with imperialism and Orientalism (Makdisi, “Romantic cultural imperialism” 601), while Byron’s eastern tales and “Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage” are viewed as the “determining influences” on European Romantic writings on the Orient (Saglia 471-72). He found inspiration from tradition, but he also composed under the impact of imperialism.

As Said affirms, “the great imperial experience of the past two hundred years is global and universal; it has implicated every corner of the globe, the colonizer and the colonized together” (*Culture* 313). Byron’s international scope and his observation of exotic society could never come into being without his being an exile. This is a tricky status: exile did not disconnect him from his homeland; rather, he fascinated his contemporary English readers with the description of exotic scenes and characters. The fabric of his poetry “always interweaves traditional craftsmanship with historical contingency and the circumstances of reception” (Stabler, *Cambridge* 177). He immersed himself more widely and deeply in various imperial cultures than many other English romantics.

## **IV. The Significance of the View of an Exile**

### **A. Byron’s amateurism as a manifestation of his independence**

#### **i. The necessity of amateurism for fulfilling worldliness**

Byron’s popularity as a poet/critic cannot be separated with his language: he presents the exotic cultures in a plain and “amateur” style. The worldliness of a critic can be fully realized in “amateurism” (Ashcroft and Ahluwalia 35). An “amateur”



critic, far from being superficial, always speaks from the “location in the secular world” (Said, *Representations of the Intellectuals*) and thence must use the “secular” language. The professionalized vocabulary of criticism has led to “an extremely sharp break between critics and the reading public because writing and criticism have come to be considered extremely specialized functions with no simple equivalent in everyday experience” (Ashcroft and Ahluwalia 31)—and thus critics are locked in an ivory tower. To present the “everyday experience” faithfully, one must reject the “cult of professional expertise” and “‘priestly’ and abstruse specialization in favor of a breadth of interest”—this is “an amateurism of approach, avoiding the retreat of intellectual work from the actual society” (Ashcroft and Ahluwalia 30). Jargons and professionalized language prevent the reading public from understanding the complicated world, and therefore fail to reach “worldliness.” The “amateur” or “secular” language, by contrast, promotes this understanding. As a discerning and committed member of society, an “amateur” critic can probe into diverse aspects—politics, history, society, and culture in general—and refer these issues to the public in everyday language.

## ii. Byron’s “amateur” language as his unique style

“Worldliness” bestows unique meanings on Byron’s independence of his career as a poet/critic. His autonomous subjectivity is found in his resistance to the poetic trend represented by Wordsworth and Coleridge. He may be regarded as unromantic because of his refusal to follow the Laker Poets, but his oppositional voice marks him as truly independent and autonomous. His independence becomes prominent not because of the alienated image of Byronic heroes haunted by *Weltschmerz*, but because of his “worldliness” and his “amateurism.”

Byron’s language goes hand in hand with his “secular criticism.” He never uses jargons to distance himself from his readers. His poetic emotion, conveyed in “the

worn and blunted words of ordinary speech,” flows from “the careless ease of a man of quality” with “gentlemanly amateurism” (Frye 53) that relies on his “common-sense judgments” (Frye 55). His “amateurism,” displayed in his “predominantly rhetorical and conversational” style (McGann, “Rethinking Romanticism” 238), stems from the heritage of the cavalier poets, the legacy of Dryden and Pope, and his experience as a cosmopolitan wanderer. Unlike Blake, Byron never delivers a sacred message like a prophet from God. Abstruse theoretical thought, “the quasi-religious language of criticism,” and the jargons of the “priestly caste of acolytes” all promote the dominance of “the dogmatic metaphysicians” (Said, *The World* 5). Such professional and abstract language helps create authoritative figures, whose “dogmatic” dominance negates the individuality and freedom of readers. Byron as questor for liberty and equality yields to no authority; he also avoids becoming a “dogmatic metaphysician” himself by adopting amateur language. He mocks Southey, Wordsworth, and Coleridge because in his eyes they speak in an un-amateur language: the first one appears “quaint and mouthy” (“Don Juan” 1.1636), the second “perplex[es] the sages” with “his new system” (“Don Juan” Dedication 28), and the third interprets German idealism with abstruse explanation (“Don Juan” Dedication 15-16). He declares in “Don Juan” that his story, unlike those of his “epic brethren gone before,” is “actually true” (1.1610, 1616), meaning that he uses language really spoken by the reading public, and that he does not advocate any transcendental, idealistic philosophy. With his “text,” Byron the “critic” associates himself with the “world” and creates his individual style. The “secular trinity”—the world, the text, and the critic—forms the title of one of Edward Said’s critical masterpieces (Ashcroft and Ahluwalia 30) and sheds light to the interpretation of Byron’s artistry. Opposing to abstruse theories, Byron the critic wrote his texts based on his down-to-earth understanding of the world. His “amateur” language plays a crucial role in subverting the “tyranny” of dogmatic metaphysics and signifies his

independence from that type of metaphysics.

An amateur “must be involved in a lifelong dispute with all the guardians of sacred vision or text, whose depredations are legion and whose heavy hand brooks no disagreement and certainly no diversity” (Said, *Representations of the Intellectuals*). The authority negates cultural diversity and insists on a monolithic worldview, while a “secular” intellectual must hold “[u]ncompromising freedom of opinion and expression” (Said, *Representations of the Intellectuals*) and must challenge the apotheosis of any political, ideological belief. This freedom is guaranteed by the pluralistic view that denies any taken-for-granted, authoritative, and monologic discourse.

## **B. The pluralistic view of an exile**

### **i. The diversity of romanticism**

The world, being essentially hybrid, heterogeneous, and dynamic, can be grasped only with the pluralistic view. Romanticism arose with this view: it recognizes “the indeterminacy of all language” (Magill 89)—this “indeterminacy” results from the multiplicity and hybridity of the world. The “cultural diversity of the early nineteenth century” challenges absolute values and cannot be pinned down in any authoritative discourse (Beatty 84). Romanticism defies the official authoritarianism, the cold rationalism, and the didactic spirit of the Enlightenment (Bakhtin, *Rabelais* 37). The romantic “preference for strangeness, emotion, imagination” essentially resists the established system, order, and restraint found in neoclassicism (Chislett 1-2). With the expansion of empires, international and interracial communication became more frequent and unavoidable. The official authoritarianism and the established system underwent unprecedented challenges from exotic cultures in the age of revolution, while cultural diversity demanded the pluralistic view for the understanding of this age since the monolithic worldview such as the Great Chain of Being could no longer explain the changing, unstable world.

The cultural diversity of romanticism itself inevitably contains self-contradictory elements. Romanticism is generally treated as a resistance against classicism, but it is also “a reinterpretation of classicism” (Jones 196). Bloom considers that romanticism is “a doomed tradition, yet a perpetually self-renewing one” (*Ringers* 324)—this implies that the romantic spirit can survive in continuous self-contradiction after the romantic age. The contrast between the Laker poets and Byron illustrates this paradoxical condition: Wordsworth revolutionized English poetry by turning away from the neoclassical heritage, while Byron challenged Wordsworth by returning to that heritage—both are classified as “romantics.” In addition, Blake composed as an unorthodox Christian; Wordsworth apotheosized nature; Coleridge changed from the Unitarian Church to the Anglican Church; Percy Shelley asserted the necessity of atheism; and Keats found inspiration mainly in pagan beauty. The label “romantic poets” may blind our eyes to the essential differences between any two major English poets in the early nineteenth century, and the term “romanticism” itself must be treated as irreconcilably heterogeneous and stubbornly disunified. Paradoxes and contradictions never vanish from human history, while the term “romanticism has been naturalized that many readers ignore its discontinuities and heterogeneity” (Quinne 8). Instability, hybridity, and self-subversion all emerge in romanticism. As an arch-romantic, Byron the “secular” and self-oppositional poet did not maintain a single and consistent voice, either.

## **ii. Byron’s conflicting personality and his serio-comic works**

Romanticism also recognizes “language’s specific inability to capture the complexity and mystery of the inner self” (Magill 89). Byron’s selfhood may embody this “inability.” Learning from tradition intensified Byron’s self-opposition; moreover, his conflicting personality enabled him to cultivate his pluralistic view. He liked human society, but he chose to wander for most of his life. “To see a poet in

exile,” Said considers, “is to see exile’s antinomies embodied and endured with a unique intensity” (“Reflections on exile”)—Byron’s self-opposition turns out to be more noticeable because of his exile. As an aristocrat, he admired George Washington and believed in the importance of democracy and liberty. Suffering from “an agonized self-conflict” and torn between “time and eternity” (Knight 39, 52), Byron describes his own personality as the combination of contradictory elements:

Temperate I am – yet never had a temper;

Modest I am – yet with some slight assurance;

Changeable too – yet somehow ‘*Idem semper*’:

Patient – but not enamoured of endurance;

Cheerful – but, sometimes, rather apt to whimper:

Mild – but at times a sort of ‘*Hercules furens*’:

So that I almost think that the same skin

For one without – has two or three within. (“Don Juan” 17.81-88)

This is a portrait of “a Titan at war with himself” (Russell). Byron declares his heterogeneous and “[c]hangeable” personality with pride: his declaration of personal oppositional inclination means to shock those who believe in a monolithic, unified, and stabilized worldview. He identifies himself as “Methodist, Calvinist, Augustinian” (Russell) and feels his manner of life guilty because he cannot reconcile these positive features with his “Satanism”—neither does he attempt to achieve such a reconciliation. He may “preach Christian love,” but the power struggle “leads to a despair of the power of love, leaving naked hate as the driving force” (Russell). He realized that his wickedness “was a hereditary curse in his blood,” feeling himself “the equal of the greatest sinners”; in short, he held a strictly conventional morality but yielded to a sinful desire (Russell). Similarly, Coleridge judges, it is “unnatural” for Byron to connect “very great intellectual power with utter depravity” (“Character of Othello”). Besides,

Methodism accepts the Arminian theology of free will, which contradicts the Calvinist doctrine of predestination. To identify oneself simultaneously as both Methodist and Calvinist is theologically paradoxical, while Byron's poems rarely encourage the faith in divine salvation, God's grace, and eternal life. Unsurprisingly this self-oppositional figure aroused controversies and enmity.

Byronic heroes also detect and endure the pain of self-contradiction. Lara illustrates a paradoxical self-portrayal: "In him inexplicably mixed appeared / Much to be loved and hated, sought and feared; / Opinion varying o'er his hidden lot"; he may "half exult and half regret" ("Lara" 1.289-93, 320). Manfred mixes "Light and Darkness -- / And mind and dust—and passions and pure thoughts" and avers human beings to be "[h]alf dust, half deity, alike unfit / To sink or soar, with our mixed essence make / A conflict of its elements . . ." ("Manfred" 3.1.164-65; 1.2.40-42). Childe Harold as "a border figure" was "both inside and outside national attachment" (Wohlgemut 7). Owing to this personality and inclination, Byron's poetry "undermined the criteria of unity and harmony which had sustained Johnsonian literary criticism in England" (Stabler, *Cambridge* 38). He practiced Blake's preaching: "Without Contraries is no progression. Attraction and Repulsion, Reason and Energy, Love and Hate, are necessary to Human existence" ("Marriage of Heaven and Hell"), an axiom that "stands almost as a defining concept for the Romantic impulse in poetry" (Curran, "Romantic poetry" 226). Blake's "Marriage of Heaven and Hell" transforms "either/or into both/and, turning the world upside down by combining contradictory forces" (McGann, "Byron and Romanticism" 298). Byron's self-opposition belongs to this "Romantic impulse," paralleling the dynamic, subversive upheaval in the romantic era. He saw the diversity of his own personality as well as the multiplicity of this world.

Byron's pluralistic view is also found in his serio-comic expression, which

embraces disparate or even antithetical modes of perception and thence demonstrates a lifelike picture of the world.<sup>4</sup> His serio-comic artistry, culminating in “Don Juan,” derives from *Don Quixote* and *Tristram Shandy*. He observes that the saddest tale of Quixote “makes us smile” (“Don Juan” 13.9.1-2), and Juan’s bitter experiences are usually narrated in a comic tone. The omnipresent, talkative, and humorous narrator in “Don Juan” is clearly modeled on that in Sterne’s masterpiece, as Frye highlights the similarity between “Don Juan” and *Tristram Shandy*: the narrators prefer to combine the “serious” and the “humorous” (*Anatomy* 234). The serio-comic tone flourishes in Byron’s later poems. “Mazeppa” presents the serio-comic scene when the old hetman Mazeppa, after being defeated by the Russian army, hopes the Swedish sentinels can protect their king as he watched his beloved Theresa fifty years ago (262-63). With a teasing tone, Byron meditates on what one can do in Lent: no one

If foreign, is obliged to fast; and you,

If Protestant, or sickly, or a woman,

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<sup>4</sup> The serio-comic literature has a long history, as Bakhtin discusses thoroughly in *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*, *Rabelais and His World*, and *Dialogic Imagination*. Bakhtin indicates the loss of the “wholeness of a triumphant life, a whole that embraces death, and laughter”—especially in the artistic imagery of the romantics and symbolists (“Form” 199). The visionary romantic poets all speak with a serious tone, while laughter is almost absent in their “vision.” Yet the “romantic grotesque,” starting from Laurence Sterne’s *Tristram Shandy*, subverts authoritarianism and didacticism (*Rabelais* 36-37). The serio-comic genre, however, is “saturated with a specific carnival sense of the world,” which “possesses a mighty life-creating and transforming power, an indestructible vitality” (*Problems* 107). This genre is closely related to “the living *present*” (*Problems* 108). Shakespeare, a master of this style, usually adds comic or farcical interludes in his tragedies, and inserts tragic or pathetic episodes in his comedies, while his tragicomedies incorporate those contradictory elements and illustrate the complexity of humanity. From Said’s perspective, the serio-comic expression demonstrates “amateurism” since it rejects dogmatic unity; it fulfills “worldliness” by presuming that truth “is born *between people* collectively searching for truth, in the process of their dialogic interaction” as displayed in Socratic dialogues (Bakhtin, *Problems* 110). Both Bakhtin and Said affirm the necessity of maintaining the interactive relationship among various voices to explore truth, which never belongs to the authority or to dogmatic metaphysics.

Would rather dine in sin on a ragout—

Dine and be d—d! (“Beppo” 68-71)

The religious observance is grotesquely associated with damnation. His translation of “The Morgante Maggiore” may also nourish his serio-comic style. The beginning of the Gospel of John — “In the beginning was the Word” — precedes the conventional call of epic poets for inspiration, “bid an angel flee, / One only, to be my companion, who / Shall help my famous, worthy, old song through” (“The Morgante Maggiore” 1.1. 6-8). This carnivalesque language subverts the sacredness of both biblical and classical traditions. Saint Peter, unable to bear the arrival of George III, desperately utters his wish to exchange his position with Cerberus in hell (“The Vision of Judgment” 393-96). The mixture of antithetical feelings displays the poet’s perception of the world simultaneously in various modes.

### iii. Contemporary responses to Byron’s pluralistic view

Yet Byron’s contemporary critics did not necessarily accept or appreciate his self-opposition and his serio-comic style. By 1817 his poetry had acquired a fame for “contradictoriness” as “an operating principle within the text (Stabler, *Cambridge* 29). Nineteenth-century readers disliked Byron’s mixture of comic and serious elements because this “would automatically undermine all moral seriousness including the integrity of personal and social relationships” (Stabler, *Cambridge* 19-20). His oppositional voice “provoked both predictable political outrage” and “anxiety about poetry’s palpable effect on its readers” since its “theatricality” “questioned poetic ideals of organic unity and sincerity of address, challenging the new orthodoxies of nineteenth-century poetic production” (Stabler, *Cambridge* 42). In addition, Francis Jeffrey criticizes Byron’s “perversion” for his juxtaposing the sublime “[e]nergy of character and intensity of emotion” on the one hand and “worthlessness and guilt” on the other (“*Edinburgh Review*” 847). This dismissal of hybridity emphasizes on the



poet's moral depravity since the "hybrid" art was regarded as threatening to social stability. The "juxtapositions of pathos and humour appeared as a form of social transgression that might corrupt readers . . ." (Stabler, *Cambridge* 21). Byron's serio-comic narratives, such as "The Vision of Judgment" and "Don Juan," defied the monolithic ideology and therefore his pluralistic view was treated as transgressive and menacing. "The world insisted on simplifying him" (Russell) because his pluralistic view runs counter to the wish for a unified, ordered, and harmonic worldview.

Among Byron's contemporaries, nevertheless, John Murray supports the poet's pluralistic view by comparing it with "the protean talent of Shakespeare" (Smiles 393). This talent displays pluralistic view as well: Shakespearean plays demonstrate "the real state of sublunary nature, which partakes of good and evil, joy and sorrow, mingled with endless variety of proportion and innumerable modes of combination" (Johnson "Preface"); he adheres to "the great law of nature, that all opposites tend to attract and temper each other" (Coleridge, "Recapitulation"). Byron indeed combines "opposites," but his "protean talent" resists to "temper" them—this resistance is radically romantic. Keats praises Byron's "sweetly sad" melody, which can dress griefs "[w]ith a bright halo" ("To Lord Byron" 7-8); however, these oxymoronic descriptions may perfectly catch Keatsian beauty but not Byronic taste, since Byron prefers to maintain opposites rather than synthesizes them. Goethe applauds "Don Juan" to be "a work of boundless genius" because it combines "the bitterest and most savage hatred of humanity" and "the deepest and tenderest love for mankind" (783). Goethe "understood most clearly this [Byron's] insistence upon ploughing art back into reality" (Barton 819)—that is, to show "worldliness" through art. Byron excels in juxtaposing the heterogeneous qualities, but he does not unify them since he consistently holds the "oppositional voices." For him, "two honest fragments, even if incompatible, were preferable to an artificially adjusted, and therefore half-true, whole"

(Barton 825). Synthesis of opposites means the death of his “protean” creativity and the falling apart of his “worldliness.”

Byron’s pluralistic artistry received both positive and negative comments. With a pluralistic view Byron criticizes, and criticism is “an act of political and social engagement” with paradoxical, and contradictory voices that means to subvert “dogmatic certainty” (Ashcroft and Ahluwanlia 32). Far from being a “consistent rebel,” he “had a temperamental aversion to system” (Ridenour, “Waste” 15-16). The pluralistic view accompanies Byron’s oppositional voice. He often retorts his critics by mentioning their names, fighting not for an ideal world but for his selfhood in *this* world. Furthermore, Byron’s pluralistic view is also found in his self-contradiction: he neither endorses a consistent worldview nor constructs a harmonious self-image. As romanticism displays self-contradiction, Byron marks himself as truly romantic by opposing to the world and to himself. When “Byron ‘contradicts’ himself, he is not changing his mind but revealing his ability to see an idea or event in several different ways at nearly the same time” (McGann, *Don Juan in Context* 104-05), a capability shown in his depiction of the serious and the comic concurrently. After all, all criticism “contains, necessarily, its enemy within itself” (Miller 447). The thorough understanding of romanticism and of Byron’s poetics indeed demands pluralistic perceptions.

#### **iv. The functions of the contrapuntal awareness**

##### **a. To reject monolithic views by highlighting cultural diversity**

Byron witnessed the sway of empires in his wandering, and his pluralistic view, stemming from his oppositional inclination, dominated his perception of the exotic scenes and characters. Stabler comments on Abrams’s omission of Byron in *Natural Supernaturalism* for the poet’s “ironic counter-voice” and “satirical perspective” on his contemporaries; this “musical metaphor ‘counter-voice’ suggests the co-existence of

two or more voices . . .” (Stabler, *Cambridge* 19). Said coins the term “contrapuntal reading”<sup>5</sup> to interpret the pluralistic view of an exile under the impact of imperialism. Imperialism presumes a monolithic, dominant worldview, while the contrapuntal awareness highlights a diverse, hybrid context. The view of an exile may expose the instability and heterogeneity in romanticism: it shows “a sense of cultural relativity, a constructivist wariness over any claims to truth or to certain knowledge . . .” (Smith 63). An exile usually possesses this capability: the memory of the homeland culture always coexists with the presence of an exotic culture (or cultures), whereas the presence of the present condition may usually incur the consciousness of another reality. This identity and experience may produce “a sharpened vision”—thus speaks Said—actually, “[w]hat has been left behind may either be mourned, or it can be used to provide a different set of lenses. Since almost by definition exile and memory go together, it is what one remembers of the past and how one remembers it that determine how one sees the future” (“Introduction: Criticism and Exile”). An exile, with the cultivated pluralistic view, can “break down the stereotypes and reductive categories that are so limiting to human thought and communication”; such categories “often shield us from the reality of others” (Said, *Representations of the Intellectual*). It is the job of a critic to highlight truth by breaking down “the stereotypes,” and Byron, owing to his exile, shines in criticizing the imperialist culture with his “set of lenses.”

#### **b. To perceive the connections of people and things**

As Said’s most innovative contribution to the interpretation of the imperial enterprise, the “contrapuntal reading” starts with “a simultaneous awareness both of the

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<sup>5</sup> “Contrapuntal” refers to two or more “independent yet harmonious lines” in music composition (Jackson). All melodies in counterpoint are harmonically interdependent and rhythmically independent. “The internal structures that create each of the voices separately must contribute to the emergent structure of the polyphony, which in turn must reinforce and comment on the structures of the individual voices. The way that is accomplished in detail is . . . ‘counterpoint.’” (Rahn 177).

metropolitan history and of those other subjected and concealed histories against which the dominant discourse acts” (Ashcroft and Ahluwanlia 92). While insisting on connections between the past and the present, between imperialists and imperialized, between culture and imperialism, Said with the “contrapuntal” awareness intends to highlight their “interdependence,” not to reduce their differences (*Culture* 61). This strategy does not aim at the elimination of imperialism by supporting nationalism instead—the elimination itself will create another authority with monolithic ideology. Literary texts are “worldly” because of “their connections to world events” and of “their affiliations with world powers” (Makdisi, “Introduction” 429; cf. McGann, “A point of reference” 213). This corresponds to Althusser’s interpretation of early Marxism: Marx “professes a philosophy of man”—a “communal being” consummated “in universal human relations, with men and with his objects . . .” (227). Their political, social, cultural aspects constitute this “worldliness” (Ashcroft and Ahluwalia 7; Rigney 305; cf. McGann, “History” 227), and hence the interpretation and evaluation of literary works must be managed in this historical-geographical context (Ashcroft and Ahluwalia 29) to highlight social interactions.

Byron depicts the world not “in a unified, integrative, or closed system” but in “a network of systems” (McGann, “*Don Juan*: Form” 30)—in Bakhtin’s words, he creates a polyphonic, dialogic world; in Said’s words, he reconstitutes a world by retaining all the oppositional voices with his “contrapuntal” and “secular” artistry. The “counterpoint” itself must incorporate imperialist voice as well; both the colonizer and the colonized must be juxtaposed so that they may “counter” each other’s “point.” Such a “counter-narrative,” once revealed, “keeps penetrating beneath the surface of individual texts to elaborate the ubiquitous presence of imperialism in canonical culture” (Ashcroft and Ahluwanlia 93). This reading must highlight the dualistic or multiple images of things and reflect “the voices, experiences, interests and identities of

humankind” (Acharya 657). It may enhance one’s perception regarding multiple perspectives (Bilgin 9). Therefore, Byron’s oppositional voice can also be treated as “contrapuntal” since his works usually incorporate contradictory, antithetical elements.

Contrapuntal reading corresponds to Bakhtinian dialogism in assuming a polyphonic, dynamic world, in which no voice is assumed to be superior or inferior to the others; rather, all voices must be treated on equal terms and interact continuously. Nevertheless, Said intends to lay bare especially the pluralistic, dynamic condition of the imperialistic culture, an aspect not emphasized by Bakhtin. Contrapuntal reading serves as a productive strategy in exposing “the worldliness of the text”: western philosophy tends to separate the aesthetic and cultural discourse from the worldly domain, so Said attempts to disclose “a dense network of affiliations within and between cultures and societies (Ashcroft and Ahluwanlia 94). Exiles in the pain of recollection can “provoke their readers into an awareness of how language is about experience and not just about itself” (Said, *Reflections*). Their view, then, does not focus on themselves alone, but on the connection of different voices.

The connections revealed through “contrapuntal” awareness may cover the historical, political, social, or cultural dimensions (Bilgin 5-6; Said, *Culture* 336; Ashcroft and Ahluwanlia 7). These connections, based on the rejection of dogmatic, monolithic authority, manifest cultural diversity. The term “contrapuntal” accentuates the importance of this “connectedness” more clearly than “pluralistic”: the latter merely indicates the coexistence of multiple voices, while the former presumes the *interactive relationship* of these voices. Metanarratives and authoritative discourse usually negate or neglect these connections in order to establish a unified, consistent, well-organized system, and thus fail to demonstrate genuine “worldliness.” The “contrapuntal” awareness, holding the interaction of several voices as normal and necessary, may further explore the importance of this polyphony of the world better

than an ideally systematic, unified perspective.

### **c. To reconstitute the world**

“Counterpoint” requires the unique ingenuity of a composer; similarly, the “contrapuntal” view, far from simply perceiving the babble in a disordered world, demands the artistic creativity of a writer. With this view, an exile can brilliantly associate heterogeneous, disparate elements. Therefore, despite the “nomadic, decentered” disposition (Said, *Reflections*), an exile does not lapse into a chaotic, lawless consciousness and worldview. Moreover, with the “contrapuntal” awareness, exiles are eager to “reconstitute their broken lives” (Said, *Reflections*) and then to maintain “the connections between things” (Said, *Culture* 336). “Much of Exile’s life is taken up with compensating for disorienting loss by creating a new world to rule. . . . The exile’s new world, logically enough, is unnatural and its unreality resembles fiction” (Said, *Reflections*). However, this does not mean that an exile will invent a monologic, simplified version of the world. “Counterpoint” itself always emerges as a “dialogue” between/among mutually dependent melodies; thence, the exile’s “reconstitution” of things, based on their connections, does not end up being a metanarrative, nor can it exhaust the possibilities of interpreting the complicated, diverse world. Byron created his own poetic style by intermingling Milton, cavalier poets, Dryden, Pope, graveyard school poets, Cervantes, and Sterne; he continually “reconstituted” this motley style so that these sources maintain a “contrapuntal” relationship in his poetry. Their interdependence consolidates Byron’s oppositional voice and enriches his narratives of exiles.

## **V. The design of the whole argument**

Byron’s experience as a wanderer—together with his learning from tradition and

his self-oppositional personality—enabled him to compose with a unique view. Therefore, inspired by Said’s discourse on exile, I intend to explore the artistry nourished from this view in “Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage.” This is not simply a travelogue: it contains lyrics, social criticism, satire, and meditations on history—among many other genres. As McGann avers, the changing “momentary attitudes” of Childe Harold exist essentially as the “design” of the poem (*Fiery Dust* 64). The hero discerns the situation “a complex product of European history, personal temperament, and circumstance”; therefore, this poem combines diverse elements (Ridenour, “Byron” 66). Coole highlights the contrapuntal relationship between Byron’s footnotes and the main text of the poem: “The man who composes a footnote [. . .] has discovered among the devices of printed language something analogous with counterpoint; a way of speaking in two voices at once . . .” (39-40). Nevertheless, the poem itself demonstrates the “contrapuntal” view as well.

Said’s description of exiles can perfectly expound Byron’s oppositional artistry in “Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage.” The poet’s “nomadic” life nurtured his “contrapuntal” awareness, while he “reconstituted” his broken life and the world in this travelogue. As romanticism features fragments and fracture (Regier 2-4), Byron in “Childe Harold” also impresses his readers with many broken images: his alienated self, the ruins in Greece and Rome, and the multiple, heterogeneous views on empires and nature. These “fragments” turn out to be a pastiche in Byron’s “reconstitution.” Harold starts in a “state of deprivation”—he is cut off from his homeland—and “turn[s] exile into pilgrimage” (Ridenour, “Byron” 66). An exile is a “bearer of oppositional analyses and maker of antinomian alliances” (Bhabha 376)—in this light Byron/Harold rejects a monolithic, unified worldview by showing the “counterpoint” of diverse voices. Byron’s “reconstitution,” based on his own oppositional inclination and various experiences, brings forward a motley, miscellaneous image that invites my further

exploration.

The discussion of Byron's "reconstitution" is divided into the following parts. Chapter Two deals with the significance of the hero's selfhood as an exile. Harold's nomadic life contributes to his decentered worldview, while his oppositional inclination displays a contrapuntal perception. The unsettling force of exile, emerging as sufferings in "Childe Harold," inspires the poet/hero to create meanings for his selfhood. Chapter Three focuses on Byron's pluralistic view(s) toward the representation, destruction, and subsistence of culture under the impact of imperialism. Culture itself incorporates heterogeneous and mutually contradictory elements, while the Greek ruins associate the ancient and the modern in the hero's mind. Chapter Four explores Byron's ambiguous attitude towards empires and imperialism. His oppositional inclination pushes him to condemn imperialism, but he also contradicts his own anti-imperialist viewpoint as well. Chapter Five examines the poet's/hero's multiple interpretations of nature. Through the pluralistic view, nature appears in various images, while the poet/hero still displays his connection with the mundane world in his solitary meditation in nature. Chapter Six discusses the inconclusive ending of "Childe Harold" and then concludes my whole argument. In brief, I attempt to examine the SCENE—Self, Culture, Empire, Nature, and Ending—that Byron reconstitutes with his "contrapuntal" view. This reconstitution manifests the poet's "worldliness": with honesty he shows his awareness in the world.

Although Said applies the "contrapuntal reading" mainly to the discussion of the implications of imperialism in literary texts such as *Northanger's Abbey* and *Heart of Darkness*, this strategy means not to probe into imperialism *per se* but to highlight the inevitability of worldliness, "to read and apprehend the world as both a place of multiple perspectives and of unequal power relations" (Said, *Culture and Imperialism* 31). Imperialism exists as one voice in the secular world, while the political, cultural,



historical and Byron's personal voices are also entwined in this world. The terms "counterpoint" and "contrapuntal views" in this book are employed to highlight the interconnections of the diverse voices in the secular world as the poet perceives it—not merely in an empire or in the imperialist enterprise. There are several "(sub)contexts" for Byron to reconstitute his self-identity—culture, empire, and nature—with the secular world as the ultimate "context." Byron does not resolve any conflict in his "reconstitution," but his "protean" creativity, coupled with the Byronic self-opposition, highlights the association of conflicting elements found in the mundane world.

All writing is world-making—Byron creates his own in his criticism and interpretation of the world. This "reconstitution" is not meant to be exhaustive, panoramic, or authoritative, yet it highlights the ambiguous and interesting "connections" between Byron and the world: under the dominance of monologic ideology like imperialism and Wordsworthian poetics of nature, the poet can still declare his autonomy by revealing a "contrapuntal" view.

## Chapter Two

### Poetic Self as an Exile

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

(Byron, "Childe Harold's Pilgrimage" 3.50-58)

Exile is life led outside habitual order. It is nomadic, decentered, contrapuntal; but no sooner does one get accustomed to it than its unsettling force erupts anew. (Said, "Reflections on Exile")

#### I. Introduction: The importance of identity

Byron's identity as an exile contains three features—nomadic, decentered, and contrapuntal—revealed in his address to Harold quoted above. To "traverse earth" means a "nomadic" life. He belongs to no location, whereas his "invisibility" to the world implies his marginal status as a wanderer. To identify himself as "[n]othing" characterizes his thought as "decentered." This recognition does not render him a nihilist; rather, it manifests his refusal to hold a transcendental worldview on the one

hand and to presume himself as an authority on the other. Furthermore, his creation of Harold resists nihilism: his close association with the knight, the “[s]oul of [his] thought,” reveals his creativity as “contrapuntal” because both the poet and the hero are “blended” in spirit and birth; Byron creates “[a] being more intense” and gains another “life.” He proclaims both himself and the hero to be different, but their views and experiences are entwined closely as two “melodies” in counterpoint. Moreover, his “feeling still with” Harold implies that his creativity will be renewed by the “unsettling force” of exile though he confesses that “no wonder waits him” because he has “grown aged in this world of woe” (3.37-39). He is always “gazing” at the world, and thus holding some connections with the others despite his marginal status. Hence, his identity as an exile will never ossify—the “unsettling force” always compels this identity to change in various circumstances. The formation of his identity must undergo sufferings as he feels with Harold in his “crush’d feelings dearth.” “Byron’s conception of himself is of a perpetual, if rambling and digressive, development rather than of a ‘shaped’ identity” (Schweizer 189-90). His identity of an exile, therefore, remains “anew” in the ever-lasting painful reconstitution.

The central interest of this travelogue represents the “self-dramatization and self-discovery” of the narrating poet (McGann, *Beauty* 49). Yet an exile, being “decentered,” cannot logically presume the “self” as the “center” of meanings. Precisely speaking, exiles do not “discover” their original identities—rather, they must re-create new identities for themselves. Self-discovery usually starts from ignorance and matures in self-understanding, while the “self” must already be there; yet exiles always endure the pain of loss, bereavement, and separation, whereas their self-understanding must always yield to revision. The exile’s “self” must constantly be reconsidered and re-formed in various “contexts” as the wandering continues. This self-understanding will also reflect his knowledge of the world.

To treat the author as the “center” presumes a humanistic interpretation. The emphasis on an author’s identity, “the modern concept of authorship,” is “the most significant and widely recognized development in the aesthetics of the eighteenth century” (Bennett 39)—that is, the Humanism-Enlightenment heritage, which assumes human autonomy based on reason. Humanists suppose that “maximizing happiness and minimizing suffering are all that matter,” and that “the application of science and reason will inevitably usher in a Brave New World of peace and contentment”; they anticipate “freedom of thought and expression” in “an open society” by endorsing “positive, rational, and ultimately more life-affirming and life-enhancing” ideas (Law). *Utopia* by Thomas More and Gulliver’s “Voyage to the country of the Houyhnhnms” by Jonathan Swift both demonstrate the humanist dream of an ideal happy land governed by reason. Sir Philip Sidney, a Renaissance humanist, argues for the sacredness of poets: they compose works just as God created heaven and earth: they “imitate the inconceivable excellencies of God” (“Apology” 146); moreover, nature is merely “brazen,” but poets can “deliver a golden” (“Apology” 145). They can enhance morality more effectively than philosophers and historians (“Apology” 147-78). Tasso affirms the role of a poet as a teacher: poetry is “fashioned to teach us how to live” (177). Bacon believes that “poesy serveth and confereth to magnanimity, morality, and to delectation. And therefore it was ever thought to have some participation of divines, because it doth raise and erect the mind . . .” (184). For Reynolds, poets are “the best masters . . . from whose fires . . . the greatest part of all humane knowledges have taken their first light” (194). For some romantic critics, the creativity of authors is also recognized as supreme and powerful. William Wordsworth argues that a poet “has a greater knowledge of human nature, and a more comprehensive soul, than are supposed to be among mankind” so that the poetry can display “the spontaneous overflow of power feelings.” Arthur Schopenhauer asserts

that a poet “holds up to us the magic glass, in which all that is essential and significant appears before us collected and placed in the clearest light . . .” (504). For Percy Shelley, poets are “the institutors of laws, and the founders of civil society, and the inventors of the arts of life, and the teachers” and they participate in “the eternal, the infinite” (517). The author’s self and individuality have long been acknowledged since the emergence of humanism. Also influential is M. H. Abrams’s formulation of romantic poetry as the reflection of the poet’s mind: the source and subject of poetry are “the attributes and actions of the poet’s own mind” (22); such poetry “circles out from the poet as center,” and such an orientation is “not only expressive but self-expressive” (99). The “widespread use of literature as an index . . . to personality was a product of the characteristic aesthetic orientation of the early nineteenth century” (Abrams 227). The conception of the poet as the center of creation owes greatly to humanism, but this focus on the poet usually assumes his/her self-sufficiency and tends to marginalize or even to neglect the other elements in literary production: the world, the reader, or the work itself.

However, the identity of an exile challenges the man-centered ideology. Exile “cannot be made to serve notions of humanism” since “the literature about exile objectifies an anguish and a predicament most people rarely experience first hand”; the experiences in exile can hardly be identified as “beneficially humanistic” (Said, “Reflections on Exile”). The poet as an exile can neither “maximize happiness and minimize sufferings,” nor “teach” the world by relying on human reason. The loss of home also results in that of one’s identity since exile offers no stable footing for one to acquire an identity. Nevertheless, identity is still crucial “because the identity of a people determines the manner in which they organize knowledge” (Ashcroft and Ahluwalia 113). An exile “must cultivate a scrupulous . . . subjectivity” (Said, “Reflections on Exile”) because “[n]obody can live in perpetual deferment of their

sense of selfhood, or free themselves from bondage without a strongly affirmative consciousness of who they are. Without such self-consciousness, one would not even know what one lacked; and a subject that thinks itself complete feels no need to revolt” (Eagleton 37). In this light, Byron’s insistent opposition to tyranny testifies to his awareness of something “lack” in himself, and this opposition pushes him to establish his selfhood. The exile’s self must be considered in his/her relationship with the world, while his/her works reveal this relationship.

Said’s discourse on exile, different from Abrams’s argument about the romantic poets, sheds a new light on the discussion of Byron’s selfhood. As an exile, Byron does not convey the “spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings” in the “beneficially humanistic” sense. In the life of loss, deprivation, and instability, it is necessary to “reconstitute” his identity. The following discussion of Byron’s selfhood incorporates three parts. Firstly, Byron reconstitutes his self-identity by maintaining connections with the world, while Harold serves as merely one of his alter egos. Secondly, Byron displays the three features of exile—nomadic, decentered, and contrapuntal—in characterizing himself or his heroes mentioned in “Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage.” Thirdly, his reconstitution of selfhood must persist because of “the unsettling force of exile.” Byron’s foregrounding of sufferings in his poetry runs counter to the humanists’ “maximizing happiness and minimizing suffering.” Yet, far from being a passive sufferer, Byron resists nihilism by means of writing and displays his perseverance and unyielding strength in his description of sufferings.

## **II. Byron’s reconstitution of self-identity**

### **A. Byron’s association with the world in his reconstitution of selfhood**

In “the perilous territory of not-belonging,” exiles feel “an urgent need to reconstitute their broken lives” (Said, “Reflections on Exile”). Byron symbolizes his fragmentary self with the image of a broken mirror: all the broken pieces make “[a] thousand images of one that was” (3.290-91); “the heart will break, yet brokenly live on” (3.288). Exiles, being separated from their homelands, undergo irrecoverable loss, and thence retain only “fragments” of their original lives. Identity represents our “location in social space, a hermeneutic horizon that is both grounded in a location and an opening or site from which we attempt to know the world” (Alcoff 335). In other words, it serves as the basis for our self-evaluation and worldview. This “hermeneutic horizon” presumes the necessity of a “context” for the formation of one’s identity: “No one is totally self-supporting, not even the greatest of free spirits” (Said, *Representations of the Intellectual*); “[i]dentity is what we impose on ourselves through our lives as social, historical, political, and even spiritual beings. The logic of culture and of families doubles the strength of identity . . .” (Said, “On Jean Genet’s Later Works” 37-38). Since the “hermeneutic horizon” of exiles continuously changes, the “reconstitution” of their identities must involve multiple backgrounds and embraces heterogeneous voices, “a huge variety of postures and tones” (Jean, Hall 135).

Byron displays multiple identities in “Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage.” As a poet, he embraces Miltonic Satanism, cavalier-Augustan heritage, and the graveyard school, glorifying the achievements of Dante and Tasso. As a critic, he criticizes imperialism and himself. He wanders as a nobleman who yearns for his home. As a cosmopolitan intellectual, he feels fascinated by Rousseau and Napoleon<sup>1</sup>. In nature he meditates like an environmentalist, who calls for the harmonious relationship

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<sup>1</sup> All arguments about Napoleon in this book are revised from a journal article by the author (Zhang, Denghan. “Byron’s Portrayal of Buonaparte Napoleon: Miltonic Satan, an Imperialist, and the Poet’s Alter Ego.” *Chihlee Journal*, vol. 42, 2022, pp. 233-85.)

between human beings and nature. In battlefields and among ruins, he speaks like a humanitarian, who mourns for the cruelty of wars and the misery of the dead. Before artifacts, he enjoys their beauty like a connoisseur. In Portugal, Spain, Greece, Albania, and Italy, he probes into the local culture and sometimes acts like one of the natives—as it is testified by the portrait *Lord Byron in Albanian Dress* painted by Thomas Phillips. These multiple identities, representing his worldliness, come into being because of his exile.

Byron recognizes the necessity of community in his “reconstitution” of self-identity. Worldliness is indispensable for him to know himself and the world. As it is indicated in Chapter One, exile did not isolate Byron in vacuum, and he actively interacted with society. As a “cosmopolitan writer” he displays “predominantly rhetorical and conversational” style (McGann, “Rethinking Romanticism” 238). This style must assume a “context”—a community, society, or an author-reader relationship—so that his discourse can continue. Moreover, worldliness covers multiple, diverse relationships among all beings, and the formation of one’s identity depends on the connections with others. Though claiming to prefer loneliness to community, Byron declares “I live not in myself, but I become / Portion of that around me . . .” (3.680-81) and that he would rather mingle with nature (3.687-88); “we become a part of what has been, / And grow upon the spot . . .” (4.1241-42). Loneliness does not deprive him of his connections with the world but enables him to see and affirm his worldliness. “In solitude, where we are least alone” (3.843), the poet discovers that some mysterious “source of Music” is “[b]inding all things with beauty” (3.846-49). He even imagines that after death he shall be free “[w]hen Elements to Elements conform” (3.702). He accentuates his connections with nature and “all things.” The recognition of such connections—also called “affiliation” in Said’s discourse—marks the worldliness of an author. “To recreate the affiliative network is therefore to make



visible, to give materiality back to, the strands holding the text to society, author and culture' (Said, *The World* 175). The world in "Childe Harold" features connections among beings, and the poet's existence becomes significant because of his associations with all beings around him. Byron acknowledges that "Childe Harold's Pilgrimage" "in some degree connects [him] with the spot where it was produced, and the objects it would fain describe" ("To John Hobhouse, Esq., A.M., F.R.S."). The "spot" can be nature, ruins, and cities; his connections with different "spots" highlight his worldliness. His "affiliation" with the world is also proclaimed:

I love not Man the less, but Nature more,  
From these our interviews, in which I steal  
From all I may be, or have been before,  
To mingle with the Universe, and feel  
What I can ne'er express—yet can not all conceal. (4.1598-1602)

He loves both society and nature, and he anticipates "interviews" with both so he can "mingle with the Universe"—the ultimate goal of the formation of his selfhood. The word "interviews" indicates that this formation is constant and dynamic, and that "self" stands on equal terms with society and nature. His intimacy with the "world" and "nature" is also revealed in his address to Augusta: "The world is all before [him]" and he will "mingle with the quiet of [nature's] sky" since nature is his friend ("Epistle to Augusta" 81-87). In Said's word, Byron "articulates a consciousness of his time that he shares with the group of which historical circumstances . . . make him a part" (*Reflections*). His wandering does not end up with a bitter loss; it drives him to "mingle with the Universe" and to nourish his worldliness, which assumes a matchless "context" for his identity formation.

In addition, he argues that one must strive with either God (4.297) or Demons (4.298)—he does not propose the possibility of enjoying life-long solitude peacefully.

The poet pays special attention to the struggle with demons, “who impair / The strength of better thoughts, and seek their prey / In melancholy bosoms” (4.298-300). Those who resist the demons, moody from their early years, love “to dwell in darkness and dismay / Deeming themselves predestined to a doom / Which is not of the pangs that pass away” (4.302-04). In other words, the strife with demons does not leave the victims alone, and their pangs proves to be unsettling and unending. Byron’s comment on strife provides “a perspective on a world which is actually there in the experiences, commitments and sufferings of all people . . .” (Ashcroft and Ahluwalia 32). Sufferings in Byron’s critical language always presuppose some self-other confrontation. Exile pushed him to cultivate the self-other relationship extensively in sufferings and accordingly promoted the formation of his identity.

### **B. Byron’s heroes as his alter egos**

Byron’s “affiliation” with the world also appears in his portrayals of characters. The abundant broken images also imply figuratively the abundance of his alter egos and the necessity of reconstituting his identity. His “habit of infusing his own personality into the fictitious heroes” is “the only unobtrusive and dignified way of pleading the truth about himself” (Little 223). As the “most confessional of poets,” Byron emerges “the most reticent” (Clubbe, “Byron, Napoleon” 181)—since he reveals himself mostly in his heroes. “Reconstitution” served as a means for him to understand and to interpret himself and the world: he constructs his own image by characterizing one hero after another. In “Childe Harold,” Byron’s self is revealed in the narrator, Harold, and several of his favorite characters, such as Rousseau, Napoleon, Dante, and Tasso. These are some of the “fragments” with which he “reconstitutes” his poetic self. The narrator speaks for the poet himself, and can be treated as Byron’s ego, while all the others exist as his alter egos.

Byron pays particular attention to wandering or banished heroes: Rousseau,

Napoleon, Dante, and Tasso all suffered in exile, and his depictions of their sufferings reflect his own as well.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, Rousseau and Napoleon exerted far more impact on Byron than the other exiles. Endowed with amazingly strong passion, they revolutionized the nineteenth-century Europe. His portraits of Rousseau and Napoleon are “doublings of himself” (Newey 185). What he says of Rousseau can also be applied to himself (Russell). This French philosopher was “the self-torturing sophist” and the “apostle of Affliction” (3.725, 726), and his “work and character define, in autobiographical terms, Byron’s own Romantic agony” (Schweizer 188). In Byron’s imagination, on the other hand, Napoleon held the “first and foremost” sway

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<sup>2</sup> In addition to “Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage,” Byron also mentions their names in other works. For example, Tasso has endured “[l]ong years of outrage – calumny – and wrong”; yet he will not yield, and “tyrant Will” cannot deprive him of his peace (“The Lament of Tasso” 45-46, 72-77). Dante proudly declares that “tyrannous faction” and “the Brawling crowd” in Florence have not “[q]uenced the old exile’s spirit, stern and high” (“The Prophecy of Dante” 1.35-42). While Byron denounces that “Florence vainly begs her banished dead and weeps” (4.531), he indirectly blames the British Empire for his exile. As one of the “mighty minds,” Rousseau “doth hallow in the core / Of human hearts the ruin of a wall / Where dwelt the wise and wondrous” (“Sonnet to Lake Lemman” 7-9). Byron assumes that visitors to Lake Lemman may “reconstitute” “the wise and wondrous” Rousseau from the ruin there. He agrees with Rousseau about the futility of this life (“Don Juan” 7.23-27). Besides, Napoleon “was crucial to the cultural politics and poetics of the Romantic period” (Bainbridge 16). He emerges in “Ode to Napoleon Buonaparte,” “Ode from the French,” “Napoleon’s Farewell,” “On Napoleon’s Escape from Elba,” Canto III of “Childe Harold,” and Canto XI of “Don Juan.” Byron sometimes characterizes Napoleon as Satan-like: “Many could a world control; / Thee alone no doom can bow” (“From the French” 11-12); the emperor, “miscall’d the Morning Star, / Nor man nor fiend hath fallen so far” (“Ode to Napoleon Buonaparte” 8-9)—Lucifer has also been called “the Morning Star.” Such a characterization manifests the influence of Milton on Byron. The outcasts drew Byron’s attention since he shared the same plight with them. In addition, Michelangelo and Boccaccio also appear in “Childe Harold” as exiles: the former escaped from Florence for fear of being persecuted by the Medici family (4.484); the latter, though born in Florence, lived in Naples in his early years, while his tomb was “[u]ptorn” so that he could “[n]o more amidst dead find room” (4.520-21)—he became a homeless ghost. Besides, Petrarch’s laureate grew on “a far and foreign soil” (“Don Juan” 4.511-12; 4.510-13)—this achievement was not acknowledged in his homeland. These historical figures in Byron’s poetry serve as the poet’s alter egos.

(Clubbe, "Byron, Napoleon" 181) and inspired the poet's "lifelong identification . . . as his other self" (Bloom, "Napoleon and Prometheus" 79) and as his first of the "historical self-projections" that include "Voltaire, Rousseau, Dante, Tasso, Pulci, and a series of remarkable worldly characters . . ." (McGann, "Hero with a Thousand Faces" 296). Byron views Napoleon as "his alter image" (Manning, [Peter], *Reading* 145); his "habitual identification with Napoleon provided a perspective on himself that the device of Harold no longer furnished" (Manning, [Peter], "Sublime" 899). Linked by "overwhelming energy" and "internal contradiction" (Hill 131), both Byron and Napoleon, determining to "rebel against" those "who craved to subdue them" (Milbanke 22), possessed "the imagination of Europe" in the first third of the nineteenth century (Dargan 530). Early in his life, Byron regarded Napoleon as his own hero, and intended to "establish himself as a conquering force in letters: Harold was his first major victory" (Douglass 8; cf. Erdman, "Byron and Revolt in England" 240). After 1822, he styled himself "Noel Byron" or "NB," the same initials as those of Napoleon Buonaparte. Byron aimed at being the "grand Napoleon of the realms of rhyme" ("Don Juan" 11.440). In addition, *Vindiciae Gallicae*, a defence of the French Revolution by James Mackintosh, and *On the Causes and Consequences of the War with France*, a criticism of British war policy by Thomas Erskine, both underpin Byron's support of Napoleon (Kelsall, "Byron's politics" 46). Byron saw "the parable of the unruly self" in Napoleon (Reiman 881), and he became defiant early because of his mimicry and worship of the emperor (Clubbe, "Byron, Napoleon" 182). The emperor was "an exemplary tragic figure, a historical embodiment of the contradictions Byron perceived within himself" (Dawson 68). Carlyle sees their connection: "the very Napoleon, the very Byron, in some seven years, has become obsolete, and were now a foreigner to his Europe" (*Sartor Resartus*). Byron highlights the "affiliation" of various characters with himself, and they all "mingle with the Universe" of his poetry.

The reconstitution of his self-identity works in the “affiliation,” which displays his worldliness at the same time.

Byron glorifies and laments for wandering heroes, and simultaneously the presentations of these characters exist as his self-portrait. Harold, Napoleon, Rousseau, Dante, and Tasso constitute some aspects of Byron’s image as an exile. His “reconstitution” demonstrates his international scope as well. The following discussion will focus on the three characteristics of Byron’s poetic image as an exile exemplified in “Childe Harold”: nomadic, decentered, and contrapuntal.

### **III. The characteristics of an exile**

#### **A. Nomadic: The dislocation of selfhood**

##### **i. The self-willed exile**

Exile, “a solitude experienced outside the group: the deprivations felt at not being with others in the communal habitation,” elicits the loss of contact with one’s origin and of a stable life; it tears people from “the nourishment of tradition, family, and geography” (Said, “Reflections of Exile”). While observing some ruins in Rhine, the wandering hero sees some “chiefless castles” (3.412) and some “tenantless” ruins (3.417). These isolated ruins, existing far away from human community, betoken Byron’s image as an exile; they stand with “a lofty mind, / Worn, but unstooping to the baser crowd” (3.415-16). They are viewed as closer to nature, “holding dark communion with the Cloud” (3.418). This image, far from being humanistic, does not affirm the status of exiles as sacred, nor their potential as unlimited—yet it symbolizes the poet’s resolute self-exile.

Byron often characterizes his heroes by highlighting their willful alienation—simultaneously it amounts to his self-portrayal. “Ungrateful Florence” banishes

Dante so that the bard refuses to be buried in his hometown (4.505).<sup>3</sup> “Clutching difference like a weapon to be used with stiffened will, the exile jealously insists on his or her right to refuse to belong” (Said, “Reflections on Exile”). This refusal also marks the image of Napoleon. By portraying Napoleon’s passion as “fire,” Byron illustrates the nomadic feature of the emperor and himself as well: his soul “will not dwell / In its own narrow being, but aspire / Beyond the fitting medium of desire” (3.372-74). Napoleon would not like to be confined to a narrow space, and this ambition pushes him to wander and conquer the world. The link of fire and nomadic spirit is already found in the characterization of Miltonic Satan: when the devil attempts to roam from hell to the earth, he looks

like a comet burned,  
That fires the length of Ophiuchus huge  
In th’ arctic sky, and from his horrid hair  
Shakes pestilence and war. (Milton 2.708-11)

Satan, “like a pyramid of fire” (Milton 2.1013), wanders to the earth with the burning desire to ruin it; when he seduces Eve, the devil behaves like “a wand’ring fire,” kindled “through agitation to a flame” (Milton 9.634, 637). Similarly, Napoleon waged wars across Europe with fire-like passion. The nomadic life, described in exaggerative language, sets the background for Satan and Napoleon to war. Fire never stays at a particular spot, but always expands its horizon in all directions as much as possible. After the Napoleonic War, Byron laments for the Spanish people who “sank beneath / Tyrants and Tyrants’ slaves” in “the fires of Death” (1.417-18)—obviously he compares Napoleon to Death. This comparison echoes Satan’s declaration to Sin and Death:

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<sup>3</sup> This willful alienation is further portrayed in “The Prophecy of Dante.” Dante finds that “[t]he World hath left me,” and his dust will be scattered (“The Prophecy of Dante” 1.47, 75); since Florence banished him, he rejects to be buried there (“The Prophecy of Dante” 1.83-84).

“on your joint vigor now / My hold of this new kingdom all depends, / Through Sin to Death exposed by my exploit” (Milton 10.405-07). The emperor’s fire, once kindled, becomes “quenchless” and “[p]reys upon high adventure, nor can tire / Of aught but rest; a fever at the core, / Fatal to him who bears, to all who ever bore” (3.375, 376-78). Byron intends to emphasize the unstoppable passion and aggression of Napoleon, but this exaggerative description may also expose the unbounded nomadic spirit of exile—since the emperor continually waged wars against the neighboring countries, he could scarcely stay in France as his empire expanded. His fire-like passion always haunted him as he wandered either as a conqueror or as a banished hero. Byron’s fascination with the image of fire demonstrates his willful desire for a nomadic life; his description of Napoleon, owing to the example of Miltonic Satan, insinuates his own unbounded passion and aggression, which culminated in his resistance against the Ottoman Empire in the Greek War of Independence.

## ii. The ambiguous relationship with “home”

This self-willed exile ironically runs counter to Byron’s unfading memory of his “home,” functioning as a gesture to combat his sufferings and to invite his contemporary readers to accept his “vision.” Exile involves a struggle with dislocation, while being nomadic becomes the “norm” of life. Yet “homelessness” cannot eliminate the presence of “home” in the memory of the wandering hero.<sup>4</sup>

On the one hand, Byron/Harold begins his exile because of “the fulness of Satiety” at home (1.34). “Home” fails to provide a meaningful life, while exile is meant to

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<sup>4</sup> As he views the cloisters of Newstead “but to weep” (“Elegy on Newstead Abbey” 144), he may feel that exile “is the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home”; the “pathos of exile is in the loss of contact with the solidity and the satisfaction of earth” (Said, “Reflections on Exile”). He “conveys a nostalgia for home and a sense of the heartache of exile”; the inconclusive ending of “Don Juan” in England suggests “Byron’s inability to detach himself from his native land (Lau 95).

oppose such a life. Fed up with “revel and ungodly glee,” he curses his family: “one sad losel soils a name for ay” (1.15, 23).<sup>5</sup> Besides, his friends are merely “flatterers” and “heartless Parasites,” while his beloved women care only for “pomp and power” (1.75-78). The hero believes that nothing “[c]an blazon evil deeds, or consecrate a crime” of his family (1.27). He recognizes the crisis of falling to emptiness before starting his journey: his native land now seems “to him more lone than Eremite’s sad cell” (1.36); his beloved woman cannot marry him (1.40); he is too cynic to seek his friends for comfort since he deems that no one loves him (1.71-73). Revelries with his family and friends incur not pleasure but loneliness, while this nothingness almost overwhelms him. Thus, his alienation originates not from exile, but from his monotonous family life. Since the native land cannot satisfy his spiritual needs for a meaningful life and for solid associations with society, he would rather find his own “home” on the ocean (3.110) and his companions in “desert, forest, cavern, [and] breaker’s foam” (3.113-14). Compared himself to a falcon, he treats “the boundless air alone” as “home” (3.130). Harold fails to cultivate his identity at “home,” while he endeavors to build it elsewhere.<sup>6</sup> In other words, the idea of “home” metamorphoses in the form of ocean, desert, forest, or air—only at “home” or in some “context” can he define himself.

On the other hand, home—together with his family and motherland—always haunts Byron’s memory in his wandering.<sup>7</sup> Hence Harold bears the rift and pathos

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<sup>5</sup> Probably this “loسل” is modelled on Byron’s uncle William, a murderer who was remitted of the capital punishment because of his aristocratic identity.

<sup>6</sup> Byron shows this desire in his early poetry: “And I will cross the whitening foam, / And I will seek a foreign home; / Till I forget a false fair face, / I ne’er shall find a resting-place”; “The poorest, verist wretch on earth / Still finds some hospitable hearth” (“Stanzas to a Lady” 25-28, 31-32).

<sup>7</sup> Byron expresses his bond with his family very frequently, as he says in “Beppo”: “England! with all thy faults I love thee still” (369). He speaks to the oak in his family mansion: “I rear’d thee with pride;



brought by exile. While he travels to Greece, the knight's "parted bosom clings to wonted home" (2.864): the exotic scenes remind him of the Greeks' resistance to Persian Empire and of the bitter loss of contact with the Great Britain, his "wonted home." The value of "home" for Byron is affirmed in exile, but his "home" is not confined to Newstead Abbey or the United Kingdom anymore. Homes are provisional for exiles, and the sense of belongingness is gradually blotted out, as he discerns: "I stood / Among them, but not of them" (3.1049, 1054-55).<sup>8</sup> He prefers to "'midst the many stand / Unheeded, searching through the crowd to find / Fit speculation" on the mysteries of nature (3.87-89). His "speculation" is aimed at the discovery of some meaning for his existence. His decision to start the "pilgrimage" stems from his awareness of the loss of selfhood in reckless revelries, and the nomadic life initiates the possibility of re-evaluating "home" and of "reconstituting" his identity.

The pain of exiles, besides, derives not simply from being separated from home, but also from "living with the many reminders that . . . home is not in fact so far away,"

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/ . . . I water thy stem with my tears"; he treats that oak as his alter ego: "thou were not fated affection to share" (To an Oak at Newstead" 6-7; 15). As he bids farewell to the Newstead, he sighs: "Thy vaults will echo back my knell, / Thy towers my tomb will view," while the former glories of the hall will always be remembered ("The Adieu" 33-40). Leaving England excruciates him like Adam's loss of paradise: "Each scene recall'd the vanish'd hours, / And bade him curse his future fate"; "I cannot view my Paradise / Without the wish of dwelling there" ("To a Lady" 3-4, 15-16). Despite the decline of his family, he finds himself always under its influence: "And vain was the hope to avert our decline, / And the fate of my fathers had faded to mine" ("Newstead Abbey" 15-16). Dante the exile, in Byron's description, also displays his spiritual association with his homeland. He imagines returning to Florence ("The Prophecy of Dante" 1.38-41) and means to protect Florence as Jesus would do to Jerusalem ("The Prophecy of Dante" 1.60-64). He speaks to Florence: "Thou'rt mine – my bones shall be within thy breast, My soul within thy language . . ." ("The Prophecy of Dante" 2.20-21). This love for Florence contradicts his refusal to be buried in his hometown—while the self-contradiction also characterizes Byron.

<sup>8</sup> This paradoxical feeling haunts Byron: "I look around, and cannot trace / One friendly smile or welcome face, / And ev'n in crowds am still alone" ("Stanzas to a Lady" 23-24); "Men without country, who, too long estranged, / Had found no native home, or found it changed" ("The Island" 1.29-30).

so that the exiles are kept “in constant but tantalizing and unfulfilled touch with the old place” (Said, *Representations of the Intellectual*). The awareness of his “wonted home” demonstrates his “tantalizing and unfulfilled touch” with his native place. “Home” is always negated while he indulges in revelries, yet it becomes extensively affirmed as he wanders in nature or exotic scenes. His connection with home is weak in England but strengthened in exile. Harold’s resolution to wander on the continent seems to expose his rebellion against everything related to his native country—so resolute that he bids farewell to no one. However, he shuns his family and friends before leaving because he fears to break his heart (1.86-90). “Home” always holds sway in the hero: neither Byron nor Harold can cut his emotional and spiritual ties with his homeland. In his letters of 1816, while the poet composed Canto III of “Childe Harold,” “there is a bitterness towards the cant of English ‘society’ which has excluded him. But there is also an intense desire to be readmitted to that society, or at least, to be justified in its eyes” (MacLeod 261-62). At the beginning of his “pilgrimage,” while speaking to his young page, Harold mourns for the loss of contact with his family although he speaks with an easy tone:

Deserted is my own good Hall,  
Its hearth is desolate;  
Wild weeds are gathering on the wall;  
My Dog howls at the gate. (1.130-33)

This lament suggests his desire to remain associated with his home. By imagining his home as wasteland, Harold shows “a consciousness regretful of its abandoning actions. Part of Byron’s subtext, in other words, is Harold’s longing for relationship” (Ellege 159). His “Good Night” song exposes “a nervousness, uncertainty, and ambivalence that belie the cavalier indifference to departure attributed to Harold earlier and prepares for the ample elaboration of his anxiety” (Ellege 158). This anxiety exposes the ever-

lasting presence of home in his memory. While meditating alone in nature, he exposes his strong yearning for his beloved, Augusta Leigh (3.474-95).<sup>9</sup> His pure love for her has “stood the test of mortal enmities / Still undivided, and cemented more / By peril . . .” (3.491-93). He dreams for her companionship, a “double joy” (3.505). Exile does not separate him spiritually from his family: while he begins his journey, he remembers his sister and guilt (1.88-89). His mother, sister, and so-called “friends” are his “only stays against emotional vacuity,” and this situation “might reasonably urge maintenance of ties with them”—it is a “paradoxical desire to preserve while breaking ties” (Ellege 157). He misses his family and friends even more when he wanders in Europe. This “vision” brings him “grief with grief continuing still to blend” (2.907). He regards it “the worst of woes”: “To view each loved one blotted from Life’s page / And be alone on earth, as I am now” (2.918; 920-21). The sadness triggered by Greek landscape reminds Byron of John Edleston, his friend in England (2.891-94). He even laments: “What is my Being! thou hast ceased to be!” (2.895); “Secure in guarded coldness, he had mixed / Again in fancied safety with his kind” (3.82-83). Besides, Byron starts and ends Canto III with the memory of his own daughter Ada: he hopes that “[m]y voice shall with thy future visions blend, / And reach into thy heart” (3.1073-74), and that “I know that thou wilt love me” (3.1086, 1090, cf. 1093). In Canto IV, he mourns for the death of Princess Charlotte, daughter of George IV of England (4.1495-1503). “The past continues to speak to us. But it no longer addresses us as a simple, factual ‘past,’ since our relation to it, like the child’s relation to the mother, is always-already ‘after the break’” (Hall, Stuart 226). Home continues to “speak” to Harold; for the hero, home revives only “after the break.” The loss of “home” cannot wipe out its

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<sup>9</sup> Byron pronounces that he and she are “entwined” and their tie “which bound the first endures the last” (“Epistle to Augusta” 127-28); he also confesses: “There yet are two things in my destiny,— / A world to roam through, and a home with thee” (“Epistle to Augusta” 7-8).

presence in the exile's consciousness; rather, it intensifies his thirst to retain some relationship with it.

Byron/Harold falls into the tension between the nomadic drive and the yearning for home. This tension parallels that of his learning from tradition: on the one hand, Miltonic Satanism and the graveyard school push him to exile himself; on the other hand, the cavalier-Augustan heritage affirms the sweetness of home and society. He does not synthesize the conflict in a harmonious discourse, nor does he abandon one so that he can stick whole-heartedly to the other. His ambiguous attitude toward home indeed manifests his oppositional inclination.

### **iii. Worldliness fulfilled in nomadic life**

Harold's loss of home and his inability of returning, though depriving him of the warmth and comfort of motherland, drive him to a larger "context." Nomadic life transforms his narcissistic care for personal sufferings to a more extensive, sympathetic view on others; his opposition to oppression and tyranny drives him to speak for victims wherever he goes. In Portugal, he observes the graves of those who were killed near "Our Lady's house of Woe" (1.261-69); he mourns for Maria I, the exiled queen of Portugal (1.334), and for those killed by the Roman Catholic Church (1.340-41). In Spain, he bemoans the bloody wars from the Middle Ages to the nineteenth century, especially the Napoleonic War: "What gallant War-hounds rouse them from their lair, / And gnash their fangs, loud yelling for the prey" (1.436-37). While watching the bullfighting, he focuses not on the prowess of the matador but on the pain of the bull (1.754-82). In Greece, he grieves for those suffer from "the weight of Despot's chains" (2.108). In "the deadly Waterloo," he defies the "king-making Victory" (3.153, 155) since Europe must endure "years / Of death, depopulation, bondage, fear" (3.175-76). In Italy, he bewails the sufferings of Petrarch, Tasso, Dante, and Boccaccio (4.497-522). In short, Harold's horizon is greatly broadened because of his exile. His sympathy

with others exemplifies the affiliation, a sign of worldliness. Byron's/Harold's detachment and marginal stance facilitate him to nourish an international scope.

Connections with others is the key to survive both literally and emblematically: "Survival in fact is about the connections between things. . . . It is more rewarding—and more difficult—to think concretely and sympathetically . . . about others than only about 'us'" (Said, *Culture* 336). Byron acknowledges that "[i]f from society we learn to live, / 'Tis Solitude should teach us how to die" (4.294-95). While living recklessly at home, Harold is disconnected from the world and his bacchanal friends cannot save him from spiritual isolation; only exile prompts him to build and maintain connections with others. Life relies on the self-other affiliations, while death means the loss of such affiliations. In this light, Harold is restored to life only after his exile from home. Nomadic life severs one from one's native place, while the attempt to associate with home or with a new place represents the will to survive. Therefore, while staying in Spain, Harold shouts out his wish to embrace the exotic culture, the "wise Prophet's Paradise": "Match me, ye climes! which poets love to laud; / Match me, ye harems of the land! . . . / Match me those Houries . . ." (1.603-10). The thrice "Match me" highlights the hero's craving for companions and his will to cultivate a new selfhood and to survive in a foreign land. He prefers to "the pleasures of activity in the world" to the interior, imaginary universe (Hall, Jean 135).

Furthermore, Harold's view of morality also exposes his unwillingness to break with society. In his early years, he neglects virtue and indulges in revelries (1.10-18). Morality presumes the proper relationships with others, yet his awakening is followed by his exile, apparently a dissociation from others. It never occurs to him that this journey can purge his sin by leading him to a sacred shrine. Rather, he seems to recognize the necessity of traditional morality in his solitary meditation: there may be "[w]ords which are things,—hopes which will not deceive, / And Virtues which are

merciful, nor weave / Snares for the failing . . .” (3.1061-63). Honesty, virtues, and integrity make sense and work only in human society, not in a secluded life. His lament for victims all over Europe, as it is mentioned earlier, also testifies to his strong sense of morality and his affiliation with the world. Byron’s longing for morality, antithetical to his alienation, unveils his intention to step into the world and to establish a solid relationship with others. “There is a strain in Byron that goes back to the cavalier aristocrats . . . the range and sprezzatura of a Sidney . . . of a true nobleman” (Curran, “Romantic poetry” 212). His gentlemanly elegance is meant to impress the audience, not to be flaunted in deserts, forests, or ruins. His sense of morality regulates and strengthens his affiliation with the world.

The nomadic life renders Harold’s identity indeterminate since he must wander, while he never belongs permanently to any place. Though he never returns to his native place, the memory of home and the experience in exotic lands usually coexist in his consciousness. His self-willed exile, symbolized by the image of fire that characterizes Satan and Napoleon, contradicts his longing for home and foregrounds his personal sufferings; however, he expands his horizon because of his exile as well, and consequently acquires a sympathetic understanding of the oppressed. Being nomadic brings the continual change of one’s identity; for Harold, this means the loss of home but the gaining of “worldliness.”<sup>10</sup>

## **B. Decentered: The rejection of the monolithic, authoritative belief**

### **i. The marginal status of the hero**

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<sup>10</sup> This echoes Byron’s ironic comments: an exile “has the whole world for a dungeon strong” (“The Prophecy of Dante” 4.132). Through Dante’s declaration, Byron asserts his spiritual freedom in various conditions. As a wanderer, he has the whole world as his stage.

This loss of home cannot abolish the poet's independent thinking. Although Harold curses his family and resolves to wander, his "pilgrimage" does not lead to a holy destination. This aimless journey connotes his denial of any transcendental goal and vision. He never stays in a particular place for a long while, nor does he, being "born for opposition," stick to any systematic, authoritative belief. Having "no reverence for system," he believes that different cultures "have different models of what reality is like. His travels confirmed this relativity" (Nicholson 117). Byron rejects "the belief that reality has a fixed, predictable shape" and that "reality can be absolutely known or totally controlled" because, for him, "reality is too big for any system to contain it" (Nicholson 111).<sup>11</sup> His sense of morality, though usually provoking him to criticize oppression, assumes no specific philosophical basis. "Byron had no philosophy" except "flaming doubts" and "stormy denials" (Symons 504-05). For him, "we are not built around a coherent and explicable centre, but a 'controlless core' that defies reason" (Howe, Anthony, "I Doubt" 30). His "incessant mobility" differentiates him from the other Romantic poets, "who value personal consistency and identity and work to achieve a sense of wholeness in their poetry" (Hall, Jean 135). Since self-contradiction characterizes Byron and his heroes, logical thinking and essentialist creed are alien to Harold. He mainly displays a "decentered" worldview.

The portrayal of Harold as the hero with a decentered worldview might stem from Byron's marginal status in England. The poet felt alienated from his peers even when he worked as a member in the House of Lords: for him, "the distance between the representatives in the House of Lords and their subjects in Nottinghamshire was not a

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<sup>11</sup> Therefore, he mocks Coleridge that "I wish he would explain his Explanation" of German idealism; he satirizes that Wordsworth gives "his new system to perplex the sages" ("Don Juan," "Dedication" 16, 28). Byron did not yield to the so-called authority.

geographical but an emotional one: the members of the House of Lords were alienated from their own people” (Coole 155-56). He was willing to speak for the wretched and the oppressed, but this stance detached himself from the other aristocrats. On the other hand, the plebeians could not accept him as one of them because of their inherent disparity in social hierarchy. An aristocrat who sympathized with the lower classes was doomed to be doubly marginalized; it is no wonder that Byron characterizes many heroes as marginal figures.<sup>12</sup> A marginal character usually remains antithetical to those in the center, and this antithesis may intensify Byron’s decentered inclination.

Harold’s marginal status persists in his “pilgrimage.” By turning himself into an exile, he turns himself into an “Other” and seldom interacts with people. Most of the time, he merely observes the others from a distance: “Still he [beholds], nor mingled with the throng” (1.828); while staying with a group of happy Suliot young men, who are “bounding hand in hand, man linked to man” (2.638), he “at a little distance [stands] / And view[s], but not displeas’d, the revelrie” (2.640-41); he believes himself to be “the most unfit / Of men to herd with Man, with whom he [holds] / Little in common” (3.100-02). He identifies himself with the neglected Parnassus (1.621-22) and discovers Muses in “Delphi’s long deserted shrine,” while all of them are silent and

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<sup>12</sup> For example, Tasso is sent to an asylum, staying with “the surrounding maniacs, in the hell” (4.322)—this is “his meek guerdon” (“The Prophecy of Dante” 3.136). He suffers from “[i]mputed madness, prisoned solitude, / And the Mind’s canker in its savage mood” (“The Lament of Tasso” 4-5). He is locked alone “like a beast of prey, couching in his “lair,” which is also his “grave” (“The Lament of Tasso” 16-18). In the madhouse “all can hear, none heed his neighbour’s call – None! Save that One, the verist wretch of all, / Who was not made to be the mate of these” (“The Lament of Tasso” 91-93). He is doubly marginalized—being ignored by his patron and among the madmen. He even considers marginalization his salvation: “had I been / Their fellow, many years ere this had seen / My mind like theirs corrupted to its grave” (“The Lament of Tasso” 177-79). Similarly, Dante, Rousseau, Harold, Cain, Mazeppa, The Giaour, and Manfred all appear as isolated, marginal figures.



feeble (1.6-7).<sup>13</sup> Poetry is often ignored or forgotten—symbolized by Apollo’s absence from Parnassus and the silence in the cave of “the Muses’ seat (1.634-35)—yet the hero would rather stand before its “the wild pomp of mountain-majesty” (1.616). The hero proclaims: “I have not loved the World, nor the World me” (3.1049); he chooses to regard the world as his “fair foe” (3.1059). As he probes human feeling “in the depths of a commonly alienated inmost self” (Wolfson 416), the question of his selfhood lies in neither “to be” nor “not to be,” but “becoming”—he may waver from one role to another but simultaneously stick to none of them. This “becoming” signifies indeterminacy and renders the hero always in the margin wherever he goes—he can never settle down and blend himself with any society. Thus, his personality displays a “conspicuous lack of personal wholeness” (Hall, Jean 135). “Centrality is identity, what is powerful, important, and *ours*. Centrality maintains balance between extremes; it endows with the balances of moderation, rationality, pragmatism; it holds the middle together” (Said, *Culture* 324). Harold never reaches the “centrality” of society, and this is Byronic “negative capability”: to negate a fixed identity and thus to embrace various roles even though they may contradict each other. Without the support of the “centrality,” Harold does not maintain “balance between extremes”; consequently, his fire-like passion burns out of control. Yet marginality accompanies his independence and freedom: he belongs to no local community, but to the world.

## **ii. Fire as the symbol of the decentering force**

The image of fire signifies not only the poet’s nomadic spirit but also his decentering force.<sup>14</sup> Rousseau and Napoleon exemplify the decentering force as fire

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<sup>13</sup> This echoes Byron’s voice in “Farewell to the Muse”: the poet finds himself “responsive to rapture no more,” and therefore he will not implore her to sing” (5-6).

<sup>14</sup> Likewise, the association of “fire” and “decentering” is found in Byron’s characterization of Dante: with fire, he tells the future of Rome and then he may die (“The Prophecy of Dante” 3.28-30). Like

most noticeably in “Childe Harold.” Byron identifies with Rousseau because of the latter’s unrivaled passion. Such a passion, compared to madness, appears as a decentering force: he “threw / Enchantment over Passion,” and could “make Madness beautiful, and cast / O’er erring deeds and thoughts, and a heavenly hue / Of words, like sunbeams . . .” (3.726-27,730-32). In other words, Rousseau’s passion easily subverted social order and hence the whole Europe turned crazy in the French Revolution: kings and noblemen were either executed or banished, and mere anarchy was loosed upon Europe. He “tried to legitimate and liberate the passions rather than to subdue them” (Cantor 394). Such passions are compared to fire: Rousseau is like “a tree / On fire by lightning; with ethereal flame / Kindled he was, and blasted” (3.734-36). This philosopher inspired the passion of French people to overthrow tyranny, but subsequently the whole Europe became chaotic and “decentered.” His “madness,” clothed in “overwhelming eloquence” (3.728), “blasted” himself and the continent.

Then Napoleon inherited the philosopher’s “fire” to “decenter” many European countries. The image of fire also signifies the emperor’s frenzied, uncontrolled passion that leads to his victory and defeat—a power to decenter the predominant ideology and to end in self-destruction. Byron’s depiction of Napoleon’s passion as fire presumes that the tinder of decentering had been kindled long before he seized the power: Napoleon’s passion for power maddened himself and others (3.379); “madness” means and the decentering of one’s mind and the subsequent social disorder. This fire-like passion pushed him to be the most authoritative figure in Europe as well as the “center” of his empire; it also incurred wars and then terminated in his exile to St.

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Cassandra, he speaks to the chaotic world “from out the Wilderness” but no one listens to him (“The Prophecy of Dante” 2.10-14). In other words, he is excluded and marginalized like all the other Byron’s heroes. The “venom” of Florence dooms his body “to the fire” so that his dust will scatter (“The Prophecy of Dante” 1.67-68, 77-78); however, Florence “shall be forgotten”—to be deprived of her privileged status (“The Prophecy of Dante” 1.93). Dante predicts his hometown to be “decentered.”

Helena. The burning fire assumes no “center”: as Napoleon followed his passion to aspire “[b]eyond the fitting medium of desire,” everything seemed to run out of his control (3.374-75); as he initiated one war after another, all Europe also ran out of control. Napoleon fell because of his irrepressible aspiration, “the self-consuming desire” (Manning, [Peter] 900). His failure to maintain “balance between extremes” indicates his lack of a stable identity—a sign of exile, too. As “the Napoleon of the realm of public discourse,” Byron threatened orthodoxy and was “less interested in stability . . . than disruption” (Murphy, “Visions” 359). The “quenchless” fire, the pain of exile in this alter ego, burns his soul too fatally to be resisted—this is a hell for all his heroes.

Still, this image as a decentering force can be traced back to Milton’s description of Satan and his legions. Compared to the locusts that “darkened all the land of Nile” in the Book of Exodus, the numberless fallen angels hover “under the cope of hell / ’Twixt upper, nether, and surrounding fires” (Milton 1.343, 345-46.). As they are just banished from heaven, this dislocated community appears decentered and aggressive. Hell “fraught with fire / Unquenchable” (Milton 6.876-77) is a decentered setting for those exiled devils, and some breath that “kindled those grim fires” may grow into “sevenfold rage” to devour them “in the flames” (Milton 2.170-72). The unpredictability and instability of fire indicate its lack of “center” and direction. Moloch intends to arm himself “with hellish flames and fury” and to attack heaven with “Tartarean sulfur, and strange fire” (Milton 2.61, 69). Fire for the devil functions as a weapon to “decenter” heaven and to dethrone God, while it at the same time tortures them endlessly in hell. Those banished angels lose their paradise, and consequently their decentering force grows like fire.

Fire as a decentering force in “Childe Harold” derives from Miltonic Satanism and blazes in Rousseau and Napoleon, while Byron’s accentuation of their “fire” also

implies his irresistible decentering force as an exile. This force, following no ultimate authority, emerges in the poet's ambiguous attitude toward feudalism.

### iii. Byron's rejection and acceptance of feudalism

Without holding a certain belief as the basis of his judgment, Byron learns from tradition and uses it for his own purpose. Yet his incorporation of various traditional voices—such as Miltonic Satanism and Augustan heritage—contributes to his pluralistic but decentering perspective. He consistently maintains this decentering view since he was “born for opposition”—and for self-opposition as well.

“Decentering” means the negation of all monolithic and authoritative beliefs. Byron with his oppositional inclination did not yield to such beliefs, and his heroes naturally bear this decentering power. As a Scottish nobleman, he embraced English tradition; in his exile, he contacted diverse cultures. Hence his life and cultural identity underwent a continual decentering. T. S. Eliot argues that a poet must be judged in the context of “tradition,” and that tradition and the individual talents exist in a hermeneutical relationship: “No poet, no artists of any art, has his complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists” (“Tradition and the Individual Talents” 761). The significance of a poet's achievement can be revealed in his/her relationship with tradition, and his/her self-identity can be evaluated accordingly.

Yet poets in exile cannot be easily judged in the same manner. “Exiles are cut off from their roots, their land, their past,” and “feel uncomfortable with tradition” (Said, “Reflections on Exile”). They exist as eccentrics and aliens to all traditions, yet they do not necessarily reject a particular tradition. Their cultural identities are formed “[n]ot an essence but a *positioning*,” while there is “no absolute guarantee in an unproblematic, transcendental ‘law of origin’” (Hall, Stuart 226). Byron demonstrates various “positions” in his observation of various scenes: “I can repeople

with the past—and of / The present there is still for eye and thought” (4.163-64). He can be a self-willed exile, a home-yearning traveler, a lover of nature, a traditional but revolutionary poet, a cosmopolitan figure, an opponent of imperialism, and a secular critic of tyranny. Identity is not static, but something that “each age and society re-creates . . . over historical, social, intellectual and political process that takes place as a contest involving individuals and institutions” (Said, *Orientalism* 332). The nomadic life renders a fixed identity impossible since “there is no ground on which resistance might take its stance; within this law there is no way of transcending dependence, only of finding a different footing for it as each successive foothold proves untrustworthy” (Punter 165). Consequently, this contributes to the poet’s decentered view, and his personality “appears to be a dazzling succession of parts that do not cohere” (Hall, Jean 135). Byron/Harold changes his “position” or “foothold” in his wandering, while tradition serves merely as one factor in his re-creation of self-identity.

The decentering view appears in Byron’s ambiguous attitude toward feudalism. This attitude illustrates his re-creation of the significance of feudalism. He disguises his hero with the mask of a medieval knight but upsets the conventions of feudalism in the portrayal of the hero. Byron labels “Childe Harold” as a “romaunt” and adopts Spenserian stanza—elements that are usually associated with medieval heroic romance, but he presents an “unknightly” knight, who does not care about love and honor (“Addition to the Preface”). The subtitle “a Romaunt” “is precisely what *Childe Harold* was not” (Heinzelman 494). In a typical feudal culture, it is necessary for a knight to maintain his loyalty to a lord, to cling to a piece of land, and to fight for his lord and for himself in the name of honor, and to demonstrate his physical prowess if necessary. Byron dons his hero “Childe” Harold, a title that carries the feudalistic stance, and Harold wanders as a typical hero in the medieval romance. Yet Harold the “unknightly” knight never claims loyalty to any lord or land, nor does he fight—instead,

he prefers to wander, and he usually condemns wars and tyranny. He laments for the dead on the battlefield (1.900) and denounces the Arch of Triumph in France: “the tears / And blood of earth flow on as they have flowed, / An universal Deluge, which appears / Without an Ark for wretched Man’s abode . . .” (4.824-27). Byron shows no interest in Harold’s lineage (1.20) and disparages the “easy idealizations” of the Middle Ages as “artificial and grossly inaccurate”; he “attacks all attempts to sentimentalize the past . . .” (Sánchez 448). This unknightly knight tends to neglect the knightly duties and retains only the title. “Decentered” is the importance of feudalism in Harold’s consciousness.

Nevertheless, the exile’s attitude toward knighthood parallels that toward his home. Just as he clings spiritually to his family, Byron still praises chivalry, a feudalist attribute, although he disregards or denounces almost all conventions of feudalism. He feels attracted by chivalry in exotic cultures.<sup>15</sup> His declaration of love to Lady Charlotte Harley in “To Ianthe” at the beginning of Canto I carries the flavor of a medieval knight’s vow to an ideal lady: praising her beauty and purity, he hopes that “Childe Harold” can glorify her (“To Ianthe” 12, 37-45). He breaks the feudalistic obligation of a knight; however, he defends Harold as “perfectly knightly in attribute” (“Addition to the Preface”). The narrator sighs for the loss of chivalry in Spain: “Here all were noble, save Nobility; / None hugged a Conqueror’s chain, save fallen Chivalry!” (1.880-81); in his eyes, Spanish people must awake to the call of chivalry (1.405-13) since their country is under the threat of Napoleon’s invasion: people “sank beneath / Tyrants and Tyrants’ slaves” (1.417-18). He admires Ariosto, whom he calls a bard of

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<sup>15</sup> Byron cherishes his travel to “the countries of chivalry, history, and fable—Spain, Greece, Asian Minor, and Italy” (“To John Hobhouse, Esq., A.M., F.R.S”).

chivalry (4.354).<sup>16</sup> This Italian poet uses the traditional elements—“Ladye-love and War, Romance and Knightly Worth”—to bring a “new creation with his magic line” (4.358, 360). Byron denounces wars, but he venerates the resistance to invasion. He praises the resistance of Spanish people against Napoleon (1.522-30). War is “a splendid sight” for Harold (1.432-33), while negotiation for peace is never proposed nor glorified. Byron/Harold rejects all restrictions imposed on an individual but retains chivalry—which, for Byron, serves as the oppositional spirit to tyranny—to maintain his liberty. Feudalism cannot regulate Harold; rather, he “redefines” it. Neither Byron nor Harold supports wholeheartedly feudal knight hood, and Harold’s “unknightly” stance illustrates his decentering ideology.

#### **iv. Byron’s secularism against the “idolatries” of authority**

The decentering ideology corresponds to the “secularism” proposed by Said. As Byron displays his independence with his “secularism,” the rejection of transcendental visions and dogmatic beliefs, he characterizes his heroes with the same feature.

As an exile, he did not stick to a consistent belief, and with such a background he always refused to be locked to a school, ideology, or political party. This enabled Byron to be an excellent and powerful critic: while the discourse which stems from “enclosure, confinement, or monopoly” always endangers critical enterprise, exile “as a permanent state” is promising for the job of a critic—in the sense of what Matthew Arnold identifies a critic as “alien” (Said, *Power, Politics, and Culture*). To be an expatriate or an exile “is not to inhabit a void” nor “to choose the artistic freedom,” but “to be granted a special insight, a vision not available to the insider” (Kanaganayakam, 1996, 213). Assuming himself as a marginal figure or an outsider, Byron announces

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<sup>16</sup> Tasso is also described as “[t]he Bard of Chivalry” (“The Prophecy of Dante” 3.150). Such a praise reflects Byron’s affirmation of chivalry.

his “alien” character in his severe criticism of “the World”:

I have not loved the World, nor the World me;  
I have not flattered its rank breath, nor bowed  
To its idolatries a patient knee,  
Nor coined my cheek to smiles,—nor cried aloud  
In worship of an echo: in the crowd  
They could not deem me one of such . . . . (3.1049-54)

Byron here declares his independence as a poet/critic. An independent mind for him is “the highest human possession” (Pafford 109). The poet has “not loved the World”—not in the sense that he always remains disconnected from society, but that he rejects the authoritative, dogmatic beliefs, symbolized by the term “idolatries.” The claims of exclusive authority mean for him merely fantasies, illusions, or lies (Nicholson 111). He is eager to inform his reader of his “secularism”—the denial of the worship of those “idols” that threaten and oppress the individual independence and freedom. This corresponds to Said’s advice for intellectuals and to become “seculars”: such an identity liberates one from the blind faith in “a political god of any sort”; moreover, “the intellectual must be involved in a lifelong dispute with all the guardians of sacred vision or text” and must assert “[u]ncompromising freedom of opinion and expression” (*Representations of the Intellectual*). This freedom is acquired in detachment and loneliness: “I stood and stand alone,—remembered or forgot” (3.1048)—thus calmly proclaims Byron, since he totally accepts his identity as a marginalized character. Only such a character, refusing to flatter the “rank breath” of the authoritative beliefs, can speak truth to the world and especially to the authority. Although the identity of an exile resists a humanist interpretation, as it is indicated earlier, Byron and humanists at least share “secularism”: humanists are “secularists” because they “accept that morality and a meaningful life are possible even in the



absence of a god” (Law). The Saidean “secularism,” exemplified by Byron’s declaration of independence, challenges the “tyranny” of the dogmatic doctrines, and bestows lonely liberty on the critic.

The “decentered” view frees an exile from the dominance of the authority and bestows worldliness on him/her. Worldliness for Said is “a paradoxical condition that develops out of being at home with a lack of home or belonging in any given place” (Franklin, Cynthia 130). It represents

the critic’s achieved freedom from loyalty and subordination to specific ideologies, cultures, systems, worlds. Seen in this way, worldliness is not opposed to homelessness, but is its complement. ‘Worldliness-without-world’ and ‘homelessness-as-home’ are different formulations privileging the same subject position: that of the specular border intellectual. (JanMohamed 113)

This passage perfectly explicates Byron’s relationships with the world. His “homelessness-as-home” assumes the whole world as his stage, while his view is not restricted to a particular perspective—therefore, his worldliness is not opposed to homelessness. “Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage” fascinated contemporary English readers, so symbolically Byron connected his home with the world and, in Said’s words, promoted “coexistence among human communities that can make and remake their own histories and environments together” (Said, “The Intellectuals and War” 20). Byron’s “worldliness-without-world” indicates his involvement in this mundane world without being bound by the “idolatry” of authority. He has not loved the world, so he can criticize its tyranny impartially and independently. His oppositional creativity, a mark of his identity, worships no authority. Byron’s popularity among his contemporary readers testify to his “worldliness.”

Moreover, Byron’s declaration of independence, decentering the authoritative belief, paves the way for him to display a pluralistic view on the world. This

declaration, resulting from his opposition to all forms of “tyranny,” also amounts to his criticism of “the World.” Criticism “is worldly and in the world so long as it opposes monocentrism in the narrowest as well as the widest sense of that too infrequently used notion . . .”; only by the rejection of “monocentrism” can a critic fully realize the “worldliness” (Ashcroft and Ahluwalia 35). “Monocentrism is when we mistake one idea as the only idea, instead of recognizing that an idea in history is always one among many” (Said, “The Text, the World, the Critic” 22). By contrast, exiles see “a plurality of terrains, multiple experiences, and different constituencies” and work with “a decentered consciousness, not less reflective and critical for being decentered . . . anti-totalizing and anti-systematic” (Said, “Orientalism Reconsidered”). The recognition of the plurality and multiplicity of this secular world is necessary for plunging into worldliness.

Byron’s decentered spirit, originating from his marginal status, characterizes Harold the unknighly knight. Symbolized by the image of fire, this spirit predominates in Rousseau and Napoleon and contributes to the poet’s ambivalent attitude toward feudalism. It amounts to the “secularism” asserted by Said as Byron refuses to bow down before the “idolatries” of authority. Unfettered by a particular perspective—in other words, to be “decentered” in his independent thinking—Byron the exile can view things critically and pluralistically.

### **C. Contrapuntal: The pluralistic view of the exile**

#### **i. The formation of the contrapuntal view in exile**

“Opposition” prevails in Byron’s descriptions of exile. His mobility lies in “his protean capacity to be of many minds, strike[s] many poses, hold[s] in suspension apparently contradictory opinions” (Graham 27). His nomadic life started because of his opposition to everything related to his home; his decentered ideology persisted because of his opposition to the dogmatic, authoritative beliefs. Both features

rendered his reconstitution of self-identity indeterminate and unsettled. With the oppositional perspective, he never attempted to reconcile any conflict since an exile is a “bearer of oppositional analyses and maker of antinomian alliances” (Bhabha 376). Byron’s being “born for opposition” manifests the ontological significance of his self, echoing German romanticism which treats irony as “the only true and, most importantly, authentic, style of existence” (Magill 97). Irony recognizes “multiple, mutually valid worldviews and abandons the single perspective of events” (Magill 104). Thus Byron usually reconstitutes his self-identity with contrapuntal views—“a Titan at war with himself” (Russell). To be “decentered” may appear subversive, but it does not aim at eliminating the authority and assuming oneself as the new authority. A decentered consciousness must insist on the coexistence of multiple voices despite their incompatibility, and the eradication of the authority may bring a new centralized power. What must be abolished is the authoritarianism of a single voice, while this coexistence lays the foundation for a contrapuntal view.

Being nomadic deprives an exile of his/her “root” but nourishes the decentered worldview and the contrapuntal perspective: “Most people are principally aware of one culture, one setting, one home; exiles are aware of at least two, and this plurality of vision gives rise to an awareness of simultaneous dimensions, an awareness that—to borrow a phrase from music—is contrapuntal” (Said, *Reflections*). This “contrapuntal” awareness, separating an exile from other people in terms of perspectives, highlights the connection of multifarious values simultaneously but never resolves their differences. Hence this consciousness affirms polyphony—the coexistence of various voices—as normal and common. Said does not confine his “contrapuntal” reading to the exposition of the coexistence between imperialism and the local culture or that between East and West: he intends to abandon essentialist interpretations of one’s identity and to explore its “contrapuntal ensembles,” because “no identity can ever

exist by itself and without an array of opposites, negatives, oppositions (*Culture* 52). Byron's claim for being "born for opposition" and "[c]hangeable . . . yet somehow '*Idem semper*'" ("Don Juan" 17.83) corresponds to Saidean "contrapuntal" view.

Byron's "contrapuntal" view saves his "decentered" consciousness from chaos. "Counterpoint" highlights the interdependence of contradictory elements. Contradiction is "a poetic issue—a subject for the poet and the poem . . . . Byron's 'ideal self' is 'born for contradiction,' not for . . . balance and reconciliation" (McGann, "Byron and the anonymous lyric" 96). His "contrapuntal" identity must be understood as a necessary connection between antithetical elements, not as a tension to be synthesized and resolved. The "contrapuntal" view denies all taken-for-granted, monolithic views and pushes readers to recognize the diversity of reality.

## ii. "Counterpoint" in Byron's self-portrayal

### a. The spatial contrast and the temporal disparity

Byron's contrapuntal artistry in his self-portrayal includes several types. The spatial contrast indicates the affiliation between two places, while the temporal disparity refers to the tension between the past and the present—both are entwined in his memory of home. The poet's ambiguous relationship with home, as it has been discussed earlier, highlights the contrapuntal artistry. His nomadic life contributes to this relationship: wherever he goes, he always remains spiritually connected with his homeland, and therefore the opposition between his home and his temporary position always haunts him—this "ambiguous" relationship is a counterpoint on the theme of "home." The absence of "home" does not eradicate his "affiliation" with his native place, while any tentative positioning can be transformed to a new "home." The counterpoint of "home" and "the tentative position" then nurtures a man of worldliness. This spatial "counterpoint" will be further explored in the following chapters.

As to the temporal disparity, an exile is "unbearably historical"—his

consciousness always incorporates the past and the present, and the temporal disparity always incurs his pain and nostalgia; an exile bears a recollection and plays it against the current experience—this is the “sense of counterpoint,” which means that “things can’t be reduced to homophony” (Said and Marranca 26). As “a great poet of memory,” Byron aches because of this gift: he starts “Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage” with the intention to forget the past, but finally “nothing has been forgotten and nothing is redeemed” (McGann, “Byron and Wordsworth” 189). For Byron as well as for Wordsworth, “the most source and subject of poetry is the painful act of remembering . . . painful, because memory entails disjunctive comparison between past and present” (Stauffer 153). Obviously, an exile always possesses a pluralistic perspective: “Because the exile sees things both in terms of what has been left behind and what is actual here and now, there is a double perspective that never sees things in isolation” (Said, *Representations of the Intellectual*). The celebration of exile “not only makes possible originality of vision, but also (since exiles are aware of at least two cultures) a *plurality* of vision” (Said, “The Mind of Winter” 55). In other words, Byron suffers because of his pluralistic temporal vision—exile forces him to be aware of the past and the present. This pluralistic consciousness, not unlike the “contrapuntal awareness” proposed by Said, anticipates the continual spiritual conflicts in his poetry. Therefore, the sufferings brought by his memory of home carry the contrapuntal relationship in space (home versus the tentative position) and time (then and now).

The temporal counterpoint also emerges in Byron’s attitude toward traditional literature. His address to the Muse subverts the traditional view on creativity: the muses are “formed or fabled at the Minstrel’s will” (1.2). He admits his poetry to be humble, but, unlike traditional epic poets, he does not ask for the inspiration of the Muses. He jokingly utters his reluctance to call them from their “sacred Hill,” to

“grace” his “plain” tale since he learns that they are weary and feeble (1.4-9). This attitude reveals his play with traditional style of writing. Tradition may benefit his writing, but his decentered view prevents him from slavish copying of tradition. Tradition may offer some “fragments”—Miltonic Satanism, cavalier-Augustan heritage, Dante, or Tasso—in Byron’s reconstitution of self-identity, but not predominate over this reconstitution as the ultimate authority. In this light, he connects himself with tradition in a grotesque manner: he claims his independence from tradition not by totally ignoring it, but by recognizing its existence and adopting it for his own use. The incorporation of “fragments” from tradition reveals his pluralistic view in creativity: he associates the past and the present in his reconstitution of self-identity. The counterpoint based on his own historical consciousness will also be further explored in the following chapters.

#### **b. The counterpoint of Byron and his alter egos**

The third type is found in Byron’s connections with his alter egos. His pride in being “born for opposition” facilitates his contrapuntal artistry in creating his heroes, who mirror the image of their creator. He describes Harold’s life:

For ’tis his nature to advance or die;  
He stands not still, but or decays, or grows  
Into a boundless blessing, which may vie  
With the immortal lights, in its eternity! (3.964-67)

Harold’s future demonstrates Byron’s vision of his own. His nomadic life will not stop, nor will his decentered views become stagnant, since “[h]e stands not still”; therefore, his oppositional nature will persevere “in its eternity.” Byron and Harold may decay or enjoy blessing together because they are affiliated by their opposition to the world—as he utters that “I have not loved the world,” he concludes by saying “let us part fair foes” (3.1058-59), meaning that he will continually oppose the authority

and tyranny. The “curse” of exile bestows a special vision—the “contrapuntal” view—on the wandering hero. Byron’s contrapuntal artistry associates his own wandering and Harold’s adventure simultaneously.

The narrator and Harold form a contrapuntal relationship as well: the former represents Byron’s “rejuvenated self,” while the latter acts as the poet’s past, guilty self (Reiman 879)—both represent some aspects of the poet himself. The narrator’s criticism of Harold amounts to Byron’s confession; the poet’s selfhood is thus portrayed in this opposition between the narrator and the young knight. At the beginning of the first canto, Byron’s condemnation of Harold as “a shameless wight” (1.14) separates the narrator and the “unknightly knight” as different individuals: the narrator looks neutral, honest, and frank, while the hero behaves as young Byron incarnate: riotous, uncouth, ungodly, and bacchic. In the first draft, the hero is called “Childe Burun”—evidently the poet intends to characterize the knight as his alter ego. Yet this contrapuntal relationship collapses as the poet indulges in pouring out only his own feelings. This is supposedly Harold’s pilgrimage; however, most of the time the narrator’s voice prevails and the knight seems to be forgotten: “But where is Harold? Shall I then forget / To urge the gloomy Wanderer o’er the wave?” (2.136-37); “But where is he, the Pilgrim of my Song, / The Being who upheld it through the past?” (4.1467-68). Eventually the presence or absence of Harold does not make any difference in this “Pilgrimage,” though the poet insists on treating himself and the knight as different (“Addition”). The story can continue because this is essentially Byron’s adventure, while Harold serves only as a mask at times.

Yet this does not mean the failure of Byron’s contrapuntal creativity. A single voice cannot make the counterpoint. Strictly speaking, Byron never creates diverse characters; his heroes always mirror some aspects of his personality. Despite the unstable presence of Harold, the “contrapuntal” description still emerges in the

presentations of some historical figures as his alter egos. These figures highlight less their thinking and feelings than Byron's personality. In Byron's poetry, they and the poet look similar but not totally identical. The counterpoint is thus further established on Byron's "affiliation" with Dante, Tasso, Rousseau, and Napoleon: they work as several "melodies" in a "fugue" entitled "Byron's self." In "Childe Harold," Rousseau and Napoleon haunt the poet's imagination more remarkably than the other historical figures.

In Rousseau and Napoleon, Byron sees his own personal qualities as well: proud, aloof, unyielding, passionate, and "[e]xtreme in all things." They all share this "extreme" personality, marked by fire-like passion:

But I have lived, and have not lived in vain:

My mind may lose its force, my blood its fire,

And my frame perish even in conquering pain;

But there is that within me which shall tire

Torture and Time, and breathe when I expire . . . . (4.1225-29)

"Fire" associates Byron with Rousseau and Napoleon. As Rousseau and Napoleon are both inspired and blasted by their revolutionary fire, Byron also undergoes a similar experience. The poet exposes that he has lost his ability to see the world emotionally and poetically. The presence and absence of "fire" both incur his pain: his passion brought him sufferings in his early years, but as his passion is declining, he worries that his creativity may lose. Yet he can still find his own value by retaining his oppositional power, that "which shall tire / Torture and Time"—a power that resembles the unyielding and resolute spirit of Rousseau and Napoleon. He recognizes the "conquering pain" brought by time, and he believes that he has "not lived in vain" because of his resistance to that pain. All things are like "meteors" with different names (4.1115), and his real death occurs when his "flame" vanishes (4.1116). With



strong passion, Byron exerted amazing impact on Europe just as Rousseau and Napoleon did, and their binary-opposed image still “breathes” in Byron’s contrapuntal and autobiographical portrayals.

### c. The contrapuntal characterization of Byron’s alter egos

Besides, the counterpoint is also found in Byron’s juxtaposition of antithetical characteristics of his alter egos. He calls Tasso the glory and shame of Ferrara (4.316)—“glory” for his masterpieces, and “shame” for his persecution by Alfonso, the “miserable Despot” of Ferrara (4.320-21).<sup>17</sup> The despot could not quell this great poet; rather, Byron predicts, the tyrant would “rot in its oblivion—in the sink / Of worthless dust . . .” (4.326-27). It implies that Byron is also the glory and shame of Great Britain: he feels guilty about his incestuous love with his half-sister, but he believes that his country would be proud of his achievement. By highlighting Tasso’s relationship with Ferrara, Byron reveals his association with his homeland. In this association glory and shame do not cancel each other out, and neither predominates the other. The image of Tasso as Byron’s alter ego is constituted with the counterpoint of glory and shame.

Rousseau’s life, Byron observes, is also marked by counterpoint: his fire-like passion brings life and death: the “ethereal flame” of his passion “kindled” and “blasted” him as well (3.735-36). Fire itself carries a double image: Rousseau’s fire brings energy and self-annihilation simultaneously. In addition,

His life was one long war with self-sought foes,

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<sup>17</sup> Tasso’s case here illustrates the “counterpoint of power and resistance”: Tasso resists to Alfonso’s persecution through his writing and his unyielding spirit. His pain is elsewhere presented in oxymoron: “And each is tortured in his separate hell -- / For we are crowded in our solitudes” (“The Lament of Tasso” 87-88). He and the other sufferers, though physically separated from each other, are all spiritually associated because they suffer at the hand of Alphonso. The use of oxymoron also works as a “contrapuntal” technique to highlight Tasso’s sufferings.

Or friends by him self-banished; for his mind  
Had grown Suspicion's sanctuary, and chose,  
For its own cruel sacrifice, the kind,  
'Gainst whom he raged with fury strange and blind. (3.752-56)

This passage may refer to Rousseau's relationship with David Hume. At first Hume sympathized with Rousseau when learning that *Social Contract* and *Emile* were banned. Both philosophers remained on friendly terms till the time when Rousseau visited London in 1776. As the British press published some critical articles against Rousseau, the French philosopher felt that Hume did not defend him, and even suspected that Hume had motivated the public criticism. In brief, with passion Rousseau won and lost Hume's friendship. Furthermore, his fire-like passion not only enlightened but also shook Europe. He displays his "contrapuntal" eloquence: "O'er erring deeds and thoughts," he casts "a heavenly hue / Of words, like sunbeams . . ." (3.731-32). This refers to the "natural right" of human beings to resist the government. This "resistance," traditionally regarded as an "erring deed," becomes in *Social Contract* necessary for people to defend their divine-ordained freedom—an argument with "a heavenly hue." His philosophy purged France of *ancien régime* and plunged Europe into upheavals. Naturally Byron, as a poet "born for opposition," characterizes Rousseau by emphasizing the antithetical forces in the philosopher's life. These forces do not become neutralized, nor do they merge into a new force. The "counterpoint" of Rousseau echoes the self-opposition of Byron as well.

Napoleon usually appears with a double image in Byron's poetry—the characterization of the emperor illustrates Byron's contrapuntal creativity.<sup>18</sup> With

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<sup>18</sup> Byron excels in depicting Napoleon's fate as paradoxical and self-subversive. Napoleon is "[t]he Desolator desolate! / The Victor overthrown! / The Arbiter of others' fate, / A Suppliant for his own!"

pluralistic insight and “a love/hate relationship with Napoleon” (Strand 506), Byron sees Napoleon the imperialist as “antithetically mixed” (3.317), “[e]xtreme in all things” (3.320), and possessing fierce passion and a cold mind (4.806). Napoleon’s personality “appears to be a mass of contradictions or extreme antithesis, a field of conflicting energies without a nucleus” (Hill 129). There are “two Napoleons, the generous young soldier, and the ambitious tyrant” (Barrett 289); his “riddle personality” includes “a summed-up category of contradictions”: “the greatest and worst of men, the noblest and the meanest, the most far-seeing and the blindest, the most ascetic and the most self-indulgent, the most beloved and the most abhorred” (Barrett 298). Byron’s attitude toward Napoleon is “half idolatry and half repugnance” (Jeffrey, Lloyd N. 77).<sup>19</sup> His “most glamorous aspect” as Byron portrays him is “his flagrant duality” (Christensen, “Speculative” 72).

This image resembles that of Miltonic devils, who  
 feel by turns the bitter change

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(“Ode to Napoleon Buonaparte” 37-40). Like Nebuchadnezzar, Napoleon loses his sense and power, “[s]o long obeyed—so little worth” (“Ode to Napoleon Buonaparte” 131-35). His escape from Elba is described as “party of pleasure”; he can take “towns at his liking, and crowns at his leisure” (“On Napoleon’s Escape from Elba” 1-2). Afterwards, he makes “balls for the ladies, and bows to his foes” (“On Napoleon’s Escape from Elba” 4)—in other words, he can wage wars and hold parties simultaneously. The emperor laments for himself in oxymoron: “the gloom of my Glory / Arose and o’ershadowed the earth with her name”; “I have warred with a World which vanquished me only / When the meteor of conquest allured me too far” (“Napoleon’s Farewell” 1-2; 5-6). He falls from “a King” to “a nameless thing” (“Ode to Napoleon Buonaparte” 1-3), the “last single Captive to millions in war” (“Napoleon’s Farewell” 8). Napoleon’s heroic extremity is finally set in “this middle state, / Between a prison and a palace” (“The Age of Bronze” 72-73). “Nor till thy fall could mortals guess / Ambition’s less than littleness” (“Ode to Napoleon Buonaparte” 17-18). Napoleon’s image in Byron’s poetry often appears as the juxtaposition of contradictory elements, whereas this juxtaposition serves as the basis of “counterpoint.”

<sup>19</sup> This attitude is similar to Manfred’s recognition of the “mixed essence” of humanity—“[h]alf dust, half deity”—and the inevitability of “[c]ontending with low wants and lofty will” (“Manfred” 1.2.40-44), and of performing “deeds of good and ill, extreme in both” (“Manfred” 2.2.35).

Of fierce extremes, extremes by change more fierce,  
 From beds of raging fire to starve in ice  
 Their soft ethereal warmth, and there to pine  
 Immovable, infixed, and frozen round,  
 Periods of time, thence hurried back to fire. (Milton 2.598-603)

The devils suffer from “fire” and “ice” in “fierce extremes.” Evidently Byron’s portrayal of Napoleon derives from Milton. The emperor exists in Byron’s poetry like Miltonic Satan incarnate: he “would be all or nothing” (4.820)—actually, his life contains both. Napoleon’s daring spirit contributes to his rise and fall (3.322). He can “crush, command, rebuild” an empire, but he fails to govern his own passion and lust for war (3.338-41). Like “a tower upon a headlong rock,” Napoleon exists “to stand or fall alone” (3.361-62). Moreover, his heart is “strangely framed” and “[c]oquettish in ambition” (4.816, 818). His “Roman mind / [I]s modelled in a less terrestrial mould, / With passions fiercer, yet a judgment cold” (4.804-06). As a conqueror, he shakes the world like the “thunderer” (3.324) or even a God (3.331) and wins his throne like Alexander the Great (3.366); as a captive, he becomes “nothing, save the jest of Fame” (3.328) and mocks the world like Diogenes (3.368). The emperor “entranced and repelled others as well as Byron” (Clubbe, “Byron, Napoleon” 184). Byron’s “counterpoint” of Napoleon features the exaggerative language that resembles Milton’s in the descriptions of devils.

As to Napoleon’s failure, Byron sighs:

Oh, more or less than man—in high or low—  
 Battling with nations, flying from the field;  
 Now making monarchs’ necks thy footstool, now  
 More than thy meanest soldier taught to yield . . . (3.334-37)

In his sufferings Napoleon still maintains an oppositional attitude toward mockery: he

“smile[s] / With a sedate and all-enduring eye” and “st[ands] unbowed beneath the ills upon him piled” (3.348-49, 351); though treated as “the jest of Fame,” he endures with “untaught innate philosophy” (3.344). The emperor becomes wiser in his downfall than in his glory (3.352). Such a peaceful mind appears as an “extreme” contrast against his aggressive ambition. Napoleon, Byron judges, is “his own worst enemy” (Hill 129), a “vain Man,” who is “vanquished by himself” and becomes a slave to his own slaves, a “fool of false dominion” (4.800-02). Despite his glorification of the emperor in his early years, Byron condemns Napoleon for his quest after “the same vulgar honors ordinary men covet,” mingling “greatness” and “vanity” in his personality, living as “a slave to his own passion for glory” (Cantor 393). His fate results from “his mixed nature” (Hill 129). Byron’s “counterpoint” of the emperor incorporates contradictory voices, since “coherent” discourse cannot properly present Napoleon’s personality. At no time does Byron respond to Napoleon consistently: “contrary emotions appear and disappear, and then reappear . . .” (Clubbe, “Byron, Napoleon” 182). Yet this is an intentional inconsistency, an oppositional creativity that matures in the contrapuntal presentation of Napoleon’s inconsistent personality.

Byron’s characterizations of Harold and the historical figures are autobiographical and self-critical. As a “cosmopolitan figure,” an exile always undergoes “a shifting between self and other, adopts various positions only to displace them,” and thus his stance is “temporary, moveable, changing . . . it knows neither root nor soil, it is traveling, foreign” (Kristeva 39). His descriptions of those historical figures exemplify “a shifting between self and other,” whereas this changing stance demonstrates his contrapuntal creativity in self-portrayal. He felt fascinated by Dante, Tasso, Rousseau, and Napoleon because they were all exiles, characterized by the nomadic, decentered, and contrapuntal features. In these portrayals, “the self was both hidden and revealed, addressed ‘the indirect communication of the hidden truth of

inwardness' . . .” (Magill 93). Moreover, his delineation the self-contradictory personalities of Rousseau and Napoleon manifests his pluralistic view, “an important means for the self’s presentation” (Magill 92): as he observes the others, he simultaneously reveals his selfhood—this is Byron’s contrapuntal artistry, a transcultural reconstitution of self-identity.

## **IV. Self under the unsettling force of exile**

### **A. Byron’s foregrounding of sufferings**

#### **i. The continual reconstitution of self-identity through sufferings**

Although Byron/Harold learns to find a home wherever he goes, he is still pursued by emptiness that he found in his native land. Near the end of his travel, he moans that the desert would be his dwelling place, while he, with the love of his half-sister, might forget mankind (4.1585-88). “Desert” symbolizes his spiritual condition, a crisis that threatens the formation of his selfhood. Lack of connections with others means the absence of a “context” by which he can define himself. Therefore, even in this isolation, he still craves for the companionship of his half-sister, since to be rooted “is perhaps the most important and least recognized need of the human soul” (Weil, *The Need for Roots*). The yearning for companions represents the need for relationships, from which one can acquire an identity. Both revelries at home in the past and wandering abroad at the present upset him like “deserts,” while escapism can never redeem himself. “Nobody can live in perpetual deferment of their sense of selfhood, or free themselves from bondage without a strongly affirmative consciousness of who they are” (Eagleton 37). The recognition of his association with family or beloved, though contradictory to his original intention to start his pilgrimage, is necessary for Harold to reconstitute his identity. “Exile is predicated on the existence of, love for,

and a real bond with one's native place; the universal truth of exile is not that one has lost that love or home, but that inherent in each is an unexpected, unwelcome loss" (Said, *Culture and Imperialism* 336). With this loss, Harold only retains the memory of his homeland. This memory becomes a "fragment" of his identity in exile. If he expects to conquer the "deserts" in his life—to evade emptiness—he must continually "reconstitute" his identity as he wanders.

Being "nomadic, decentered, and contrapuntal," an exile must endure the "unsettling force" that prevents one from getting accustomed to an exotic environment. Familiarity with a place means the end of exile, and a true exile remains at odds with a particular place: exile means "being a sort of permanent outcast, someone who never felt at home, and was always at odds with the environment, inconsolable about the past, bitter about the present and the future" (Said, *Representations of the Intellectual*). In other words, an unsettling force always pushes the exile to live the nomadic life, to maintain a decentered consciousness, and to hold a contrapuntal view. Consequently, the formation of selfhood is necessarily a matter of becoming.

This "becoming" persists with the "unsettling force." As he recognizes: "My whole life was a contest" ("Epistle to Augusta" 26), Byron always foregrounds this force imposed on his heroes,<sup>20</sup> Disasters compel one "to recreate oneself in a higher

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<sup>20</sup> For instance, Dante recognizes that it is the doom "[o]f spirits of my order to be racked / In life, to wear their hearts out, and consume / Their days in endless strife, and die alone . . ." ("The Prophecy of Dante" 1.149-52); he would rather wander than lose the infinity of his mind—"They made an Exile, not a Slave of me" ("The Prophecy of Dante" 1.159-60, 178). Besides, Tasso suffers to the end of his life because of his unyielding spirit: "The wretched are the faithful; 't is their fate / To have all feeling, save the one, decay" ("The Lament of Tasso" 60-61). Prometheus attracts Byron's attention because of his opposition to Zeus's tyranny and his "silent suffering" with the "wretched gift Eternity" ("Prometheus" 6, 24). Manfred's chaotic mind, containing contradictory elements, falls into "contending without end or order" ("Manfred" 3.1.166). In addition, Childe Harold, Cain, Mazeppa, and the earlier Byronic heroes tend to be persistently haunted by their mental trauma and guilt, and therefore the tone appears moody and hopeless.

form; that is, to realize the alien power within the self that enables us to live” –while Conrad, Lara, Harold, and many other Byron’s heroes constitute his “paradigm for identity itself” (Nicholson 119). Thus, stoicism marks the personality of Byronic heroes and pervades “Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage” (Landsdown 88). Dante, Tasso, Ariosto, Rousseau, and Napoleon all appear as sufferers in “Childe Harold.” “Exile is never the state of being satisfied, placid, or secure. In the words of Wallace Stevens, it is ‘a mind of winter’ in which the pathos of summer and autumn as much as the potential of spring are nearby but unobtainable” (Said, “Reflections on Exile”). “Becoming” is always tantalizing: the “nearby but unobtainable” of spring might not be far away, but Byron the exile never settled down and enjoyed such a blessing.

The “unsettling force” of exile in “Childe Harold” looms in the form of unending, nameless sufferings. This attitude toward sufferings differs from Wordsworth’s: “Byron insists on the very kinds of experience that Wordsworth claims to have transcended” since the younger romantic finds that this “transcendence” does not really “escape from the mundane experience” (Rawes, “Visionary” 134). For example, when he needs consolation, Wordsworth fails to maintain “sensations sweet,” pleasure, and harmony despite his power of memory and imagination (“Tintern Abbey” 27-48). Byron is “secular” because he honestly recognizes his inability to remove his sufferings. Byron remarks: “An exile, saddest of all prisoners” (“The Prophecy of Dante” 4.131). Harold’s song of farewell, despite his seemingly easy and calm voice, “describes an early stage in the narrator’s acquaintance with separation grief, on the facet of the encompassing anxiety . . .” (Ellege 156). Early in his travel, Harold discovers the impossibility of escaping from one’s selfhood and sufferings:

What Exile from himself can flee?  
To zones though more and more remote,  
Still, still pursues, where’er I be,



The blight of Life—the Demon Thought. (1.857-60)

Here self-identity and sufferings are assumed to be closely connected—in other words, sufferings define the hero's identity. Exile cannot eliminate Harold's selfhood even though he moves to remote zones. The "blight" of life refers to his sufferings, and the "pursuit" of sufferings knows no end—"[s]till, still." This "blight" haunts him everywhere, even when he stays at home: "But in Man's dwellings he became a thing / Restless and worn, and stern and wearisome, / Drooped as a wild-born falcon with clipt wing" (3.127-29); "As eagerly the barred-up bird will beat / His breast and beak against his wiry dome / Till the blood tinge his plumage . . ." (3.132-34). His journey only intensifies his memory of pain: "What deep wounds ever closed without a scar?" (3.788). Even though healed, he believes that his sufferings will never come to an end, since his scar may always remind him of his pain: "Still round him clung invisibly a chain / Which galled for ever, fettering though unseen" (3.77-78).

Such an unsettling force also haunts Byron's alter egos in exile. The association of Rousseau and Napoleon with fire insinuates their sufferings and alludes to the biblical revelation and Milton. "Hurled headlong flaming from th' ethereal sky / With hideous ruin and combustion down," Satan dwells in "adamantine chains and penal fire" with "lasting pain" (Milton 1.45-46, 48, 55); Moloch utters that "pain of unextinguishable fire / Must exercise us without hope of end" in hell (Milton 2.88-89). It is impossible for an exile to flee from himself, as Rousseau suffers from an unending strife: "His life [i]s one long war with self-sought foes" (3.752). The seed of suffering, the fire-like passion, is buried deep in his soul; this "fire" continues to burn after his death: his "dust [i]s once all fire" (3.719). Being "[e]xtreme in all things," Napoleon must endure tremendous sufferings. Byron's exaggerative language, a sign of Miltonic Satanism, also highlights the unsettling force of sufferings. Once the paradise is lost, the "unextinguishable fire" tortures the devils and the poet; however,

Byron still constructs his selfhood in destructive plights.

The sufferings of exile emerge with the opposition between the memory of the “sweet home” and the impossibility of returning. Harold at the end does not return home: for exile “homecoming is out of the question” (Said, “Reflections on Exile”), and there is no “fixed origin to which we can make some final and absolute Return” (Hall, Stuart 226). The failure to return home for Byron/Harold carries not only literal sense but also symbolic significance. Harold’s meditation on “wonted home” indicates his expansion of horizon: he is “returning” to Greece, the “home” and origin of western culture and civilization. Unable to return home, he turns to identify Greece as a new “home.” He sees mainly ruins in Greece, just as he portrays his “home in a ruined state” to convey his “sense of painful separation from home and a yearning to return” (Lau 95). “Ruins” also symbolize his broken relationship with his home. The dead soldiers there become his fellowmen, and the relics plundered by Elgin belong to his “motherland.” Therefore, he shouts, “But spare its relics—let no busy hand / Deface the scenes, already how defaced!” (2.875-76). Imperialist plunder and exile have defamiliarized his “wonted home,” and his opposition to this pillage fosters the emergence of his new identity: he denounces Elgin, a Scottish nobleman, and stands with the Greek people.

Since Harold neither returns to his native country nor settles down in a particular place, he cannot obtain a stable self-identity. In Greece, he identifies himself as a Greek; in Italy, he declares “Rome! my Country” (4.694). Yet he does not find Rome “a sanctuary for the homeless” at the end (Rawes, “This” 181). Spain, Portugal, Greece, Albania, or Italy is only a provisional “home,” while the hero’s exile may continue. With the unbroken relationship with home, nevertheless, exiles exist “in a median state, neither completely at one with the new setting nor fully disencumbered of the old, beset with half-involvements and half-detachments, nostalgic and

sentimental on one level, an adept mimic or a secret outcast on another” (Said, *Representations of the Intellectual*). Identity for Harold, therefore, is not an issue of “being” but of “becoming.” In all situations, his “half-involvements and half-detachments” marks his presence “in a median state.” “Out of place” becomes the “norm” for an exile, whose identity “is a set of currents rather than a fixed place or a stable set of objects” (Barenboim 48). Harold recognizes that he is absorbed in either nature or human community, yet without committing himself wholeheartedly to either, “and this is life” (3.689). He can merge into a new environment by learning the local language: “I’ve taught me other tongues—and in strange eyes / Have made me not a stranger” (4.64-65), and it is easy to “seek me out a home by a remoter sea” (4.72)—yet his “median state” predominates his consciousness. Homecoming is out of the question, so is the commitment to a new place. “The Byronic stance highlights the liminal position of the expatriate. To be an expatriate is to be . . . outside the nation; at the same time, it is to define oneself according to the nation. It is thus to be both inside and outside national attachment” (Wohlgenut 104). In other words, Harold must learn to “reconstitute” his own identity as his exile lasts. A fixed and stable identity can never characterize the poet and the hero.

## ii. The fetishization of exile

Byron does not conceal the bitterness of Harold’s wandering life: “Full swiftly Harold wends his lonely way” (1.477); “life-abhorring Gloom / Wrote on his faded brow curst Cain’s unresting doom” (1.826-27). In his pilgrimage, for the most part, he meditates as a “gloomy Wanderer” (2.137) and a “cold Stranger” (2.141) on the scenes, seldom enjoys them, and habitually lapses into bitter comments. Byron’s self-alienated drive, owing to Miltonic Satanism and the graveyard school, comes to the fore in Harold’s association with Cain as a “gloomy Wanderer.” The nomadic life, haunted by a nameless sin, brings nothing but misery, desperation, and restlessness.

Such a bitter and shameful experience had better remain concealed in memory.

Though often complaining about sufferings in exile, however, Harold turns out to fetishize this painful experience and deliberately claims his “pleasure.” He renames an agonizing, inglorious exile into a “Pilgrimage,” a sacred journey. “Happier in this than mightiest Bards have been, / Whose Fate to distant homes confined their lot” (1.630-31). To be “confined” to “distant homes” grotesquely depicts the nomadic life of the exile: being reluctant to leave England, he lacks a carefree mind; to find “distant homes” means to rebuild his self-identity incessantly. These “homes” provide only provisional resorts, not a stable, permanent rest. Accepting this provisional status, he can forget everything in Spain while traveling to Greece (1.640-42). In other words, he can fetishize his exile by forgetting his loss and sticking to his gain.

Moreover, he asks himself and his readers:

Is it no better, then to be alone,  
And love Earth only for its earthly sake?  
.....

Is it not better thus our lives to wear,  
Than join the crushing crowd, doomed to inflict or bear? (3.671-72, 678-79)

These rhetorical questions glorify exile and expose the wanderer’s pride in maintaining a nomadic and lonely life. Solitude can prevent conflicts with others, while community may “crush” one’s feelings and will. Exile protects him far from the madding crowd and leads him to the comfort of nature. Here Byron echoes Gray’s praise of the solitary dead:

Full many a gem of purest ray serene,  
The dark unfathom’d caves of ocean bear:  
Full many a flower is born to blush unseen,  
And waste its sweetness on the desert air. (“Elegy” 53-56)

The fetish of death and wilderness in the graveyard school poetry anticipates Byron's description of exile. The fetishization of exile is also found in Milton's Satan: "Me miserable! which way shall I fly / Infinite wrath, and infinite despair? / Which way I fly is hell; myself am hell; / . . . / To which the hell I suffer seems a heav'n" (4.73-75, 78). Satan attempts to justify his sin and exile with overstatement; likewise, Byron's writing "needs to be understood in this context of exclusion and self-justification . . ." (MacLeod 262). He justifies Harold's alienation with willful and exaggerative language. Satan never repents since repentance means submission to God; Byron/Harold never regrets because he refuses to abandon his oppositional disposition. To "mix with mankind" humiliates Byron: "I will not descend to a world I despise" ("Lines Addressed to the Rev. J. T. Becher" 1, 4). His embrace of alienation and exile almost assumes the tone of "a Godlike sovereignty" (McGann, *Fiery Dust* 65) that allows no challenge and questioning.

An exile "can make a fetish of exile, a practice that distances him or her from all connections and commitments" (Said, "Reflections on Exile"). To blame society as "the crushing crowd" sounds cynic and cold, a typical temperament of an exile, who may "fall prey to petulant cynicism as well as to querulous lovelessness" (Said, "Reflections on Exile"). Byron's "fetish of exile" manifests his oppositional temperament, Miltonic Satanism, and the graveyard school; however, it subverts the stereotypical image of exile: wandering can be wonderful.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> In Byron's poetry, Dante and Tasso also fetishize their exile with exaggerative languages. Dante believes his name will be immortal: "Man wrongs, and Time avenges, and my name / My form a monument not all obscure"; in the future pilgrims will come to visit his tomb ("The Prophecy of Dante" 1.50-51, 153-54); "And if I have not gathered yet its praise, / I sought it not by any baser lure" ("The Prophecy of Dante" 1.48-49). He presents in the *Paradiso* "the vindictiveness and severity of judgment embodied in the *Inferno*" (Said, "Reflections on Exile"). In Byron's characterization, Dante as an exile excels in the willful exaggerative language. Tasso, another Italian poet, also displays a nomadic

Byron's language corresponds to Said's observation: "Willfulness, exaggeration, overstatement: these are characteristic styles of being an exile, methods for compelling the world to accept your vision" ("Reflections on Exile"). This style matches the poet's oppositional temperament, since opposition "was the formulation of choice proffered by the Romantics themselves in their most high-flying statements . . ." (Goodman 198). The more unbearable sufferings become, the more exaggerative Byron's language appears. Such a style conveys Byron's fetish of exile, his invincible strength against sufferings, and his sense of superiority to the common run of humanity—the features that stem from Milton's artistry.

### **iii. Sufferings presented in counterpoint**

#### **a. The binary images related to suffering**

Worldliness requires a pluralistic perspective. Byron's descriptions of sufferings are neither agonizingly monolithic nor monotonously unilateral. The unsettling force of exile in Harold's journey may appear in a dual image: "All suffering doth destroy, or is destroyed, / Even by the sufferer—and, in each event, / Ends . . ." (4.190-92). The poet indicates the possibility of conquering or surrendering to suffering. He clings to "hope replenished and rebuoyed" (4.192), while losers "[w]ax gray and ghastly, withering ere their time" (4.195). People may respond to the same tribulation differently: Byron has endured in his exile and proves himself unconquerable, but he also recognizes that some others fail to do so. Even though the suffering is suppressed, it "comes a token like a Scorpion's sting, / Scarce seen, but with fresh bitterness imbued . . ." (4.200-01); actually, Byron highlights, "we are darkly bound"

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inclination: he wishes "to overfly / The narrow circus of [his] dungeon wall"; his is not bounded by "Distraction and Disease" in the madhouse ("The Lament of Tasso" 22-23). Tasso describes his homelessness: "I loved all Solitude – but little thought / To spend I know not what of life, remote / from all communion with existence . . ." ("The Lament of Tasso" 174-76).

by some “electric chain” (4.207): the subdued griefs always renew their shock, and the “blight and blackening” can never be left behind (4.210-11). Long-term sufferings do not deprive him of his pluralistic perception, and he can still meditate on the essence of sufferings with a peaceful mind, knowing that he may “feel the shock renewed” even though he has borne the “blight and blackening” calmly for a long while. He does not proclaim a total victory over sufferings; rather, he still insinuates the possibility of his failure to resist sufferings: as he meditates “amongst decay,” he stands like a “ruin amidst ruins” (4.218-19). His image as a “fragment” implies his weakness and vulnerability. As he considers that “suffering doth destroy, or is destroyed,” he is also thinking his victory and failure in tribulations.

On the other hand, Byron also confesses that he suffers because he has mocked the others in his poetry: “The thorns which I have reaped are of the tree / I planted,—they have torn me,—and I bleed: / I should have known what fruit would spring from such a seed” (4.88-90). This may insinuate Byron’s mockery of Robert Southey and William Wordsworth and their counterattacks. Similarly, the fire-like passion that characterizes Rousseau and Napoleon tortured themselves and others; self-affliction and revolution both come from the same source. His oppositional inclination does not simply assume the others as reproachable: the “thorns” always hurt himself and others. With a pluralistic perception, Byron highlights the dual images related to sufferings.

### **b. The mixture of pleasure and pain**

Moreover, Byron’s contrapuntal view discloses the mixture of pain and pleasure in sufferings.<sup>22</sup> Harold is “Pleasure’s palled Victim” (1.826); “[w]ith pleasure

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<sup>22</sup> For example, Dante, under Byron’s pen, believes that poets aim “[a]t an external life beyond our fate” (“The Prophecy of Dante” 4.13). Their creation, compared to Prometheus’s bestowing of fire on men, may find “the pleasure given repaid with pain” (“The Prophecy of Dante” 14-16). Byron’s writing, in this light, will bring the heterogeneous experience—pleasure mixed with pain—because of his pluralistic insight.

drugged, he almost longed for woe” (1.53). In love he discerns the mixture of pain and pleasure: “Full from the fount of Joy’s delicious springs / Some bitter o’er the flowers its bubbling venom flings” (1.817-18). His memory also brings him this paradoxical feeling. He loves Venice because his memory of this city constitutes “the happiest moments which were wrought / Within the web of my existence” (4.167-68) even when he is haunted by “some feelings Time can not (sic.) benumb” (4.170). Indeed, for Byron “history is a field of desire – a theater of cruelty even, pleasure and pain” (McGann, “Byron and Romanticism, a dialogue” 297). While traveling in Bosphorus, Byron/Harold feels that “rippling waters made a pleasant moan” (2.759); seeing the “merry masquerade” there, he wonders that some people may “throb with secret pain” (2.774-75). In Vatican, the statue *Laocoön and His Sons* catches Byron’s eyes: he recognizes “Laocoön’s torture dignifying pain” and the futility of his struggle; yet this meditation also gives him some aesthetic pleasure (4.1432-37)—in Kant’s words, “negative pleasure.” Human life embraces both tragic and comic elements, which depend on each other in Byron’s poetry: “[o]n the one hand, there is a tragic sense of personal dread and inescapable fatality; on the other, there is a comic assertion of human solidarity and exoneration” (Landsdown 51). This special perception derives from the poet’s experience as exile: “To see a poet in exile . . . is to see exile’s antinomies embodied and endured with a unique intensity” (Said, “Reflections on Exile”). Byron may compose by setting up the counterpoint of pain and pleasure. His juxtaposition of both contradictory feelings echoes Burke’s argument: “Our minds and bodies are so closely and intimately connected, that one is incapable of pain or pleasure without the other”; one may experience therefore “a sort of delightful horror, a sort of tranquility tinged with terror” (Burke).

Yet Byron’s mixture of pain and pleasure differs from Keats’s. Keats undergoes the paradoxical feelings mainly in his transcendental vision of beauty: Apollo can play



the tune of “pain and pleasure” to move the whole universe (“Hyperion” 3.66); the poet feels heartache when he is “too happy” in the presence of a nightingale (“Ode to a Nightingale” 1-5). As “exile is irremediably secular” (Said, “Reflections on Exile”), however, Byron the “secular” poet always perceives the sufferings in this mundane world. He catches the antithetical feelings simultaneously with his pluralistic view, and his connection with others comes to the fore in his “secular” concern.

**iv. The measurement of the hero’s strength through the description of sufferings: The counterpoint of self-identity and memory**

The “unsettling force” of exile prevails in Byron because of his inability to forget his own past. As the narrator of “Childe Harold” confesses, his memory haunts him from the beginning of his pilgrimage: “Strange pangs” of memory would flash on his mind (1.65-67). His memory continues to torture him, but he plunges into it continually: he claims to bleed for his “ancestral faults” and his own sin (4.1190-91), and he can hardly forget his family. His life is a perseverant, unyielding opposition to the “unsettling force” of sufferings.

The obsessive pursuit of sufferings can never vanquish Byron and his heroes; nevertheless, the disparity between the past and the present endows him with a contrapuntal view. Furthermore, Byron’s self-identity and his memory of sufferings form a contrapuntal relationship. Sufferings define his selfhood and serve to measure his mental capacity: the dramatic and extensive descriptions of sufferings insinuate his tremendous endurance: the greater his sufferings appear, the greater his resistance becomes. Thus, Byron’s foregrounding of sufferings is a technique of self-portrayal. Although the “triumphant episodes in an exile’s life” are “meant to overcome the crippling sorrow of estrangement,” the “essential sadness can never be surmounted” (Said, “Reflections on Exile”)—therefore, the stoic will of Byron and his heroes is also unsurmountable.

Sufferings build and reveal the poet's identity. "Circumstance, that unspiritual God," the poet complains, "turns Hope to dust—the dust we all have trod" (4.1122-25). Life for him is "uneradicable taint of Sin, which yields to all the woes" (4.1128-34); he suffers because he has seen various forms of sin (4.1216-19). The emphasis on sufferings and hopelessness insinuates simultaneously his endurance and fortitude. Byron knows deeply the life-long curse of the exile:

We wither from our youth, we gasp away—  
Sick—sick; unfound the boon—unslaked the thirst,  
Though to the last, in verge of our decay,  
Some phantom lures, such as we sought at first—  
But all too late,—so are we doubly curst. (4.1108-12)

Therefore, nature can bring him only temporary relief, while his ennui and memory always haunt him. Nevertheless, this passage highlights not Byron's weakness but his miraculous endurance. Literally Byron presents the unconquerable oppression of time: human beings start to "wither" in their youth, and they are "double cursed": they are withering, and this awareness, without being able to save them, only excruciates them more. Yet Byron still stands and resists this "curse" with indifference. Time and memory may conquer all, but Byron and his heroes never prostrate before their "tyranny." Hopelessness and sin fail to annihilate him, while he has gradually learned to cope with difficulties with perseverance. Although he bemoans that he has "thought / Too long and darkly" and that his "springs of life were poisoned" (3.55-56, 60), now he feels that he can "bear what Time can not (sic.) abate, / And feed on bitter fruits without accusing Fate" (3.62-63). His wounds "kill not, but ne'er heal" (3.68). However, his endurance grows with his sufferings: "Something—I know not what—does still uphold / A spirit of slight patience; -- not in vain, / Even for its own sake, do we purchase Pain" ("Epistle to Augusta" 38-40). Such an understanding can be traced

back to Milton: Mammon judges,

Our torments also may in length of time  
Become our elements, these piercing fires  
As soft as now severe, our temper changed  
Into their temper; which must needs remove  
The sensible of pain. . . . (Milton 2.274-78)

Like Mammon, Byron “tends to an impersonality” to the extent that the poet can “entertain or undergo extremes of emotional experience with a kind of indifference of consciousness” (McGann, “Byron and the lyric of sensibility” 161). This indifference, which characterizes Byron and his alter egos as well, is nourished by unabated sufferings—the unsettling force of exile. He echoes Rousseau’s assertion: “Man is born to suffer; pain is the means of his preservation” (*Emile*). In Byron’s portrayal of Prometheus, similarly, silence or indifference works as “a most powerful weapon” against sufferings (Dennis 147). In brief, the emphasis on the unsettling force of exile exposes the poet’s unyielding will. “Sufferings” and his “will” form a contrapuntal relationship. “Sufferings” preserve and nourish his selfhood.

Calling Harold “[t]he wandering outlaw of his own dark mind” (3.20), Byron describes Harold’s experiences:

The furrows of long thought, and dried-up tears,  
Which, ebbing, leave a sterile track behind,  
O’er which all heavily the journeying years  
Plod the last sands of life,—where not a flower appears. (3.24-27)

With the pluralistic view, he looks “behind” but discovers only “a sterile track”: the past appears empty, waste, and lifeless. On “the last sands of life,” he harvests nothing despite his labor throughout “the journeying years.” As nothing about the past is forgotten, his pilgrimage illustrates that nothing at the present has been acquired;

moreover, nothing in the future can be expected, as Manfred observes: the painful life makes “future like the past” (“Manfred” 3.4.130). Byron/Harold grows up “in this world of woe,” “piercing the depths of life, / So that no wonder waits him” (3.37-39). He learns to resist sufferings with indifference, but simultaneously this indifference blunts his sensitivity: the past and the present yield no wonder to him. His pilgrimage, far from dispelling his ennui, haunts him under the shadow of nothingness. Memory endows him with a contrapuntal perspective but fails to drive out the threat of nihilism.

## **B. Writing as the means to oppose nihilism**

### **i. The value of writing**

Nihilism perhaps brings the most terrible pain to Byron. His self-exile means “an act of self-annihilation” (Bennett 179)—since this action separates him from his home, the “context” that bestows meanings on his existence. While Byron/Harold feels fed up with his dissolute life at home, emptiness begins to threaten him. He can only find the meaning of his existence in a “context,” but his separation from tradition and homeland drives him to nothingness. All exiles can hardly avoid such a threat.

As a poet “born for opposition,” he chooses to resist nihilism with writing. A masterpiece, marked by its originality, inscribes the poem and the poet in language, and then both will live on beyond the contemporary age (Bennett 3-4). With Romanticism, the impulse to gain immortality through creating became theorized and practiced: the issue of the identity of an author turned to be increasingly important in literary thinking, while poetry helped produce the writer’s identity (Bennett 2; Hill 133). Writing, in addition, can protect one from lapsing into emptiness (Magill 94). Poetic creation provides “a qualified refuge from the wretchedness of the fated mortal condition, a masking and protective shield for the preservation of individual entity against an engulfing alien society” (Pafford 107-08). On the one hand, writing serves as a means for Byron/Harold to remain associated with his homeland and thus to survive—as

survival “is about the connections” (Said, *Culture* 336). “Affiliation” is a feature of the text’s worldliness: it enables a text to link the “status of the author, historical moment, conditions of publication, diffusion and reception, values drawn upon, values and ideas assumed, a framework of consensually held tacit assumptions, presumed background . . .” (Said, *The World* 174-75). The existential significance of writing relies on its worldliness, and the affiliation engenders meaning for the poet’s self-identity. On the other hand, writing embodies Byron’s reconstitution of his identity. His performance in the House of Lords was comparatively ineffectual than “the political significance of the man as writer” (Kelsall, *Byron’s Politics* 2). Byron the poet spoke louder than Byron the politician. He cultivates his oppositional/contrapuntal creativity through sufferings, and this creativity comes into being in writing.<sup>23</sup> Byron discerns the nihilistic tendency of his nomadic life, and therefore he intends to bestow meanings on his ennui through writing: the poet confesses that he is “nothing,” but Harold as his “Soul of thought” is not so since creativity itself resist nihilism (3.50-54). Also, a “being more intense” lives in creating as he gives life to his imagination, and the poet gains meaning of life in creating Harold (3.50-58). “Throughout the poem, it is in creating that ‘fate’ can be overcome; it can also seem that ‘fate’ acts as a spur to as well as an antagonist of the impulse to create”; the poem “derives much of its force from its wrestling with a language of compulsion” (O’Neill 39). The “fate” of exile refers to the unending sufferings. “A being more intense” for Byron comes from his continual reconstitution of self-identity,

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<sup>23</sup> Some of Byron’s heroes also emphasizes the value of writing. For Dante, “The unborn Earthquake yet is in the womb, / The bloody Chaos yet expects Creation” (“The Prophecy of Dante” 2.41-42). Ariosto and Tasso, “dying in despondency,” composed with “a genuine Poet’s soul,” “[u]nmated by time” (“The Prophecy of Dante” 3.152, 155, 157). Tasso speaks to his hometown Ferrara: even though the city may fall down, “[a] Poet’s wreath shall be thine only crown, -- / A Poet’s dungeon thy most far renown” (“The Lament of Tasso” 222-23, 225-26).

and this creativity can resist nihilism.

Therefore, he affirms the power of writing by praising the immortality of Shakespeare's masterpieces: Shylock and Othello "can not (sic.) be swept or worn away (4.33-34). Art can be eternal because the "Beings of mind" is "[e]ssentially immortal" (4.37-38). Likewise, Rousseau's example as a writer also inspires Byron: the philosopher "from Woe / Wrung overwhelming eloquence, first drew / The breath which made him wretched . . ." (3.727-29). His eloquence turns "[m]adness beautiful" (3.730), and beauty becomes "existence in him" (3/740-41). This love of beauty "breathe[s] itself to life in Julie" (3.743), the protagonist of his epistolary novel *Julie, ou la nouvelle Heloise*. He cultivates his creativity as a response to the "unsettling force" of sufferings, an example that Byron follows. The "Beings" of mind "create / And multiply in us a brighter ray" (4.38-39), "[w]atering the heart whose early flowers have died, / And with a fresher growth replenishing the void" (4.44-45). "Exiles," Byron emphasizes, can shake off the "mortal bondage" of this "dull life" and can display the "more beloved existence" (4.40-43). This "beloved existence" stems from writing that opposes emptiness. Although the feeling of emptiness "peoples many a page" of human life, creativity can reveal "strong reality" that outshines the empty world (4.48-51). He strives with his poetry to be remembered by later generations (4.76-78). Literature about exile mostly presents anguish and predicaments, meaning to "overcome the crippling sorrow of estrangement" (Said, "Reflections on Exile"; *Reflections*). In other words, Byron may wish to overcome his sorrow by writing about his agony. His "being more intense" grows in sufferings and defies nihilism in writing.

## **ii. Byron's problems of writing**

### **a. The loss of creativity**

Yet writing about personal anguish and predicaments brings some problems for

Byron. Firstly, he exposes his loss of ability to see the world poetically:

Since my young days of passion—joy, or pain—  
Perchance my heart and harp have lost a string—  
And both may jar: it may be, that in vain  
I would essay as I have sung to sing:  
Yet, though a dreary strain, to this I cling;  
So that it wean me from the weary dream  
Of selfish grief or gladness . . . . (3.28-34)

As he mourns for the loss of his fire (4.1226),<sup>24</sup> here he echoes Wordsworth's lament: "The things which I have seen I now can see no more" ("Ode: Intimations of Immortality" 9). This problem results from his separation from human community, "a frequent theme in Romantic poetry" including "Childe Harold's Pilgrimage" (Dawson 79). Byron sees the limits of the creative faculty: "Of its own beauty is the mind diseased, / And fevers into false creation" (4.1090-91). The life of exile means loss, deprivation, instability, and alienation, but writing at least may save himself from his egotism, his "selfish grief or gladness." Through writing, the poet intends to be free from personal feelings. The loss of creativity is a crisis in his reconstitution of self-identity.

Yet this crisis does not crush the poet's creativity. Instead, this lament unveils his stoic perseverance and endurance. He never bows down before any idol even in his "weakness"; moreover, he never gives up writing: "I would essay as I have sung to sing"—the unsettling force of exile can continually inspire him. Therefore, he can still feel with Harold in his "crush'd feelings' dearth" (3.58). Only a strong-willed

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<sup>24</sup> He laments for the loss of his "fire" elsewhere: "I am ashes where once I was fire, / And the bard in my bosom is dead; / What I loved I now merely admire, / And my heart is as grey as my head" ("To the Countess of Blessington" 9-12).

poet can insist on creating even though facing the loss of “fire.” This force distinguishes Byron from Wordsworth—no wonder the self-exiled poet foregrounds sufferings in his poetry.

### **b. Writing and forgetfulness**

Secondly, Byron’s self-contradiction appears in his desire for forgetfulness. He yearns for “forgetfulness” (3.35) since memory brings him sufferings—the pain in the nihilistic existence. Writing about himself is supposed to relieve his pain, as Bloom judges: “what the Western tradition has termed the ‘subject’ or the ‘self’ always has been a fiction, a saving lie to assuage anxieties” (*Anatomy* 48). Starting from 1816, when Byron composed Canto III of “Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage,” he began to explore the means of recovery from pain; one way to recover was “to explore his own capacity for forgetfulness” through “imaginative creativity” and attention to nature (Rawes, “1816-17” 119). Manfred utters his wish for “self-oblivion” and fails to fulfill it (“Manfred” 1.1.144); Tasso bemoans, “Oh! would it were my lot / To be forgetful as I am forgot!” (“The Lament of Tasso” 80-81)—a failure shared by Byron and his heroes. The poet wants to forget “his excessive egoism (his ‘selfish’ grief or gladness),” and “[w]riting will offer just that emotional intensity Byron needs to feel himself alive again” (MacLeod 261). Sufferings make his identity, and therefore his imaginative creativity never blesses him with forgetfulness; instead, it stirs his recollections, and his “self” always predetermines his writing. “Imagination and poetry do not offer a relief and escape but a permanent and self-realized condition of suffering, a Romantic Agony” (McGann, “Romanticism” 589).

Byron/Harold starts his travels with the expectation to forget his sufferings, to dispel his *Weltschmerz* and ennui, and to revitalize his life. However, he still feels frustrated at the end of Canto IV since Europe’s history and landscape cannot eradicate his painful memory. The hero learns that “one cannot permanently disengage from



destructive suffering, cannot ‘subdue’ or suppress a grief . . .” (Elledge, “Byron’s Separation” 24). Consequently, writing works as “mock pharmakon.” According to Plato, the creation of letters was at first assumed to cure “forgetfulness”; however, this invention “will create forgetfulness in the learners’ souls because they will not use their memories” (*Phaedrus* 87-88). In brief, writing is believed to corrupt memory. However, Byron’s case reverses this irony: his writing fails to wipe out his memory, while sufferings as the unsettling force remain entangled with him. Byron’s desire for self-oblivion or forgetfulness drives him to emptiness, and therefore this desire negates his resistance to nihilism through writing. The significance of writing, thence, lies not in bringing self-oblivion or forgetfulness, but in creating meaning for his life. Writing pushes this exile to confront his sufferings, to renew his memory, and to dispel emptiness.

### **c. Decentered spirit and non-deconstruction**

Thirdly, writing as “mock pharmakon” seems to trigger the possibility of a deconstructive interpretation. Yet writing in “Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage” does not yield to deconstruction. Rejecting the traditional opposition (presence versus absence, speech versus writing, or order versus disorder), deconstruction aims “to reverse the hierarchy” (Derrida, *Positions* 56-57). It presupposes the existence of a system or a logical thinking, and then it may proceed “a general displacement of the system” (Culler 86). However, as an exile, Byron could not stick to any form of logocentrism. “Origin” and “system” are absent in his decentered view. His unyielding spirit “is staged in an entirely secular context, where the concept of God as a defining antagonist is absent” (Schweizer 191). In Said’s words, Byron as a “secular” writer believes in no transcendental ideology. The characterization of an unknighly knight does not “deconstruct” feudalism; his ambiguous attitude toward this medieval ideology merely displays his oppositional inclination, not a “displacement” of feudalism. He still

appreciates chivalry but rejects bloody, honor-bound wars. In his reconstitution of self-identity, he asserts no specific philosophy, and his opposition to tyranny does not operate as deconstruction, either. Some values must still be affirmed in his reconstitution; otherwise, writing itself can be nihilistic and futile.

When he means to oppose nihilism, he does not play with his self-identity and nothingness as Derrida deals with “presence” and “absence” respectively. Since the reconstitution of self-identity for Byron the exile indicates neither “to be” nor “not to be,” but “becoming,” this reconstitution assumes no hierarchy or system to be deconstructed. This “becoming” differs from the deferral of signification or the endlessness of interpretation proposed by Derrida. The deferral of signification implies “a meaning which always tends towards meaninglessness because it can never be satisfactorily situated in the world” (Ashcroft and Ahluwalia 22). For Said, however, “the closeness of the world’s body to the text’s body forces readers to take both into consideration” (*The World* 39). In other words, the connections among the world, the text, and the author negate emptiness and consolidate “beings.” Byron’s pluralistic view can disclose multiple aspects of his relationship with others—this ability does not anticipate the deferral of meaning. Texts, besides, “announce their worldliness without simply reflecting it, and without assuming that the Author is some kind of ‘centre’ of meaning” (Ashcroft and Ahluwalia 23). Post-structuralism rejects the center or organizing principle, which determines meanings. A “center” always presupposes a systematic, self-sufficient structure. Since Byron needs to *reconstitute* his identity, he cannot presume himself as the center of meaning. This reconstitution neither collapses nor becomes a play on words in his writing. A text for deconstruction critics is regarded as “a structure of the paradigmatic and syntagmatic,” while for Said it is “a cultural production, a cultural act” closely related to this world, and therefore a text itself demonstrates worldliness, the feature of the texts’ “way of

being in the world” (Ashcroft and Ahluwalia 18, 22). Byron writes, as an exile, about his real experience in this world, and this illustrates Said’s argument about writing: the act of writing itself, located in the world, absorbs many different forces into the text (*The World* 129). In his reconstitution of self-identity, these “different forces” contain diverse characters and scenes mentioned in “Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage.” He creates the text to oppose nihilism, and a text is a being in the world (Said, *The World* 33). Worldliness facilitates the formation of Byron’s selfhood and excludes *différance* from his writing. He cannot predominate over all discourse as the fixed “center,” while his being continues to grow in his exile.

Byron must suffer by refreshing his painful memory of exile. Thence, he prefers “forgetfulness” (the “absence” of sufferings) to “memory” (the “presence” of sufferings). Nevertheless, sufferings and his self are too closely blended to be separated—the former form and define the latter, so self-oblivion is out of the question as the poet continues to reconstitute his self through sufferings. Writing never “deconstructs” the opposition between “forgetfulness” and “memory.” Sufferings are always present throughout the travelogue, while writing never reverses Byron’s preference for “forgetfulness”—he merely learns to accept what time cannot abate with indifference (3.62). Sufferings nourish his strong will, whereas writing records his experience and ironically refreshes his memory of sufferings. As the extent of sufferings serves to measure his stoic strength, Byron/Harold appears almost invincible before tremendous sufferings. Far from being trapped in the opposition between “forgetfulness” and “memory,” Byron successfully opposes nihilism by presenting his unconquerable self under the impact of unsettling force of exile in “Childe Harold.”

Despite his strong-willed self, Byron does not write by assuming his self-identity as the logic center of his discourse. His claim to be “born for opposition” indicates that identity means for him a matter of relation, not of essence. Identities are formed

in “the unstable points of identification or suture, which are made, within the discourses of history and culture. Not an essence but a *positioning*”; this positioning “has no absolute guarantee in an unproblematic, transcendental ‘law of origin’” (Hall, Stuart 226). An exile, being nomadic, decentered, and contrapuntal, can hardly cling to essentialism or logocentrism. “Fire” as a metaphor for his selfhood can illustrate his difference from deconstruction philosophers. Embracing constructive and destructive powers, fire brings civilization as well as disasters. In Byron’s portrayals of Rousseau, Napoleon, and himself, neither of antithetical forces of fire is privileged, not to mention that their relationship is reversed. Their evenly matched opposition makes fire—its existence is inevitably ironic. Byron praises Rousseau for creating new ideas and upsetting the old regime, but he denounces Napoleon’s passion for wars, an effort to privilege the destructive power over the constructive and to set himself as the new single authority. Byron’s inherent opposition to tyranny prevents him from treating a single force as the “origin” or the “center.” He recognizes himself as “nothing” (3.54), but Harold as his “[s]oul” of thought (3.55) engenders meaning and resists nihilism. His oppositional view may sometimes appear self-subversive, but far from being a nihilist, he still yearns for meanings in creating Harold. Writing as a demonstration of his decentered view opposes the monolithic, authoritative belief, but affirms his creation of a “being more intense”—and a being of worldliness as well.

### **iii. Writing: The means to consolidate worldliness**

Writing “is a function never exhausted by the completion of a piece of writing” (Said, *The World* 131). Byron writes poetry to oppose sufferings, while only an inexhaustible power can resist the unsettling forces of exile. Worldliness is “incorporated in the text, an infrangible part of its capacity for conveying and producing meaning” (Said, *The World* 39). Writing itself can create a world: “One doesn’t just write: one writes against, or in opposition to, or in some dialectical relationship with

other writers and writing, or other activity, or other objects” (Said, *Power, Politics, and Culture*; “Interview: Edward W. Said” 35; cf. Said and Robbins, “American Intellectuals” 47). This argument explains Byron’s writing career. His feeling incurs “a set of agonistic relations among himself, his poetry, his readers and his victims” (Stauffer 141). The community that contains “himself, his poetry, his readers and his victims” bestows some significance on his existence, while his poetry “invites the reader to sympathize with alienation” (Stauffer 144). “Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage” was composed in response to Byron’s contemporary readers, and the poet sometimes speaks directly to his daughter Ada and his friends in this poem. Harold’s aimless journey, though presenting the decentered consciousness of the poet, is always assumed to be oppositional and dialogic. Indeed, “no one writes simply for oneself. There is always an Other; and this Other willy-nilly turns interpretation into a social activity . . .” (Said, “Opponents” 3). Writing itself is “oppositional” and pushes a writer to the world. With writing, Byron struggles for freedom from painful memory and ennui, while this freedom “is bound up with acute inner conflict and with a sense of relationship with others . . . . Such freedom is profoundly conflicted and conflictual” (O’Neill 40). Sufferings mean not only his personal problem but also a “social” matter, illustrating his opposition to others. His wrestling with pain cannot be separated from his worldliness—he does not seek for comfort in a transcendental realm. This connection with others sustains one’s existence: survival depends more on the thinking “about others than only about ‘us’” (Said, *Culture* 336). Exile smashes the wanderer’s self into “fragments,” but “Byron’s view of himself as a classical ruin is, of course, a shrewdly ambiguous victory over time” (Schweizer 193). In other words, his reconstitution of self successfully resists emptiness and the “unsettling force” of exile because he insistently writes “in opposition to” others.

In terms of writing about sufferings, Harold’s criticism of Spanish people

exemplifies the association of self and others. In Sevilla he found that people behave like what he did: “The feast, the song, the revel here abounds; / Strange modes of merriment the hours consume” (1.487-88). Haunted by his sufferings, Byron does not neglect those of others. Therefore, he blames them: “Here Folly still his votaries inthralls; / And young-eyed Lewdness walks her midnight rounds” (1.491-92). The dandies remain ignorant to the threat of the coming war, while the rustic foresees its destructive power (1.495-98). They became the target of imperialist invasion: the Spanish War broke out in 1811. As an exile, he criticizes profligate, licentious people, who behave just as he did at home. Byron and the Spanish people are grotesquely associated in the narrator’s criticism. This oppositional view displays a pluralistic perspective: his criticisms of others may simultaneously be self-criticism, as manifested in his portrayals of Dante, Tasso, Rousseau, and Napoleon, or in his criticism of the Spanish people.

Byron’s oppositional inclination nourishes his critical capability and worldliness. As Byron grieves for the sufferings all over Europe, he mainly speaks as a critic. His critical judgment, in Said’s words, comes “by a sense of association with others, other intellectuals, a grassroots movement, a continuing history, a set of lived lives” (*Representations of the Intellectual*). His criticism illustrates that “art becomes social by its opposition to society, and it occupies this position only as autonomous art” (Adorno 225). He intends to speak for those sufferers and to condemn their oppressors, since he holds it his job to challenge every form of tyranny. “Criticism as a social activity cannot be easily confined to one place” (Said, “The Future of Criticism” 952). The “criticism” in “Childe Harold” demonstrates an international horizon: he criticizes Portugal for being “swoln with ignorance and pride” (1.222); he mocks Spanish men because they fled for their lives in the Napoleon War, leaving Agustina de Aragón, a Spanish maid, to defend their country (1.558-66); he denounces Elgin for

plundering the Athenian temple (2.95-99); he belittles human society while wandering in nature (3.1598-1602); he attacks the oppressors of Dante, Tasso, Boccaccio, Petrarch while traveling in Italy. Byron characterizes Harold as a cosmopolitan figure by learning from Montesquieu's *Lettres Persanes*, Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, Voltaire's *Candide*, and Goldsmith's *Citizen of the World* (Wohlgemut 95). The poet's international scope epitomizes the "worldliness" proposed by Said; his learning from writers at home and abroad, his wandering experiences, and his oppositional, critical voice are all imposed on Harold and the narrator.

A critic must be "the alchemical translator of texts into circumstantial reality" (Said, "The Text" 4). The description of this "reality" presupposes an awareness of "worldliness" and rejects the plunge into a transcendental vision. Byron excels in "visualizing the exotic and the extreme" and in mingling fantasy and realism (Nicholson 110), while "art" and "reality" entangle in "Childe Harold" (O'Neill 45). Therefore, while Harold wanders in nature, he does not feel "elevated" into a paradise; rather, he is still haunted by secular thoughts and cares, a topic that will be further explored in Chapter Five. Criticism is "personal, active, entwined with the world, implicated in its processes of representation," and the critic, "through the operation of the oppositional, critical spirit," can "prepare the ground for change" (Ashcroft and Ahluwalia 32). His "oppositional voice" in his travel narrative made him famous overnight (Coole 149)—he did arouse the attention of the world with this voice before his self-exile from England. His worldliness is dynamic: his interaction with the "world" must continue, and he can enlighten his readers with the international horizon.

"Childe Harold" discloses Byron's close association with his contemporary world. This poem "is vitally concerned with the position of the individual in the world ('the world' at that time meaning largely, but not exclusively, Western Europe)" (Martin 78). In Byron's judgment, the reception of the first two cantos would determine "whether

the author may venture to conduct his readers to the capital of the East, through Ionia and Phrygia” (“Preface to the First and Second Cantos”). With this travelogue, he also intended to “initiate a dialogue with his immediate peers and lawmakers in the House of Lords” (Coole 149). In composing the third canto, he saw his own life coincided with Europe after the French Revolution and Napoleonic Wars (Rawes, “1816-17” 119)—this is a “grand Byronic identification of psyche and world historical moment” (Christensen, *Lord Byron’s Strength* 156). His sufferings “mirror[ed] those of war-torn Europe” (Franklin, Caroline 91). In the last stanza of Canto IV, Byron bids farewell to his readers, hoping that they may remember his pain in writing this pilgrimage. Byron’s composition of this travelogue illustrates the “collective enterprise” of texts: “Nothing in a text merely occurs or happens; a text is made—by the author, the critic, the reader—and it is a collective enterprise” (Said, “Interview: Edward W. Said” 37). Texts “are always enmeshed in circumstance, time, place and society—in short, they are in the world, and hence are worldly” (Said, “The Text” 4). “Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage,” as “a profoundly public work,” is “designed to appeal to a new audience sympathetic to its coherent and anti-teleological explorations of history, politics and contemporary affairs” (Martin 77). His “conversational style” “underscores M. M. Bakhtin’s emphasis on interaction across boundaries” (Phillipson 325). Writers must always interact with the public: they are “endowed with a faculty for representing, embodying, articulating a message, a view, an attitude, philosophy or opinion to, as well as for, a public” (Said, *Representations of the Intellectual*).<sup>25</sup> The

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<sup>25</sup> Byron similarly advises poets: “To polish poems; they must touch the heart: / Where’er the scene be laid, whate’er the song, / Still let it bear the hearer’s soul along; / Command your audience or to smile or weep” (“Hints from Horace” 138-41). His awareness of the public also determines the portrayals of his heroes. He criticizes Rousseau’s “love of ideal Beauty” as “distempered” (3.740,742)—this transcendental vision is alien to Byron’s “worldliness” or “secularism.” On the other hand, though



composition of “Childe Harold” can be finished because of the “collaboration” of Byron and his readers, and its value relies on its worldliness.

## **V. Conclusion: Byron’s resistance to a stabilized identity**

Most writers in the Romantic period were interested in “the constitution and legitimation of the self” from whose point the world can be viewed (Makdisi, “Romantic cultural imperialism” 605). Byron’s selfhood appears prominent in his poetry: in reading his works, “he himself is never absent from our minds” (Hazlitt). Though Byron remained vain and arrogantly conceited, he could not present his self-identity as a typical humanist. Byron had to “reconstitute” his self since exile had shattered his original identity; the recovery of the original identity was impossible, and therefore he needed to rebuild a new one by absorbing “fragments” from exotic cultures. Because exile “is fundamentally a discontinuous state of being” (Said, “Reflections on Exile”), Byron/Harold would have always felt the pain of “out of place.” Harold never returns to his homeland, and this reconstitution remains an unsettling process for him “[t]o strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield” (Tennyson, “Ulysses” 70).

Byron’s contradictory self is alien to “balance and reconciliation” (McGann, “Byron and the anonymous lyric” 96). Being nomadic and decentered, Byron as an exile “is usually dismissed as fragmentary, erratic, chaotic, and contradictory in both his philosophy and criticism” (Lessenich 180). Being contrapuntal, Byron can discern the multiplicity of reality, the paradoxical nature of Rousseau and Napoleon, and the dual images related to sufferings. He foregrounds sufferings in his reconstitution of self-identity, and writing is originally assumed to relieve his sufferings. This

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cloistered in an asylum, Tasso claims that love pervades his soul and mingles him with whatever he sees on earth (“The Lament of Tasso” 150-51). He is portrayed as a poet of “worldliness” in Byron’s poetry despite his vision of the deliverance of Jerusalem.

reconstitution is established based on his connections with others: the “permanent state” of being an exile is promising for a critic (Said, *Power, Politics, and Culture*), and a critic or an interpreter must learn “to explore the other” (Barenboim 49)—such as Byron’s exploration of Dante, Tasso, Rousseau, and Napoleon. He highlights their characteristics as exiles since he himself suffered as an exile. His descriptions of these great figures reveal his own personality and experiences simultaneously. Moreover, as it is discussed in the first chapter, he absorbs Miltonic Satanism, the cavalier-Augustan heritage, and the graveyard school. Byron’s three features as an exile and his exaggerative descriptions of sufferings owe greatly to Milton. These “fragments” taken from England are mingled with those from Italy and France in the formation of Byron’s poetic self. Byron was not merely a lonely wandering hero. His association with tradition and contemporary society must also be taken into consideration to illustrate the whole picture of his identity. He gained these “fragments” in his nomadic life and wove them in his contrapuntal art; they exist as various “melodies” in a fugue and never reach synthesis because of Byron’s “decentered” view.

Byron’s/Harold’s pilgrimage exposes his own resistance to a fixed identity because a “mobile stance undermines notions of identity both private and public” (Wohlgemut 95). The *reductio ad absurdum* is always inherent in the diasporic (Punter 168), and an exile usually demonstrates “the often paradoxical nature of identity in an increasingly migratory and globalized world” (Ashcroft and Ahluwalia 5). Byron’s identity manifests the tension between presence (being in place) and absence (being out of place), so he cannot accept a stable identity. An exile rejects any imposed identity and displays “a kind of nameless, subversive negativity, yet has a sense of his or her own autonomous powers and capacities that far outstrips the hazy, indeterminate awareness of ourselves as agent that we derive from routine social life” (Eagleton 37). Byron/Harold is cut from this routine, and this “subversive negativity”

does not haunt the poet/hero in nihilism; with his oppositional inclination he cultivates a contrapuntal view to interpret himself and others.

Byron's case exemplifies that self-identity determines the organization of one's knowledge: he underwent deprivation and loss as an exile, and therefore he always "reconstituted" his "broken life"; similarly, he "reconstituted" the ideas of culture, empire, and nature as he wandered on the continent. The following chapters probe into Byron's observations of and meditations on these aspects in "Childe Harold." Broadly speaking, these observations and meditations also manifest the wandering poet's selfhood.

## Chapter Three

### **Culture: Its Representation, Destruction, and Subsistence under the Impact of Imperialism**

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!

(Byron, "English Bards and Scotch Reviewers" 873-76)

Most people are principally aware of one culture, one setting, one home; exiles are aware of at least two, and this plurality of vision gives rise to an awareness of simultaneous dimensions, an awareness that—to borrow a phrase from music—is contrapuntal.

(Said, *Reflections*)

#### **I. Introduction: The exile's perception of cultures**

"Doubly blessed" are those who can see and feel the glory of ancient cultures—thus believes Byron the poet. This "doubly blessedness," owing to his "contrapuntal" awareness, enables him as an exile to see simultaneously English culture and exotic cultures—Spanish, Portuguese, Italian, Greek, and Albanian—on the one hand and the past and the present of a culture on the other. This "blessedness" means the cultivation of becoming a poet of worldliness. Byron intends to "force readers to evaluate more objectively, but also compassionately, the foreign people and places that he had visited

during his Mediterranean travels of 1809-11” (Coole 149). *Objectively*, since he expects his readers to abandon the self-other dichotomy found in the common cultural prejudice; *compassionately*, since Byron the “secular” critic holds it necessary to affiliate with people of various cultures, ancient or modern. The coexistence of both attitudes displays his ambiguous worldview: he cares for cultures and society (thus compassionately), but he remains detached from them (thus objectively). “Childe Harold” was at first composed to connect the English readers with Europe and to foster cultural interactions. His travels provoked him to meditate on the cultural contrast and have associated his readers with these cultures, an effort that demonstrates his “worldliness.”

“Culture” may serve as a context for Byron/Harold to define himself and to affiliate with others. It “allows people to give meaning to their world, coordinate their activities, and share a sense of community”; yet it also “feeds into a division between ‘us’ and ‘others’” (Rigney 306). It affirms “certain ‘good’ things” and creates and re-creates itself as a specialized apparatus for doing all those things” (Said, “Reflections on Recent American ‘Left’ Literary Criticism” 28). In short, it promotes the sense of belonging and that of exclusion by holding some certain common values, languages, rituals, and history. Therefore, the self-other dichotomy usually arises in the emergence of a particular culture, while the insiders may exclude, discriminate against, exploit, or even attempt to exterminate the outsiders—a phenomenon found in imperialism and fascism.

Yet Byron/Harold the exile sticks to no indigenous culture and negates the cultural separation. His international scope embraces diverse cultures and rejects the self-other dichotomy asserted by fundamentalists and racists. On the one hand, this derives from his aimless wandering. “Byron identifies himself with whole nations (Greece, Italy, England—with Europe at large) and with their national heroes (political

as well as artistic)” (MaGann, “Byron’s lyric poetry” 211). His nomadic life contributes to his perception of the world as ever-changing, heterogeneous, and multiple; therefore, it is ridiculous for him to treat a culture as the fixed, absolute, and transcendently detached. Culture, “far from being autonomous or transcendent,” is “close to the historical world”; it is never fixed and stable (Said, *Culture* 111-12). Byron reconstitutes his identity by treating Dante, Tasso, Rousseau, Napoleon, and some other European characters as his alter egos, and consequently the cultural differences can never bar his learning from exotic cultures. Without being bound by any local culture, he embraces the whole Europe. On the other hand, Europe in the early nineteenth-century, when Byron exiled himself from his homeland, was undergoing drastic changes in all aspects. Culture and anarchy coexisted in the upheavals: Napoleon destroyed the old order, while the other imperialists intended to re-establish that order. In such a circumstance, Childe Harold “is obsessed with the idea of the renewal of human culture in the west at a moment of its deepest darkness” (McGann, *Beauty* 260). European culture was undergoing a revolution that haunted the whole continent in instability and chaos—in Dickens’s words, it was “the best of times” and “the worst of times,” mixing wisdom and foolishness, belief and incredulity, light and darkness, hope and despair (1). Hence, Byron holds a decentered worldview and a contrapuntal perception. As he praises the “doubly blessed” poet who “rends the veil of ages” to see the glory of ancient Greece, he must have discerned that culture “is always changing: the past can not (sic.) be a complete guide to the future” (Nicholson 117). Thus, his contrapuntal perception of the past and the present does not turn him into a traditionalist. The survival of a culture cannot depend on copying from the past, or on insisting the self-other dichotomy. As a cosmopolitan, he intended to “define” himself in various cultural contexts, but he would not be “confined” by a particular culture.

An exile, therefore, regards cultures as ever-changing. This recognition pushes Byron to re-examine his self-identity as well. As he continually reconstitutes his identity in his exile, he never resorts to a stable, systematic, and transcendental framework as his guideline. Yet this “decentered” thinking never results in a nihilistic worldview because of his “contrapuntal” insight—an ability to discern the interaction of antithetical elements, and not to take chaos and disorder for granted. Since an exile holds a pluralistic view, it is inevitable that Byron can perceive multiple aspects of a culture: “. . . whereas the whole of a culture is a disjunct one, many important sectors of it can be apprehended as working contrapuntally together” (Said, *Culture* 194). It is impossible for Byron to present the panorama of his contemporary cultures as well as the ancient cultures. Yet his pluralistic views form a unique interpretation of culture: an exile, symbolized in a broken, fragmentary self-image, must discern the “disjunct” image of culture more keenly and deeply than the non-exiles. He feels affiliated with the ruins because of their similar fragmentary images. His understanding of cultures usually reflects his identity as an exile.

This chapter focuses on the representation, destruction, and subsistence of culture under the impact of imperialism, and the discussion will be divided into four parts: (1) the representation and inheritance of culture are restrained because of human finitude, while the plunder of relics by the imperialists lead to a misrepresentation—the ancient culture can never be reconstituted as monolithic and unified; (2) ruins, a common image in romantic literature, may represent the absence and presence of an ancient culture and must be judged in their original environment, while Greek ruins reveal Athena’s paradoxical status as well as the loss of the resistant spirit in the nineteenth-century Greece; the ruins themselves display the inevitable change of cultures; (3) war/fighting can display and destroy culture: war or fighting illustrates the coexistence of civilization and barbarism—a contrapuntal image which

also reveals the mutability and decentered condition—whereas Byron also observes the subversion of gender stereotype in war; (4) as the subsistence of culture depends on liberty and autonomy, the resistance to invasion and dominance becomes necessary; Byron holds contrapuntal views on the quest for freedom, a human right widely proclaimed in his contemporary culture. He believes in the necessity to defend freedom, but he also questions the effectiveness of resistance toward oppression, while the existence of inborn slavery challenges the power-resistance confrontation. Like his self-understanding, Byron’s pluralistic views on culture may sometimes appear paradoxical or contradictory, but his deliberate self-contradiction illustrates his ability to see different aspects of culture at the same time. His observation of cultures, in short, reflects his features of being an exile: cultures appear as changing, decentered, and contrapuntal.

## **II. The representation of culture**

### **A. The recognition of human finitude**

“Childe Harold” displays Byron’s representation of culture through his contrapuntal artistry. Culture manifests human creativity, whereas the evaluation of culture also means that of human capacity. Greece, Venice, and Rome created splendid cultures, but none of them can maintain their splendor eternally. Mutability befalls all cultures—a fact that Byron witnessed in his nomadic life. Seeing the lost splendor with his pluralistic view, Byron affirms the human potential to develop brilliant cultures but negates the permanence of cultural inheritance. Therefore, human finitude must be recognized, whereas this recognition indicates the inevitable mutability of culture.

While meditating on the ruin of Athena’s temple, Byron praises Socrates: “Well



didst thou speak, Athena's wisest son! / 'All that we know is, nothing can be known'" (2.55-56). While defending for himself, Socrates proclaims that he means to tell "the whole truth, and that he owns merely "humankind of wisdoms," not that of "a superhuman kind" (Plato, *Defence* 31). The philosopher argues that only god is wise, and that "human wisdom is worth little or nothing" (Plato, *Defence* 34). Yet Socrates is regarded by Delphi's oracle to be the wisest mortal because he knows his own ignorance—in other words, knowledge is boundless, and it is true wisdom to accept the limit of human capacity. Thence Byron's praise of Socrates negates humanism: mankind, following "what Chance or Fate proclaimeth best," cannot predominate the world by gaining more knowledge, and death always waits for all creatures (2.57-63). Furthermore, "Athena's wisest son" does not argue for a nihilistic worldview when he asserts that "nothing can be known"—he emphasizes the necessity of the awareness of one's finiteness as the zenith of human knowledge. This awareness can be achieved through the contrapuntal view. The recognition of human finitude becomes obvious when the contrast between the past and the present is illustrated and lamented. "Change" haunts all cultures with irresistible force, a lesson that the nomadic life has taught Byron, while his awareness of human finitude owes greatly to his wandering. The contrapuntal perception of ruins can expose the inevitability of the rise and fall of human culture. This perception can lead to the correct understanding of culture and human capacity.

The awareness of one's finitude also emerges in the appreciation of art. Byron affirms artistic creativity (4.466-68), as Michelangelo, Vittorio, Galileo, and Machiavelli still "furnish forth creation" (4.487-88). These masters create masterpieces and constantly inspire numerous spectators. The very presence of inspiration, nevertheless, highlights some insufficiency of the spectators: they need the inspiration from the masters so that they may broaden their horizon and see what they

did not see. The impact of the artworks appears so great as to render the spectators dumb and intoxicated. Byron is shocked by his loss of subjectivity when viewing the statue of Venus in Rome:

We gaze and turn away, and know not where,  
Dazzled and drunk with Beauty, till the heart  
Reels with its fulness; there—for ever there—  
Chained to the chariot of triumphal Art,  
We stand as captives, and would not depart. (4.442-46)

Beauty initiates the contrapuntal view of the spectators: they see not only the masterpieces but also their finitude. Not that they can taste the beauty as connoisseurs, but that they become “captives” of “triumphal Art,” surrendering themselves totally and willingly to the mysterious might of Beauty. In this loss of subjectivity, one can deeply understand that “nothing can be known,” and consequently he/she feels “[d]azzled and drunk.” The artwork reveals “immortality” (4.436), while no words can catch its beauty (4.447)—such beauty enlightens mundane spectators, showing their inability to fathom its mystery. Their refusal to depart indicates their intoxication of being conquered by Beauty. Similarly, Byron recognizes his inability to restore and re-present the glory of ancient Greek culture—now represented symbolically by the ruins of Jupiter’s temple:

Mightiest of many such! Hence let me trace  
The latent grandeur of thy dwelling-place.  
It may not be: nor ev’n can Fancy’s eye  
Restore what Time hath laboured to deface. (2.85-88)

With his contrapuntal view, the poet discovers the “Mightiest” representation of Greek culture, but he also negates the possibility of fully demonstrating its “latent grandeur” because of his limited imagination, the “Fancy’s eye.” Byron, the “captive” of

“triumphal Art,” learns that “nothing can be known.” “Time” exerts an irresistible might on the ruins so that human beings can hardly imagine the “latent grandeur” of ancient Greece. This recognition of human finitude runs counter to humanism, the man-centered worldview.

This “loss of subjectivity” corresponds to Gadamer’s argument about the appreciation of a work of art. This appreciation, compared to “play” or “game,” reaches the same situation: “Play fulfills its purpose only if the player loses himself in play”; “the work of art has its true being in the fact that it becomes an experience that changes the person who experiences it” (Gadamer 102). This change arises because of the independence of the artistic work, the true subject of the experience of art. On the other hand, the work of art as “play” must be presented through the “players”—this process relies on “to-and-fro movement that is not tied to any goal that would bring it to an end,” while the play/artwork “renews itself in constant repetition” (Gadamer 103). Human finitude is implied in this “repetition”: “it is the game that is played—it is irrelevant whether or not there is a subject who plays it” (Gadamer 103). The actual subject of play is not the subjectivity of an individual, but the play itself—“the game masters the players” (Gadamer 104, 106). In Byron’s case, the significance of artworks or ruins must be reconstituted through his contrapuntal views; this reconstitution, displayed in “Childe Harold,” anticipates “constant renewal” of readers. The artistic or cultural glory must be represented and conveyed in this manner—though to a very limited degree. The poet’s subjectivity, on the other hand, does not play an active role in the reconstitution. Byron is drawn by the ruins as a “captive” to convey the “latent grandeur” or “buried glory” of the ruins.

The recognition of human finitude, denying the active role of human subjectivity in the appreciation of artworks, also highlights a decentering view held by the exile. The spectators cannot determine the value of art; rather, they must confess their

insufficiency and then experience the enlightenment of art. Art elevates the spectators, not vice versa. The veneration of art as the true subject decentralizes human subjectivity and thus negates humanism. Furthermore, this veneration does not assume “art” as the center or the supreme authority in culture. Art serves as one source of inspiration for Byron the exile. In his pilgrimage, he also meditates on history, politics, literature, philosophy and expands his horizon accordingly. Culture as a heterogeneous entity remains a “decentered” context for Byron the exile. This recognition represents Byron’s open-mindedness to all sources of inspiration and facilitates the workings of his contrapuntal perception. “Counterpoint” always presumes the harmony of at least two melodies—in other words, multiplicity, decentering, and change are necessary for the contrapuntal understanding and interpretations.

In Venice, Byron’s description of the Bridge of Sighs also presents his contrapuntal view. The structure of this bridge invites interpretations from such a view: a “palace and a prison” stand on two sides of the bridge, and “a dying Glory smiles” as a queer response to this ambiguity. On one side, the palace signifies life and glory; on the other side, the prison symbolizes death and shame. This bridge was named by the poet since the death convicts may sigh while seeing the beautiful scenery of Venice on the bridge for the last time of their lives. Its “dying Glory” connotes that it is also an antiquity, which still “smiles / O’er the far times.” The bridge itself has glory because of its history, but, like the death convicts walking on it, it is also “dying.” It also symbolizes the “beautiful and repressive” aspects of civilization (Bone, “*Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage IV*” 151-52) — “beautiful” for its structure, and “repressive” for its association with death. In addition, this bridge also signifies “continuity” and “decay,” manifesting “the power and the limitations of human artefacts” (Bone, “*Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage IV*” 152). Its existence reveals the presence and power of ancient

Venetian culture, while the deteriorated structure exposes the insignificance of humanity under the impact of time. Its structure displays the contrast between some contrary states of human beings and invites contrapuntal interpretations. Life and death, glory and shame—the bridge itself links the antithetical, irresistible forces imposed on human beings. Consequently, human finitude is revealed since no one can escape from these forces.

Therefore, the recognition of human finitude in the representation of culture involves the three features of exile. The nomadic life features “change” as the norm, and thence Byron foregrounds the mutability of culture and his inability to grasp it totally. This recognition also decentralizes human subjectivity and displays the multiplicity and heterogeneity of culture. In addition, the contrapuntal perception enables him to see not only the buried glory of the past but also one’s own finitude. Antiquities and ruins may trigger a keen insight into the magnificence of ancient cultures, but they serve merely as signifiers to the signified. Moreover, the knowledge of the signified remains only a part of the whole truth that one can see with the contrapuntal view. The awareness of human finitude, nevertheless, is the ultimate wisdom, a more valuable cultural asset than the antiquities and ruins. Byron, a poet of worldliness, learns the cream of Socratic wisdom. His meditation on exotic cultures also displays his reconstitution of self-identity.

### **B. The problematic representation of culture**

As Byron feels overwhelmed by Venus’s statue, he exposes the human inability to know the immortal beauty; then he suggests some artists or connoisseurs to “describe the undescrivable” (4.470-73). Human beings live in a world of representation, and “representations . . . are the very element of culture” (Said, “Secular Interpretation” 34; *Culture* 56). Byron’s suggestion to “describe” undescrivable beauty affirms the necessity of “representation.” The “truth” of beauty is “undescrivable,” and therefore

its representation remains problematic even though “[t]he natural appetite or taste of the human mind is for truth” (Reynolds 349). To describe beauty indicates an effort to know it. “‘Knowledge’ is always a matter of representation, and representation a process of giving concrete form to ideological concepts, of making certain signifiers stand for signifieds” (Ashcroft and Ahluwalia 65). Yet true representation can never reproduce the original “signifieds”: if all representations are intertwined with the culture of the representer, then “a representation is *eo ipso* implicated, intertwined, embedded, interwoven with a great many other things besides the ‘truth’ which is itself a representation” (Said, *Orientalism* 272). At most, the representations are the representer’s interpretations of the “signifieds.” In Byron’s case, “Childe Harold” demonstrates the exile’s perception of cultures, not the cultures in their original condition.

Therefore, various interpretations of cultures are found. Europeans in the early nineteenth century tended to “create” their own vision of exotic cultures: they “sought to ‘regenerate’ modern Greece by purging its oriental elements and ‘restoring’ a Hellenic state that was itself largely a construction of European classical scholarship, rather than a reflection of the actual cultural identity of modern Greeks” (Leask, “Byron” 104). In brief, this corresponds to the Orientalist discourse. Greece was treated as the East: “The exotic is a way of seeing the world that fetishizes differences, creating otherness as having ‘inherent’ qualities and an ‘immanent mystery’” (Sánchez-Arce 150). The exotic is always treated as “Other”—the being that the West is not. “To a Westerner (considered here as the ‘subject’ or the ‘self’) the Orient (the ‘object’ or the ‘other’) is exotic because it is remote and different. . . . When the subject, then, studies this exotic experience, he is studying a Western subjective attitude”; in other words, “he is studying himself and not the object” (Oueijan 30-33). As the “West” intends to define the “East,” this turns out to be the definition of the “West” and consequently this

representation of the “East” can never be accurate (Said, *Orientalism* 325-26). Such an Occident-Orient association “is a relationship of power, of domination, of varying degrees of a complex hegemony . . .” (Said, *Orientalism* 5). The Orient, like sentimentalism, serves as a door to escape from reality (Havens 105), since the descriptions of exotic scenes may drive the reader’s attention from the status quo. The “revival” of ancient Greece exemplifies a misrepresentation of culture. It assumes the self-other dichotomy that denies the Greek heritage as one of the origins of western culture.

Among Byron’s contemporaries, the “true” representation of culture was not the major concern of poetry. For Wordsworth and his followers, “the representation of fact unmodified by feeling is non-poetry” since a poet’s feeling is treated as the “first-order criterion”; for Coleridge, “the union of the new with the old”—not the revelation of reality—constitutes the essence of the ideal poetry (Abrams 298-99). In other words, these English romantic poets have their own perceptions and understandings of “reality.” As they describe the beauty of nature, “the demand that a work correspond to nature was no less variable in its significance than the word ‘nature’ itself” (Abrams 264). “Poetical works do not ‘copy’ the phenomena of the external world, they ‘imitate’ the ideal forms which we know through the operations of the human mind”; “the poet imitates the essential qualities of his subject, human beings or individual persons in their generic distinctiveness”—a view shared by Aristotle, Sir Philip Sidney, and Samuel Taylor Coleridge but undermined by eighteenth century empiricism and modern historical thought (McGann, “A point of reference” 207, 214). The “reality” that the visionary poets ‘imitate’ is not the objective world as such, but their “encounters with the objective world”; the only subject matter is the poet’s self, and the only ideas “will be ideas about the activity of consciousness in the world around it” (Wallace 113). Those poets do not aim at representing the reality; they prefer to create an ideal world.

Therefore, their descriptions of nature can seldom be understood in the literal sense.

Byron holds a “secular” view in his representation of culture and world—quite unlike the transcendental vision of Blake, Wordsworth, and Keats. From 1817 to 1824, “Byron’s work is consciously preoccupied with Poetry and Truth” (McGann, “My brain is feminine” 66).<sup>1</sup> Intellectuals must excel “the art of representing” to the extent that “it is publicly recognizable” (Said, *Representations of the Intellectual*). Byron’s “publicly recognizable” representation of exotic cultures contributes to his worldliness. His understanding of Greek culture opposes those of Orientalists. Byron’s views on the Greeks differ from those negative representations held by many of his contemporaries (Coole 153), who treated Greece as the “Other,” not as one origin of their culture; “misrepresentation or exaggeration of any kind, whether positive or negative, will ultimately be detrimental to the Greeks’ cause” (Coole 154). Byron’s travels cultivated his recognition of cultural relativity: “Beliefs taken for granted by one culture as absolutely real are regarded by others as non-existent” (Nicholson 117). As a “secular” poet, he rejects absolute truth and authoritative belief—especially the widespread, taken-for-granted belief that regards Greece as the “Other.” The idea of absolute truth not only violates reality but also promotes domination and tyranny (Nicholson 117). As it is discussed earlier, Byron identifies Greece as his “home”—not as the “Other” to the West—and intends to struggle for its liberty and independence. “For Byron, a major cause of the Greeks’ continued oppression – and of the reluctance by the rest of Europe to intervene – is the ‘irresponsible’ reportage and representation of the Greek people by those in positions of power” (Coole 154). He holds European

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<sup>1</sup> Byron’s yearning for reality has emerged in his early years: while fighting against harsh critics, he declares: “While Truth my sole desire is nigh, / Prepared the danger to defy” (“To a Knot of Ungenerous Critics” 25-26). Insisting on the “true” story of Don Juan, the poet appeals to “History, Tradition, and to Facts, / To newspapers, whose truth all know and feel” (“Don Juan” 1.1616-18).



scholars particularly responsible for the misrepresentation of Greeks with “prejudicial readings of their own encounter with the population” (Watson 12). His attitude toward Greece is anti-Orientalist, rejecting the view that this country represents what the West is not.<sup>2</sup> His “secular” view differs from the “transcendental” vision of the other arch-romantics as well.

### **C. Elgin’s plunder of the Athenian temple**

Byron claims himself a “ruin amidst ruins,” implying his belief that one must understand a culture, which emerges even though merely in the form of fragments, in its original environment. Therefore, he attacks Elgin’s plunder of the Athenian Acropolis:

But who, of all the plunderers of yon Fane  
On high—where Pallas linger’d, loth to flee  
The latest relic of her ancient reign—  
The last, the worst, dull spoiler, who was he?  
Blush, Caledonia! such thy son could be!  
England! I joy no child he was of thine:  
Thy free-born men should spare what once was free;  
Yet they could violate each saddening shrine,  
And bear these altars o’er the long-reluctant brine.                   (2.91-99)

“The last, the worst, dull spoiler” refers to Thomas Bruce, the 7<sup>th</sup> Earl of Elgin (1766-1841), a Scottish nobleman like Byron; he moved from Parthenon numerous marble

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<sup>2</sup> Yet Byron is pessimistic about the representation of truth: through Dante, he laments that he may behold the “evil days to gifted foreshown, / Foretelling them to those who will not hear; / As in the old time, till the hour by come / When Truth shall strike their eyes through many a tear . . .” (“The Prophecy of Dante” 4.150-53). He shares with Cassandra the same plight: no one believes in their statements and predictions. Hence, the poet implies, the cultural change, multiplicity and decentering—the “truth” of reality—may always be ignored or denied.

statues and then placed them in the British Museum. This exhibition supposedly represents the ancient Greek culture under the patronage of the British Empire. Byron also condemns Elgin for destroying monuments and antiques in “English Bards and Scotch Reviewers” (1027-30) and “The Curse of Minerva” (199-206). The identification of the “plunderer” as a son of Scotland (Caledonia) does not justify England to be innocent, since this violence is ultimately attributed to the British Empire, to which Scotland belongs. The poet means to satirize the British Empire by congratulating that Elgin was not an English child. After all, the raided Greek statues have been stored ever since in the British Museum in London, the very center of the empire. Byron associates Elgin’s plunder with imperialist invasion, which deprives the relics of their original background. The temple, a symbol of ancient Greece, “was once free,” but now it survives at the mercy of the British imperialists, the “free-born men.” The “saddening shrine” and “the long-reluctant brine”—the personification of the pillaged historical site—exposes the poet’s sympathy and identification with ancient Greece: he is separated from his homeland just as the relics are removed from theirs, while both appear in broken images.

Elgin’s plunder “can be seen as the act of a patriotic British virtuoso to establish London as the modern Athens, replete with objects of ‘pure’ Hellenic . . .” (Leask, “Byron” 104). This plunder was proceeded with the excuse to save the relics from “Turkish barbarism” (Esterhammer 35), but the Greek relics underwent the damages from the British Empire as well. As Elgin intended to “protect,” “establish,” and “represent” the ancient culture, he was destroying it. Now these relics are termed as “Elgin Marbles,” a term that exposes not the ancient Greek glory but the imperialist barbarism. So does the term “Musée Napoléon,” a place which stores all that the emperor has plundered from relics of ancient civilizations. Yet Byron denounces this imperial plunder since exiles find it unbearable to become “part of a triumphant

ideology” (Groom 45). The exhibition of the Parthenon relics in the British Museum represents the absence of the genuine Greek culture under the dominance of the British imperialism. “[M]emorializing a nation in museum is, of course, a form of colonialism – a way of imposing imperial order” (Groom 45). The Greek relics in the British Museum appear merely as “fragments” torn from its original ruins—to be precise, these are “fragments of fragments” of the original Greek culture, “exiled” from their homeland. These artifacts are now stored in the center of the British culture, undergoing “the amputation of heritage” (Elledge, “Chasms” 132). Viewed in the light of “the hermeneutical circle,” these relics lost their original significance once they are separated from their original “context” at the mercy of British imperialism. “‘Being there’ [in Greece] is the challenge Byron sets against Elgin’s ‘taking away’” (Esterhammer 32). For Byron, these marbles represent not “wonders” but loss and deprivation. His concern about the cultural context of the relics is antithetical to Keats’s view on them. Keats mourns for his weak spirit while watching these “wonders”: the “Grecian grandeur” appears in sharp contrast to his mortal self. The imperialist ravage of the Greek culture does not attract his attention at all (“On Seeing the Elgin Marbles” 1-12). As a visionary poet, he focuses on his “alienated subjectivity” (Esterhammer 30) and lacks Byron’s “worldliness” and “secular” penchant. Byron observes the marbles as a “ruin amidst the ruins,” not in the museum, and therefore he affiliates himself totally with the antiquities. The imperialist “restoration” of ancient Athens in London merely demonstrates a fragmentary, distorted image of a culture. Elgin’s plunder means the “decenter” of the Greek culture, while the British exhibition of the relics signifies the “change” of the Hellenistic heritage. The contrast between the past and the present of the same culture displays a “contrapuntal” perspective.

The plunder upsets the assumed “civilization” of the British Empire and exposes

the imperialist vandalism.<sup>3</sup> As “the modern Pict” (2.100), Elgin functions as a scapegoat that bears the sin of British imperialism in Byron’s criticism. That Scottish nobleman takes pride in his ability to “rive what Goth, and Turk, and Time hath spared: / Cold as the crags upon his native coast, / His mind as barren and his heart as hard” (2.101-03). Consequently, he “displace[s] Athenæ’s poor remains” (2.105). Great Britain destroys Greek culture more savagely than the barbarians—as Minerva comments, Briton was “once a noble name,” but now bears the “blush of shame” (“The Curse of Minerva” 89-90). The Greek artifacts were removed to the center of the British Empire, deprived of “the sympathetic imagination with a perception of what civilization could be under the Spirit of Freedom” (Hubbell, “Byron’s” 195). Ironically the “free Britannia” (2.213) devastates this spirit by pillaging the relics from the origin of western civilization. England, a land of “free-born men,” should have spared Greece, which was once free (2.97), and should have guarded the Greek relics (2.132); yet the British Empire carries “[t]he last plunder from a bleeding land” (2.113-14). Britain, though hailed as the “Ocean Queen” (2.113), is the “abhorred” Northern climes in the age of imperialism (2.135). Now the artifacts in the British Museum illustrate blatantly the brutal, barbarous crime of the British imperialism — “a systematic policy of cultural imperialism sponsored by the British government” (Wood 174). The “worst” plunderer “could violate each saddening shrine” and carry the altars in Parthenon “o’er the long-reluctant brine”—in other words, the sin of the

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<sup>3</sup> Byron also condemns British imperialism for this crime with Minerva as his mouthpiece:

’Scaped from the ravage of the Turk and Goth,  
Thy country sends a spoiler worse than both.  
Survey this vacant, violated fane;  
Recount the relics torn that yet remain . . . . (“The Curse of Minerva” 97-100)

Britain did not undergo the invasion from the barbarians in the Middle Ages, but as it prospers, its ravage becomes more disastrous than the Turk’s or the Goth’s. The “spoiler” refers to Elgin.

imperialist robbery deserves international condemnation. The poet feels so guilty for British imperialism that he wishes to conceal this crime: “Tell not the deed to blushing Europe’s ears” (2.112). By contrast, the exhibition of Elgin’s marbles highlights the unashamed pride of the British Empire, an endeavor to proclaim their savagery to the civilized world.

Elgin’s plunder of Athenian relics exemplifies “reification” in the Marxist sense. Reification means “the transformation of a person, process or abstract concept into a thing” (Roberts 39)—human relations become “identified with the physical properties of things” (Burriss). The relics are treated as valuable cultural assets and sold to the British Museum. Most spectators tend to view those relics as the representations of Greek culture, not knowing the cultural environment that produced these relics. Indeed, “reification sees the triumph of the commodity, and the subsequent eclipse of the sense of society as an organic whole” (Roberts 39). The museum displays only the relics, which have been transformed through transaction to be commodities, while Greek “society as an organic whole” can be revived only through the contrapuntal insight. To value those relics commits “commodity fetishism,” in which the “whole” Greek social culture is neglected, misunderstood, or violated. Greek art and culture in the vogue of Hellenism in Romantic Britain are reified together with human creativity and relational abilities. “Reification involves the fragmentation and destruction of the totality of existence” (Roberts 45). The imperialist’s “protection” of the Greek relics only contributes to the fragmentary understanding of the Greek culture. Human beings cannot bring their “physical and psychic ‘qualities’ into play without their being subjected increasingly to this reifying process” (Lukacs). The exhibition of Elgin’s marbles demonstrates “reified” fragmentation of Greek culture. The artistry that created these marbles appear as “the dehumanized and dehumanizing function of the commodity relation” (Lukacs). “Reification undermines the sense of

totality in society . . . [and] fragments our perception of the whole world . . .” (Roberts 41). Yet the gestalt understanding of a culture is necessary: “The commodity can only be understood in its undistorted essence when it becomes the universal category of society as a whole” (Lukacs). The Museum exists merely as a world of commodities; the panorama of Greek culture remains beyond the understanding and perception of imperialists. Moreover, the reified fragmentation of Greek culture breaks the ties of human relationship: the relics have been regarded as valuable commodities from an *exotic* land, an action that denies ancient Greece as one of the sources of the British culture. The reification of Greek culture deprives the Britons of the awareness of their true relationship with ancient Greece.

Byron highlights the problems of representations of culture. The ancient culture *per se* cannot be exactly reproduced in a different context; rather, it means an issue “of the struggle between different and contesting representations” (Ashcroft and Ahluwalia 7). Both Elgin the imperialist and Byron the exile attempt to represent the Greek culture, while “Childe Harold” demonstrates their “contesting representations.” The imperialist robs abundant relics and re-establish the ancient culture in the museum. Yet the assemblage of fragments fails to represent the true ancient Greece—as the Orientalism in the nineteenth century had almost nothing to do with the Orient. This misrepresentation shows not an attempt to understand a foreign culture, but an exploration to build up the empire; with this misrepresentation, the imperialist indirectly asserts the imperialistic subjectivity, “a collective and political identity” that defines the imperial culture “as against its civilizational ‘others’” (Makdisi, “Romantic cultural imperialism” 602-03). The “others”—one of them is Greece, supposedly one of the origins of western culture—are devoured, devastated, and denied in the “development” of the imperial enterprise. This subjectivity of empire is exalted by negating or neglecting that of other cultures. Such a misrepresentation exposes the

imperialist ignorance of their ignorance of the ancient cultures. In Socrates's words, imperialists "know nothing of the matters on which they pronounce"—and they are not aware of their blindness (Plato, *Defence* 33). Unable to represent the ancient culture, they merely demonstrate the mutability of culture. Byron the exile always feels affiliated with the relics and ruins of ancient culture since his nomadic life has illustrated the inevitability of change too profoundly to be ignored.

On the other hand, Byron's attack of this "misrepresentation" clearly highlights the value of Greek cultural heritage—the opposition to tyranny—manifested in the Greeks' resistance to the invasion of the Persian Empire. His attack of imperialist plunder illuminates the contrapuntal awareness of culture "being there" and "taken away." He sees the barbarity of the empire and respects the independence of exotic culture. His refusal to be a "patriot" of the British Empire stems from his experience as an exile. "Exiles cross borders, break barriers of thought and experience"; they have "cross-cultural and transnational visions" (Said, "Reflections on Exile"). Their nomadic life enables them to be aware of at least two cultures at the same time; their decentered worldview rejects the supremacy of the imperialist authority; their contrapuntal insight highlights the coexistence and interaction of antithetical forces. These three features characterize Byron as an exile, and prompt him to oppose the imperialist hegemony. Of course, the poet does not claim a panoramic understanding of the ancient Greece. Nevertheless, as "the experience of migration is culturally destabilizing, giving rise to a sense of truth as provisional" (Smith 62). Byron recognizes his finitude in representing a culture. He does not mean to "describe the undescrivable" with his contrapuntal insight. His resistance to hegemony and invasion owes to his recognition of cultural multiplicity and independence.

### **III. Ruins: The manifestation of an ancient culture in the pluralistic vision**

#### **A. The ability to see the past and the present**

##### **i. Ruins, nostalgia, and the contrapuntal perception of ruins**

In his pilgrimage, Byron/Harold usually visits ruins, natural scenes, and historical buildings and sites, while he rarely mingles with crowds. “Childe Harold” is “preoccupied with fracture and loss” (Elledge, “Byron’s Separation” 16). Ruins exist as fragmentary images of a culture, while “fragmentation” is closely linked to our understanding of English romantic literature, criticism, and aesthetics and helps us define Romanticism (Regier 3-4). “Relics” or “ruins” for Byron means more than valuable cultural assets: they hold “the synecdochic capacity of articulating a much fuller tableau” (Semmel 14). He explores “what ruins might tell us, over and above what they show us, about the past and future as well as the present . . .” (Rawes, “This” 179)—an exploration that relies on his contrapuntal perception. His fascination with ruins corresponds to his characteristics as an exile: ruins display the change of culture, while the exile himself also experiences an unstable life; ruins expose the absence of a “center” that predominates over the ancient culture, while the exile himself also holds a “decentering” worldview; ruins invite the exile to meditate, with his contrapuntal insight, on the contrast between the past and the present.

Ruins incur nostalgia and grief, especially for those who feel the dominance of time. In the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, “an age obsessed with decline, decay, and ruins,” “ruination itself became an aesthetic virtue, if one tinged with sadness” (Semmel 14, 15), while nostalgia “signified a disease, specifically a disability of wartime and colonial mobility, a somatic revolt against forced travel, depopulation, emigration, and other forms of transience”; nostalgia “was soon on the move . . .”



(Goodman 196). Therefore, exiles hold this mood more keenly than the others. Treated as a “disease” when coined by Johannes Hofer, a Swiss physician, nostalgia prevailed among soldiers and sailors as the British empire expanded (Goodman 196). The typical Romantic attitude to earlier ages is also described as a recognition of “irretrievable dispossession,” which refers to an awareness of the bitter loss of some valuable heritage (Bann 10). After the Napoleonic Wars, Britons flooded to the battlefield of Waterloo to “reach the past through the medium of its tangible remains,” but found “the elusiveness of the past, the fragmented quality of history” (Semmel 11). In other words, they felt the “irretrievable dispossession” brought by the war, but they found it difficult to “see” the past in its original condition through the “tangible remains.” The understanding of nostalgia as “disease” tends to focus on the trauma brought by the broken images of ruins, while the cultivation of the pluralistic views must “transcend” this trauma.

Byron’s poetry “cultivates moods of despair,” which becomes “the source of his greatness as a poet and his importance for the . . . reader” (McGann, “Romanticism” 586). Such moods, stemming from his alienation and exile, mark his difference from the humanists, who hold an optimistic view toward the improvement of human status. Yet Byron does not lapse into his personal trauma when watching the remnants of ancient cultures. The value of “Childe Harold” does not rely simply on the poet’s nostalgic grief for personal bereavement. His “nostalgia” displays a continual temporal consciousness with his contrapuntal perception: the past and the present must not be treated as separate entities, and their relationships must be discovered and conveyed to the future. His “pilgrimage,” though starting with breaking of his personal relationships with family and friends, pushes him to re-present the past-present relationships. He needs to reconstitute not only his identity but also the understanding of cultures.

**ii. The poet's affiliation with ruins: The gestalt understanding of cultures**

Byron's "nostalgia" does not merely carry a sad mood; he foregrounds the necessity of shielding the ruins from the further plunder of imperialists. He can "see" the glory of the ancient culture in "the magic waste" (2.874), so he calls passengers not to

Deface the scenes, already how defaced!

Not for such purpose were these altars placed:

Revere the remnants Nations once revered:

So. May our Country's name be undisgraced . . . . (2.876-79)

Ruins and exiles parallel each other: both exemplify the fragmentation of culture and society separately. Both testify to the looming threat of some destructive powers: ruins survive under the impact of time and wars, while exiles wander with the memory of some broken family relationships. Byron symbolizes his fragmentary self with the image of a broken mirror (3.288-91). This symbolization demonstrates both his recognition of his own finitude and his affiliation with ruins. While Byron/Harold roams among ruins, he sees not only the remnants of ancient culture but also his broken image. The maintenance of ruins, therefore, protects the "Country's [Britain's] name" and metaphorically the poet's personal honor. While wandering among the ruins in Greece or Italy, he always acknowledges the site as his "home," the cultural context which he reconstitutes his identity. This acknowledgment indicates his inheritance of the exotic cultural heritage and his disregard of cultural boundaries—a sign of worldliness. He also calls for the affiliation of all countries in the necessity to "[r]evere the remnants Nations once revered." Imperialists break the affiliation by "defacing" the remnants of ancient cultures, while Byron highlights the way for all contemporary nations to protect antiquities collaboratively. This protection means a

power of culture to resist the barbarous, destructive force of imperialism.

For those who own the contrapuntal view, however, the existence of ruins reveals the connection of the past and the present on the one hand and arouses the viewers' empathy on the other. They may lament for the irrecoverable loss of the past, but they can always see their affiliation with the ruins. Byron demands all travelers not to deface the ruins, since he cannot bear to see them "suffer" more. "Suffering," as it is indicated in Chapter Two, becomes not a personal issue but a problem shared by self and others. This empathy for ruins drives him to explore their significance more profoundly. The concept of fragment is "oxymoronic, yet critically self-replenishing and productive" (Regier 4). Ruins are "productive" because of their "incompleteness": they invite the poet to envision the whole picture of their original splendor, a condition that corresponds to "gestalt." Fragmentation essentially opposes totalization, yet the pluralistic vision can bridge the discrepancy between the fragmentary segments and the panorama. This view enables the hero to visualize the glory of ancient culture from its fragments. For the common travelers, ruins represent the "absence" of an ancient culture; for those with the contrapuntal insight, ruins reveal the "presence" of its glory.

Servius Sulpicius Rufus, Byron judges, saw "the crushed relics of their vanished might" in Greece (4.401). The "might" of the relics, having "vanished" in the eyes of common travelers, can only be perceived with the contrapuntal view. The "sepulchres of cities" incur in his eyes "[s]ad wonder"; his pilgrimage teaches him "the moral lesson" (4.404-05)—by which he discerns the grandeur of ancient Greece on the one hand and the inevitability of decline in either the past or the present on the other. Following Rufus's example, Byron acknowledges that

That page is now before me, and on mine

*His* Country's ruin added to the mass

Of perished states he mourned in their decline,

And I in desolation: all that *was*

Of then destruction *is* . . . . (4.406-10)

The poet sees both the ruin in “perished states” and his own “desolation”—in his contrapuntal view, he associates himself with the ruin again. This “moral lesson” compels him to contemplate these broken images. Rufus, a Roman citizen, watched the Greek ruins, and Byron watches both the Greek and the Roman ruins. Ruins represent the presence of an ancient culture in the past and announce its absence at the present. The “vanished might” of the glorious culture cannot claim immortality, while the poet, though “seeing” this might and glory with his contrapuntal view, still mourns “in desolation.” Rufus records this might in his works, and Byron does the same in “Childe Harold.” Their “pages” are meant to speak to the future, especially to those who own the contrapuntal perception. Their nostalgia, based on their observation of and affiliation with the “fragments,” links the past and the present; they invite readers to reconstitute the ancient culture and then revive it in their imagination. This “reconstitution” of ancient culture relies on the “affiliation” of the past and the present, endorsed by the contrapuntal perception of ruins.

While musing on his own griefs, Byron also achieves this “affiliation”:

But my Soul wanders; I demand it back

To meditate amongst decay, and stand

A ruin amidst ruins; there to track

Fall’n states and buried greatness, o’er a land

Which *was* the mightiest in its old command,

And *is* the loveliest . . . . (4.217-22)

As the poet visits Greece and Rome, he usually wanders among ruins and appears with the image of “[a] ruin amidst ruins.” This broken image symbolizes both the poet’s identity and the ancient culture. Though traveling aimlessly, he is often driven to

“meditate amongst decay.” His fascination with ruins may stem from such an association between himself and the remnants of the past glory. He identifies himself with those ruins: they both have undergone some destructive impacts and exist in desolation. Travelers may only see the “Fall’n states” of the antiques, but Byron/Harold, with his contrapuntal awareness, simultaneously perceives their “buried greatness” as well as their “mightiest” and “loveliest” aspects. Furthermore, in his meditation on the ruins, he “reconstitutes” the cultural context as well: a “mightiest” land in the past turns out to be “the loveliest” at present. As an exile, Byron appears keen and sensitive in his awareness of changes and thus nourishes his “decentered” worldview.

Byron’s travels initiated his “ecological understanding of human culture” and influenced his conception of “nature” and “culture” in his later writings (Hubbell, “Byron’s” 186). Such an understanding emphasizes the necessity of gestalt in the consideration and evaluation of culture. The “ecological” understanding asserts the necessity of “the relational, total-field image” (Næss, *Ecology* 28; Næss, “Shallow” 95; Rangarajan) and therefore the connections among humans and nonhuman beings must be affirmed (Næss, “Spinoza and the Deep Ecological Movement”). Ecology means “the science of community” and thus “ecological conscience” refers to “the ethics of community” (Leopold 340)—this matches “affiliation” of beings proposed by Said. In other words, the evaluation of relics must be proceeded in their original environment, not in museums. An “ecological” understanding of relics and ruins must be fulfilled in “gestalt”—the whole picture of the original context. Besides, all the “fragments” can form an organic whole of the original culture in one’s imagination. As Byron claims himself a “ruin amidst ruins,” he stresses “the need to see these monuments *in situ*, and not in museum or gallery. . .” (Groom 49). As the relics are plundered and moved to museums, the original cultural context has been ruined. For Byron, “ruins

are both intensely personal and approximately selfless places”; in his “state of permanent exile,” he seeks to “recover his sense of attachment and of dwelling in the face of ruins” (Chalk 55). Monuments, he realizes, “when forcibly fragmented and sold or collected as souvenirs, lose their historical context and even their aesthetic value, instead becoming commodities” (Esterhammer 34). This echoes his need of a “context” while reconstituting his “fragmentary” self. The commoditization of relics violates the gestalt perception of ancient cultures, deteriorates the destruction of cultural remnants, and fails to promote the true understanding of those cultures. This is a sin of imperialism as well as a barbarous behavior under the guise of civilization. Byron’s painful “pilgrimage” enables him to expose this sin. His “permanent exile” from his homeland parallels the irrecoverable separation of the relics from their original glory. Only with the contrapuntal view can he perceive the scene of the ancient culture and of his selfhood. Art and literature “provide means of refreshing our sense of this totality” of society and culture (Roberts 45). Byron resists imperialism by affirming the gestalt understanding of cultures. Amid the changing and decentering environment, he sees with his contrapuntal views the connection of the past and the present as well as exposes the relationship between antithetical forces.

### **iii. Time and immortality**

The contrapuntal view on ruins enables one to see the significance of time and immortality as well.<sup>4</sup> He comments on the significance of ruins: “There is the moral

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<sup>4</sup> Byron displays his historical consciousness by commenting on the significance of time:

Out upon Time! who for ever will leave  
But enough of the past for the future to grieve  
O’er that which hath been, and o’er that which must be:  
What we have seen, our sons shall see;  
Remnants of things that have passed away,  
Fragments of stone, reared by creatures of clay! (“The Siege of Corinth” 501-06)

of all human tales; / 'Tis but the same rehearsal of the past" (4.964-65). In other words, the ruins, endowed with some valuable lessons from the past, can benefit human beings. "The fragmented relics partially recuperated in assemblages of antiquities offered access to a kind of unsyntaxed past" (Manning, Susan 50). The "rehearsal of the past" through the contrapuntal perception may display rich meanings. He observes that "there is a power / And magic in the ruined battlements" (4.1158-59). He calls for the inspiration from Time to shed light on the wreck (4.1170-71). The "rehearsal" implies the existence of the unchanged or immortal cultural assets, which remain hidden to the public, but which can be revealed with contrapuntal insight. This "rehearsal" does not anticipate the establishment of a utopia, but the fulfillment of "which hath been" and "which must be." Byron the "secular" critic intends to revive the assets which have been forgotten or neglected, not to reach a transcendental, visionary world.

This insight can also disclose "Time" in a new light. In general understanding, Time symbolizes mostly a destructive power; however, in the contrapuntal perception, Time is honored as "the Beautifier of the dead," "Adorner of the ruin," "Comforter," the "only Healer," "the Corrector," the "sole philosopher," and "the Avenger" (4.1162-69). The multiple identities reflect the pluralistic vision of the poet—without this vision, Byron would not be able to discern such multiple roles of Time. The perception of the multiplicity prevents this "secular" critic from immersing himself in despair and grief triggered by nostalgia—the contrapuntal view cannot be bound and conquered by a single mood. His contrapuntal capability saves him from despair and nihilism even when he witnesses the impact of the changing and decentering world. This echoes my argument in Chapter Two: Byron resists nihilism through writing, an

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The "Remnants" and "Fragments" always suggest some stories "that have passed away," but the poet does not lapse into grieving for this loss. He intends to convey "enough of the past for the future," and he believes that the future generations will also see what he "sees" beyond these ruins.

act of creativity based on his contrapuntal views.

Though empires and their glory may pass away, the poet indicates, literature still exists—Shylock (in *The Merchant of Venice*) and Othello “can not (sic.) be swept or worn away” (4.33-34). Besides, ruins may remind Byron of some masters: an urn in Geneva incurs the memory of Jean Jacques Rousseau (3.719); Venice contributes to his extol of Otway, Radcliffe, Schiller, and Shakespeare (4.158); Arqua brings Petrarch to his vision (4.264). Ruins and antiquities confirm the decline and vulnerability of ancient cultures, while great literature can always refresh our memory of their achievement, represented by the great masters. Those masters possess the contrapuntal artistry as well, so they can renew the ancient glory to the later generations. Loss and continuity are emphasized at the same time: while no culture can prosper permanently, Byron recognizes the immortality of masterpieces that can resist the destruction of time. This indication affirms his endeavor through writing to cope with sufferings and to create values to resist nihilism discussed in Chapter Two. Literary masterpieces can create and maintain the values that will not fall into emptiness. The magnificence of Venetian culture, the poet implies, may be recalled in “Childe Harold.” The perception of the past and the present does not necessarily haunt the poet in grief and nostalgia. Ruins barely survive the destruction of Time, but the contrapuntal view can associate them with immortality; their “incompleteness” and “fragmentation” inspire Byron to compose the counterpoint of time and immortality.

## **B. The revelation of ruins**

### **i. The loss of the resistant spirit in nineteenth-century Greece**

Ruins as valuable cultural assets may reveal some truth in addition to their original “buried” glory. Such revelation relies on the contrapuntal perception of the past and the present; it also inspires the poet to restore “what hath been” and “what must be.” As he usually identifies himself with a culture in his wandering, his intention of this



restoration may sound urgent and passionate.

Ancient Greece intoxicates Byron, but nineteenth-century Greece frustrates him. Canto II of “Childe Harold” delineates Byron’s arrival in Greece—in a sense that the hero “returns ‘home’ to the root of western civilization” (Wohlgemut 102). This “returning” home represents the expansion of his horizon and the fulfillment of his worldliness. Yet this “home” appears mainly in ruins. Byron mourns for the status quo of Greece while thinking about its history:

Fair Greece! sad relic of departed Worth!

Immortal, though no more; though fallen, great!

Who now shall lead thy scattered children forth,

And long accustomed bondage uncreate?

Not such thy sons who whilome did await,

The helpless warriors of a willing doom,

In bleak Thermopylæ’s sepulchral strait—

Oh! who that gallant spirit shall resume,

Leap from Eurotas’ banks, and call thee from the tomb? (2.693-701)

This “home” is haunted by paradoxes just as the poet himself is. Such paradoxes arouse in the contrast between the past and the present. Being “immortal” and “great” contradicts being “no more” and “fallen” respectively, yet Byron’s contrapuntal eyes combine them to utter his desperation. “The helpless warriors” in ancient Greece won immortal glory in Thermopylæ by defeating the Persian Empire, but their bravery and persistence found no heir when the peninsula was oppressed by the Ottoman Empire. Their “immortality” is only triggered by “sad relic,” while the contemporary Greeks, in Byron’s eyes, fail to maintain the “departed Worth”—in other words, to resist the “long accustomed bondage” imposed by the Turks and to overthrow the tyranny of the Ottoman Empire. Nineteenth-century Greece, though still “fair,” becomes merely a

“relic,” which appears “sad” because the Greeks under the dominion of the Turks have lost the heritage of their ancestors—the opposition to tyranny. The “ruined grandeur” is ironically “enclosed by an imperial power” (Martin 85-86). Byron sees the disparity between the past and the present, while he affiliates himself with Greece, “the focus of his deepest despair” with “[a] set of contradictions in itself” (McGann, “Romanticism” 586). The oppositional spirit of the ancient Greece is dead, while the poet feels it crucial to resurrect it “from the tomb.” He holds it his responsibility to “uncreate” their bondage; his oppositional inclination marks him the true heir of the “departed Worth” of ancient Greece. Indeed, he resumed the “gallant spirit” when devoting himself to resisting the hegemony of the Ottoman Empire.

## **ii. Athena’s paradoxical status**

The loss of Greeks’ resistant spirit, in Byron’s perception, is also symbolized by the image of Athena’s broken temple. By meditating on the ruins of Athena’s temple, the poet attempts to imagine and to reconstruct the ancient Greek culture. Literally, Byron laments that she is not worshipped now because of the impacts of wars (“steel, and flame” [2.6]), time (“ages slow” [2.6]), and imperialism (“the dread sceptre and dominion dire / Of men” [2.7-8]); symbolically—and paradoxically—he indicates the decline of an “immortal” and “great” culture. These ruins occupy an ambiguous status: they exist somewhere between the absence and presence of the ancient Greek culture. Byron describes Athena and her temple by illustrating the contrast between the past and present: in the past it was the “Dome of Thought, the Palace of the Soul” (2.49), but now her mighty warriors and wits are gone (2.11-12), while only “defenceless Urn,” “a Nation’s sepulchre,” “broken arch,” “ruined wall,” desolate chambers and “foul” portal remain in the temple (2.20-21, 46-48). As a wise and mighty warrior, Athena still fails to resist time and the Turkish invasion—not to mention the common Greek people.

Athena herself also embraces antithetical elements. On the one hand, she is

hailed as “Goddess of Wisdom,” which may create and develop culture, as her “sacred glow” can enlighten “polished breasts”—yet she fails to enlighten the Turks and the Britons; on the other hand, she is also the goddess of war, but now she surrenders to “the dread sceptre and dominion dire” of Muslims (2.7). Athena, as the goddess of wisdom, always appears with the image of a victorious warrior, but her ruined temple exposes her power to be limited (2.51-52). Her wisdom and prowess cannot protect both her temple and Greece from the threat of exotic forces. The temple witnessed the glory of the ancient Greek civilization, but now it scarcely survives “War and wasting fire, / And years” (2.4-5). “Wisdom” and the military force do not guarantee the permanence of Athena’s “sacred glow” (2.8). She bears “[t]he Warrior’s weapon and the Sophist’s stole”—but both are “sought in vain” (2.16-17). It is almost impossible to recover the grandeur: “Can all Saint, Sage, or Sophist ever writ, / People this lonely tower, this tenement refit?” (2.53-54). Greek culture flourished in ancient days, while Ottoman Empire and Islam predominate in Greece (2.23-24). Athena’s ruined temple manifests the absence of Greek culture and the presence of Turkish imperialism (represented by “Mahomet’s”), which will also be replaced by “other Creeds” in the future (2.24-25). In her ruined temple, even a worm can disdain “her shattered cell” (2.44-45)—a description which insinuates the fragility of culture. Byron mourns for the decline and fall of all powers with a pessimistic tone: all religious worshippers cannot find any reliable, unchanged support, whereas “Doubt and Death” haunt them (2.25-27). Athena was overthrown by those who never felt her “sacred glow,” while those with “the dread scepter and dominion dire” which vanquish her will be replaced by “other Creeds” as well. Byron’s descriptions of the sites of Greek antiquity present “the *vanitas* theme” (Ibata 63): no authority or power can prevail eternally—a view that echoes Byron’s decentered view. The poet suggests that we can perceive “future Joy and Woe” by ruminating on the dust and urn in Athena’s temple

(2.34-36)—a contrapuntal perception that associates the past with the present, leaving a valuable message to the future.

### **iii. The necessity of reconstituting the understanding of cultures**

Dust, urn, relics, or antiquities not only expose the fragility of cultures but also prompt our reflection on their original glory. The identity of an exile, as it is discussed in Chapter Two, is fragmentary and therefore requires continual reconstitution. A nomadic hero wanders with the memory of his home culture and contacts diverse cultures without sticking to any one of them; consequently, the nomadic hero holds a decentered view. Furthermore, the hero's contrapuntal perception always exposes the ironic contrast between the past and the present. As "Childe Harold" is "a lamentation in noble phrases over the widespread ruins of a dead chivalry and a dead tyranny" (Knight 48), Byron reveals that no cultural context—chivalry, ancient Greece, ancient Rome, for instance—can exist permanently. This corresponds to his view of self-identity: since an exile must always reconstitute his self, it implies that he cannot find a fixed, stable cultural "system" by which he can define himself once for all. "Ruins" highlights the impossibility for a culture to resist the destruction of time. They exist as simply some "fragments" of an ancient culture, while the so-called immortality of culture exists in the vision triggered by masterpieces or the contrapuntal view. This view can perceive the "presence" of a culture and convey the past glory to the present and the future, yet this "reconstituted" glory can hardly amount to the original one, while the poet also needs to "reconstruct" one culture after another in his travel.

## **IV. War/fighting displaying and destroying cultures**

### **A. Fighting: The negative aspect of culture**

Athena's identities illustrate the ambiguous relationship between war and wisdom:

she symbolizes the coexistence of the constructive and destructive forces in culture. War or fighting itself brings inevitable change, upsets the losers, and presumes an oppositional confrontation between two sides at least—thus it anticipates a contrapuntal view. Byron denounces military invasion and diplomatic manipulation, but he affirms the necessity of opposition to any form of tyranny. Social revolution, even if in the form of bloody wars, is indispensable for Byron to eliminate oppression (Watkins, “Byron” 99); therefore, Napoleon’s revolution won his admiration and endorsement, whereas he even participated in the Independence War of Greece. Fighting against invasion can maintain the existence of a culture and a nation, while the ruins of Athenian Acropolis represent the decline of Greek resistant spirit and wisdom. War or fighting itself can be destructive, but, like wisdom, it is indispensable in the defense against invasion.

Except for the necessity of national defense, Byron generally detests war/fighting. He sometimes strives to maintain the difference between the narrator’s perception of wars and the hero’s—a relationship that can demonstrate Byron’s contrapuntal artistry. Harold tends to be naïve and somewhat ruthless to the bloody conflicts, while the narrator, as Byron’s mouthpiece, displays a profound, pluralistic understanding of war and sympathizes with those who suffer from it. Harold is “one who hath no friend, no brother there” (1.433). He belongs to no campaign, so war ironically becomes “a splendid sight” (1.432), like a scene in a play, and he has nothing to do with it. Unlike the narrator, he appears unmoved by the scene of war in Actium, Lepanto, and Trafalgar—all of them witness the ravage of imperialism. In Actium, Octavius defeated Anthony and then established the Roman Empire. In Lepanto, the Holy League waged a war against the Ottoman Empire and consequently resisted the expansion of the Turks. In Trafalgar, the British navy overwhelmed the French and the Spanish fleets. Harold dislikes “themes of bloody fray, or gallant fight” and hates

“the bravo’s trade” as well as “martial wight” (2.359-60). While meditating on Augustus’s victory, Byron/Harold denounces the emperor’s annihilation: “Imperial Anarchs, doubling human woes!” (2.404). Both Harold and the narrator attack war and fighting, but the former lacks the depth of observation and empathy of the latter. Though Harold almost disappears in the later cantos, the narrator himself still displays a contrapuntal perception. Therefore, the following discussion about war or fighting concerns the narrator’s viewpoint.

The development of culture usually depends on stability and peace, while war or fighting may endanger this development and negates the affiliation of beings. Byron, unlike typical medieval knights, detests fighting of any form; his praise of the Greek resistance to Persian invasion shows his love of peace. “Childe Harold” presents “a world riven by political and military strife,” “reviewing and re-evaluating in the political chaos of Europe at the end of the nineteenth century’s first decade” (Martin 79, 80). His observations and comments on war and fighting, however, illustrates his contrapuntal view on culture: war and fighting may not only threaten cultural development but also exist sometimes as a part of culture.

Bullfighting, a traditional Spanish cultural activity, embraces civilization and barbarism and challenges the poet’s attitude toward chivalry. The matador is condemned “to bear and bleed,” to die or to display his fighting skill (1.746, 758-59). He fights alone, so does the bull—both are compelled to fight against each other till one of them falls dead; however, with a critical tone, Byron delineates more the sufferings of the bull than the prowess of the matador:

On foams the Bull, but not unscathed he goes;

Streams from his flank the crimson torrent clear:

He flies, he wheels, distracted with his throes;

Dart follows dart—lance, lance—loud bellowings speak his woes. (1.761-64)

The beast, mustering up all his strength and courage to fight till death, is presented almost as a tragic hero: “Foiled, bleeding, breathless, furious to the last,” he “stops—he starts, disdainingly declines,” but finally sinks “[w]ithout a groan, without a struggle” among the triumphant cries of the crowd (1.774, 785-87). Byron laments for the “mad career” and “[v]ain rage” of the bull (1.759, 781), sighing for its inevitable, doomed death. Such a description reveals the poet’s sympathy with the wretched and the conquered, while the victorious matador is almost ignored at the end. His focus on the suffering bull parallels his attention to suffering heroes—Dante, Tasso, Rousseau, and Napoleon. Early in his life, Byron determined to speak for the wretches “who receive little other representation” (Coole 150). His contrapuntal perception juxtaposes the sufferings of the bull and the fanatical endorsement of this bloody sport. “Byron deftly deploys the accouterments of chivalry in order to explore the invidious contrast between knightly tournaments of romance and contemporary exaltation in senseless bloodletting” (Vicario 117). He notices the zealous participation of local people in this bloody event (1.720-23) but does not celebrate with them. He does not defend the Spanish crowd for their passion for bullfighting despite his assertion of chivalry. He criticizes the Spanish people:

Such the ungentle sport that oft invites  
The Spanish maid, and cheers the Spanish swain.  
Nurtured in blood betimes, his heart delights  
In vengeance, gloating on another’s pain. (1.792-95)

He understates the cruelty of bullfighting as “ungentle”—actually this is a life-or-death struggle. This blood-nurtured culture excruciates Byron and alienates him from further communication from the local people. Unlike those intoxicated crowd, he utters his cold criticism as a bystander in the hot atmosphere. “At once displaying passion, bravery, and beauty, bullfighting also expresses the brutality that characterized

Spanish national traditions” (Sánchez 459). When the Spanish people shouts for the chivalric bravery of the matador, Byron condemns the “senseless bloodletting” of this traditional “ungentle sport,” which remains “sweet sight for vulgar eyes” (1.789). In this land of romance, this “cultural heritage” also exposes the destructive force deep-rooted in the local culture. Yet Byron maintains an ambiguous attitude toward this tradition: he “looks fondly upon the culture he has come to love but cannot endorse” (Sánchez 460). As it is pointed out in Chapter Two, Byron affirms the value of chivalry since it corresponds to his oppositional spirit to tyranny. Though Byron hates wars and bloody combats, he appreciates chivalry and judges Spain as a country with this virtue (“To John Hobhouse, Esq., A.M., F.R.S”). Since bullfighting belongs to the Spanish chivalric culture, Byron’s comments on this “ungentle sport” becomes paradoxical.

Though not so bloody as bullfighting, jousting as a part of the chivalric culture also incurs Byron’s negative criticism. “All have their fooleries” (1.711). The fighters fight alone, while the audience “enjoy” the show: “Young, old, high, low, at once the same diversion share” (1.719). The spectators are eager to see the fighting so that “No vacant space for lated wight is found” (1.723). As the cavaliers combat for their honor and life, some gentlemen among the spectators are wooing ladies; nevertheless, “None through their cold disdain are doomed to die, / As moon-struck bards complain, by Love’s sad archery” (1.727-28). “And all that kings or chiefs e’er gain their toils repay” at the expense of the cavaliers’ fighting (1.737). The poet does not regard jousting as a practice of fighting for self-defense, but as a foolish, despicable amusement, while Harold’s silence toward jousting suggests his indifference to the demonstration of chivalry.

Likewise, Byron visualizes the scenes of gladiators’ fighting in ancient Rome:

And here the buzz of eager nations ran,



In murmured pity, or loud-roared applause,  
 As man was slaughtered by his fellow man.  
 And wherefore slaughtered? wherefore, but because  
 Such were the bloody Circus' genial laws,  
 And the imperial pleasure.—Wherefore not?  
 What matters where we fall to fill the maws  
 Of worms—on battle-plains or listed spot?  
 Both are but theatres—where the chief actors rot. (4.1243-51)

This eccentric picture of a typical Roman cultural activity mixes “pity” and “applause.” The “imperial pleasure” derives from the bloody fighting. Like in the bull-fighting scene, Byron presents the suffering of the loser more than the glory of the victor, whom he describes as merely “the wretch who won” (4.1260). Oxymoronic is the term “the bloody Circus’ genial laws”: only one law—the mightier can survive—predominates, and this bloody law is never “genial.” In such a terrible “Circus” or “theater,” “the chief actors” were doomed (4.1251) and treated as beasts. Fighting in this case merely downgrades humanity, but such an inhuman sport existed when the Roman culture prevailed in Europe; therefore, the arena testifies to the coexistence of civilization and barbarism in Rome. With the intention to speak for the oppressed or the neglected, the poet portrays the typical gladiator in length: he “conquers agony,” but will be immediately conquered by death (4.1254); before his own death, he remembers that his father was killed “to make a Roman holiday” (4.1266-67)—a pathetic vision that accompanied the tragic fight of the gladiator. Byron juxtaposes the “Roman holiday” and the sufferings of the father and the son—both were “the playthings of a crowd” (4.1275). Human life was sacrificed when the spectators delighted in this bloody, barbarous game—a destructive force that coexists with Dante, Tasso, Petrarch, Michelangelo in Byron’s memory of the Roman culture.

Byron observes the bloody, destructive aspects of a culture, but he neither defends them nor anticipates their disappearance in the future. Naming Harold a knight, Byron never praises the fighting skills and the honor of death for some causes. Wars and conflicts usually result from “some slight cause of wrath, whence Life’s warm stream must flow” (1.800). It is ridiculous to die for trifles, but it is more ridiculous to resort to wars unceasingly or to indulge in fighting with amusement. Though feeling intoxicated with the chivalry of Spain, he does not idealize this culture by neglecting its negative elements. His honest presentation of fighting reveals the operation of his contrapuntal perception.

### **B. Irony in Waterloo: Byron’s foregrounding of the neglected soldiers**

As Byron detests wars and fighting, his view on the Battle of Waterloo differs from those of imperialists. Since “exile is irremediably secular and unbearably historical” (Said, “Reflections on Exile”), Byron never praises the victory of heroes on the battlefield; instead, he tends to consider the background and the aftermath of a war and to cast his eyes especially on victims. The glorification of victors usually idealizes the power of the heroes and neglects misery of the defeated and the dead as well as the bitter loss of the participants—an idealization and a neglect that do not appeal to a “secular” critic.

The poet wandered on the continent after Napoleonic wars had ravaged Europe. Because Byron venerated Napoleon in his early career, the poet’s attitude toward the Battle of Waterloo becomes ambiguous. In “Childe Harold,” “Byron portrays a Europe in ruins, wrecked by the violence unleashed by the French Revolution” (Cantor 393) and deteriorated by Napoleonic Wars, and thence Napoleon must be blamed for the ruined Europe. The emperor betrays the revolutionary ideal and frustrates the poet’s earlier veneration. Byron’s ambiguous attitude towards war was shaped by “his

self-identifying hero worship of Napoleon” and “his detestation of imperial expansionism” (Howe, Anthony, “Glory” 149). This attitude, together with his contrapuntal insight, may also contribute to his perception of the contradiction and absurdity aroused by wars.

The defeat of Napoleon in Waterloo does not delight Byron at all, neither does he defend the emperor. Rather, the poet ponders on the whole Europe under the impact of the war, not simply on the rise and fall of a single character. About the Battle of Waterloo, contemporary British poets tend to celebrate Wellington’s victory; yet Byron describes it as an elegy (Csengei 90)—not to mourn for Napoleon but for the decline and damage of Europe, manifested by numerous wounded and dead soldiers in Waterloo. His identity as an exile endows him with a unique perspective: an exile is eccentric, detached, and nostalgic; his/her view, in Said’s words, “is produced by human beings for other human beings”—but simultaneously this view is alien to humanism (“Reflections on Exile”). This “ironic” perspective corresponds to his declaration: “I stood / Among them, but not of them” (3.1054-55). His alienation coexists with his affiliation with others, and his worldliness frees him from the limit of any local culture. In other words, the exile upholds the affiliation of people; simultaneously, he recognizes the truth that they cannot reach the humanistic ideal. All forms of fighting tend to negate humanism—the philosophy which proclaims that human beings are endowed with tremendous potential to improve themselves, to eliminate sufferings, and to reach happiness. With the affiliation with the soldiers in Waterloo, he intentionally ignores warmongers and never expects the coming of peace since he is not so optimistic as humanists. This war irrecoverably shatters Europe in Byron’s eyes:

Even as a broken Mirror, which the glass  
In every fragment multiplies—and makes  
A thousand images of one that was,

The same—and still the more, the more it breaks;  
And thus the heart will do which not forsakes,  
Living in shattered guise; and still, and cold,  
And bloodless, with its sleepless sorrow aches,  
Yet withers on till all without is old,  
Showing no visible sign, for such things are untold. (3.289-97)

Byron's mourning is the counterpoint of his alienation from and affiliation with the neglected dead soldiers: his cold, matter-of-fact tone represents his alienation, while his understanding of their sufferings manifests his affiliation. He and these soldiers are marginalized in their contemporary world; nevertheless, this "affiliation" does not bring comfort and hope for rejuvenation and salvation. The broken mirror will always be "the same" and all the fragments can never be pieced together again—at least the poet does not point out the possibility. Hence even in his elegy, he still maintains a cold, aloof attitude—a peculiar style of an exile. His sympathy with the soldiers does not eliminate his detached inclination, neither does his alienation blind his eyes to the agonies of those unknown warriors. Byron compares a suffering soldier to "a broken Mirror"—the painful feelings will be multiplied in every fragment of the glass, and the soldier must live "in shattered guise." This image highlights "the fragility of the heart" (Mekler 471)—the heart of the wounded soldiers and of the poet as well since Byron holds empathy for them. Byron as an exile knows deeply the pain of heart-breaking. The broken mirror image symbolizes "the fragments of a lost Eden, a broken present, and a still more fragmented future" (Gleckner 243). In his contrapuntal perception, suffering associates not only the poet and the Waterloo soldiers but the present and the future: the heart "withers on till all without is old." This withering shows "no visible sign" because not everyone possesses the contrapuntal insight, and consequently "such things are untold"—things which Byron determines to highlight. This broken image

of the soldiers parallels the ruins of Athena: the envisioning of the whole picture relies on the poet's "reconstitution." After the war, "the heart will break, yet brokenly live on" (3.288). He laments for the soldiers in Waterloo: "Last noon beheld them full of lusty life;-- / Last eve in Beauty's circle proudly gay"; however, very soon "[t]he 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" (3.244-45; 250-52). This day was "Battle's magnificently-stern array" (3.248). Byron projects "images of death onto images of life and constantly oscillating between the two states" (Csengei 91). This painful feeling renders the survived soldiers in a limbo status between life and death. Moreover, the mourning is devoted to not only the soldiers in Waterloo but also the whole Europe: the continent does not restore peace and order as the victors in the Congress of Vienna have presumed, nor does Byron suggest the prospect of such restoration. The "broken mirror" insinuates the irreversible consequence of the war, and the whole Europe may lapse into the limbo status afterwards. The glorification of Wellington for his victory in the Battle of Waterloo ignores the sufferings of numerous soldiers. Though not anticipating the coming of spring like Shelley, Byron affiliates himself with them by foregrounding their sorrow and despair. These ignored soldiers deserve more attention than Napoleon and Wellington.

In Waterloo, Byron recognizes "the pervasiveness of contradiction in human affairs," and this contradiction works "almost like a perverse principle" (O'Neill 46). He "sees" not only the cruelty of war but also the merriment shortly before the war. On June 15<sup>th</sup>, 1815, the Duchess of Richmond held a party in Brussel. That very night, the Battle of Quate-bras broke out, followed by the Battle of Waterloo two days later. At that party "[a] thousand hearts beat happily" and "all went merry as a marriage bell" (3.185, 189). When the guests met happily to "chase the glowing Hours with flying feet" (3.193-94), Frederick William heard the cry of war "with Death's prophetic ear"—

then he bravely “rushed into the field, and, foremost fighting, fell” (3.202-07). This description matches Thackeray’s in *Vanity Fair*. The threatening of war is grotesquely mingled with joviality of the banquet. The opposites between civilian life and the world of war, as the poem progresses, “become indistinguishable from one another” (Csengei 91). Therefore, the sufferings and deaths of numerous soldiers in Waterloo become lamentably ridiculous with such a contrast—a fugue developed with the counterpoint of “Ode to Joy” and *Totentanz*.

Byron’s perception of irony in Waterloo manifests his worldliness and contrapuntal view. The battle means not simply the failure of a hero or the victory of the British Empire. He cares for the unnoticed soldiers just as he sympathizes with the fighting bull, and he illustrates their limbo status between life and death symbolized by the broken mirror. His empathy for those soldiers opposes his contemporary mainstream culture. Besides, he also discloses the grotesque contradiction represented by the party held by Duchess of Richmond. His sympathetic observations do not anticipate a bright future envisioned by the humanists, but he always speaks for the neglected as he deeply feels the pain of exile and marginalization. He is “secular” in his neglect of heroes and in his sympathy of neglected soldiers; his view is “contrapuntal” in revealing the irony of the Battle of Waterloo.

### **C. The coexistence of civilization and barbarism**

Barbarism can be a part of culture, as the Spanish bullfighting exemplifies. The world depicted in “Childe Harold” “is bounded by regions of wilderness and exotic barbarism” (Martin 79). Europe, under the ravage of imperialism, witnessed the coexistence of civilization and barbarism, whereas contradictions and antithetical situations prevailed. War, one of the imperialist strategies to conquer the other countries, brings destruction; nevertheless, military interventions are treated as “a regrettable but nonetheless a necessary component of ‘enlightening’ and ‘civilizing’

primitive, unruly . . . ‘others’” (Peterson 16). Consequently, civilization and barbarism become intricately entwined in imperialism: the “civilized” empires can bring more disastrous damage with advanced weapons than a barbarous tribe. In addition, war and the resistance to it can hardly vanish, as children in later generations will sing, “‘Here, where the sword united nations drew, / Our countrymen were warring on that day!’ / And this much—and all—which will not pass away” (3.313-15). Such an observation is accentuated in Byron’s contrapuntal view.

Wars degrade humanity. In the Battle of Talavera, the invaders and the defenders shed blood (1.430-31). The British, the Spanish, and the French submitted themselves to War; the fights were in vain (1.441-49). War itself is compared to a deity, while the three countries “offer sacrifices” to it (1.441). Tyrants cast away warriors, who are treated as “the broken tools” (1.453), while all participants are compared and downgraded to beasts (1.436). The soldiers are all “Ambition’s honoured fools” (1.450). The oxymoron exposes Byron’s attitude to war and imperialism. Honor “decks the turf that wraps their clay” (1.451) and “shine[s] in worthless lays, the theme of transient song” (1.467). Fame “will scarce reanimate their clay” (1.470). The imperialists struggle to gain the fertile land, and the soldiers “in a narrower sphere wild Rapine’s path pursue” (1.476). Yet finally only crows devour both the imperialists and the conquered. They all “crumble bone by bone” (1.458) — “Grave” is the only winner in a war (1.439). Ironically, the land becomes “fertile” because of abundant dead bodies; the imperialist dream is “fulfilled.” The “ideal” brings only death—it brings the imperialists nothing but death, making both the winners and losers equal. Byron sees through the essence of imperialism: “let them play / Their game of lives, and barter breath for fame” (1.468-69). Living “might have proved her [the nation] shame” (1.474). Indeed, despots own nothing (1.456-58) and the imperialist ambition is only a dream (1.455). In this “dream,” the imperialists

expose their most barbarous cruelty in the name of civilization—this is the vanity of imperialist “honor.” In this light, Harold the unknighly knight is justified with his alienation from questing for this “honor.”

Byron’s comments on the Battle of Talavera affirms the resolution of some Spanish people to resist Napoleon’s invasion. Yet this affirmation is far from being the whole truth of Byron’s judgment of the Spanish culture. “If the Spanish are to be denounced for the culture of barbarism evident in the bullfight, they are also to be celebrated for their willingness to protect their home and nation at all costs”; Byron oscillates “between optimistic celebration and cynical critique of Spain” (Sánchez 460). This estimation of Spain “leads neither to complete disillusionment nor unbridled enthusiasm, but rather a final acceptance of the dualities inherent in the Spanish condition” (Sánchez 461). Perceiving the “dualities” with his pluralistic view, Byron appreciates this culture, but alienates himself from it. Bullfighting and resistance to invasion both involve physical prowess and blood shedding, while Byron and Harold offer no conclusive statement on this “dual” culture. His “affiliation” with the Spanish people remains tinged with detachment and reservations.

Moreover, Byron never calls for the elimination of barbarity from culture. If the existence of barbarism is a necessary evil in civilized society, then its signs or remnants can serve as a reminder to avoid wars. The sight of “the reeking plain” and “female slaughter red” may arouse “a tear of Pity for the dead” (1.900-02); perhaps the “bleached bones” of the soldiers and their “blood’s unbleaching stain” can testify to the future generations about the terror of war (1.906-08). The absence of these bloody signs of war cannot effectively abolish cruelty; their presence, by contrast, consolidates the value of peace and civilization. The existence of barbarity, therefore, may function like the fall and death of a tragic hero: to purify the spectators by arousing pity and fear. The significance of holding the memory of wars lies not in the glorification of heroes,



but in the prevention of more wars.

Despite the disasters brought by barbarism, civilization does not necessarily mean a weak and fragile force. After the Peloponnesian War (431-404 BC), when the Syracusan cavalry defeated the Athenian army,

Redemption rose up in the Attic Muse,  
Her voice their only ransom from afar:  
See! as they chant the tragic hymn, the car  
Of the o'ermastered Victor stops—the reins  
Fall from his hands—his idle scimitar  
Starts from its belt—he rends his captive's chains,

And bids him thank the Bard for Freedom and his strains. (4.138-44)

The hymn, a form of the Athenian culture, miraculously delivers “[r]edemption” and “ransom” to rescue the conquered Athenians from slavery. The tragic chants “conquer” their conqueror, the “o'ermastered Victor.” The reins and scimitar become powerless before poetry: civilization can win freedom and resist the would-be barbarism—the pen is indeed mightier than the sword. Likewise, when Venice was annexed to the Austro-Hungarian empire in 1814, Byron believes, the art of Tasso would “cut the knot / Which ties thee to thy tyrants” (4.148-49). This belief echoes Byron's affirmation of writing, with which he intends to oppose nihilism. He declares himself to be “born for opposition” to all forms of tyranny, which may include nihilism and slavery, while writing or any form of civilization can serve as his weapon. Brutality may not vanish from civilized society, but art or culture, Byron believes, always gains the upper hand.

Furthermore, while observing the statue of Venus, Byron dramatizes the manipulative power of the goddess of love:

Appear'dst thou not to Paris in this guise?  
Or to more deeply blest Anchises? or,

In all thy perfect Goddess-ship, when lies  
Before thee thy own vanquished Lord of War?  
And gazing in thy face as toward a star,  
Laid on thy lap, his eyes to thee upturn,  
Feeding on thy sweet cheek! while thy lips are  
With lava kisses melting while they burn,  
Showered on his eyelids, brow, and mouth, as from an urn! (4.451-59)

Venus's beauty exerts an irresistible impact on the emergence of the Roman Empire: Paris's judgment, under her influence, leads to the Trojan War, while with Anchises she gives birth to Aeneas, who, escaping from Troy, is assumed by Virgil to be the ancestor of Augustus, the first Roman emperor. Paris and Anchises surrender themselves to the beauty of Venus, and consequently the Roman civilization comes into being. On the other hand, as the symbol of love, she conquers Mars: the brutal, impetuous god of war lies "vanquished" on her lap and receives her lava-like, death-incarnate kisses. Venus can manipulate Mars; the Trojan War breaks out for the love of a woman, and numerous warriors die on the battlefield—indeed Venus's kisses come as if "from an urn." Byron's eulogy of Venus indicates the necessary association of civilization and barbarism. He "redefine[s] classical civilization within a history of barbarism" (Martin 85) and affirms that "there is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism . . ." (Said, *Reflections*). Venus, supposedly effeminate and frail as a symbol of civilization, exerts an incredible power over war and barbarism. The "perfect Goddess-ship" conquers machismo with her female tenderness, which appears more overwhelming and lethal than macho violence. Her embrace of both antithetical elements exposes the essence of culture.

Byron's "pilgrimage" is enlightening not simply because he witnesses the glory of civilization, but more because he reveals the intermingling of civilization and barbarism

with his contrapuntal insight. With this insight, he sees the vanity of the imperialist honor, the duality of the Spanish culture, the avoidance of wars by retaining the signs of barbarism, and the complicated entanglement of civilization and barbarism. Barbarism may ruin civilized society, but civilization can exert a more enduring, tremendous counterattack. Byron's representation of cultures covers both the constructive and destructive forces.

#### **D. War and women**

Venus's vanquishment of Mars subverts the general gender stereotypes that presume males to be stronger than females. War has long been regarded as men's business: Virgil sings "arms and the man" in *The Aeneid*; therefore, "European power-wielders . . . justify military interventions by casting themselves in favorable masculinist terms" (Peterson 16). In the traditionally male-dominated culture, women are treated as "Others," who are unable to represent themselves, a job that must be fulfilled by men, supposedly wiser and stronger. The act of representing others "inevitably involves some degree of violence, decontextualization, miniaturization" (Viswanathan, *Power, Politics, and Culture*). Women accordingly endure distortion and negation in male discourse. Such an image reflects not the actual femininity but male fantasy essentially.

Byron sees this male fantasy in Ali Pacha's camp:

Here woman's voice is never heard: apart,

And scarce permitted, guarded, veiled, to move,

She yields to one her person and her heart,

Tamed to her cage, nor feels a wish to rove . . . . (2.541-44)

A typical Albanian woman is neglected and "tamed" in a male chauvinist environment, which looks like a "cage" to them. She owns neither subjectivity nor individual voice: submission to a man is taken for granted, and her individual feeling is denied and ignored. Byron points out this "demerit" despite his admiration of Ali Pacha; however,

he does not criticize this male-chauvinistic culture. Gender discrimination is stated as a matter of fact, while the poet does not call for the elimination of male predominance.

By contrast, an independent, Amazon-like Spanish woman wins his approval: he praises the undaunted and aggressive counterattack of Agustina de Aragón against the French army (1.558-84). When Spain was in peace, she might feel appalled by “the semblance of a scar” and “an owlet’s larum” (1.562-63)—an observation that corresponds to traditional gender stereotype. She possesses stereotypical female characteristics as well: in “her soft hour,” she may speak with “light, lively tones” (1.568-70); she has a “fairy form, with more than female grace” (1.572). Nevertheless, the “gaiety and peace-loving disposition of Spanish women counters the barbarity of their tradition” (Sánchez 459). In other words, Byron highlights the woman’s fear for scar on the one hand and their hysterical fascination with bullfighting—“the barbarity of their tradition”—on the other (1.792-95). Their frenzy fascination with the “ungentle sport” contradicts their fear of a scar. The duality of Spanish women is disclosed through the poet’s contrapuntal view; the taken-for-granted femininity is challenged in Byron’s observation of Spanish women.

Furthermore, war indeed exposes the plurality of femininity. Byron praises Agustina’s glance to be “wildly beautiful” (1.598), insinuating that she is far from being merely a docile, lovely creature, and that her beauty veils her terrible force. Male readers may “marvel” when they hear her story since her power totally embarrasses male warriors (1.567). Her overwhelming power is implied in “her long locks that foil the painter’s power” (1.571): to “foil” can denote the ability of a hunted animal to run over as to confuse the hounds. In other words, men can hardly understand her capability or to compete with her. She is compelled to fight alone when no Spanish soldiers move forward to resist Napoleon’s army. She, “all unsexed, the Anlace hath espoused, / Sung the loud song, and dared the deed of war” (1.560-61),

with the courage to move “in the horrid phalanx” in the war (1.588). Like Minerva, she walks over dead bodies “where Mars might quake to tread” (1.565-66), smiles “in Danger’s Gorgon face,” and can “lead in Glory’s fearful chase” (1.574-75). Byron presents her amazing strength by raising a series of rhetorical questions:

Who can appease like her a lover’s ghost?

Who can avenge so well a leader’s fall?

What maid retrieve when man’s flushed hope is lost?

Who hang so fiercely on the flying Gaul,

Foiled by a woman’s hand, before a battered wall? (1.580-84)

These questions are meant to glorify this Amazon-like warrior. A group of male soldiers run away with fear, while a single woman beats the enemy. However, Byron immediately comments that Spain’s maids are “no race of Amazons, / But formed for all the witching arts of love” (1.585-86). This amounts to a sarcastic humiliation of the French imperialism: Napoleon is defeated by “the tender fierceness of the dove” (1.589); his army, “the flying Gaul,” is vanquished by a woman. Byron’s views toward women, therefore, do not follow the male chauvinist gaze on the “Other.” In such a gaze, women are presented as monolithic, unchanged, and passive, while Byron’s observation of women appears pluralistic, changeable, and dynamic. Byron’s exaggerative descriptions of this maid mark him as a genuine exile: “Willfulness, exaggeration, overstatement: these are characteristic styles of being an exile, methods for compelling the world to accept your vision” (Said, “Reflections on Exile”). Byron’s contrapuntal “vision” unveils the plurality of femininity. Yet it is hasty to conclude that the poet endorses feminism. As an exile, he remains alienated to almost all causes, and he never intends to justify the necessity of the “race of Amazons” or of gender equality.

War or fighting can destroy and display cultures. It threatens the subsistence of

culture; however, for imperialists and bullfighting lovers, this destructive force becomes a part of culture. Byron demonstrates the duality of culture and accentuates what is usually neglected: civilization and barbarism always coexist, the numerous neglected soldiers in Waterloo deserve our attention more than Napoleon and Wellington, and females (Venus, Augustina) can be more powerful than males. The representations of a culture will be partial and incomplete without highlighting these elements.

## **V. The contrapuntal views on the quest for freedom**

### **A. Individual freedom and community: A contrapuntal perception**

“War” and “the quest for freedom” may overlap in the discussion of romantic culture. In the age of revolution, “war” may serve as an inescapable means to achieve liberty. The last section deals mainly with Byron’s contrapuntal views on war, while this section explores those on liberty and the attempt to fulfill this ideal.

The quest for individual freedom, pervasively glorified in romantic culture, exposes the lack of this freedom in that era. From the eighteenth century, European critics had often associated freedom with state independence, and freedom had long been taken for granted in Europe (Stock 121-22). Only with the rise of the modern states does freedom appear in the form of “universal right” (Althusser 225). To acquire individual freedom and state independence, wars and revolutions become necessary. The American Independence War and the French Revolution reveal the struggle for freedom under the monarchical dominance, and truly free citizens would never devote to this quest for themselves. As it is linked with independence of a nation, freedom “establishes a patriotic identity” and “creates collective hopes for ‘Europe’ based on the shared principles of law, reason and opposition to despotism”

(Stock 128). This is also a cultural issue: “the national liberation struggle as a historical act also becomes an act of cultural resistance to the extent that the object of national liberation is the freedom of a society and its values from foreign domination” (Amuta 160; cf. Cabral 40). The affirmation of freedom must resist all forms of dominance. In other words, the quest for freedom always involves a contrapuntal perception, for it must contain the praise of freedom and the condemnation of oppression or tyranny simultaneously.

The idea of relationship between the individual and nation/society was developing in the romantic era, and this relationship dominated contemporary educated Western minds. However, the tension between individual freedom and society was also recognized: “individual liberty tended to wreck social bonds, and an overemphasis on community quashed personal liberty” (Magill 97). The fulfillment of state independence, with the elimination of tyranny, seemed to be able to guarantee the individual freedom. Nevertheless, the emergence of Napoleon’s “revolution” challenged the taken-for-granted asset of Europe: the slogan proclaimed by the emperor—liberty, equality, and fraternity—implies that Europeans still could not enjoy these basic human rights. Individual freedom remained threatened by society and nation.

The association of liberty with revolution and national independence is an important part of Byron’s thinking (Stock 126), but he stresses the clash between individual freedom and state/society. Byron cultivated his oppositional artistry when Napoleon intended to revolutionize the whole Europe with Rousseau’s ideal. His association with the Whigs stems from the belief that “the forces of liberty . . . were locked in a long struggle with the powers of oppression” (Kelsall, “Byron’s politics” 45). Liberty is one of “the most potent political elements in his writing” (Kelsall, “Byron’s politics” 53). The poet’s perseverant opposition to tyranny indicates his

awareness of the lack of freedom all over Europe. With the rise of Napoleon's imperialism, he still believes that "Freedom ne'er shall want an heir" ("Ode from the French" 98). Though threatened, freedom will flourish eventually:

Yet, Freedom! yet thy banner, torn, but flying,  
Streams like the thunder-storm *against* the wind;  
Thy trumpet voice, though broken now and dying,  
The loudest still the Tempest leaves behind;  
Thy tree hath lost its blossoms, and the rind,  
Chopped by the axe, looks rough and little worth,  
But the sap lasts,—and still the seed we find  
Sown deep, even in the bosom of the North;  
So shall a better spring less bitter fruit bring forth. (4.874-82)

Here freedom does not depend on state independence; rather, it always grows alone in adversity: as a "banner," it confronts the wind; as a "trumpet," its voice encounters a tempest; as a "tree," it endures decadence and chopping. The perception of this adversity reflects a contrapuntal view: the yearning for freedom always presumes the threatening of oppression and destruction. Again, Byron does not expect the coming of a utopia eventually: at best the "less bitter fruit" may grow with the resolute struggle for liberty. The justification of revolution always appears as contrapuntal since it involves the condemnation of tyranny and the praise of freedom simultaneously. Byron curses imperialism and praises freedom: despite the "glories" of the invaders, freedom will still rejoice and be adored ("Ode from the French" 71-76). Without the challenge or oppression of the invaders, freedom would simply be ignored or taken for granted; the value and glory of freedom emerge only with the presence of tyranny.

Moreover, Byron's criticism of tyranny or imperialism marks his identity as an independent "secular" critic. Freedom characterizes an independent modern



subjectivity: the “autonomous self-determination . . . carries with it the corollary notion of achieving freedom through casting off the restraints of oppressive external forces” (Kaiser 18). Tyranny or imperialism menaces this independent subjectivity, and therefore Byron always criticizes it. Criticism is “opposed to every form of tyranny, domination, and abuse; its social goals are noncoercive knowledge produced in the interest of human freedom” (Said, *The World* 29). Criticism in the name of freedom, besides, characterizes a “secular” intellectual: “Uncompromising freedom of opinion and expression is the secular intellectual’s main bastion” (Said, *Representations of the Intellectual*). To be “secular” means to focus on this world, not on the afterlife or a transcendental realm—this is a feature of “worldliness.” Byron never asserts to “transcend” the oppression by resorting to an ideal world—he directly opposes tyranny. Critics must speak for people or issues generally neglected or even forgotten based on the universal principles: “all human beings are entitled to expect decent standards of behavior concerning freedom and justice from worldly powers or nations,” and “deliberate or inadvertent violations of these standards need to be testified and fought against courageously” (Said, *Representations of the Intellectual*). Byron’s argument about freedom does not involve the liberation of poetic imagination from the Augustan poetics—instead, he endorses Dryden and Pope and adopts the strict Spenserian stanzas in “Childe Harold”—he calls for the political liberation of Europe. Byron’s “secular” voice differs essentially from the visionary poetics of Blake, Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Keats; this voice marks him a poet of worldliness.

A “secular” critic asserts the affiliation between individuals and society. Though Byron emphasizes the importance of independence and freedom, he also yearns for human communication and affiliation, as my discussion of his reconstitution of self has illustrated. Imperialists conquer the exotic cultures and lands for their own uses, an action that Elgin’s plunder of Athenian temple exemplifies. In other words,

imperialism ruins the gestalt view of a culture and destroys the connections of those relics to the original cultural context.<sup>5</sup>

Yet the quest for freedom triggers a problem: total, absolute freedom is impossible since “the ego was always a relation of self to a nonself and, as such, was always bound in relation”—an idea that can be traced back to Johann Gottlieb Fichte (Magill 98). “Relation,” which always “binds” self and others, can never be abandoned in the struggle for independence and freedom; the relation or affiliation with others does not allow excessive, uncontrolled individual freedom. Byron “refuses to set individual and society against each other as though they were equally autonomous entities”; rather, society “determines individual consciousness, so that personal life *is* social life” (Watkins, “Byron” 108-09). In this sense, Byron is “bound” with the bull, the wounded soldiers in Waterloo, Dante, Tasso, Rousseau, and Napoleon; the poet’s sufferings are entwined with theirs in “Childe Harold.” A “secular” poet always perceives the social impact on individuals; the affiliation with others renders alienation impossible. “Freedom, which takes on evident political and historical meanings in the poem, portrays itself, psychologically, as both rebellion against dependence and a revolt against the constant pressure to be separate” (O’Neill 40). The acquisition of freedom for Byron, in short, relies on the resistance to imperialism on the one hand and the maintenance of the worldliness through affiliation on the other. Alienation or escapism can neither serve as the goal of revolution nor facilitate the quest for

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<sup>5</sup> Therefore, Byron calls for the union of people to overthrow tyranny (“Ode from the French” 91-94). The united force works more effectively than the leadership of a charismatic hero, whose role is never emphasized in Byron’s poetry. Napoleon at first acted as such a hero; since this hero’s revolutionary ideal soured into imperialism, Byron turned to recognize the union force of people as the core of revolution. Tyrants shall tremble when people gather to resist them (“Ode from the French” 101-02), while a strong hero may frustrate his followers by turning into a despot himself. To worship a hero may dissolve the affiliation of people and subvert the validity of revolution.

individual freedom. Tyrants and despots, usually alienated from the others and ignoring the “social bonds,” do not really enjoy true freedom. In Byron’s contrapuntal view, individual liberty must be fulfilled in the “social bonds,” and community must consolidate personal freedom. Byron the “secular” critic never willingly isolates himself from community, nor does he view alienation as true liberty.

## **B. Byron’s optimistic and pessimistic views on fighting for freedom**

### **i. The affirmation of resistance**

Resistance to tyranny results from the monarch’s violation of the “social bonds.” Under the influence of *Rights of Man* by Thomas Paine, the romantic age has been assumed to be “free to reject the tyranny of the past, and to inaugurate a new age of more extensive liberty” (Dickinson 3). The tyranny at that time usually derived from imperial dominance, and resistance to the imperial tyranny became necessary and sacred to maintain the natural right of liberty. Equally influential was William Godwin, who also attacks monarchy and aristocracy on the one hand and who asserts the extension of individual freedom in *Enquiry concerning Political Justice*. The defense of personal freedom turned out to be a sacred human right in the age of revolution.

In such a culture, Byron glorifies all attempts to resist tyranny.<sup>6</sup> He sees “the

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<sup>6</sup> For example, he argues that the safety of France

sits not on a throne,  
With Capet or Napoleon!  
But in equal rights and laws,  
Hearts and hands in one great cause – (“Ode from the French” 79-81)

Monarchy breeds tyranny, while “connections” of all people are indispensable to resist it. The “stream of blood” of the brave heroes erupts like lava and sweeps “down empires with its blood” (“On the Star of ‘the Legion of Honour’” 13-14). “And he who in the strife expires / Will add to theirs a name of fear

glories of old days” (3.580) by meditating on the ruins. In Waterloo, “the ruined wall / Stands when its wind-worn battlements are gone; / The bars survive the captive they enthrall” (3.284-86). Seeing the “shattered wall” of Ehrenbreitstein in Coblenz, the poet envisions

. . . when shell and ball

Rebounding idly on her strength did light:—

A Tower of Victory! from whence the flight

Of baffled foes was watched along the plain:

But Peace destroyed what War could never blight,

And laid those proud roofs bare to Summer’s rain—

On which the iron shower for years had poured in vain. (3.556-62)

Standing as a “ruin amidst ruins,” Byron seems to envisage the victory over tyranny while recalling the retreat of invaders in the past. The ruins, in his contrapuntal perception, manifest the destructive force of invaders and the resolute will of resistance; they mark the cruelty of war and the struggle for peace simultaneously. The coexistence of both war and peace, symbolized in the “shattered walls” of the “Tower of Victory,” highlights the value of the resistance to tyranny for the sake of individual freedom. Similarly, in Morat, Switzerland, “[b]y a lone wall a lonelier column rears / A gray and grief-worn aspect of old days”—this “last remnant of the wreck of years” shows “a marvel that it not decays” (3.617-23). The poet uses “Aventicum” to call Switzerland: this is the capital of that area established by the Roman Empire, and therefore this term insinuates the presence of empire. The deeds of resistance “should not pass away,” and the names of heroes “must not wither,” while empires will decay

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/ That Tyranny shall quake to hear . . .” (“The Giaour” 118-20). “A land of slaves shall ne’er be mine” (“Don Juan” 3.783); “I may stand alone, / But would not change my free thoughts for a throne” (“Don Juan” 11.719-20).

(3.635-37). Their fame is “[i]mperishably pure beyond all things below” (3.643). Byron’s contrapuntal view on relics still reveals that the immortality of resistance involves the juxtaposition of imperial dominance and the fight for freedom. Empires will vanish, but this message from the “old days” must be conveyed to the future. Byron’s artistry matches the “contrapuntal reading” of the ruins: such a reading “reveals the overlapping and intersection of imperialism and its resistance. This is the value of contrapuntality, because it enables the critic to detect the constant counterpoint of power and resistance . . .” (Said, *Culture and Imperialism* 105).<sup>7</sup>

The “counterpoint of imperialism and its resistance” also emerges in Byron’s depiction of the resistance against tyranny and foreign invasion. Wars manifest this contrapuntal relationship and shape the cultural identity of a nation. For Byron, the resistance to oppression is the most valuable cultural heritage of ancient Greece. In 514 B.C., Harmodius assassinated Hipparchus, an Athenian dictator, but was killed; his glory is found “when the myrtle wreathes a Sword” (3.179)—it symbolizes the resistance to tyranny in order to gain freedom. “Age shakes Athenæ’s tower, but spares gray Marathon” (2.836). Marathon was the battlefield where Greeks successfully defeated the Persians, and therefore represents the spirit to resist imperial invasion and dominance. “Age” renders Athena’s temple in ruin, but the resistance to the imperial power never perishes. “For Byron, the power that enabled the Greeks to create the greatest civilization on earth was the spirit of freedom”; Greece “gave birth to the Western concepts of political and personal freedom” (Hubbell, “Byron’s” 193, 195). The resistant spirit proves to be the immortal cultural heritage of ancient Greece, while Byron inherited this spirit and affiliated himself with the origin of Western culture.

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<sup>7</sup> The juxtaposition of power and resistance derives from Foucault. Said agrees with Foucault’s formulation that “where there is power there is resistance,” but he blames Foucault for his “lack of political commitment” (Ashcroft and Ahluwalia 107).

The heritage of Marathon, the resistant spirit, has inspired many fighters to quest for freedom, and this continual inspiration manifests its immortality. Marceau fought as “Freedom’s Champion” to defend France against Austria in the Battles of 1795-96, while his efforts guaranteed the independence of his country (3.544-53). Moreover, Byron glorifies the Spanish resistance against Muslims (1.383-95). The sons of Spain, though seldom free, have fought for their freedom despite the treachery of their noblemen; wars became a necessary evil for their survival (1.882-90). The Spanish knights dressed “in mailed splendour” and defeated the Moor (1.383). The “bloody Banners” signify the fierceness of invasion and the sacrifice of the brave warriors (1.391). It is a “glorious tale” (1.396): this victory over the Moor turned Spain a “renowned, romantic Land” (1.387) and drove the Muslim’s power out of Europe (1.394). He also affirms the resistance of the Spanish people against Napoleon’s invasion (1.358-59); “None hugged a Conqueror’s chain, save fallen Chivalry!” (1.881). The Spanish resistance to Napoleon’s invasion in 1808 was generally viewed as a chivalric action (Southey 228). The nineteenth-century British literary culture tended to treat the Peninsular War in terms of chivalric romance (Sánchez 446). Likewise, Byron affirms the resistance of Albanian people to the Ottoman Empire: the fierce Albanian children can endure “the toil of War” so well, “[u]nshaken rushing on where’er their Chief may lead” (2.577-85); they rush to war “in splendour and success” (2.587). Similarly, Byron sees its revival of Venice in his vision: her love of Tasso would bring freedom (4.148-149) since Tasso himself represents the unyielding resistant spirit. “So perish monuments of mortal birth, / So perish all in turn, save well-recorded *Worth*” (2.808-09). This “Worth” refers to the immortality of resistance to invasion for the sake of independence and freedom. It represents a cultural force, which “has great influence in determining relationships between people and nature, between one person and another, among groups in society and among societies in the

international community” (Amuta 161). Affiliation becomes affirmed and intensified in the “Worth.”

Wars threaten the autonomy of a nation but also inspire the formation of an independent culture. Imperialism means to homogenize the “Other” by dominating it. Byron ironically points out the “homogenous” result of wars: death for both the conqueror and the conquered. Great cultures may pass away and leave ruins and relics for the memory of future generations, but the spirit of resistance perseveres and continually motivates “Freedom champions.” “Blood follows blood, and, through their mortal span, / In bloodier acts conclude those who with blood began” (2.566-67)—in other words, Byron observes the contrapuntal relationship between power and its resistance, and war itself exposes the inevitability of this relationship. Only with the contrapuntal perception can one discover the worth of this resistance.

## ii. The incredulity toward the success of resistance

Although Byron believes that the glory of the resistance to invasion will always be praised (2.855-63), he may also hold incredulity toward the success of resistance. “Childe Harold,” especially Canto II, is “the hymn of freedom” and “a sustained *threnos* over an enslaved people and a vanished culture—a lost world” (Blackstone 172). The “vanished culture” may refer to either the ancient Greece or the nineteenth-century Spain, which has lost its chivalry and the will to resist oppression (1.405-13). He praises Rienzi, who defended the freedom of Roman citizens; yet the poet also mourns for the brevity of his reign as a tribune (4.1018-26). Byron praises Venice for its resistance against the Ottoman Empire: “ye are names no Time nor Tyranny can blight” (4.126) because the victory prevented Europe from being ravaged by the Turks. Yet Byron also points out that Venice, as a free state, has earned its fortune through slave trade (4.122); universal freedom seems to be a dream. Besides, he worries, “a kingless society” may merely replace the old social structures with a “Democratical tyranny”

(Watkins, “Byron” 103). Resistance or revolution does not guarantee the emergence of liberal society: more resistance may follow the subversion of tyranny to oppose new dictators.

Byron never avows the necessary triumph of people’s resistance and the inevitable downfall of tyranny. His pessimism, first of all, may owe to the politicians’ deception of people.<sup>8</sup> French people, inspired by Rousseau, destroyed tyranny, but “good and ill they also overthrew,” and rebuilt “[d]ungeons and thrones” afterwards (3.774, 776-77). Having had dwelt “in Oppression’s darkness” for a long time, the French people might attack innocent people and bring out tyranny again (3.785-87). The French Revolution led not to democracy but to the Reign of Terror and then Napoleon’s ascension.

Secondly, tyranny cannot be eradicated through wars. The fall of Napoleon, Byron recognizes, did not pave the way for liberty and democracy in Europe:

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

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<sup>8</sup> As Byron indicates,

Fair Freedom! we may hold thee dear,  
When thus thy mightiest foes their fear  
In humblest guise have shown.  
Oh! ne’er may tyrant leave behind  
A brighter name to lure mankind! (“Ode to Napoleon Buonaparte” 86-90)

Napoleon the “tyrant” deceives people in “humblest” disguise. His exile and death do not mean the ending of tyranny, because “[s]ome new Napoleon might arise / To shame the world again” (“Ode to Napoleon Buonaparte” 96-97). An ambitious, careerist politician may call for support in the name of freedom, just as Napoleon has done, and their “humblest guise” can usually “lure mankind.” Byron’s incredulity toward the success of resistance may owe to his being “lured” by Napoleon.



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! (3.163-71)

The “Lion” symbolizes Napoleon, while the “Wolf,” Klemens Wenzel von Metternich (1773-1859). France is not liberated with the downfall of Napoleon, nor is the whole world, since Napoleon the tyrant falls at the hand of other tyrants. His downfall “simultaneously marks the defeat of both ‘free’ government and kingly arrogance” (Stock 124). The poet protests that “o’er one fallen Despot boast no more!” (3.172). Congress of Vienna (1815) is compared to “the base pageant” (4.871): it “nips Life’s tree, and dooms Man’s worst—his second fall” (4.873). The political conflicts devastate Europe irrecoverably:

For Europe’s flowers long rooted up before  
The trampler of her vineyards; in vain, years  
Of death, depopulation, bondage, fears,  
Have all been borne, and broken by the accord  
Of roused-up millions . . . . (3.174-78)

Byron appears quite pessimistic about the future of the war-ridden continent. Wellington’s victory over Napoleon, the “trampler” of Europe, cannot promise any rejuvenation.<sup>9</sup> A “people that exploits another cannot be free” (Althusser 236).

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<sup>9</sup> Byron elaborates his pessimistic argument about the future of Europe in some other poems. Freedom may be lost in “imperial seas of slaughter” (“Ode from the French” 90). In “Don Juan,” Byron describes Wellington as “Europe’s Liberator”—but Europe is still enslaved (9.40). In his opinion, “to have freedom and not to extend it to other nations is to be a ‘slavemaker’” (Wohlgemut 107). Freedom must be viewed as the business of the whole world, not simply that of a single country: a so-called “free” nation still suffers from slavery if all the neighboring nations are oppressed (“Don Juan” 10.537-44); “How should the Autocrat of bondage be / The king of serfs, and set the nations free?” (“The Age of

Metternich manipulated the European politics as a “slavemaker.” The restoration of many European monarchies after the fall of Napoleon proves that the number of “trampers” of Europe dramatically increases. This pessimistic attitude toward the consequence of resistance reveals the poet’s worldliness as well: no single country can be isolated from the rest of the world, while the affiliation of all countries cannot be denied.

Thirdly, the spirit of the struggle for freedom is usually forgotten and hardly maintained:

Such was the scene—what now remaineth here?

What sacred Trophy marks the hallowed ground,

Recording Freedom’s smile and Asia’s tear?

The rifled urn, the violated mound,

The dust thy courser’s hoof, rude stranger! spurns around. (2.850-54)

Byron mourns that nothing remains in Greece to commemorate the quest for freedom. Only the death images—urn, mound, dust—predominate the scene. The champions of freedom, Byron insinuates, no longer exist in Greece. The poet’s curse of Elgin, the “rude stranger,” also reveals his despair about the Greeks’ inability to defend their own culture. Besides, it is difficult to nourish and convey the resistant spirit to the future generations:

A thousand years scarce serve to form a state;

An hour may lay it in the dust: and when

Can Man its shattered splendour renovate,

Recall its virtues back, and vanquish Time and Fate? (2.797-800)

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Bronze” 300-01). Such an understanding of freedom derives from his affirmation of the affiliation of all nations.

It takes far less time to destroy a nation than to establish it. This fragility stems from the lack of a resolute will to fight for liberty and independence. The “shattered splendour” refers to the lost “virtues” such as independence, perseverance, and bravery. As an exile with a broken self-image, Byron judges that those who lose these virtues as “shattered.” These virtues can bestow immortal values to humanity since human beings can “vanquish Time and Fate” with them. The ancient Greek culture is immortal because of these virtues, but the contemporary Greeks, with the “shattered splendour,” are too weak to defend Athena’s temple, and they never know “the weight of Despot’s chains” before (2.106-08). Athena, Achilles, and Hades, powerful as they were supposed, cannot frighten the imperialist plunderer away (2.118-26). Byron challenges “Spirit of Freedom” for being unable to resist the Turkish tyranny, so Greek people have been enslaved from birth to death (2.702-10). Byron “was clearly doubtful both about the Greeks’ ‘national character’ and about their chances for freedom” (Makdisi 135). “Thy glorious day is o’er, but not thine years of shame” (2.728). The ruins of the Parthenon in Athens reveal that “Greece is not the beginning of a gradual and progressive spread of freedom, but only a false dawn, a ‘wonder of an hour’ in a longer, continuous history of tyrannies” (Martin 86). The poet appears quite pessimistic about the maintenance of independence and freedom.

Similarly, “the apocalypse of Spain is succeeded by the ‘sepulchre’ of Greece” (Martin 86). Spanish people have “shattered” their splendor when their nation is invaded by Napoleon’s army, while they are driven to desperation: “No step between submission and a grave” (1.551). Learning Napoleon’s invasion into Spain, Byron finds that they lack the will to resist the emperor, and therefore he calls the Spanish people to awake and rise (1.405-18). It is a pity that they do not own the bravery of their ancestors, who defeated the Moors (1.383-94). France the imperialist soars like a vulture, while the Spanish people—especially “the young, the proud, the brace”—are

“in crowds to Hades hurled” with “desperate Valour” (1.548-49, 555). The Napoleonic war, the “bloodiest strife,” pushes Spaniards to decide whether they may prostrate before “Tyrants and Tyrants’ slaves” (1.418): it tells “more of Spain and Spaniards” than the other events (1.891-92). Even if they may fortunately survive, the Spanish people “fight for Freedom [of those] who were never free” (1.883); very likely their effort may fall “in the dust”:

Not all the blood at Talavera shed,  
Not all the marvels of Barossa’s fight,  
Not Albuera lavish of the dead,  
Have won for Spain her well asserted right. (1.918-21)

Talavera, Barossa, and Albuera were the battlefields where the Spanish people fought against the French armies from 1809 to 1811. The thrice “Not” emphatically indicates the hopeless and helpless endeavors of Spanish warriors to defend their country. “How many a doubtful day shall sink in night, / Ere the Frank robber turn him from his spoil, / And Freedom’s stranger-tree grow native of the soil!” (1.924-26). Byron doubts whether it is possible to be free from the imperialist’s invasion. Sevilla remains “the Spoiler’s wished-for prey” (1.479). This town was ruled by Moors, while Napoleon also intended to control it. “Soon, soon shall Conquest’s fiery foot intrude, / Blackening her lovely domes with traces rude. / Inevitable hour! ’Gainst fate to strive / Where Desolation plants her famished brood / Is vain . . .” (1.480-84). Byron grieves for the futility of the Spanish resistance to Napoleon, but he admires this spirit (Sánchez 460). “But all unconscious of the coming doom” (1.486)—the invasion of Napoleon appears too sudden to be resisted. “Byron himself was recurrently sceptical and unsentimentally realistic about the operations of ‘freedom’ in practice” (Webb 219). Unlike Shelley, Byron cannot foresee the coming of spring after winter. He is quite pessimistic: it is in vain to fight against fate, while the

invasion of imperialist seems irresistible. The struggle “gazes out on Freedom as if through the bars of a prison, and achieves many of its most poignant yet unsentimental effects in so doing” (O’Neill 47). The poet values the persistent resistance in tremendous difficulty, yet this endeavor does not promise the coming of freedom..

For Byron, “Europe’s achievements are defined by the liberty and common purpose associated with opposition to monarchical power,” while “Childe Harold” displays European history “based on conflict between advocates and opponents of freedom” (Stock 123)—this amounts to a contrapuntal interpretation of history. Conflicts always involve at least two opposing forces. Byron demonstrates both the optimistic and the pessimistic attitudes toward the quest for freedom. Since an exile is necessarily contrapuntal, it is natural for Byron to perceive antithetical aspects of an issue, and self-contradiction may follow his contrapuntal view.

**iii. Byron’s questioning of the power-resistance coexistence: The attack on the willingness to be slaves**

It is rash to conclude that Byron believes in the necessary “overlapping and intersection” of power and resistance. To his surprise, he discovers that his contemporary Greeks, unlike their ancestors who fought against the thirty tyrants, dare not challenge the oppression of the Ottoman Empire: “Nor rise thy sons, but idly rail in vain, / Trembling beneath the scourge of Turkish hand, / From birth till death enslaved; in word, in deed, unmanned” (2.708-10). Freedom is acquired only through the resistance to imperialist dominance. Yet those “unmanned” Greeks prefer slavery to freedom and submit themselves to the Turks without resistance. Freedom remains absent for the Greek people: “But ne’er will Freedom seek this fated soil, / But slave succeed to slave through years of endless toil” (2.736-37). The Greeks, though oppressed by the Turks, can still forget their sufferings in a carnival (2.738-46).

Byron/Harold witnesses this carnival, but he does not participate in it perhaps because this escapism annoys and offends him.

Byron attacks this “power without resistance”: he blames his contemporary “Hereditary Bondsmen” since they dare not strike the blow to gain freedom (2.720-21). They are “[p]roud of their trampled nature,”

Bequeathing their hereditary rage  
To the new race of inborn slaves, who wage  
War for their chains, and rather than be free,  
Bleed gladiator-like, and still engage  
Within the same Arena where they see

Their fellows fall before, like leaves of the same tree. (4.840-46)

These “Bondsmen” kill their fellowmen for survival, and cowardly surrender to their oppressors.<sup>10</sup> As a “secular” critic, he devotes himself to opposing tyranny and imperialism for the sake of freedom, but he also sees the prevalence of “inborn” slavery. The reluctance to struggle for personal freedom, in Byron’s judgment, stems from the chained and limited thought of human beings: thought is “our last only place / Of refuge,” but this divine faculty is “chained and tortured—cabined, cribbed, confined, / And bred in darkness” (4.1137-41). This mental and spiritual bondage is the most terrible enemy of freedom: it chokes resistance at its root.

Freedom as the status of the absence of any restraint corresponds to the ideal of humanism, which endorses the possibility of happiness and protects “certain freedoms”—freedom from persecutions and conflicts (Law). Nevertheless, Byron as an exile “was no utopian” and remained “cynical about the possibility of humanity

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<sup>10</sup> Witnessing these “inborn slaves,” Byron laments: “Star of the brave! thy ray is pale, / And darkness must again prevail”; “When thy bright promise fades away, / Our life is but a load of clay” (“On the Star of ‘the Legion of Honour’” 31-32; 35-36). No hero can save the “inborn slaves” from their misery.

solving humanly created problems” (Watkins, “Byron” 129). Therefore, he does not proclaim “freedom” as universally acknowledged despite his passionate support of this human right. With a decentered worldview, his pluralistic vision challenges the monolithic, authoritative ideology. He shows a sceptical view of history in “Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage”: “there is no prospect of an improved future, and no heroes or great men to bring it forward” (Martin 88). His observation of contemporary politics “makes him cynical about unthinkingly optimistic ideas of progress . . .” (Stock 124). His contrapuntal view, cultivated with his oppositional inclination, reveals that freedom, far from being divinely ordained, must be obtained through the resistance to oppression. Though highlighting the power-resistance entanglement in his argument about the quest for freedom, he also observes the existence of “Hereditary Bondsmen,” who submit themselves willingly to tyranny. Resistance, a valuable cultural heritage, can maintain the existence of culture; the lack of resistance also means the death of an autonomous culture. This observation marks him as a “secular” critic, who is not blinded by any taken-for-granted ideal. The coming of winter does not promise that spring is not far behind, and therefore his insistent resistance to tyranny appears amazing and respectable.

## **VI. Conclusion**

Byron’s meditations on cultural issues reveal his characteristics as an exile. Being nomadic, he recognizes the mutable representations of cultures: the glory of ancient cultures is displayed in numerous ruins and in museums; wars may destroy and display cultures; the resistance to tyranny—a precious cultural heritage—may rise and fall. Being decentered, he denounces Elgin’s destruction of the Athenian temple and foregrounds the neglected soldiers in the imperialist wars; he highlights the coexistence

of civilization and barbarism; he negates the gender stereotype. Being contrapuntal, he highlights the subsistence of cultures in seeing the past and the present in ruins, in discerning the ambiguity of war and fighting, and in holding a paradoxical view on the quest for freedom. He imposes his nomadic, decentered, and contrapuntal characteristics on his meditations on the representation, destruction, and subsistence of a culture.

“Truth” contains diverse, multifarious aspects. Byron sees this multiplicity of culture with his contrapuntal awareness, but he also recognizes human finitude in representing the “truth” about culture. As he wanders among ruins, these broken images denote the absence of an ancient culture; yet the poet’s contrapuntal perception can envision its presence. He re-presents the ancient cultures by presuming himself as a “ruin amidst ruins,” emphasizing the necessity of gestalt understanding of cultures; by contrast, Elgin’s plunder of the Athenian temple fails to reconstitute the Greek culture since the imperialist pillage deprives the relics of their cultural context. The exhibition of Elgin’s marbles in the British Museum signifies more the imperial hegemony and savagery than the original Greek culture. This “state-sponsorship of Hellenism” means “a license for cultural exploitation” (Wood 172). Byron’s contrapuntal views differ from those of his contemporary imperialists.

Accordingly, Byron praises the resistance of ancient Greeks to the Persian invasion and calls for the revival of this spirit in the nineteenth-century Spain. In the age of Napoleon imperialism, the poet highlights, war or fighting unveils the coexistence of civilization and barbarism, power and resistance, the praise of freedom and the condemnation of tyranny, while Byron himself holds both optimistic and pessimistic views on the struggle for freedom. Antithetical perspectives intermingle with each other in Byron’s contrapuntal artistry.

“Childe Harold,” Byron’s “reconstitution” of the ancient culture through his



contrapuntal view, exemplifies the communications of cultures. Cultures or civilizations never exist in insulation; the insistence on the separation of cultures brings only inaccurate understanding (Said, “The Clash of Definitions” 84). The identity of an exile fosters cultural interactions: being nomadic, Byron contacts various exotic cultures—Spain, Portugal, Greece, Albania, and Italy; being decentered, he challenges the taken-for-granted cultural assumptions—the bravery of matadors, the gender stereotype, and the honor of dying for one’s country; being contrapuntal, he exposes the association of antithetical cultural elements, highlighting the merits and demerits of cultures honestly. His “pilgrimage” discloses the shame of imperialism and “inborn” slavery, while his accentuation of the gestalt understanding of ruins marks his difference from the imperialists in terms of viewing culture. “It is more rewarding—and more difficult—to think concretely and sympathetically, contrapuntally, about others than only about ‘us’”; the contrapuntal thinking, unlike the imperialist ideology, never reiterates “how ‘our’ culture or country is number one . . .” (Said, *Culture* 336). The pillage of ruins reveals the evil of imperialism in promoting “the separation of cultures”: the exotic cultures, treated as the “Other,” are misrepresented as what home culture is not. However, this self-other dichotomy, a form of separation, will ruin cultures, while connection and communication facilitate their development since survival means “the connections between things,” the rejection of dominating others, and the dismissal of the imposition of hierarchy on people (Said, *Culture* 336). Culture is a matter of “appropriations, common experiences, and interdependencies of all kinds among different cultures” (Said, *Culture* 217). Therefore, hybridity and contradiction must be regarded as normal and common: “Far from being unitary or monolithic or autonomous things, cultures actually assume more ‘foreign’ elements, alterities, differences, than they consciously exclude”; cultural experience and every cultural form are “radically, quintessentially hybrid” (Said, *Culture* 15, 58). Cultures are “too

intermingled, their contents and histories too interdependent and hybrid, for surgical separation into large and mostly ideological oppositions like Orient and Occident” (Said, *Representations of the Intellectual*). Neither the East nor the West exists as an inherently unified, homogenous entity. The contrapuntal view can discover the association of contradictory, antithetical elements in culture.

Such a view benefits Byron the critic: the valid criticism must be “exercised in the traffic between cultures, discourses and discipline, rather than in the appropriation, systematization, management, and professionalization of any one domain” (Said, “The Future of Criticism” 956). In this light, history, “a field of indeterminacies,” contains “movements to be seen running along lateral and recursive lines as well as linearly, and by strange diagonals and various curves, tangents, and even within random patterns” (McGann, “History, herstory, theirstory, ourstory” 224). Imperialism cannot tolerate such “random patterns” of culture and intends to yoke diverse cultures under its official authority. Such a force always means “tyranny” to Byron. In short, Byron holds the inevitability of human finitude, gestalt understanding of culture, affiliation of people, decentered and pluralistic views, while the imperialists assume an all-domineering vision, the ignorance of hybrid cultural context, the self-other dichotomy, and the hierarchical and monolithic perspective.

The presence of culture presumes the existence of order, while the lack of order means anarchy. Yet Europe in Byron’s observation amounts to something between culture and anarchy: on the one hand, imperialism intends to promote its order and culture among the conquered; on the other hand, this intention always incurs the extermination of its “Other” and the resistance to its dominance. Elgin’s marbles embody the limbo between culture and anarchy: his action, representing the imperialist violence imposed on Greece, intends to subordinate the ancient culture into the framework of the British empire—a barbarous, vandalistic deed in the name of

protecting civilization. The emergence of the imperialist culture relies on the plunder in anarchy. Yet nowhere in Byron's work does one find the sense that "Europeans are culturally superior to Asiatics" (Makdisi, "Romantic cultural imperialism" 619)—in the case of Elgin's marbles, the British Empire is not "culturally superior" to the Ottoman Empire in its claim to "protect" the relics of Athenian temple. This "protection" attempts to homogenize the exotic culture into a monolithic entity under the imperial reign. His criticisms on Elgin and Napoleon manifest his opposition to imperialist hegemony.

The discussion of the nineteenth-century European culture usually involves the issue of imperialism, as this chapter has illustrated. Though Said proposes "a pronounced awareness of European and Western culture as *imperialism*" (*Culture and Imperialism* 224), I treat both "European culture" and "imperialism" as essentially different concepts. The imperialists may manipulate "culture" in their hegemonic rule of the conquered races, yet "culture" can also serve as a weapon to fight against imperialism. The next chapter will further explore Byron's views on imperialism. As he understands and interprets various cultures from the viewpoint of an exile, it can be expected that he criticizes empires with the same view(s). Both "cultures" and "empires" function as "contexts" for the wandering, homeless poet to reconstitute his identity as well.

## Chapter Four

### Byron's Criticism of Empire:

#### Vanity of Imperialists, Ambiguous Views on Imperialism

A universal Deluge, which appears  
Without an Ark for wretched Man's abode,  
And ebbs but to reflow!—Renew thy rainbow, God! (4.826-28)

#### I. Introduction

##### A. The prevalent impact of imperialism on Europe

Imperialism ravished the 18<sup>th</sup>- and 19<sup>th</sup>-century Europe like a “universal Deluge,” and consequently numerous “wretched” people suffered helplessly to no end—as it was not abolished with the fall of Napoleon (see Chapter Three), it “ebbs but to reflow.” The absence of the “Ark” may denote the lack of safety and protection: “Noah’s Ark” could not be found in the war-torn Europe; it may also suggest the lack of law and order—the “Holy Ark” that preserves Torah has been abandoned. This absence, then, also implies the rejection of God’s sovereignty and thus the uncontrolled, aggressive actions of imperialists. This situation resembles that in the days when judges ruled Israelites: “there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes” (Judges 21:25). All imperialists also viewed their actions “right”—to exterminate barbarism in the name of civilization. The association of “safety” and “law” in the image of “Ark” hints that laws can protect people; nevertheless, the “law” imposed by imperialists on the conquered failed to guarantee the safety of their empires: the “Deluge” threatened Europe beyond the control of any imperialist. All

imperialists acted for their own power and profits in this “universal Deluge,” which exerted all-encompassing and calamitous impact.<sup>1</sup> Europe in such a circumstance featured nothing but mutability, chaos, and heterogeneity. The prayer to God to renew the “rainbow” signifies the poet’s wish to stop imperialism the “Deluge”—since in the Book of Genesis rainbow marks God’s promise not to destroy the world with flood again (9:13). Yet the “universal Deluge” of imperialism still imperiled the whole world throughout the nineteenth century.

Therefore, “the texts of European high culture are consistently and fundamentally engaged with—and on the whole complicit with—the imperial enterprise” (Robbins, “Edward Said’s *Culture and Imperialism*” 2). The “Enlightenment preoccupation with literature . . . was profoundly entangled with Britain’s escalating imperial presence” (Keen 206). The British Empire expanded drastically from the second half of the eighteenth century, while the indigenous anti-imperial voices also flourished simultaneously. “Romanticism appears as much the product of wartime as of that familiar dialectic, Revolution and Reaction”; from 1756 to 1815, Britons were fighting wars all over the world to gain lands and profit, while the shade of wars and the impact of imperialism usually haunted contemporary writers (Favret 316). The resistance against imperialism emerged almost instantaneously with the imperial enterprise. Through the 1780s Britons started to oppose the enslavement of Africans in the West Indies. With the religious revival of the Church of England, the Evangelicals denounced colonial slavery and campaigned in the press and Parliament. Of course, the abolitionist attempts did not necessarily support anti-imperialism—the sugar and

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<sup>1</sup> Byron describes that in the heyday of imperialism “Church, state, and faction wrestle in the dark, / Tossed by the deluge in their common ark” (“The Age of Bronze” 646-47), and that “Europe has slaves— allies—kings—armies still” (“Don Juan” Dedication 127). “Art for art’s sake” was untenable and impractical in the “Deluge” of imperialism.

coffee, for instance, were still anticipated to be harvested “by the willing labor of emancipated former slaves” (Fulford 182). This exposes the ambiguous attitude toward British imperial enterprise in the romantic age. William Blake composes *America: A Prophecy* as “an anti-imperialist allegory” (Fulford 183). Robert Southey and Samuel Taylor Coleridge attack slavery and imperialism—the former in his “To the Genius of Africa” and the latter in “Africa”—yet their voices did not catch the attention of the mainstream British culture (Fulford 182). Still, the recognition that “[e]mpire was the globalization of tyranny and brutality” was found in the heyday of the British Empire (Fulford 182-83). Yet the acquiescence to imperialism overwhelmed the resistance to it. At that era the mainstream British culture was Eurocentric, and the anti-imperial voices were usually suppressed or ignored.

The Eurocentric imperialists always assume an egotistic perspective. Their ideology rests on treating the non-Europeans as the “other”: “there is one Europe or one West (one ‘us’) that constructs the Orient” (Ashcroft and Ahluwalia 60). The Orient is arbitrarily defined as what the West is not: Europeans cannot know themselves as they truly are; therefore, they must depend on the standpoint of the non-Europeans to discover themselves (Wolin 746). Without contributing to their true self-understanding, however, this self-other or subject-object dichotomy functions as the basis of European’s (mis)understanding of non-Europeans, whereas imperialists must “exterminate the brutes” (Conrad) to consolidate their sovereignty. The “education” and “elimination” of the “Other” proceed in the name of civilization, yet the misunderstanding of imperialists always persists with the growth of empire. The British imperialists turned everything “into England; and everybody they met they turned English. But no place could ever really be England, and nobody who did not look exactly like them would ever be English, so you can imagine the destruction of people and land that came from that” (Kincaid 92). The imperialists impose their

ideology on various ethnic groups and anticipate the unification of the empire under their hegemony. Homogenization of all ethnic groups in the empire, nonetheless, is promoted because of the conquerors' sense of racial superiority: all the uncultivated barbarians need the guidance of civilization, a task that can be fulfilled only by the conquerors. The "white man's superiority," "maintained by the classical European colonial empires," prompts "a violent subjugation of African and Asian peoples" (Said, *Representations of the Intellectual*). Mutability, multiplicity, and heterogeneity must be eliminated or rejected to sustain the stability and authority of their regime. Eurocentrism, based on the invalid self-other dichotomy, exists as the ideology of European imperialism, and has provided a distorted worldview. The "Deluge" raged because of the imperialists' blindness to the truth about themselves and the "Others."

### **B. Byron's resistance to imperialism**

Byron's attacks on imperialism manifest his "oppositional" inclination and his view as an exile. Byron usually hurls his rage at oppressive social structures such as state or church (McGann, *Romantic Ideology* 138-39). He resists the acclaimed authority, which always aims to "control others" and "to satisfy a need for domination" (Nicholson 111). Exiles had "cross-cultural and transnational visions, suffered the same frustrations and miseries, performed the same elucidating and critical tasks . . ." (Said, "Reflections on Exile"). Meditating on the contemporary international conflicts and on the ruins, Byron declares that he never bows down to "idolatries" of the world, and that he looks down on imperialism.<sup>2</sup> "Childe Harold" contains Byron's "political remarks" which expose "the evils [of imperialism] inherent in existing social

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<sup>2</sup> Byron proclaims that "Kingdoms and Empires in my little day / I have outlived, and yet I am not old" ("Epistle to Augusta" 33-34); "And what have Caesar's deeds and Caesar's fame / Done for the earth? We feel them in our shame" ("The Island" 2.320-21). With the oppositional inclination, the poet holds it necessary to defend the freedom of a state by shedding blood since "[t]he blood of tyrants is not human" ("Marino Faliero" 4.2.160-63).

structures” (Watkins, “Byron” 109). Harold’s unknighly behavior challenges and mocks imperialism. As a “Childe,” he does not follow the conventions of feudalism (see Chapter Two); rather, he often criticizes the cruelty of war initiated by imperialists. As he wanders, he usually ponders on the ruins of ancient civilizations, and his meditation brings to light some broken images of empires as well as the impact and futility of imperialism.

Moreover, Byron as an exile cultivates a nomadic, decentered, and contrapuntal view (see Chapter Two), which resists the official, monolithic ideology of imperialism. By leaving his homeland, he criticizes the status quo of Britain. The empire at that time was “insular and self-enclosed,” while his departure means “escape from that tightly-bordered cell”—such an “insular and self-enclosed” environment contributed to the egotistic worldview of imperialism; “Childe Harold” “foregrounds travel as border crossing” (Wohlgemut 100, 101). “Travel in *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage* challenges the Burkean understanding of the nation as something clearly-bordered and unified . . .” (Wohlgemut 101). In “Childe Harold,” the Orient is treated as a place of “refuge and potential alternative to modernity,” while Byron simultaneously criticizes “Western, European, English concepts, taboos, norms and standards” (Makdisi, *Romantic Imperialism* 123, 137). Britain the once “unified” empire becomes “exotic” in Byron’s eyes: he imagines that he would travel to a place of “scorching” climate (Canto I) and then finds his “home” wherever he goes. The world and his “home” change continually; besides, the “world” and his “home” are interchangeable in “Childe Harold.” This experience of “dislocation, exile, migration, and empire” can invigorate “presence of a banished or forgotten reality”—this is also the intellectual background of Edward Said as a critic (Said, “Introduction: Criticism and Exile”). The “forgotten reality” refers to the world featuring mutability, diversity, and heterogeneity—the real world “forgotten” by imperialists. Being nomadic,



decentered, and contrapuntal, an exile like Byron may interpret the “reality” with similar characteristics: the nomadic life renders his conception of the world as endlessly changing, his decentering views nourishes his disbelief in the totalizing, centralizing imperialistic enterprise, while his contrapuntal insight presumes the heterogeneity and multiplicity of the world. This worldview essentially runs counter to that of imperialists, who assume stability, centralization, and homogeneity of their regime. Byron’s “border-crossing” broke the “insular” environment and contributed to his worldliness.

The decentered worldview prompts Byron to oppose imperialism and to create “novelized” poetry that features no traditional heroes. “Much of the exile’s life is taken up with compensating for disorienting loss by creating a new world to rule” (Said, “Reflections on Exile”). Based on Lukács’s theory, Said points out that the epic presents “no other world,” while the novel reveals that “other worlds may exist” for exiles (“Reflections on Exile”), the worlds that display change, decentering, and heterogeneity. The official ideology always presumes a monolithic worldview, while an exile can detect the mutability and multiplicity of reality. In addition, Bakhtin affirms that Byron’s “Childe Harold” and “Don Juan” exemplify “novelized” epic poetry (“Epic and Novel” 5-6), and that in such genres “an indeterminacy, a certain semantic openendedness, a living contact with unfinished, still-evolving contemporary reality (the openended present)” (“Epic and Novel” 7). Byron’s identity as an exile enables him to create a world different from that in epic—or, to present a more realistic and credible world. The abundant broken images in the “pilgrimage” ridicule the imperialist ambition to be futile. The “novelized” poetry resists the imperialist monolithic ideology by affirming indeterminacy and openendedness. Besides, Byron never glorifies epic-like hero: his heroes—Dante, Tasso, Rousseau, the early Napoleon, Petrarch, and all his “alter egos”—were either marginalized among their

contemporaries or resistant to the hegemony. The veneration of these “marginalized” or outcast figures denies the privileged status of politicians and belittles the imperialist “achievement.”

### **C. The imperialist Europe as a vanity fair**

As Byron declares that “Truth my sole desire is nigh, / Prepared the danger to defy” (“To a Knot of Ungenerous Critics” 25-26), he is condemning his contemporary world for its lack of truth<sup>3</sup>, a world which amounted to a “vanity fair” like that in Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress*. Bunyan’s vision of the vanity fair matches the imperialist Europe in the nineteenth century. All walks of life are included in this fair—Bunyan affirms it by quoting Psalm 62: 9: “Men of low degree are only vanity and men of rank are a lie; in the balance they go up; they are together lighter than breath.” The word “vanity” also downgrades humanity as Bunyan emphasizes: “all that is sold there, and all who come there, are worthless.” Therefore, blessed are the exiles—such as Christian and Faithful—who do not belong to this world. Besides, this fair commodifies and fetishizes all forms of vanities—this corresponds to the imperialist’s thirst for wealth and honor, which are acquired through invasion or exploitation and exemplified by the exhibition of Elgin’s marbles in the British Museum. The inhabitants there delight in “juggling, cheats” and similar “entertainments,” while “thefts, murders, adulteries, perjuries” prevail (Bunyan). In short, truth and honesty are absent; therefore, the mentioning of “truth” brings disorder and then Faithful and Christian are arrested. Bunyan insinuates that “vanity” actually haunts all Europe, since in this fair “the Britain Row, the French Row, the Italian Row, the Spanish Row, the German Row . . . offer a variety of vanities for sale.” Similarly, all the “civilized” European countries in the

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<sup>3</sup> This echoes Byron’s proclamation that “I write the World, nor care if the World read, / At least for this I cannot spare its vanity” (“Don Juan” 15.475-76).

early nineteenth century were under the impact of imperialism: they were either dominating or dominated by other nations. Byron the exile criticizes the imperialist Europe, just as Faithful and Christian the outsiders and “strangers” oppose the vanity fair.

Byron’s oppositional inclination and his identity as an exile enable him to be an earnest and keen critic. Criticism is essentially “oppositional” (Ashcroft and Ahluwalia 34). The “confrontation with established power is one of the most important motifs in Byron,” while this confrontation is frequently “associated with being driven out of society” (Nicholson 123). This oppositional temperament also characterizes exiles: “They have to be thoroughgoing individuals with powerful personalities and, above all, they have to be in a state of almost permanent opposition to the status quo”—the whole point “is to be embarrassing, contrary, even unpleasant,” and consequently so peculiar and abrasive are their life and social performance (Said, *Representations of the Intellectual*). The “outsider’s and the skeptic’s autonomy” qualify a free critic (Said, *Representations of the Intellectual*). With this freedom, a critic can speak truth to power with a pluralistic vision. “Speaking truth to power” works as Byron’s weapon to “write back to empire”<sup>4</sup>—a critical capacity nourished by his exile.

Before his exile, Byron actively participated in politics as a nonconformist nobleman, but his political career is “a record of failure ending in inarticulateness” due in part to the circumstance (Kelsall, “Byron’s politics” 50). His criticism flourishes mostly in his poetical works, especially in his satire, while “truth” is often venerated as

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<sup>4</sup> This echoes Byron’s affirmation that his muse deals with nothing but “facts”: “And were her object only what’s called Glory, / With more ease too she’d tell a different story” (“Don Juan” 14.97-104). Imperial glory and truth are held as antithetical in Byron’s worldview.

his muse.<sup>5</sup> Byron extols Socrates and his wisdom: “Well didst thou speak, Athena’s wisest son! / ‘All that we know is, nothing can be known’” (2.55-56).<sup>6</sup> Socrates proclaims that he means to tell “the whole truth” (Plato 31). Byron learns from the philosopher the recognition of one’s ignorance as the truth (see Chapter Three), while he also endeavors to point out the imperialists’ ignorance of their ignorance. Byron’s courage illustrates the resolution to “speak truth to power” proposed by Said.

In addition, “[t]he goal of speaking the truth is . . . mainly to project a better state of affairs and one that corresponds more closely to a set of moral principles—peace, reconciliation, abatement of suffering—applied to the known facts” (Said, *Representations of the Intellectual*). The “better state of affairs” means liberty and independence for Byron. His ideal represents the “relative independence” of an intellectual and displays “amateurism” in the public sphere. In Said’s argument, an amateur or a secular, antithetical to the professionals hired by the authority, remains an outsider to the official and therefore can speak impartially for the public interest. This courage to speak truth presumes a pluralistic vision (about the contrast between reality and ideal) and pushes Byron to master satire.

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<sup>5</sup> As Byron himself affirms: “Yet Truth sometimes will lend her noblest fires, / And decorate the verse herself inspires” (“English Bards and Scotch Reviewers” 855-56); “I’ve learned to think, and sternly speak the truth; / Learned to deride the critic’s starch decree” (“English Bards and Scotch Reviewers” 1058-59). Simultaneously, the poet can maintain his neutrality: “Nor care if courts and crowds applaud or hiss” (“English Bards and Scotch Reviewers” 1062). The poet composed “English Bards and Scotch Reviewers” while staying in England, and he practiced his “preaching” only after his exile. Exile nurtured his criticism and satire.

<sup>6</sup> Byron quotes the same words in “Don Juan” (7.34). He also indicates that Newton, like Socrates, searched continually for truth (“Don Juan” 7.37-40). Then he immediately quotes that “all is vanity,” commenting that “all know, or very soon may know it” (“Don Juan” 7.41-44). Hence the revelation of truth for the poet is closely associated with the recognition of vanity, but it is ironic that human beings still insist on struggling for “the nothingness of Life” (“Don Juan” 7.48)—and thus echoes Socrates’s judgment that they are ignorant of their ignorance.

## **D. The imperialist's blindness to reality**

An empire is assumed to be “expansive, militarized, and multiethnic political organizations that significantly limit the sovereignty” of the conquered peoples (Steinmetz 79). Therefore, it is a heterogeneous entity maintained by the domination over various races. An empire is “a particular form of domination or control between two units set apart in a hierarchical, inequitable relationship . . . in which a metropole dominates a periphery to the disadvantage of the periphery” (Suny 25). They engage in making a monolithic, hierarchical world through violence and exploitation. Thus, intensified is the disparity between self (the home country) and others (the conquered races). The “truth” that imperialists acknowledge includes their assumed “superiority” to the conquered, the legitimacy of their hegemony, and the necessity of order and stability.

As critics attack imperialism, they must highlight its reality—to decenter the supremacy and authority of the empire by indicating the mutability and multiplicity of the status quo. “The need for criticism to return to the world is the desire of post-colonial criticism in general” (Ashcroft and Ahluwalia 33). To “return to the world” means to underscore some embarrassing facts that imperialists tend to ignore: the changing situation of empire, the establishment of social hierarchy through violence, the oppression of the conquered people, and the rude attempt to homogenize disparate cultures and races. In short, imperialists, failing to recognize the world (Wirth and Rigney 333), err in neglecting the mutability, multiplicity, and heterogeneity of reality. Imperialism reveals “a rather different kind of meaning loss”: the life world and experiences in colonies, “very different from that of the imperial power—remain unknown and unimaginable for the subjects of the imperial power,” while it is almost impossible for imperialists to “include this radical otherness of colonial life, colonial suffering, and exploitation . . .” (Jameson 50-51). The realities, however, can be

revealed through texts. Said argues that “the world does exist, and that worldliness is constructed within the text” (*The World* 39). The world, the critic, and the text are affiliated to “write back to empire”: the revelation of the mutability, decentering, and heterogeneity of the world in the text can counterattack the imperialist’s claim for imperial stability and unity.

This chapter deals with Byron’s criticism of imperialism in “Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage,” to highlight that “[t]he power of resistance comes in the ability of the author to ‘write back’ to imperialism, to speak ‘truth’ to injustice” (Ashcroft and Ahluwalia 39). As Christian and Faithful defy the vanity fair by exalting “truth,” Byron denounces imperialism with the same weapon. He points out the inevitability of change, the decentering of authoritative worldviews, and the heterogeneity of the world—the “truth” that imperialists usually suppress or ignore—while he can highlight the interactive relationships of antithetical forces. These descriptions are not meant to be honored as “absolute” or “supreme,” but merely the “truth” perceived by an exile, who is characterized as nomadic, decentered, and contrapuntal. The identity as an exile enables the poet to perceive what imperialists do not discern or accept. He indicates the futility of imperialism in his meditations on ruins; however, he sometimes speaks like an imperialist unawares—his resistance to empire coexists with his complicity with imperialism. This alien voice in his anti-imperialist discourse displays his “oppositional” artistry: antithetical voices are not finally reconciled; the poet’s interpretations of empire and imperialism parallel his self-contradictory and ironic personality. Nevertheless, it is absurd to claim that imperialism should not be blamed because Byron contradicts himself. The existence of the alien voice does not negate the validity of his criticism of imperialism.

## **II. To write back to empire: Byron's revelation of "truth"**

### **A. The inevitability of change**

#### **i. The image of fire as the revolutionary power**

The main targets of Byron's criticism of imperialism in "Child Harold" include the Roman Empire and the Napoleonic Empire; both empires may serve as examples to the growing British Empire in the early nineteenth century. Few are Byron's comments on the Alexander's Empire, the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the Russian Empire, and the Ottoman Empire in the same poem, but these comments correspond to those on Rome and Napoleon in terms of his perspective as that of an exile. In other words, his meditations on an empire stem from his opposition to tyranny, while the ancient empire and the contemporary ones form a contrapuntal relationship in his perception. As he laments for the decline of Rome or of Napoleon, he is also warning Britons and all the other imperialists.

"To write back to empire" involves necessarily the attack on imperialism. The word "imperialism"—the policy to expand the power, profit, and territory of an empire—was first used to blame Napoleon's military despotism, and then to criticize the British Empire (Knox; Spann). The Napoleonic Wars "assuredly fired Byron's imagination" and brought "an encompassing set of ideas about the exciting possibilities and dangers of restructuring society entirely" (Watkins, *Social* 20). "Childe Harold's Pilgrimage" surveys "Europe in the era of the Napoleonic wars and their aftermath" (Cantor 393). Byron reproaches Napoleon's expansion of his empire as well as the restoration of the aristocratic regime of European countries by Klemens von Metternich in the Congress of Vienna. The Napoleonic Empire is the immediate target of Byron's criticism of imperialism since Napoleon had predominated Europe while Byron was taking his "pilgrimage." Furthermore, "Byron portrays a Europe in ruins, wrecked by

the violence unleashed by the French Revolution” (Cantor 393). The French Revolution and its aftermath “inflamed Byron with lifelong revolutionary fervor” (Thomas 60). Therefore, the rise of Napoleon in the poet’s understanding can be traced back to the French Revolution, a historical event that was inspired by Jean-Jacques Rousseau.

To describe that the aftermath of the revolution “inflamed” Byron brings forward the image of fire. This image, associating Miltonic Satan and the Byron’s heroes (see Chapter Two), also symbolizes the subversive force of an empire. The irresistible revolutionary force grows like fire, as Byron judges that Rousseau’s philosophy, powerful as Apollo’s oracles (3.762-63),

. . . set the world in flame,

Nor ceased to burn till kingdoms were no more:

Did he not this for France? which lay before

Bowed to the inborn tyranny of years?

Broken and trembling to the yoke she bore,

Till by the voice of him and his compeers,

Roused up to too much wrath which follows o’ergrown fears? (3.765-69)

This passage acknowledges Rousseau’s influence on the French Revolution. His impact as “fire” symbolizes the dynamic, transformative influence of his philosophy on *Ancien Régime*. In brief, “he knew / How to make Madness beautiful” (3.729-30)—this “Madness” or strong passion burned all over Europe because of Rousseau’s eloquence. The Old French Empire was burned down as Rousseau “threw / Enchantment over Passion” (3.726-27) of the oppressed people. Byron declares his own autonomy by learning from “the ‘fiery dust’ of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, the ‘apostle of affliction,’ who ‘from woe wrung overwhelming eloquence’” (Earle 4). This eloquence impresses numerous readers, united oppressed people, and exerts worldwide



influences. Among Byron's heroes, therefore, Rousseau demonstrates "worldliness" most directly through writing. His philosophy, symbolized by "fire," challenged tyranny and anticipated modern democracy.

Rousseau and Napoleon are portrayed in Byron's poetry as "the twin peaks of humanity" (Cantor 393). The "Napoleonic Rousseau" was driven to "unending strife" (Cantor 394); likewise, Napoleon, "inflamed" by Rousseau's philosophy, intended to revolutionize the whole Europe with the same fire.<sup>7</sup> The dust of Rousseau "was once all fire" (3.719). He inspired the French Revolution, but soon Napoleon turned it into an imperial enterprise: Byron criticizes Napoleon as a "trampler" of Europe's vineyard (1.175). The emperor is linked with "fire" (3.371-72) that led to his destruction. Hence "fire" itself carries a double image: on the one hand, it destroyed the old age; on the other hand, it also threatened the new age and the fire carriers themselves as well. Consequently, Napoleon achieved greatness but was also corrupted by greatness (Barrett 289). Rousseau "inflamed" Napoleon with the revolutionary fire, but Napoleon manipulated this fire and burned himself eventually. No hero can really "master" and "control" the revolutionary fire.

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<sup>7</sup> Byron often characterizes Napoleon with the image of fire. Napoleon is compared to Prometheus, "the thief of fire from heaven" ("Ode to Napoleon Buonaparte" 136). In this comparison, Byron asks the overthrown emperor whether he may withstand the subversive fate. Fire brings civilization and destruction, so it is essentially a double image; likewise, Napoleon constructed and destroyed his own empire. "For Byron, Napoleon embodied all the attractions and ambiguities inherent in a Promethean force of will" (Clubbe, "Byron, Napoleon" 191). With Napoleon, Byron "was joined in popular view as the type of the Promethean genius" (Manning, [Peter], *Reading* 145). Napoleon is portrayed as Byron's alter ego (see Chapter Two), and their dynamic, earth-shaking forces are associated with fire. Prometheus's image is paradoxical: he means to benefit mankind by committing theft, embracing the positive and the negative qualities at the same time. The Promethean fire inspired Napoleon to revolutionize France, but with the same fire he also waged wars with neighboring countries. Byron's recognition of Napoleon as Prometheus implies that the emperor "stole" the revolutionary fire from Rousseau.

Fire destroys everything as it grows, while its growth brings subversion and self-subversion. It can be either spreading or extinguished, but it never becomes stagnant and motionless. The presence of fire always presumes the necessity of change. Rousseau's ideal, Napoleon's empire, and all Europe underwent irresistible, fire-like changes. In Byron's poetry, this image may signify Rousseau's revolutionary ideal and Napoleon's imperialism—both brought transformation and were transformed themselves. The only “unchanged” truth proves to be the inevitability of change.

## **ii. The unavoidable rise and fall of empire**

In addition, Byron also highlights the rise and fall of empire to accentuate the certainty of change. An imperialist merely focuses on the rise of the empire, while Byron juxtaposes both the rise and fall in his contrapuntal perception. The expansion of an empire transforms the status quo, and its regime will also be overthrown. For vanity Napoleon built the Arch of Triumph, and “the tears / And blood of earth flow on as they have flowed” (3.823-25). This monumental building was meant to extol the emperor's achievement. Yet the emperor could not maintain his sovereignty despite his burning ambition—soon in Waterloo, only “an Empire's dust” exists in “this place of skulls”; there is no “colossal bust” or “column trophied” to celebrate the imperialist victory (3.145-54). The image of dust suggests the fragility, insignificance, and worthlessness of imperial rule.

No empire can claim everlasting glory and permanent prosperity. Pizarros conquered Inca and dominated the local people as a Spanish governor. In the early nineteenth century, however, Spain was invaded by Napoleon, whose troops “pour[ed] adown the Pyrenees” (1.910). The Spanish Empire, despite her power and glory in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, failed to resist Napoleon's invasion in the early nineteenth century. Besides, Istanbul was the capital of the Byzantium Empire and the Ottoman Empire: it was “won for Allah from the Giaour, / The Giaour from

Othman's race again may wrest" (2.729-30). History constantly reveals the rise and fall of empires, as Byron judges in Rome: "First Freedom, and then Glory—when that fails, / Wealth—Vice—Corruption,—Barbarism at last" (4.966-67). Byron's observation of Roman history presumes a gestalt view: he "sees" this "proud people" "[f]rom the first hour of Empire in the bud / To that when further worlds to conquer failed" (4.1010-12). The poet describes the foreseeable decline of empire because of her weakness:

Their breath is agitation, and their life  
A storm whereon they ride, to sink at last,  
And yet so nursed and bigoted to strife,  
That should their days, surviving perils past,  
Melt to calm twilight, they feel overcast  
With sorrow and supineness, and so die . . . . (3.388-93)

The "storm" symbolizes the imperialists' invasion, nourished by their ambition, their "breath" of "agitation." "Breath" signifies "life": imperialists live by their ambition to invade; it may also imply "emptiness": the ambition of invaders is vain and worthless. The juxtaposition of "breath" and "storm" form a contrapuntal relationship: both are air, and display "weakness" and "strength" respectively. Riding on a storm may look menacing and commanding, yet their "seat" is merely a violent disturbance of air, void and destined to vanish eventually. It connotes that they are "running on empty"—imperialists may exhaust all their resources.<sup>8</sup> Despite their "bigoted" willpower to

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<sup>8</sup> "Breath" as a metaphor is also employed to satirize Napoleonic Empire. Napoleon's rise and fall aroused "unending strife" in Europe:

The triumph and the vanity,  
The rapture of the strife –  
The earthquake-voice of Victory,

aspire, they must “sink at last” and die in misery. As imperialists struggle to aspire, Byron needles their ambition by pointing out that all monarchies are destined to decline and fall:

Kingdoms are shrunk to provinces, and chains  
Clank over sceptred cities; Nations melt  
From Power’s high pinnacle, when they have felt  
The sunshine for a while, and downward go . . . . (4.102-06)

Byron’s satire works in “counterpoint”: antithetical elements (kingdoms versus provinces, high pinnacle versus decline) are juxtaposed to emphasize the vanity of monarchs.<sup>9</sup> The “sunshine” of an empire cannot last long, and thus it is vanity to boast about conquest and expansion. Disintegration and slavery (symbolized by “chains”) will gain the sovereignty over all kingdoms. This comment corresponds to Solomon’s lament in the beginning of Ecclesiastes: all is vanity because profits cannot be secured despite one’s labor (1:2-3). The imperialist enterprise is vanity in the sense that it cannot last forever.

### iii. The weakness and insignificance of empire

Moreover, the inevitability of change of empire is also revealed in Byron’s

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To thee the breath of life . . . . (“Ode to Napoleon Buonaparte” 28-31)  
“Victory” refers to the successful expansion of Napoleon’s territory and influence. “Thine evil deeds are writ in gore” (“Ode to Napoleon Buonaparte” 91). Napoleon’s “breath of life” means imperialism, which rests on “triumph,” “vanity,” and “strife.” This “breath” murdered numerous people and triggered more wars. Besides, the “breath” suggests the futility of his enterprise: the vanity of imperialism appears as empty as “breath.” Fame grows like “climbing up a hill, / Whose summit, like all hills, is lost in vapour” (“Don Juan” 1.1739-40).

<sup>9</sup> The contrapuntal view of the rise and fall of empire is also presented with the image of monarchs as “corn”: “But corn, like every mortal thing, must fall, / kings—Conquerors—and markets most of all” (Byron, “The Age of Bronze” 574-75). Corn must fall as it matures; an empire must collapse as it prospers to the maximum. The maturity and the degeneration are entwined in the history of an empire: in the contrapuntal interpretation, both are two sides of the same coin.

description of oceans. Human beings and culture appear insignificant before oceans:

Man's control

Stops with the shore;—upon the watery plain

The wrecks are all thy deed, nor doth remain

A shadow of man's ravage, save his own,

When, for a moment, like a drop of rain,

He sinks into thy depths with bubbling groan—

Without a grave—unknelled, uncoffined, and unknown. (4.1606-11)

Oceans here represent a mysterious power of nature, in which the imperial sway appears insignificant: imperialism, “man's ravage,” exists as merely a “shadow” or “a drop of rain,” while its obliteration, suggested by the images of “wrecks” and “bubbling,” will be ignored and forgotten—emphasized by three negatives: “unknelled, uncoffined, and unknown.” Imperialist forces appear impotent in ocean: the warships are “toys” of ocean, and they “melt into thy yeast of waves, which mar / Alike the Armada's pride or spoils of Trafalgar” (4.1627-28). Byron alludes to the destruction of the Invincible Armada in 1588 and the failure of the French and Spanish fleet in Trafalgar in 1805. The Spanish Empire and the French Empire yielded to the power of nature. The international conflicts and the imperial enterprise are merely trifling for mother nature. All the ancient empires—Assyria, Greece, Rome, Carthage—now pass away together with their tyrants, but Ocean/Nature remains unchanged: “Time writes no wrinkle on thine azure brow” (4.1630-37). Ocean bears the “image of Eternity”—“boundless, endless, and sublime” (4.1643-44). Ocean and empire form a counterpoint—the contrast between eternity and transience separately. Nature dwarfs all imperialists and mocks their pride and ambition.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Shelley also emphasizes the fragility of Napoleon's empire: this “fallen tyrant” held “[a] frail and

Moreover, ocean also bears the image of exile as a critic. Ocean as a “glorious mirror” (4.1639) implies that it can reflect “truth” of all people—just as Byron the critic intends to write back to empire by showing “truth.” This “mirror” as “the Almighty form” (4.1639) means to conquer imperialists with “truth.” Ocean can be “[c]alm or convulsed” (4.1641), while Byron often embraces antithetical elements in his contrapuntal interpretation of “truth.” Its revelation can be found “in breeze, or gale, or storm” (4.1641)—these are also the images used to highlight the futility of imperialism. Ocean appears “fathomless, alone” (4.1647)—an image that corresponds to the wandering poet. The evaluation of imperialism is now at the mercy of the exile as a satirical critic. No wonder that Byron affiliates himself with ocean: “I have loved thee, Ocean! And my joy / Of youthful sports was on thy breast to be / Borne . . .” (4.1648-50). Empires are always changing, but ocean exists beyond the sphere of mutability since it is “boundless, endless, and sublime— / The image of Eternity” (4.1643-44). The “monsters” and all the world obey the ocean (4.1646-47); symbolically, the “truth” uttered by Byron the exile—like the power of the ocean—can overwhelm imperialists.

Venice also exemplifies the insignificance of any political power when it is compared with ocean. This city-state flourished from the 9<sup>th</sup> century to the 15<sup>th</sup>, declined in her conflicts with the Ottoman Empire, and then was annexed to the Austro-Hungarian Empire in 1814. The ruins in Venice remind Byron of her history and her necessary decline. Frederick I of the Holy Roman Empire was defeated here, while Francis I of Austria (also Francis II of the Holy Roman Empire) reigns the same city: “An Emperor tramples where an Emperor knelt” (4.101). Venice, though not an empire, was entangled in the rise and fall of empires; no nation can remain neutral and

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bloody pomp which Time has swept / In fragments towards Oblivion”; consequently, Napoleon “and France are in the dust” (“Feelings” 1, 6, 11).

noninvolved in the imperialist conflicts. Byron juxtaposes “images of Venice past and present: its onetime wealth and greatness and its contemporary decline and subjugation to foreign rule” while he conceives of the Venice at the present as a ruin (McLean 229). The Bridge of Sighs still shines with “a dying Glory” that has survived for a thousand years (4.5-6). He also “sees” how the merchants of Venice earned “spoils of nations” from “the exhaustless East” (4.15). Though Venice, like Greece, also suffered from the imperial invasion, Byron does not anticipate her political independence. Rather, he laments especially for the decline of her financial prosperity. The Bucentaur, the fleet owned by Venetian governors in ancient days, now “lies rotting unrestored” (4.93), and consequently the Adriatic becomes “spouseless” (4.91) since in the governors held a ceremony every year with his fleet to symbolize the marriage of the sea and Venice. In the relic the poet sees beyond the “withered power” of Bucentaur the glory “[w]hen Venice was a Queen with an unequal dower” (4.96-99). “Those days are gone—but Beauty still is here. / States fall—Arts fade—but Nature doth not die” (4.23-24). Byron’s pluralistic view revives all the ancient glory. Financial prosperity through seaborne trade contributes to the rise of Venice, but the wealth of the city state now “lies rotting unrestored.”

Byron’s lament for Venice works as a warning to the British Empire: “Albion! to thee: the Ocean queen should not / Abandon Ocean’s children; in the fall / Of Venice think of thine, despite thy watery wall” (4.151-53). Like Venice, the British Empire also gained prosperity through voyages, yet she might also fall as well. Wealth and military force cannot catch and maintain the immortal cultural assets, those “which hath been” and “which must be.” The “watery wall” cannot assure the safety of Britons although they claim themselves “Ocean’s children.” England had better consider the “decrepit Venice” and learn from her demise at the hands of European imperial powers (Ogden 121-22). The poet’s meditations on ocean and Venice, therefore, are meant to

alert the British Empire: power, wealth, and glory do not everlastingly bless her.

Byron the nomad finds no perpetual home, and therefore “change” predominates as the “norm” in his worldview. He illustrates the inevitable change of empire in three aspects: the irresistible revolutionary fire that can devour an empire; the constant rise and fall of empire; the insignificance of empire under the ravage of ocean. Imperialists remain blind to this commonsensical truth as they strive to expand their territories and power. Their endeavors are futile, and their ignorance of this futility is vanity.

## **B. The decentering of the imperial authority**

### **i. The prevalence of chaos**

Although the term “imperialism” emerged for the first time in the criticism of Napoleon, the study of empires “dates back to the Roman Empire” (Steinmetz 78). The earliest meaning of *imperium* means “Rome’s right to command obedience from the peoples it had subjected” (Lieven 8). In Latin, the noun *imperium* denotes “empire,” “command,” and “authority” simultaneously; the verb *imperio* means “to command” and “to rule.” Thus, the concept of “empire” in ancient Rome assumes the authority of the emperor to be self-evident and necessary. The Roman Empire, for the first time in history, united politically the whole region bordering the Mediterranean under one rule. Hence the establishment of the Roman Empire anticipates the formation of Eurocentrism. As Byron indicates, Rome is the “Mother” of European countries (4.417, 695). The centralization of power features the organization of an empire. Imperialists love earth for *their* own sake—to grab resources for *their* financial benefit, and to exploit the colonized for *their* own profit.

Ironically, the “center” of the Roman Empire failed to secure the imperial peace and order; chaos “governed” the empire for more than one thousand years. Byron’s/Harold’s pilgrimage mainly proceeds within the territory of the Roman Empire,



while he can revive her original splendor with his contrapuntal views by watching ruins and antiquities. The poet describes Rome as “[t]he Commonwealth of Kings” (4.226), insinuating the actual absence of the ultimate authority in the empire; “Kings” must fight for their sovereignty. The Roman Empire dominated Europe, but Italy was suppressed by the other European countries in the nineteenth century. The “decentering” of the imperial authority also reveals the inevitability of change.

Byron calls Rome “my country” (4.694)—this declaration represents the poet’s identification with the Roman culture<sup>11</sup> and his spiritual alienation from his homeland. Byron underwent a “decentering” process, the constant change of his “home,” and thus he perceives the same condition of the Roman Empire. Rome has changed from the center of an empire to a city of antiquities in danger of being invaded and conquered. Moreover, Byron loves Italy because of the rebellious spirit of Romans against oppression and tyranny (2.131-33): before the establishment of the empire, the Roman Republic resisted the centralization of power on a dictator, and Byron’s oppositional inclination matches this resistance. With this inclination, Byron could not bear the transformation of Rome to an empire. Rome subverted the Republic, so she had to be subverted again. Thus, he blames monarchs as the origin of wars: “Ah, Monarchs! could ye taste the mirth ye mar, / Not in the toils of Glory would ye fret; / The hoarse

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<sup>11</sup> Byron shows his identification with Rome and therefore cares about her peace: never “[s]hall foreign standard to thy walls advance”; “Oh! when the strangers pass the Alps and Po, / Crush them, ye Rocks! Floods whelm them . . .” (“The Prophecy of Dante” 2.99, 101-02). However, he yearns for universal peace—not merely the peace of Rome—and this peace must not rest on the maintenance of the imperial authority. Rome is only one of his “homes”—since the wandering poet views the whole world as his stage. Byron’s oppositional inclination pushes him to “decenter” the imperial authority. His call for the subversion of empire or for the resistance to invasion does not contradict his desire for peace: he aims at acquiring the tyranny-free peace. This echoes Rousseau’s view: “But if the wars of kings are less cruel, their peace is terrible; better be their foe than their subject” (*Emile*). He despises the “Hereditary Bondsmen” (2.720), who would rather enjoy peace in oppression. Nevertheless, Byron’s identification with Rome also exposes his complicity in imperialism, a topic that will be discussed later.

dull drum would sleep, and Man be happy yet” (1.501-03). Kings and emperors always lead nations to chaos, and thus their dethronement must be carried out.

The insistence on speaking truth challenges the authority, which “brooks no disagreement and certainly no diversity”; a “secular” or an “amateur” critic like Byron must uphold “[u]ncompromising freedom of opinion and expression” (Said, *Representations of the Intellectual*). His identification with Rome does not prevent him from pointing out the irresistible decentering of the empire. Chaos prevails in the process of decentering, and the poet does not shun this “truth” in his criticism. His “patriotic” passion for Rome prompts him to speak truth to her, to ridicule the oppressive monarchy, and to illustrate the oppositional spirit as the true glory of a nation. With this insistence, he speaks the same truth to the Napoleonic Empire.

## **ii. The loss of the central ideal**

The association of Rousseau and Napoleon with the image of fire suggests their toppling impact on Europe (see Chapter Two); in addition, this image also insinuates the loss of the central ideal in the Napoleonic Empire. Born for opposition, Byron adamantly affirms the necessity of freedom and independence. His belief in liberty and autonomy grew because of his connection with the Whigs; the Whigs took it for granted that the forces of liberty “were locked in a long struggle with the powers of oppression” (Kelsall, “Byron’s politics” 45). The Whigs claimed themselves “the friends of the people,” and usually opposed the Crown. This claim may incur the anti-imperialist tendency in Byron, as the narrator in “Don Juan” claims to war against “every despotism in every nation” (9.192). As Rome abandoned the republic and became an empire, Napoleon betrayed Rousseau’s revolutionary ideal and turned out to be an emperor. Therefore, Napoleon’s betrayal of this ideal—the inviolability of individual freedom and independence—becomes the target of his criticism. Byron’s “revelation” of the truths about Rome and Napoleon means to restore the ideal, to

decenter the decentering forces.

Rousseau's revolutionary fire becomes the sheer power of destruction at the hand of Napoleon:

But good with ill they also overthrew,  
Leaving but ruins, wherewith to rebuild  
Upon the same foundation, and renew  
Dungeons and thrones, which the same hour refilled,  
As heretofore, because Ambition was self-willed. (3.774-78)

The "Ambition" refers to Napoleon's. Fire never distinguishes "good" and "ill"; it devours everything before its extinguishment. As Napoleon ascended to the throne, the revolutionary fire lost the ideal of defending the personal liberty and independence—the "good with ill" were persecuted just as they had been before the revolution. Napoleon put his enemies into dungeons and pushed his relatives to thrones with the intention to enhance his power and authority. This "centralization" of his personal power oddly initiated the disintegration of his empire since this endeavor consequently arose more resistance and counterattack. Inspired by Rousseau's ideal that human beings are born free and equal, he then discarded this ideal as he attempted to dominate the whole Europe. Byron's comment on Rousseau can also be applied to Napoleon: with strong passion he assumed "the imperial mien" to "shake again the world, the Thunderer of the scene" (3.323-24); yet he was predominated by his strong passion "as a tree / On fire by lightning" (3.734-35). He vanquished his vassals and many "astounded kingdoms" (3.329-33), and could "crush, command, rebuild" an empire (3.338). Many European countries became decentered and chaotic after Napoleon's invasion. Thence, Rousseau "decentered" the French monarchy with his eloquence; Napoleon started his enterprise by exalting Rousseau's ideal, but later Rousseau was "decentered" in the Napoleonic Empire; finally, Napoleon was deposed

and exiled. The whole revolution proceeds as a process of “decentering.” George Orwell brilliantly names the domineering pig “Napoleon” in *Animal Farm* and teases his betrayal of Rousseau’s ideal with the revised Seventh Commandment: “ALL ANIMALS ARE EQUAL BUT SOME ANIMALS ARE MORE EQUAL THAN OTHERS.” The name “Napoleon” turns out to symbolize a traitor, a decentering force.

The decentering of the imperial authority is also symbolized in Napoleon’s own decline and fall.<sup>12</sup> He fell because he failed to govern his “pettiest passion” and to “curb the lust of War” (3.339, 341). He is portrayed as a wounded eagle:

In “pride of place” here last the Eagle flew,  
Then tore with bloody talon the rent plain,  
Pierced by the shaft of banded nations through;  
Ambition’s life and labours all were vain—

He wears the shattered links of the World’s broken chain. (3.158-62)

Napoleon struggled to stay in his “pride of place” in vain. As the “center” of his empire, he could not maintain the peace and order in either his heart or his domain. As the “fool of false dominion” (4.802), he achieved nothing with battles. In the battlefield of Waterloo, finally, only “an Empire’s dust” remains (3.145-53)—his life and labors “all were vain.” Wars and conquests, far from liberating people and promoting national independence, injured him severely and deprived him of his freedom—a fact implied with the image of “the World’s broken chain.” The poet

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<sup>12</sup> Just as things of empire falls apart, its “center,” Napoleon the emperor himself, cannot hold his own passion and fate. He owns “conflicting energies without a nucleus” (Hill 129). The passion to conquer more lands means madness in Byron’s view, as he describes the ambition of Alexander the Great as “[t]he madman’s wish” (“The Age of Bronze” 34). Madness represents the “decentering” of one’s reason and thought, the inability to make sound and valid judgment. In addition, Byron ends his “Ode to Napoleon Buonaparte” with the glorification of Washington, and thus “decenters” Napoleon and derides imperialism. The poet believes that only democracy can beat tyranny: “And Washington, the tyrant-tamer, wake, / To bid us blush for these old chains, or break” (“The Age of Bronze” 388-89).

honestly presents the decentering of his idol since he could not tolerate Napoleon's "decentering" of Rousseau's revolutionary ideal.

### iii. Byron's glorification of marginal figures

Harold's pilgrimage itself displays a "decentering" perspective toward empire. Byron "immortalized the gesture of escapism" in "Childe Harold" and "Don Juan" (Makdisi, "Romantic cultural imperialism" 619). His "escape" from his homeland broadened his horizon and then nourished his "worldliness." Empires, either East or West, are equally reprehensible for incurring disasters; imperialists, either oriental or occidental, must not be treated as the "center" of human history. Harold's pilgrimage is therefore culturally symbolic: he "escapes" from the "center" of the British Empire and resists Eurocentrism in his crossing between cultures. This "cultural fluidity and movement" does not guarantee any "shelter" for the wanderer and tends to negate the empire's opposition to other cultures (Makdisi, "Romantic cultural imperialism" 619). Exile nurtured Byron's decentering perspective and worldliness. This outsider, with his worldliness, sees more than Eurocentric imperialists. The true glory belongs to great masters, who were usually exiled and excluded among their contemporaries.

Therefore, Byron praises the cultural achievement of Rome more than he condemns her imperialism. Such an achievement depends mostly on "marginal" figures from various generations. "Byron's transhistorical identification with these poets derived from a self-consciously historicised sense of alienation from his own time and native land" (Halmi 25). Now "Rome is as the desert" (4.726)—gone is the imperial glory; Roman culture is widely regarded as a valuable heritage because of Cicero, Virgil, Livy, and many others—"these shall be / Her resurrection; all beside—decay" (4.734-36). Culture will last longer than imperialism, while the memory about Rome depends on the "marginalized" masters. Most of his alter egos are either artists or fighters for freedom—they are characterized as rebellious to tyranny (see Chapter

Two). While traveling in Italy, Byron is attracted by those who were marginalized by their contemporaries: Dante, Ariosto, Tasso, Galileo, Scipio, and Brutus. For the Romans, “Tasso is their glory and their shame” (4.316)—glory, because of his masterpieces; shame, because of his persecution at the hands of Alfonso II. Now the tyrant has long been forgotten, but the tortured master becomes “Victor unsurpassed in modern song” (4.346). For their contemporaries, these marginalized figures were “absent” from the mainstream culture and were never glorified in their homeland while they were alive; yet for later generations, their achievements represent the “presence” of the Roman culture. Dante was banished from Florence, while Brutus was hailed as the “immortal Exile” (4.529). Their “mighty dust” (4.523) may be easily overlooked, but their impacts are indeed too “mighty” to be neglected. Byron’s glorification of those marginal figures serves as a strategy to “decentralize” emperors and empires. These figures suffered from tyranny, and Byron usually characterizes them as fighters for freedom. Such a characterization stems from Byron’s oppositional inclination and affirms their resistant spirit (see Chapter Three). Artists—not monarchs and politicians—must stay at the “center” of our perception,<sup>13</sup> and represent the forces of culture to resist imperialism.

#### **iv. Byron’s attention to the neglected and the oppressed**

In Chapter Three, Byron’s attention to the oppressed is treated as his affiliation with others and as the manifestation as his worldliness. This attention, furthermore, also works as his approach to “decenter” empire. In Waterloo, while most contemporary British writers extolled Wellington’s victory, Byron “evokes the reader’s

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<sup>13</sup> Byron asserts that poets and patriots “will arise, though Empires fall” (“Answer to a Beautiful Poem” 1.16). For the same reason, he grieves for the death of Sappho, but appears indifferent to the battlefields of Actium, Lepanto, and Trafalgar (2.355-69); brave men and traditional heroes “shone not on the poet’s page, / And so have been forgotten . . .” (“Don Juan” 1.36-37).

sympathy, primarily for the victims of war”—this is “a shared, collective melancholia for the complex trauma that Waterloo brought about” (Csengei 93). In his travels, the poet never extols the imperial glory and Wellington’s feat<sup>14</sup>; his admiration of Napoleon does not stir him to mention the emperor’s contribution to Europe, either. More remarkable and eye-catching is his sympathy for the neglected and the oppressed.

Hence, Byron again demonstrates his worldliness by embracing all oppressed nations, desiring “to be a symbol, the savior of an oppressed people” (Strand 528). He claims to love Venice even more when the city is “in her day of woe” (4.161)—that is, when she loses her independence and becomes a part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.<sup>15</sup> He laments for the sufferings of Portuguese people under the dominance of the Roman Catholic Church (1.333-41). Byron declares that the woes of Greece will still pervade his poetry (2.751). When the Ottoman Empire dominated Greece, European travelers there found the local inhabitants “coarse,” “brutish,” and ignorant of their cultural heritage (Kelsall, *Byron’s Politics* 22) so that the rest of Europe “deemed the Greeks unfit for liberation from Turkish tyranny” (Coole 153). Byron negates this Eurocentric misconception by praising Greeks’ victory over the Persian invasion: the “boundless fame” of Marathon depends on the Persians’ bowing “beneath the brunt of Hellas’ sword” (2.839-41). Marathon “became a magic word” since it incurs the vision of the war: “The camp, the host, the fight, the Conqueror’s career” (2.845).<sup>16</sup> Finding some “Hereditary Bondsmen” (2.720), Byron intends to push them

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<sup>14</sup> Byron instead mocks Wellington by spelling his name as “Villainton” (“Don Juan” 9.1). As “the best of cut-throats,” this general gained abundant profits from the Battle of Waterloo (“Don Juan” 9.25-32). Though praised as the “Saviour of the Nations” and “Europe’s Liberator,” Wellington still failed to save the “enslaved” continent (“Don Juan” 9.39-40).

<sup>15</sup> This resembles Byron’s declaration of his love of Ireland though this is not his native land: he would defend her from “misfortune and tyranny” (“The Irish Avatar” 102-110).

<sup>16</sup> Marathon symbolizes freedom in Byron’s poetry: standing there, he would not become a slave, while Greece for him “might still be free” (“Don Juan” 3.701-06).

to the “center” of international politics by blaming them for not resisting the Ottoman Empire: they endure in the “bondsman’s peace,” and “wield the slavish sickle, not the sword” to the tyrant (2.786-88).<sup>17</sup> The oppressed people can acquire freedom only through the “decentering” of their oppressors—a sacred truth held to be self-evident and universally valid by the poet. The neglected and the oppressed, not the imperial heroes and conquerors, always deserve our attention.

Chaos and the loss of ideal can decenter an empire; the marginal figures, the neglected, and the oppressed are all foregrounded in Byron’s view—this is one way of the exile’s proposal of “truth” to write back to empire. The imperial glory means nothing when compared to the achievements of artists or juxtaposed with the sufferings of numerous victims. The world presented in “Childe Harold” features neither heroic deeds nor royal splendor. The poet’s insistence on opposing empire qualifies him as a critic, who, though politically and socially marginalized, cannot “be co-opted by governments or corporations,” while their *raison d’etre* is “to represent all those people and issues that are routinely forgotten or swept under the rug” (Said, *Representations of the Intellectual*). Instead, for Byron the critic, it is the empire that must be swept under the rug.

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<sup>17</sup> His eagerness to rescue the Greeks is vividly presented:

What, silent still? and silent all?  
Ah! no;--the voices of the dead  
Sound like a distant torrent’s fall,  
And answer, “Let one living head,  
But one arise,--we come, we come!”

‘T is but the living who are dumb. (“Don Juan,” 3.731-36)

Byron here calls for the Greeks’ resistance against the Turkish Empire. The first step is to break the universal silence to the hegemony and centralization of the empire. Silence means their acceptance of being marginalized and persecuted. He believes that the patriots can enjoy the eternal fame “though Empires fall” (“Answer to a Beautiful Poem” 1.13-16). The patriots, the fighters for national independence and freedom, are venerated as the “center” of history.



## **C. Heterogeneity and multiplicity**

### **i. Heterogeneity and multiplicity as the norm of empire**

#### **a. The lack of unity because of decentering**

A decentering situation necessarily assumes a world of heterogeneity and multiplicity—a condition that imperialists, with their centralization of official power and their hegemonic domination, cannot accept or may attempt to eliminate.<sup>18</sup> The lack of a center means the absence of an ultimate authoritative power, while consequently diverse forces may vie with one another. Despite its strict hierarchical social structure, its assumed “unity,” and its pervasive governance, an empire can hardly eradicate its racial and cultural hybridity, nor can it establish and maintain a form of uniform, stable society.

Byron’s travel, a form of border-crossing, fostered his experiences of cultural interactions and his observations of heterogeneity and multiplicity. This “travel” is both geographical and historical: Byron’s view embraces both space and time since he sees various areas of Europe as well as different ages of its history. Cultural or social monolithism is absent in his perceptions of the world, whereas diversity has always been prevailing in Europe from the ancient time. The lands he traveled belonged exclusively to the territory of the Roman Empire, and in the early nineteenth century they were dominated by the British Empire, the Napoleonic Empire, and the Ottoman Empire. These lands have never witnessed the scene of cultural and social unification. The Roman Empire was a land of “Freedom—Faction—Fame—and Blood” (4.1009).

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<sup>18</sup> In Byron’s view, tyranny or hegemony deprives people of their liberty and independence, and poets of their inspiration (Byron, “The Prophecy of Dante” 3.80-86). It suppresses various “alien voices” to maintain the stability and authority of the imperial regime, while a contrapuntal perception assumes the affiliation and interaction of the alien voices. Therefore, tyranny and Byron’s contrapuntal insight are mutually incompatible.

This comment reveals the civilized and barbarian aspects of Rome.<sup>19</sup> Under the impact of Roman imperialism, the conquerors established glorious culture, as the ruins manifest, but also turned the world into a “wide den” (4.1305). He praises the creativity of Cicero (4.1007-08) and the achievement of Trajan (4.999), but he also criticizes its political and social disorder (4.1014-17)—in short, Rome embraces both culture and anarchy. Likewise, the “wrongs” of the empire ring in Europe (4.416); it is “Mother of Arts” and “of Arms” (4.417), meaning that it combines civilization and barbarism, while it guarded European civilization and now still guides the Europeans (4.418). The empire fell at the hands of the European barbarians, while they must repent for this “parricide” (4.421-23): Rome was subverted by the barbarians, who also “inherited” the Roman culture by embracing both her “Arts” and “Arms.” This situation resembles that described by Yeats: “Things fall apart; the center cannot hold; / Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world” (“The Second Coming” 3-4). The “Mother” and her children are never culturally monolithic. Byron’s meditation on the history of Ancient Rome yields a picture of cultural diversity. This corresponds to Daniel’s vision of the Roman Empire in the Old Testament: “And as the toes of the feet [of a great image] were part of iron, and part of clay, so the kingdoms shall be partly strong, and partly broken” (Daniel 9:42). The strength and weakness of the Roman Empire is disclosed in Harold’s contrapuntal view nurtured by his “pilgrimage.” Rome, Italy, and Europe are never culturally unified.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> The social and cultural diversity of Rome is also pointed out in “The Prophecy of Dante”: The “gay, the learned, the generous, and the brave” may appear in Rome together with conquerors and discoverers of new worlds (3.44-47). The “conquerors and discoverers” also crossed the border of their indigenous cultures and promoted cultural interactions.

<sup>20</sup> The heterogeneous cultural background challenges the validity of Eurocentrism. Byron tends to treat Italy as “a problematic national and political entity”; he conceives it as “culturally hybrid, as both Oriental and Occidental” (Ogden 116-17). Hence, Eurocentric critics would not regard Italy as a part

Although Europe has often been treated as Christendom, Christianity has never really “unified” Europe. Although Roman Catholicism still prevails Europe (4.419-20), Byron sees a land ridden with religious conflicts. In his vision, St. Peter’s Basilica in Vatican is not only the center of the Catholic faith but also the execution ground of the apostles such as Peter and Paul: “Christ’s mighty shrine above His martyr’s tomb” (4.1371). Likewise, Hagia Sophia in Istanbul, the capital of the Eastern Roman Empire (also called the Byzantium Empire), is an Eastern Orthodox Church and a mosque where “the usurping Moslem prayed” (4.1377). “Rome was, then, like ancient Britain, a juxtaposition of the Christian and pagan, of the pure and the savage: a union of the Gothic with the classical”—yet “its dialogue with the present was forever fluctuating and changing . . .” (Groom 49). In other words, Catholicism, growing as a form of imperialist culture, may betray Christ’s teachings; pagan beliefs may threaten the survival of the Christian belief. Pure Christianity did not exist in ancient Rome, while Christian and pagan beliefs have coexisted in Europe more than a thousand years. The “dialogue” between the past and the present highlights

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of Europe. For Byron, the separation between the East and the West is not absolute (Ogden 118). Neither the East nor the West exist as a purely homogeneous entity, while Italy in Byron’s eyes features a hybrid picture of culture. In this hybrid picture, Venice in Byron’s works appear ambiguous: in “The Giaour” it is western, and in “Beppo” it becomes “a cultural hybrid of East and West”—hence, this city emerges as a mixture of the Occidental and the Oriental; moreover, this “cultural hybrid” suggests that the frontiers between East and West were blurred and that the assumed superiority of Europe is called into question (Ogden 124). Byron’s residence in Venice “enabled him to cultivate further both his ‘Occidental’ and ‘Oriental’ identities, making it possible for him to let grandiose *palazzi* in the manner of an English imperialist . . .” (Ogden 131). In this hybrid environment, it is absurd to insist on a Eurocentric view—the West is culturally superior to the East. Besides, Byron associates England and Venice: both maritime powers would never flourish without the resources from the East. This relationship exposes the insufficiency of the West: the imperial powers are not essentially superior to the East. Besides, none of Byron’s works show that Europeans are culturally superior to Asians (Makdisi, “Romantic cultural imperialism” 619). The British Empire relies on the East to maintain its place as a mighty western regime. Byron’s depictions of Venice, in brief, upsets Eurocentrism and negates the superiority of the West. Cultural and social hybridity prevail as Byron the exile recognizes.

“decentering” as the norm of European history. The past is merely the rehearsal for the present and the future.

**b. The coexistence of the sublime and the beautiful**

Byron judges that nothing can be compared with St. Peter’s Basilica, which integrates sublimity and beauty: what could be “[o]f a sublime aspect? Majesty— / Power—Glory—Strength—and Beauty all are aisled” (4.1384-85). The Old Basilica was first built under the command of Emperor Constantine the Great, while the architecture that Byron describes was being constructed from 1506 to 1626, with Michelangelo, Raphael, and numerous other artists as the contributors. Thus, inevitably diverse is its artistic style that echoes the cultural and social complexity of Rome. Its grandeur is not overwhelming, while its vast space “grows to harmonize” (4.1399)—a combination of the sublime and the beautiful.

The combination of these antithetical features may look queer and incredible at the first glance, since the sublime—marked by power, obscurity, privation, vastness, magnificence, pain, and infinity—“always dwells on great objects” and the beautiful “on small ones”; it is almost impossible to reconcile both ideas (Burke).<sup>21</sup> The

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<sup>21</sup> Burke’s descriptions of the sublime and the beautiful differ slightly from those of Kant: for Kant, the sublime is to be found in a “formless object” and features “boundlessness,” while the beautiful “is connected with the form of the object, which consists in having boundaries.” Burke may describe any horror-incurring object as “the sublime”; yet Kant argues that “the wide ocean, agitated by the storm, cannot be called sublime.” Moreover, Kant asserts that we must seek the beautiful in nature but the sublime “merely in ourselves and in our attitude of thought”—a distinction that Burke does not propose. Byron’s judgment of the sublime quality in St. Peter’s Basilica, therefore, matches Burke’s because Kant does not describe a building, an object with a concrete form, as “the sublime.” On the other hand, while Byron judges St. Peter’s as a mixture of the sublime and the beautiful, Kant views the same architecture as only inspiring the feeling of the sublime: “For there is here a feeling of the inadequacy of his Imagination for presenting the Ideas of a whole, wherein the Imagination reaches its maximum, and, in striving to surpass it, sinks back into itself, by which, however, a kind of emotional satisfaction is produced” (Kant). Byron’s recognition of the mixture of the sublime and the beautiful manifests his insistent perception of the contrapuntal relationships between antithetical elements.

sublime arouses astonishment and horror: “whatever is qualified to cause terror is a foundation capable of the sublime” (Burke)—as the grandeur of the basilica may awe the spectators and remind them of their insignificance. By contrast, beauty, featuring delicacy, fragility, cleanness, and elegance, brings pleasure and love without the assistance of will and reasoning: “whatever produces pleasure . . . is fit to have beauty engrafted on it” (Burke)—as the poet, under the dome, feels attracted by the “eloquent proportions” of numerous artworks. He simultaneously finds himself in the “[o]utshining and o’erwhelming edifice” (4.1411, 1418). “The fountain of Sublimity displays / Its depth, and thence may draw the mind of Man / Its golden sands, and learn what great Conceptions can” (4.1429-31). The impact of sublimity and the enjoyment of beauty coexist in his sightseeing.

On the one hand, Byron emphasizes the superiority of “Art and its great Masters” (4.1427) to imperialism in terms of influences: their achievements and “great Conceptions” will always be remembered, while empire and imperialism are doomed to be forgotten. The presence of artists now becomes far more remarkable than that of imperialists. On the other hand, this basilica, embracing the sublime and the beautiful, epitomizes Rome; the supposedly antithetical elements incur pain and pleasure respectively. Their coexistence not only parallels that of barbarism and civilization but also symbolizes the cultural heterogeneity of the Roman Empire. The Roman civilization “outshined” all her contemporary rivals, but her barbarism also “overwhelmed” all her neighboring areas. Similarly, this echoes Napoleon’s influence: the emperor “enlightened” Europe with Rousseau’s ideal and “entrapped” the continent in chaos and conflicts. The heterogeneous impact of imperialism is insinuated in the juxtaposition of the sublime and the beautiful in the basilica. Besides, the observations of the mixture of pain and pleasure also echoes his descriptions of his sufferings (see Chapter Two). Hence his experience as an exile facilitates his

awareness of the juxtaposition of heterogeneous elements in the Roman Empire. This experience enables him to discern the hybridity of empire and to display his pluralistic view. His interpretation of the Basilica echoes both his observation of the Roman Empire and his “reconstitution” of his own identity.

**c. The association of nature and culture**

Furthermore, Byron views in Rome a unique combination of nature and culture: it is “the Garden of the World, the Home / Of all Art yields, and Nature can decree,” (4.228-29), and as the paradoxical integration of different elements:

Thy very weeds are beautiful—thy waste

More rich than other climes’ fertility;

Thy wreck a glory—and thy ruin graced

With an immaculate charm which cannot be defaced. (4.231-34)

The beautiful weeds and the fertile waste belong to nature, while the wreck and the ruin manifest culture—both coexist in Rome and form “an immaculate charm.” The weeds would not appear beautiful, nor would the waste richly fertile, if the glory of the ruin did not stand with them—while the glory of those ruins would be diminished without the weeds and waste. This nature-culture association symbolizes the essential hybridity of the empire as well.

The dichotomy between nature and culture has been absent in non-Western discourse (Descola; Hallowell; Howell; Ingold; Strathern), while in western modern texts this dichotomy contradicts “the actual trafficking between the two spheres” (McLean 215) and arouses criticisms (Deleuze; Haraway; Serres; Stengers). Therefore, the mixture and interaction of both forces, not their separation, must be treated as the norm.<sup>22</sup> Byron’s descriptions of Rome correspond to the argument that

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<sup>22</sup> The nature-culture dichotomy in the romantic age stems from Rousseau’s philosophy: “God makes

creativity embraces “both the natural and cultural realms” (McLean 216). For him, nature and culture may be fundamentally different but not antithetical or conflictual. Rome, though no longer the center of an empire, has witnessed the rise and fall of many imperial forces; the association of diverse elements becomes inevitable and irresistible. Her “immaculate charm” would be decreased without the coexistence of nature and culture. In addition, as it has been argued earlier, empire appears insignificant before ocean, a symbol of nature, while imperialism is overwhelmed by art and artists, the soul of culture. Byron’s contrapuntal insight perceives the submission of Rome to nature and culture, not to imperialism.

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all things good; man meddles with them and they become evil”; human beings “will have nothing as nature made it”; the social conditions “would stifle nature” (*Emile*). Nature as what “God makes” refers to the phenomena of the physical world on the one hand and the innate qualities of a person on the other. Humanity is presumed to oppose nature, and therefore culture, the human achievement, must be “evil.” Rousseau believes that humanity endures the conflicts between both forces (*Emile*). Nature and culture are regarded as antithetical for “green writers” in the nineteenth century (Hubbell, “Question” 14). This worship of nature and denouncement of culture also prevail in Wordsworth’s poetry. Wordsworth’s glorification of nature often accompanies or implies his rejection of and contempt for culture; consequently, with the great influence of this poet laureate, the nature-culture dichotomy is usually taken for granted in many comments on romantic poetry. As he complains that “[t]he world is too much with us,” he means to expose the degeneration of humanity in culture to the extent that “[l]ittle we see in nature that is ours” (“The world is too much with us” 1-3). “Books,” the products of culture, stir “a dull and endless strife” and science and art amount to nothing but “barren leaves”; on the other hand, the “woodland linnet,” a symbol of nature, brings sweet music and wisdom—in short, nature as our teacher can enlighten us about humanity and morality more “[t]han all the sages can” (“The Tables Turned” 9-12, 29-30, 21-24). Nature for Wordsworth means “all in all” as he becomes “[a] worshipper of Nature” (“Tintern Abbey” 76, 153). An adult perceives the fading of the light of nature since “Shades of the prison-house”—that is, the corruption from culture—have haunted the growing adolescent (“Ode: Intimations of Immortality” 67-76). Luke, Michael’s son, “in the dissolute city gave himself / To evil courses,” while Michael’s “unfinished Sheep-fold” still appears pathetically powerful by “the boisterous brook of Green-head Gill” (“Michael” 451-54, 491-92). Wordsworth appreciates and delights in nature but escapes as a “discontented sojourner” from “the vast city,” a symbol of culture, while the large city is merely a “turbulent world / Of men and things” (*The Prelude* of 1850 1.1-8; 8.71-72). By contrast, Byron does not accept the Wordsworthian separation of nature and culture. Chapter Five will further explore this topic.

**ii. The self-subversion of empires and imperialists: The contrapuntal view on empire**

**a. The revelation of irony to resist empire**

The recognition of the heterogeneous reality, moreover, exists as the basis of Byron's contrapuntal insight. "Contrapuntal" always presumes the interdependence and cooperation of at least two independent melodies. The decentering empire, though heterogeneous and chaotic, does not haunt the exile in emptiness; rather, the exile can mock imperialism by highlighting the association of some contradictory or antithetical forces. Imperialism exalts monologism (such as Eurocentrism), monolithic authority, and hierarchical society (marked by a strict self-other dichotomy). By contrast, the contrapuntal view emphasizes the dialogue between/among disparate voices—a relationship usually suppressed in imperialism. This view does not aim at excluding the authoritative voice, but to highlight the coexistence and interaction between/among diverse voices and to create some meanings accordingly. The decentering of the authority merely aims to eliminate its hegemony and self-aggrandizement, not its existence. Civilization and barbarism, Christianity and pagan belief, sublimity and beauty, nature and culture all contributed to the formation of the Roman culture. These forces prevailed beyond the control of the imperial authority.

Byron excels in satire because of his keen perception of irony in this world. In other words, he discloses the disparity or contrast between the past and the present or the synchronicity of some antithetical elements. The contrapuntal view focuses on "connectedness," on intertwined experiences, past and present" (Bilgin 5-6). Imperialism means tyranny, and tyranny itself distorts humanity. This distortion does not allow the existence of challenging forces which highlights the association of past and present or of various voices. One strategy to write back to empire for Byron includes the manifestation of this distortion.



The association of “wisdom” and “war” is emphasized in Byron’s meditation on the broken Athenian temple: Athena’s paradoxical status may symbolize the situation of Greek culture (see Chapter Two). Her temple, “once Ambition’s airy hall” (2.48), conveys some truth about imperialism as well: both “wisdom” and “war” characterize Athena and imperialism. Imperialists mean to cultivate the “inferior” conquered people by “enlightening” them, and simultaneously to oppress them by waging wars. The Parthenon at Athens, “the origin of civilization,” has spread “through an imperial expansion justified by an enlightened understanding of civic freedom” (Martin 85). Yet this “Ambition” fails to maintain the subsistence of Alexander’s empire, as the ruin of Athena’s temple signifies. Despite the splendor of this empire, the zenith of Greek imperialism, Byron laments that “Even Gods must yield—Religions take their turn: / ’Twas Jove’s—’Twas Mahomet’s—and other Creeds / Will rise with other years . . .” (2.23-25). Byron’s temporal consciousness—the contrast between the past and the present—exposes the inevitable rise and fall of empires. Greece has been conquered by Romans and Turks after the fall of Alexander. The conquerors never formed affiliation with the local people; they usually destroyed the local culture. Athena’s wisdom might facilitate the Greek’s invasion as Alexander was expanding his empire, but it did not enlighten him to see his own finitude (in the sense of the Socratic awareness of one’s ignorance) and the immorality of imperial invasion. The Turks merely attempted to replace the Greek heritage with the Muslim tradition, while “other Creeds”—the European imperialists—suppressed the Ottoman Empire. Greece witnessed the clashes of heterogeneous cultures.<sup>23</sup> History has proven that the conquerors’ “victories” never guarantee the permanent peace and order of an empire.

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<sup>23</sup> Byron judges that “the arts of War and Peace” grew in Greece (“Don Juan” 3.691)—a land that embrace heterogeneous elements and experience conflicts of various camps.

“Wisdom” and “war” can be suppressed or manipulated by imperialists; empire may conquer the other nations and be conquered eventually. Humanity, under such a circumstance, undergoes persecution. The values of “wisdom” and “war,” when placed in the imperialist enterprise, become limited, unreliable, and futile at last. Neither can stabilize and preserve the changing, decentered empire—a bitter lesson revealed in the contrapuntal view.

### **b. The heterogeneous situation of Napoleonic Empire**

Byron’s contrapuntal perception also reveals the irony and self-subversion of the Napoleonic empire. The relationship between Athena and Alexander resembles that between Rousseau and Napoleon: the philosopher extolled revolutionary ideals (wisdom), while the emperor manipulated these ideals in his policy (wars). The emperor brought “liberty to subjugated peoples or as the foundation of a new imperialism at the service of a titanic egoism. Napoleon fulfilled freedom but also betrayed this ideal” (Clubbe, “Byron, Napoleon” 191). “Napoleon’s fight against tyranny” became “a war for imperialism” (Watkins, *Social* 20). He subverted the revolutionary spirit: French Revolution broke out with the motto: liberty, equality, fraternity. Yet Napoleon’s strong passion to promote these ideals brings disasters to neighboring countries: for Spanish people at the invasion of the French army, “all must shield their all, or share Subjection’s woes” (1.359). The *realpolitik* of Napoleonic Empire mocks Rousseau’s philosophy in Byron’s perception. The emperor might be wise enough to win many wars but was not wise enough to secure his power and glory.

Like the Roman Empire, the Napoleonic Empire is also marked by “a profound heterogeneity” (Keen 210). The areas—Portugal, Spain, France—through which Byron travelled had been occupied by Rome and were dominated by Napoleon. The poet notices the “ruined Splendour” of landscape in Portugal (1.273), where Byron laments for the sufferings of Portuguese queen, Maria I (1.333-41). The queen under

the threat of Napoleon became “ruined,” but she still attempted to maintain her royal “splendor.” Many Portuguese people, under the dominance of the Roman Catholic Church, Napoleon, and Britons, were killed and persecuted. The sight of a dome reminds Byron of blood, yet it coexists with “sweetness” and “life” (1.349-50). Byron juxtaposes the beautiful landscape and the suffering people under tyranny, a queer but realistic combination meant to shock the readers and especially the imperialists. In Sevilla, comparably, a rustic farmer witnesses his desolate vineyard in the “hot breath of War” (1.497-98), but a “lusty muleteer” sings in a pleasing tone (1.504-07) despite the loss of the national independence.<sup>24</sup> A local peasant introduces the scenes of battles “with triumphant boast” (1.519-20) though his country is predominated by Napoleon. Under Napoleon’s reign, in addition, the French people “mourn, but smile at length—and, smiling, mourn” (3.280).<sup>25</sup> Paradoxical feelings are emphasized in Byron’s perception of the land overwhelmed by imperialism. Heterogeneity, not unity and consistency, exists as the norm of empire.

### **c. The conquerors becoming the conquered**

The heterogeneity of empires is also reflected in the fate of their monarchs. By portraying Napoleon’s paradoxical personality and ironic fate, Byron also insinuates the inevitable downgrading of the emperor. The poet always portrays Napoleon with

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<sup>24</sup> This muleteer chants “Viva el Rey” (1.508) to extol Fernando VII (1784-1833), a Spanish king. He was dethroned by Napoleon in 1808 but restored in 1813. After Byron’s death, however, the king turned to oppress revolutionaries, who had supported Fernando before Napoleon’s fall.

<sup>25</sup> The image of France is downgraded under Napoleon’s dominance: the “brightest or blackest” aspect of France is filled with Napoleon’s name (Byron, “Napoleon’s Farewell” 3-4). France demonstrates paradoxical features under Napoleon’s sovereignty. Napoleon made France “the gem and the wonder of earth,” but simultaneously the country decayed and sunk (Byron, “Napoleon’s Farewell” 10-12). The glory and decline coexist: the triumph in battles meant the loss in “strife with the storm”; “Then the Eagle, whose gaze in that moment was blasted / Had still soared with eyes fixed on Victory’s sun!” (Byron, “Napoleon’s Farewell” 13-14, 15-16). France glorifies and abandons freedom, a heterogeneous situation that characterizes the Napoleon’s imperialism.

double images: “antithetically mixed” character (3.317), “[e]xtreme in all things” (3.320), his “riddle personality” contains unresolved contradictions (Barrett 298); his “most glamorous aspect” is “his flagrant duality” (Christensen 72; see Chapter Two). Napoleon promoted his “revolution” with unparalleled passion, but he accepted his downfall with incomparable tranquility (3.352). Byron dramatizes the rise and fall of Napoleon by highlighting the exaggerative contrast: like “a tower upon a headlong rock,” Napoleon exists “to stand or fall alone” (3.361-62). As the Earth trembles before him, Napoleon behaves like a God, while all the kingdoms worship him accordingly (3.325-33)<sup>26</sup>; with a Roman mind (4.804), he can boast like Julius Caesar: *Veni, Vidi, Vici* (4.811), but he also owns Vanity, “one weakest weakness (4.817). The emperor’s paradoxical personality and experience incarnate the essential heterogeneity of his empire. His ironic fate is also that of his empire; Byron’s criticism of this emperor amounts to his curse of imperialism. No leader can maintain the absolute authority; the possibility of subversion always haunts it.<sup>27</sup> The “center” of the Napoleonic Empire features heterogeneous elements.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Napoleon, Wordsworth also notices, was “publicly addressed as a Providence upon earth; styled, among innumerable other blasphemies, the supreme Ruler of things”; he “approved of the language of those who thus saluted him” (“The Convention of Cintra”).

<sup>27</sup> This echoes Byron’s judgment: A “true tyrant / Would have depopulated empires” (“Marino Faliero” 3.2.534-35).

<sup>28</sup> Byron elaborates Napoleon’s paradoxical image about his rise and fall in some other poems. The poet’s portrayal of the emperor also serves as Byron’s criticism of empire and imperialism. With Rousseau’s ideal and “unquestioned” might, Napoleon at first owned the “power to save,” but his imperialist ambition compelled him to “kill those who worshipped him” (“Ode to Napoleon Buonaparte” 14-16). Napoleon’s identity undergoes subversion:

The king of kings, and yet of slaves the slave,  
 Who burst the chains of millions to renew  
 The very fetters which his arm broke through,  
 And crushed the rights of Europe and his own,

The image of fire, in addition to symbolizing both the inevitability of change and the irresistible decentering, also suggests the paradoxical characteristics the Napoleonic Empire. Fire itself is “innately unstable and antithetical,” and indicates that the world “must always be waxing or waning, consuming or self-consuming” (Hodgson 366). This image symbolizes Napoleon’s imperialist desire: “desire runs in public life to the extreme of a Napoleon; more intimately or privately, it burns wildly in a Rousseau, whom Byron sets forth as a parallel to Napoleon” (Hodgson 366). The emperor’s paradoxical personality matches the fate of his empire. The downfall of his empire is also envisioned with the image of fire: “Even as a flame unfed, which runs to waste / With its own flickering, or a sword laid by, / Which eats into itself, and rusts ingloriously” (3.394-96). “Fire” as the emperor’s desire pushes him to expand, but the decline at the same time follows as the fire “eats into itself.” The imperial fire is “[f]atal to him who bears, to all who ever bore” (3.378). In this light, the revolutionary

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To flit between a dungeon and a throne? (“The Age of Bronze” 255-59)

With unbounded ambition, he rose “first in glory, deepest in reverse, / He tasted Empire’s blessings and its curse” (“The Age of Bronze” 94-96). Therefore, he is set in “this middle state, / Between a prison and a palace” (Byron, “The Age of Bronze” 72-73). With such an “antithetically mixed” center, the Napoleonic Empire could not claim unity, homogeneity, and stability. Napoleon humiliated the conquered kings: they, “rejoicing in their late escape / From chains, would gladly be their Tyrant’s ape” (“The Age of Bronze” 97-98). With unrivalled force, he “made monarchs draw his car”; he, “[w]hose game was Empire, and whose stakes were thrones; / Whose table Earth—whose dice were human bones” (“The Age of Bronze” 44, 51-52), fell too dramatically to be recognized: his “Eagle’s lofty rage” was “[r]educed to nibble at his narrow cage” and turned to mourn for “petty quarrels upon petty things” (“The Age of Bronze” 55-56, 61). A “tamer of the Great” became a slave whom all “could tease or irritate” (“The Age of Bronze” 67-68). His subversion has been demonstrated to the world: “By gazing on thyself grown blind, / Thou taught’st the rest to see” in his downfall that “Ambition’s less than littleness!” (“Ode to Napoleon Buonaparte” 12-13, 18). His imperial “foolish robe” will fade; as a “[v]ain forward child of Empire,” he loses all his “playthings”—his imperial glory and power (“Ode to Napoleon Buonaparte” 155-62). He sold himself “to death and shame / For a meanly royal name” (“Ode from the French” 38-41). Byron blames him: “Ill-minded man! why scourge thy kind / Who bow’d so low the knee?” (“Ode to Napoleon Buonaparte” 10-11). Napoleon’s image in Byron’s eyes usually appears subversive and self-subversive concurrently; his ironic fate parallels that of his empire.

force can be both subversive and self-subversive. Like fire itself, this force will be extinguished as it grows.

In the conflicts between empires, conquerors may turn out to be conquered. Empires cannot coexist peacefully—they tend to devour each other. No conqueror can occupy the “center” permanently, while some “decentering” force always destabilizes and subverts the authority so that the rise and fall of empire become an unchanged mode in history. Napoleon first “decentered” the old France and became the “center” of his empire, and then he was also “decentered” through his incessant military invasions. Thence, he assumed heterogeneous roles as his empire rose and fell.

Napoleon is not alone to bear a self-subversive image in Byron’s poetry. Sylla, a capable Roman general with “dictatorial wreath” (4.748), “rolled on Fortune’s wheel” (4.739) and subdued his enemies, but he also fell under Fortune’s wheel with his fame dwindled (4.749-50). Both Caesar and Pompey were “[v]ictors of countless Kings” and “puppets of a scene” (4.783). In early Roman history, both contributed to the expansion of the state with numerous conquests. Then Pompey was defeated by Julius in the Battle of Pharsalus and killed in Egypt by Achilles and Lucius Septimius. Nevertheless, Julius was later murdered under the statue of Pompey: Nemesis offered Caesar as a sacrifice to the altar of Pompey (4.777-82). Besides, Cromwell won the “double victory”—Battle of Dunbar and the Battle of Worcester—on September the third (4.764): this was also the date of his death in 1658. This coincidence renders him as a conqueror and a conquered. Byron does not present the military prowess, bravery, and intelligence of conquerors; rather, he tends to satirize them by pointing out their double images.<sup>29</sup> Since change and decentering forces predominate empire,

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<sup>29</sup> Byron likes to downgrade the imperial image of a hero or a leader. Alexander I of Russia, one of the

multiple and heterogeneous voices must prevail as well.

Byron the exile—being nomadic, decentered, and contrapuntal—observes empires as changing, decentering, and heterogeneous. The image of fire symbolizes these features: it burns down almost everything; it assumes no center; it approaches extinguishment as it grows. His verse “glows like a flame, consuming everything in its way” (Hazlitt). His observations, though politically incorrect in the age of imperialism, reveal some truths of empire and imperialists. The vanity of imperialists is exposed in their negation and neglect of these inevitable truths; Byron’s criticisms of empires also reflect his insight nourished by his exile. He foregrounds the mutability, decentering, and heterogeneity not as something exotic, but as some essential features of empires.

### **III. The futility of imperial enterprise**

#### **A. The fruitless conflicts among empires**

To compare empire to “vanity fair” denotes the excessive pride of imperialists on the one hand, and the emptiness of their enterprise on the other hand—as the word “vain” means. Byron illustrates Napoleon’s pride by describing the emperor as an eagle or God; the futility of his imperialism has been implied in his self-subversion. As an empire is changing, decentered, and heterogeneous, conflicts and destruction must haunt it. Vain is the attempt to maintain the imperial sovereignty and dominance—

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heads of the Holy Alliance, is a “coxcomb Czar, / The Autocrat of waltzes and of war! / As eager for a plaudit as a realm, / And just as fit for flirting as the helm”; the poet utters: “I’d wander / Rather a worm than such an Alexander” (“The Age of Bronze” 434-37, 478-79). Caesar, Pompey, Mahomet, and Belisarius were “heroes, conquerors, and cuckolds” (“Don Juan” 2.1643-48). The Franks “have a king who buys and sells” (“Don Juan” 3.768). To death “[s]o many conquerors’ cars were daily driven, / So many kingdoms fitted up anew” (“The Vision of Judgment” 35-36); the death of George III of Britain “made no great stir on earth” (“The Vision of Judgment” 65).

vainer is the imperialists' ignorance of the futility of imperialism.

Byron likes to ridicule the futility of imperialism.<sup>30</sup> Napoleon established the Arch of Triumph (4.823-24), but his exile finally mocks his "triumph." "Vanity" is Napoleon's weakness: "With but one weakest weakness—Vanity— / Coquettish in ambition—still he aimed— / And what? can he avouch, or answer what he claimed?" (4.817-19). Imperialism for Byron is the enterprise of pandemonium, a group of "madmen" and "fools" striving for a futile goal:

This makes the madmen who have made men mad  
By their contagion; Conquerors and Kings,  
Founders of sects and systems, to whom add  
Sophists, Bards, Statesmen, all unquiet things  
Which stir too strongly the soul's secret springs,  
And are themselves the fools to those they fool;  
Envied, yet how unenviable! what stings  
Are theirs! One breast laid open were a school  
Which would unteach Mankind the lust to shine or rule. (3.379-87)

The pride of imperialists means "madness" and "foolishness," a contagious disease that may attack various groups of people: "Founders of sects and systems," "Sophists, Bards,

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<sup>30</sup> Byron comments on the vanity of imperialist ambition as he mentions Alexander the Great, who wept when he learned that there was still a large piece of land to be conquered: "How vain, how worse than vain" ("The Age of Bronze" 33). Besides, "[t]he gory sanction of his [Caesar's] Glory stains / The rust which tyrants cherish on our chains" ("The Island" 2.322-23). After Napoleon's death, Byron considers, "Can Glory's lust / Touch the freed spirit or the fettered dust?" ("The Age of Bronze" 115-16). The "freed spirit" refers to the survived people, while the "fettered dust" means the dead who had suffered from Napoleon's tyranny. Byron "likens the triumphs of Napoleon to those of the Caesars, in light of the ultimate vanity of both" (Esterhammer 33). The emperor's "Glory" has nothing to do with either the living or the dead—it is vain to struggle for such a glory. The conquerors "waste so much gold for a little dross, / As hath been done, mere conquest to advance" ("Don Juan" 8.21-22).



Statesmen.” This “disease” turns all those involving in this enterprise into “fools.” Imperialism is self-destructive; the imperialists will be consumed by their own ambition. This awareness might dissuade people from entertaining “the lust to shine or rule”—in other words, the ambition to conquer—yet imperialists can never learn this lesson, as the subjunctive verb “would unteach” indicates. The conqueror who “surpasses or subdues mankind” must endure “the hate of those below” (3.339-400); this will be “reward the toils which to those summits led” (3.405). The collaboration of these “madmen” results in ruining the affiliation of the conquered people themselves and in establishing their hegemony. For Said, affiliation, “a feature of the text’s worldliness” (*The World* 174-75), draws us to “the location and the *locatedness* of the text’s production” (Ashcroft and Ahluwalia 25-26). It represents the true recognition of the relationship between the world and oneself. However, the “mad” imperialists ignore the changing, decentering, and heterogenous condition and intend to impose their “sects and systems” on the conquered land. The hegemonic control of empire may form a new affiliative network—in other words, oppression and resistance must coexist and form a contrapuntal relationship consequently. For the imperialists, the maintenance of their authority relies on the elimination of resistance; however, both oppression and resistance constitute the being of empire, just as “fire” symbolizes that it is consuming and self-consuming.

Imperialists may fall, but imperialism can persist. In other words, the counterpoint between oppression and resistance can hardly be destroyed. Tyranny cannot be eliminated by wars (see Chapter Three); likewise, imperialism can still ravish the world after the downfall of an imperialist. Byron calls Waterloo and the Congress a “king-making Victory” (3.153).<sup>31</sup> He was disillusioned by the political legacy

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<sup>31</sup> Byron condemns “bloody and most bootless Waterloo! / Which proves how fools may have their

promoted by Wellington in the post-war era: the Congress of Vienna restored to power the ancient regime of Austrian Empire (Ogden 120). “What! shall reviving Thralldom again be / The patched-up Idol of enlightened days?” (1.167-68). The poet feels furious about Metternich’s manipulation of European politics: he hates “proffering lowly gaze / And servile knees to Thrones” (1.170-71). The international conflicts became more complicated after the fall of Napoleon.<sup>32</sup> Napoleon fell not at the hands

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fortune too, / Won half by blunder, half by treachery” (“The Age of Bronze” 223-25). It is vain for the other imperialists to claim victory in their defeat of Napoleon. The continual imperialist oppression always indicates the persistence of resistance against it. Byron complains that after the Napoleon’s defeat,

States to be curb’d, and thoughts to be confined,  
 Conspiracy or Congress to be made—  
 Cobbling at manacles for all mankind—  
 A tinkering slave-maker, who mends old chains  
 With God and man’s abhorrence for its gains. (“Don Juan” Dedication 108-12)

Monarchies and tyranny were restored with the fall of an imperialist, and thus the Battle of Waterloo is a “king-making Victory.”

<sup>32</sup> On the one hand, the British Empire intended to grab profits after the Battle of Waterloo, as insinuated in Byron’s depiction of Wellington: “Proud Wellington, with eagle beak so curled, / That nose, the hook where he suspends the world! / And Waterloo, and trade . . .” (“The Age of Bronze” 534-36); English people “are very fond of war” (“Don Juan” 2.1245). For Byron, “England’s own imperial identity became implicated in Austria’s Italian rule” (Ogden 121). On the other hand, more imperial forces intended to aspire after the fall of Napoleon, as Byron satirizes the “victors” in the Battle of Waterloo:

The blest Alliance, which says three are all!  
 An earthly Trinity! which wears the shape  
 Of Heaven’s, as man is mimicked by the ape.  
 A pious Unity! in purpose one—  
 To melt three fools to a Napoleon. (“The Age of Bronze” 395-99)

“The blest Alliance” refers to “Holy Alliance” formed by Russia, Austria, and Prussia. The Czar Alexander declared to act on the basis of “justice, love, and peace” in dealing with international affairs. However, the three empires annexed large pieces of lands from neighboring countries after the fall of Napoleon. Their imperialist ambition did not appear less aggressive than that of Napoleon: the three monarchs, “more hungry, must have something more— / The power to bark and bite, to toss and gore” (“The Age of Bronze” 404-05). The new imperialists beat the old ones and subsequently they would also be challenged and overthrown. The oppression-resistance “counterpoint” always exists.

of democracy, but of other imperialists. Indeed, “the defeat of Napoleon merely replaced one kind of tyranny with another” (Hill 128). Byron views the Battle of Waterloo as “the exchange of one form of tyranny for another”: “England may have succeeded in ridding the world of Napoleon, but it has put another despot in his place” (Wohlgemut 104). Byron speaks to Napoleon: “’Tis but a worthless world; / So hath it proved to thee [Napoleon], and all such lot who choose” (3.359-60)—in other words, *Vanitas Vanitatum* (Vanity of vanities) for all empires. The ideals of the French Revolution were abandoned, since the Bourbons were restored to the throne of France. Revolution and imperialism formed a subversive picture of Europe in the early nineteenth century.

As Byron displays both optimistic and pessimistic views on the quest for freedom (see Chapter Three), he also highlights the coexistence of imperialism and the resistance to it. Since imperialism continually prevails, the resistance to it will never pass away. The opposition forces remain unconquerable and indomitable by tyranny—this is the true glory of the quest for freedom. In other words, imperialism and its counter force form a “counterpoint” in human history: the vanity of empire versus the glory of resisting its tyranny. Byron highlights this contrapuntal relationship as he meditates on the true glory of resistance to imperialism:

While Waterloo with Cannæ’s carnage vies,  
Morat and Marathon twin names shall stand;  
They were true Glory’s stainless victories,  
Won by the unambitious heart and hand  
Of a proud, brotherly, and civic band,  
All unbought champions in no princely cause  
Of vice-entailed Corruption . . . . (3.608-14)

Byron contrasts Waterloo and Cannæ on the one hand and Morat and Marathon on the other: the former two wars represent sheer power struggles, while the latter, the fights for liberty and autonomy. In 216 B.C., Hannibal, an outstanding general of Carthage, defeated Roman armies in Cannæ. This victory, however, did not stop the expansion of Rome—hence, it is similar to the Battle of Waterloo in the sense that imperialism still predominated Europe after one monarch’s failure and exile. His nephew Louis-Napoleon Buonaparte, the first President of France and then Napoleon III, seized power by force in 1851 and founded the Second Empire with the intention to continue his uncle’s business. On the other hand, the Battle of Morat was fought near Bern in 1476 between Charles the Bold, the Duke of Burgundy, and the Swiss Confederates. Charles adopted aggressive expansionist politics and thus won from the Swiss a nickname “the Turk in the West.” His ambition was thwarted by the Swiss army though Burgundy had mustered a superior military force; therefore, the Duchy of Burgundy fell, and the Swiss secured their autonomy and freedom. The Swiss Confederates resisted the invasion of Burgundy just as the ancient Greek people counterattacked the assault of the Persian Empire for maintaining their independence. The close association of imperialism and the resistant force catches Byron’s attention. His praise of “opposition” coexists with his condemnation of imperialism. Wars can be justified for the cause of liberty, not for that of of imperial hegemony. The “true Glory’s stainless victories” and the “vice-entailed Corruption” form a contrapuntal relationship.

Yet Byron does not propose any possible synthesis of this contrapuntal relationship. This contrapuntal perception saves Byron’s judgment from sheer nihilism and pessimism: vain is the imperial enterprise, but splendid is the opposition to it. Imperialists may still prosper after the “king-making victory,” but the fighters for freedom also persevere. The fulfillment of one’s freedom relies on the persistent

resistance to tyranny. As Byron feels pessimistic about the impossibility to eliminate imperialism, he also proclaims the undying, unyielding opposition to its tyranny. His paradoxical feelings stem on his recognition of their contrapuntal relationship. This paradoxical awareness is Byronic contrapuntal understanding of history.

## **B. Ruins as a metaphor for empires**

### **i. Ruins as a sign of the imperial fall**

In addition to “fire,” Byron also symbolizes empire with the image of “ruin.” Ruins inspire Byron’s contrapuntal insight to discern the rise and fall of ancient cultures (see Chapter Three). History is better written on the ruins than on books (4.968-69); ruins are more “eloquent” than Cicero (4.982-83). In brief, ruins display the necessity and irresistibility of change. He adores Trajan’s achievement revealed in ruins, but also laments that an emperor “yielded back his conquests” eventually (4.996-99). The rock of triumph, where the Romans glorified their heroes, and Tarpeian, where traitors were executed—both are ruins now (4.1000-04), while factions and eloquent speeches in the Forum have fallen asleep for a thousand years (4.1006-08). The futility of imperial enterprise suggests the predictable decline and fall of empire, while the existence of “ruins” proves this futility. “Man marks the earth with ruin” (4.1065)—implying that the imperial power and territory are limited by ocean, and that ruin indicates the existence of empire. Byron/Harold wanders in the realm of the Roman Empire, going from the peripheral areas (England, Portugal, Spain, Greece, Albania) to the center of the empire (Rome) at the end. Yet his perception illustrates more the empire’s “decentering” and disintegration than her power and glory.

Byron often presents the Roman Empire with broken, fragmentary images.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> In “The Prophecy of Dante” Byron describes the ruin in Rome after the attack of the barbarians (2.71-80). This doom of the “[l]one Mother of dead Empires” also haunts her “children”:

“The grandeur of Rome lives most in its ruins” (Knight 49). Calling Italia “the throne and grave of empires” (3.1027), Byron acknowledges that Rome is “[t]he fount at which the panting Mind assuages / Her thirst of knowledge” (3.1028-29), and that knowledge “[f]lows from the eternal source of Rome’s imperial hill” (3.1030). The attention to “the throne and grave of empires” conveys Byron’s contrapuntal view (the past versus the present), while the “knowledge” about the ancient Rome comes from his meditations on ruins.

## ii. Byron’s fascination with ruins because of his exile

Byron’s obsession with “loss” derives from his experience as an exile. Byron/Harold exists in a permanent displacement from his homeland. He identifies Rome as his home and country (4.694), while “home” or “native land” usually appears as ruins in his memory.<sup>34</sup> “Loss” associates Byron the exile with empire: an exile can

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Empires have mouldered from the face of earth,  
Tongues have expired with those who gave them birth,  
Without the glory such a strain can give,  
As even in ruin bids the language live. (“English Bards” 195-98)

This “lament” for empires asserts the futility of imperial enterprise by foregrounding their collapse. The poet predicts that “all empires shall expire” in fire (“The Age of Bronze” 183-84), so ruins illustrate the necessary consequence of this prediction.

<sup>34</sup> Byron glorifies Newstead, his own family estate: “fast-falling, once-resplendent dome” (“Elegy on Newstead Abbey” 1); “Hail to thy pile! More honour’d in thy fall, / Than modern mansions” (“Elegy on Newstead Abbey” 5-6); “Newstead! What saddening change of scene is thine! / Thy yawning arch betokens slow decay” (“Elegy on Newstead Abbey” 137-38). Leaving England, he imagines his homeland as a wasteland (1.128-33). Besides,

And Ruin is fixed on my tower and my wall,  
Too hoary to fade, and too massy to fall;  
It tells not of Time’s or the tempest’s decay,  
But the wreck of the line that have held it in sway. (“Newstead Abbey” 21-24)

In other words, ruins display less the invincible power of time or nature than the inevitable decline and fall of noblemen (“the wreck of the line”), the upper class in an empire. In “Don Juan,” Byron alienated nineteenth-century Britain from its own self-representation, inviting the reader to read ‘home’

never dwell in a permanent “home”; an empire cannot hold its power and stability perpetually. “Ruins,” symbolizing “loss,” enlighten the poet to interpret empire by emphasizing the “loss.” As imperialists eagerly expand their lands and gain property, Byron points out their foreseeable loss and decline with his contrapuntal view. As he travels to the southern Europe—Portugal, Spain, and Italy—Byron, like many other Britons of the romantic era, views this area as “a place of refuge and exile,” “a ruined monument to lost liberties,” and “a nidus of revolutionary fervour” (Schor 224). This area, dominated or invaded by the Napoleonic Empire, abounds in ruins and broken antiquities, which indicate the fall of ancient empires and insinuate a similar loss of the nineteenth-century empires. The existence of ruins illustrates the inevitability of change and the decentering of the imperial authority. Therefore, he observes and criticizes imperialism from the perspective of an exile, while the fragmentary images and ruins prevail and convey the irresistible loss of his own family and of the empire.

### iii. Ruins revealing “the same rehearsal of the past”

In the contrapuntal view, ruins display both the glory and decline of empire. Ruins, on the one hand, manifest the cultural glory of the empire: the “glorious Dome” has been “spared and blest by Time,” and displays “pride of Rome” (4.1308-14). The “[r]elic of nobler days, and noblest arts” are “[d]espoiled yet perfect” (4.1315-16). The imperial glory can only be resurrected in the poet’s imagination. On the other hand, the poet does not elaborate the imperial “pride” and “perfection”; rather, he emphatically delineates its disintegration:

Rome—Rome imperial, bows her to the storm,

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and ‘nation’ as a series of fragmented and misbegotten texts” (Stabler, *Cambridge* 137). The recognition of his home as a ruin suggests the possible future of the British Empire as well. The image of home as ruins haunts Byron in his perception of the other “contexts”—cultures, empires—as apparently fragmentary, broken, and lost. The “gestalt” view (see Chapter Three) can be restored only through the contrapuntal perception—to bridge the gap between “what is” and “what might have been.”

In the same dust and blackness, and we pass

The skeleton of her Titanic form,

Wrecks of another world, whose ashes still are warm. (4.411-14)

The poet discloses what common travelers may perceive: Rome has vanished into “dust and blackness” because of the unstoppable destruction by time, wars, plagues, storms, and many other disasters. The empire has almost been forgotten: it is already dead (“skeleton”), and its wrecks belong to “another world”; nevertheless, the significance of its warm “ashes” can be disclosed only through the contrapuntal insight.

Byron’s meditation on ruins of the empire reveals its inescapable disintegration. Ruins as a metaphor serve as his weapon to “write back” to imperialism. Canto IV of “Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage” focuses on the glorification of the ancient Rome and on the lament for the decline and fall of the empire. Her “Titanic form” (4.413) connotes her loss of power and authority just as the Titans in Greek mythology are overwhelmed and cast out by the Olympian deities. Roaming among “arch crushed, column strown / In fragments” (4.957-58), he discovers that “the moral of all human tales” means “the same rehearsal of the past”: a nation usually rises with freedom and glory but falls with corruption and barbarism (4.964-67). His vision of ruin and desolation parallels his “problem of loss”: Byron feels his loss of “the ability to deal with the world emotionally (thought his ‘heart’) and poetically (thought his ‘harp’)”—as he has lost his wife, daughter and reputation, the bitterness of loss haunts him; “all that is left of a previous existence is in ruins, both in the personal context and in the context of post-Napoleonic Europe” (MacLeod 261-62). In other words, the ruins of the ancient Rome anticipate the destiny of all empires in the later generations. The fugue, featuring on the counterpoint of Rome and all the other empires, emerges with the theme of “the rise and fall of empires.” “Childe Harold” avers the repeated “rehearsals” of this fugue in Europe.



Europe has always been changing and decentered, while the existence of ruins betokens the unchanged fate for all empires. Time has wronged Italy “with ten thousand rents” of its “imperial garment” (4.489-90); its decay is “still impregnate with divinity” and “revivifying ray” (4.492-94). The Roman Empire declined and fell: the poet invites readers to see the cypress and to hear the owl (4.699), both of which are images of death; the imperial glory can only be traced through “broken thrones and temples,” and this empire “at our feet” is “as fragile as our clay” (4.700-02). This lament subverts the lofty image of the empire. Rome for Byron “is first and foremost a multifarious, endless varied encounter, an experience of, a meeting with, living realities” which include “historic,” “moral,” “physical,” “sensual,” and “emotional” dimensions (Rawes, “This” 179). The revelation of the “multifarious, endless varied encounter” with “living realities” depends on contrapuntal views. History, from the past to the present, is totally disclosed before his contrapuntal perception: the “nameless column with the buried base” can speak with more eloquence than Cicero (4.982-83); the statues of St. Peter and St. Paul appear far more powerful and glorious than the arch or pillar of Titus or Trajan—symbolically, the dynamic impact of culture can “crush the imperial urn” (4.986-90). Caesar’s laurels and the “nameless column,” together with Titus and Trajan’s monuments, either disappear or crumble now because of the destruction of Time (4.984-87); such a lament implies the fragility of imperialism. If the “human tales” displayed by the ruins reveal “the same rehearsal of the past,” then the scenes in Rome now may insinuate the future of all empires. The “*living* realities” of Rome indicate the inevitability of this “rehearsal.” Besides, Rome as “[t]he field of Freedom—Faction—Fame—and Blood” has witnessed “the first hour of Empire” and the age of anarchy as well as “[t]he Goth, the Christian—Time—War—Flood, and Fire” (4.712, 1009-14)—the conqueror of Europe was conquered by natural and cultural forces as well as by barbarians and civilization. The imperial fall, “the same

rehearsal of the past,” results from the cooperation of antithetical forces.

Though wandering as an exile and calling Rome his country, Byron never forgot his homeland. His wandering and alienation do not deprive him of his memory of his homeland (see Chapter Two), while his obsession with ruins on the continent may reflect his anxiety with the future of the British Empire. Therefore, his detailed descriptions of and comments on Rome are also meant to alert Britons to the future of their empire. Like Venice, Rome may presage the downfall of the British Empire: the superpowers always lapse into “the same rehearsal of the past.” Byron’s pilgrimage reveals “a heightened awareness of the cruelty of the British government” and “a profound loss of confidence in the British political system” (Zhou 264). The ruins in Rome and Venice reveal the loss of the imperial glory, while London in the future may share the same fate. Byron’s fascination with ruins provides him a chance to display his pluralistic vision, rebuilds the context to which those ruins belong, and insinuates the inevitable collapse of empires. His contrapuntal view affiliates the past and the present and thus affirms the necessary downfall of all empires.

Byron judges the Roman Empire as the example for all empires in later generations. He mourns for Rome by emphasizing her loss and death:

The Niobe of nations! there she stands,  
Childless and crownless, in her voiceless woe;  
An empty urn within her withered hands,  
Whose holy dust was scattered long ago;  
The Scipios’ tomb contains no ashes now;  
The very sepulchres lie tenantless  
Of their heroic dwellers: dost thou flow,  
Old Tiber! through a marble wilderness?  
Rise, with thy yellow waves, and mantle her distress. (4.703-11)

In Greek mythology, Niobe loses all her children because of her pride, a sin that Rome and all her “children” also commit. “Pride” blinds Niobe to see that she and her children are simply mortals; similarly, because of their “pride,” imperialists cannot see the truth that they all yield to change, decentering, and heterogeneity, and that their ambition will end up in futility. Weeping for her children, Niobe is turned into a column of stone on Mount Sipylus; Rome crumpled and now leaves the traces of her glory in ruins and antiquities. Seeing “her glories star by star expire,” Rome is haunted by “[c]haos of ruins” now (4.714-18). “The orphans of the heart must turn to thee, / Lone Mother of dead Empires . . .” (4.695-96). This is an ironic and tricky recognition: the poet judges the Roman Empire as the origin and example of all the fallen empires, “[t]he Niobe of nations,” in later generations. The military and territorial expansion, however, is essentially imperialist invasion that has forced numerous people to live in exile. Byron as an exile yearns to turn to Rome and acknowledges the empire as his “Mother.” With contrapuntal views, Byron associates Rome with all empires in later generations; her “voiceless woe” is heard by an exile. As the “Mother” of dead empires, Rome is now “childless” in the sense that all empires are doomed to collapse. The “empty urn,” “tenantless” sepulchers, and “marble wilderness” all connote the disappearance of the imperial enterprise—only with a pluralistic vision can one detect its presence through the decayed relics and ruins. The “[c]haos of ruins” leads to “void” (4.718), which agonizes the lonely quester. Since “Rome is as the desert,” only “some false Mirage of ruin rises near” (4.726, 729). Scipio (Publius Cornelius Scipio Africanus [236 BC-183 BC]), a consul and a general in ancient Rome, defeated Hannibal in the Second Punic War and secured the stability and peace of Rome. However, he exiled himself from Rome and retired to his country seat at Liternum because of some unauthenticated accusation of bribery. His “exile” and the disappearance of his “ashes” or “holy dust” imply the incompatibility of liberty

and imperialism: Scipio the fighter for freedom cannot “dwell” in the urn or tomb provided by the empire. Freedom is absent in empire, but Byron’s contrapuntal insight foregrounds this “absence” to criticize imperialism. The “marble wilderness” was once the center of the empire, which was defended by Scipio the exile and mourned by Byron the exile; now it has been “decentered” and exiled from the world stage. Tiber, the witness of the rise and fall of the Rome, also incurs the memory of the fallen empire, and the poet wishes that this river can bring some comfort. Niobe or Rome fails to see the truth about herself, but Tiber and Byron discern her “voiceless woe.” Byron’s lament for the “Mother” of all empires emphasizes emptiness, decay, loss, and death; yet he does not mean to preach nihilism—his oppositional creativity still affirms the necessity of fighting for freedom and independence. The ruins warn the world of the futility of imperialism; by contrast, even though the ashes of Scipio have vanished, his contribution is still remembered and praised. The poet sticks to a contrapuntal presentation of the contrast between oppression (empire) and resistance against it (Scipio).

The ruin of Coliseum also signifies Rome in Byron’s contrapuntal view:

A Ruin—yet what Ruin! from its mass  
Walls—palaces—half-cities, have been reared;  
Yet oft the enormous skeleton ye pass,  
And marvel where the spoil could have appeared.  
Hath it indeed been plundered, or but cleared?  
Alas! developed, opens the decay,  
When the colossal fabric’s form is neared:  
It will not bear the brightness of the day,  
Which streams too much on all—years—man—have reft away. (4.1279-87)

The “enormous skeleton” of the Coliseum parallels the “skeleton” of the “Titanic form”

of Rome (4.413). In ancient Rome, the antiquity served as an amphitheater, an execution ground, and a stage of gladiatorial fighting—a place that linked civilization and barbarism. This link echoes the essential heterogeneity of empire. It arouses the memory of the Romans' persecution of various races. The miserable sufferings of gladiators have testified to the imperial dominance on numerous victims. Besides, “the spoil” triggers the image of Roman invasion to exotic lands; despite the abundant spoils brought back by the Roman armies, none of them can be found in the Coliseum now. The empire, which had plundered the other nations, was also invaded and “cleared”: “all have (been) reft away.” Now Rome is just like “the enormous skeleton”; the “colossal fabric” of the Coliseum arouses some memory of the imperial glory. The ruin itself cannot “bear the rightness of the day”—symbolically, the empire could not recognize its real condition, while its socio-political structure was unbearably fragile. This antiquity stands at the center of the city Rome (many buildings “have been reared” around it), but it represents that the empire itself has long been “decentered.” In the Coliseum, the poet indicates, heroes trod on the spot, but their dust is now trodden by travelers (4.1296). Thus, Byron satirizes the Roman centrism—the forerunner of Eurocentrism: some pilgrims declared that the fall of Coliseum would be followed by that of the Roman Empire and then by that of the world (4.1297-99). The inscriptions of the “three mortal things”—the fall of the Coliseum, the fall of Rome, and the fall of the World—still exist, but the predictions fail (4.1302-03)—the building and the world still subsist, while the Roman Empire has dissolved. The fate of Rome does not predetermine that of the whole world. In other words, the pride of Rome, like that of Ozymandias portrayed by Percy Shelley, turns out to be self-mockery, with the broken Coliseum as the reminder of the imperial glory.

“Ruin” as the image of empire embraces paradoxical feelings and interpretations. It is associated with the imperial glory and decay—as Byron comments, it is common

for one to hold various feelings in the meditations on history (4.973-76). Nevertheless, with this image, Byron emphasizes the futility of imperial enterprise more than its glory. The ceaseless conflicts render all empires changed, decentered, and heterogeneous; the imperial pride leads to vanity—"the same rehearsal of the past": "The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done: and there is no new thing under the sun" (Ecclesiastes 1:9).

## **IV. An alien voice: Byron's complicity in imperialism**

### **A. Byron's inclination toward imperialism**

Byron's reconstitution of his identity always proceeds with his interpretations of a "context": he forms his understanding of various cultures in his pilgrimage, while he also attempts to judge imperialism/empire throughout his journey. The understanding and judgment simultaneously reveal his identity: to all cultures and empires, his criticisms usually expose him as an outsider, an exile who never dwells perpetually in any place, sticks to no specific belief, and sees contrapuntal relationships between contradictory forces. Therefore, despite his anti-imperialist comments, it is hasty to conclude that he consistently resists imperialism.

Byron's "complicity" with imperialism—insinuated in his recognition of Rome as his country (4.694)—may be unavoidable: "Exiles feel, therefore, an urgent need to reconstitute their broken lives, usually by choosing to see themselves as part of a triumphant ideology or a restored people" (Said, "Reflections on Exile"). The "triumphant ideology" in the early nineteenth-century Europe was imperialism. Byron the exile sides with imperialism unawares.<sup>35</sup> Literary texts, in addition, "are

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<sup>35</sup> This exposes Byron's self-contradiction again: he cannot bear to become "part of a triumphant ideology" (Groom 45, see Chapter Three), but he still speaks for it sometimes.

far more worldly than scholars once used to allow: more aware of their location in the world, of their connections to world events, and even of their affiliations with world powers . . .” (Makdisi, “Worldly Romanticism” 429). Bunyan indicates that “the way to the Celestial City lies through this town (vanity fair), with its lusty fair which is held year-round.” It is impossible to avoid the vanity fair unless one goes “out of the world.” Similarly, Byron the pilgrim must also go through the vanity fair and forms some “affiliations” with imperial powers. The ruins parallel his fragmented self (see Chapter Three). Indeed, “Byron’s representation of Italian history—full of ruins and rebirths—in many ways paralleled the poet’s understanding of his own life . . .” (Ogden 121). In his wandering, Byron/Harold traces the “glory” of the Roman Empire from ruins, piece by piece. This fragmentary image of empire parallels his isolated, alienated image. His affiliation with the ruins of empire implies his unapparent identification with her power, and renders his identity as self-contradictory, ambiguous, and changing.

Byron utters his own inclination toward imperialism: “Ambition was my idol” (“Don Juan” 1.1729). Among his idols, Napoleon was the most “dangerously dazzling” (Kelsall, “Byron’s Politics” 44). Byron wished for Napoleon’s victory during the Hundred Days and felt sorry for his defeat in Waterloo (Russell). He highlights Alexander the Great as “[t]heme of the young, and beacon of the wise” (2. 335), without mentioning the cruelty of the wars that the king incurred. Seeing the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, Byron “also turned back reflectively upon his own culture as the world’s dominant colonial power, and upon the significance of his own complicity in that power as a poet of orientalism” (Leask, *British* 23); he neither “sought to subvert the imperialist project” nor did he seek “simply to endorse it” (Leask, *British* 2; Hogle 29). “Byron’s opposition to the British imperialist project is as ambivalent as his Orientalism” (Alber 112)—this opposition derived from his identity

as an exile. Byron's proclamation of his alienation—"I stood / Among them, but not of them" (3.1054-55)—may conclude his attitude towards all kinds of "contexts": he does not belong to any culture and empire, yet he may affiliate himself with them to some extent.

### **B. Imperialist invasion as the divine justice**

Byron's identification of Napoleon as his alter ego renders his criticism of the emperor ambiguous and paradoxical (see Chapter Two). They both "encapsulate the energy of the decades after 1789" (Clubbe, "Byron, Napoleon" 184). With his oppositional spirit to tyranny, Byron should have spoken for the oppressed people. However, he violates his ideal when travelling to Portugal, the first exotic land in his pilgrimage.

Although the poet blames the emperor for his expansion of imperial territory, Byron treats Napoleon's invasion into Portugal as the fulfillment of the divine justice (1.211-15). God pushes Napoleon to invade Portugal, and to purge the land "from fellest foeman" (1.215). Portugal is presented as "[a] nation swoln with ignorance and pride" (1.222), as Egypt cursed by God with ten terrible plagues in the Old Testament (1.233). In 1807, the French army marched through Spain into Portugal; then Napoleon supported his brother Joseph Bonaparte to be the new king of Spain in 1808. Portugal, a protégé of the British Empire, a colonized land, exists as an "Other" to both Napoleon Empire and the British Empire. It is a sharp contrast against Byron's first impression of this country (1.206-10): he shows the sense of superiority to Portuguese people. It is "the first principle of imperialism that there is clear-cut and absolute hierarchical distinction between ruler and ruled" (Said, "Yeats" 82). He speaks as an "Englishman" despite his alienation from his homeland—and condemns the Portuguese people to be ungrateful (they "lick yet loathe" [1.223] their patron [the British Empire]). With a patronizing language, he takes for granted the dominance of the British Empire



on Portugal: Portugal did not fully subordinate herself to the hegemony of the British empire, and therefore must be denounced. Despite the threat of Napoleon, nevertheless, Portugal still refused to declare war on Britain in 1807. Besides, in 1808, when the Convention of Cintra was signed and consequently the defeated French armies retreated from Portugal with abundant trophies, the victorious British troops won nothing: “Woe to the conquering, not the conquered host, / Since baffled Triumph droops on Lusitania’s coast” (1.304-05). The “Lusitania” refers to the Iberian Peninsula as a province of the Roman Empire, negating Portugal as an autonomous, independent nation. The “baffled Triumph” insinuates that of the British empire. Both Spain and Portugal had been occupied by the Roman Empire, and they both suffered from Napoleon’s invasion and dominance in the early nineteenth century. Byron views the conflict as that between Britain and France, while Spain and Portugal are totally marginalized, treated as subordinated to the colonial power of the British army.

The public opinions in London tended to condemn France after the “baffled Triumph,”<sup>36</sup> while Byron also felt displeased because the British Empire gained nothing for her “support” of Portugal: “Britannia sickens, Cintra! at thy name” (1.307). He describes the Palace of Queluz, where the Convention was signed: “dome displeasing unto British eye” (1.289); the treaty itself deserves mockery (1.290-96) and cheated a nation like “the dwarfish demon” (1.297); “Folly [of France and Portugal] dashed to earth the victor’s plume [Britain]” (1.301). The treaty was seen as a disgrace by many British people: “folks in office” fret at the mention of this convention (1.308-09). Britain as the victor was cheated by their defeated foe, the Frenchmen (1.312-

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<sup>36</sup> For example, Wordsworth criticizes the British government for tolerating French tyranny in “The Convention of Cintra.” He argues that the revolutionary spirit of the Spanish and Portuguese people “had been driven by a freedom rooted in both their imagination and religious belief” (Mason 36).

13). It exposes the inability of the authority to turn the result to their benefit. The victor might be scorned and sneered in the future (1.310-14). He associates his early profligate life and the status quo of Portugal (1.320-23), implying that the nation cannot reform as he has done. He meditates on the “loss” of the British Empire while walking alone over the Cintra mountains (1.315-16); however, he would like to flee from the beautiful scenes (1.317). He “learn[s] to moralise” (1.319)—that is, he attempts to defend the interest of the British Empire to claim the right of being a “victor” in the Convention of Cintra. He regrets what he did in his youth in the light of Reason, yet he is blind to the empire’s exploitation of the colonized in Portugal. “As imperialism increased in scope and in depth, so too, in the colonies themselves, the resistance mounted” (Said, “Yeats” 73). Byron neglects the resistance of the Portuguese people to the Britons and speaks just like an imperialist.

With this imperial prejudice, Byron cannot fully enjoy the beautiful scenery of Portugal. He praises the beautiful scene (1.207-10; 226): it is “celestial” (1.226), “Cintra’s glorious Eden” (1.236), “Elysium’s gates” (1.242). Yet he accentuates the “gap” between beautiful scenes and the “filthy” people there: the Portuguese do not deserve this heavenly gift. He looks down on them: “Why, Nature, waste thy wonders on such men?” (1.235). With his closer inspection, Lisbon appears ugly: “For hut and palace show like filthily: / The dingy denizens are reared in dirt; / Ne personage of high or mean degree / Doth care for cleanness of surtout or shirt” (1.229-32). Portuguese people are “paltry slaves . . . born ’midst noblest scenes” (1.234). Hence, nature cannot “purge” the people; rather the “impious hand” of Portuguese people contaminates the heavenly, celestial scenes. It is Byron’s imperialist prejudice, which assumes the “distortion” of natural beauty simply because of Portugal’s ingratitude to Britain’s “favor.” Byron’s care for the “profit” of the British Empire distorts his inherent opposition to tyranny, pushes him to defend the imperial “right,” and deforms

his appreciation of nature.

Byron/Harold sympathizes more with the Spanish people than with the Portuguese. In Spain, nature does not appear “filthy” because of the conflicts between the invader and the invaded. Yet Spain as a “renowned, romantic Land” (1.387) and a “glorious field of grief” (1.459) arouses incongruous feelings of the poet. Byron glorifies the victory of Spain in resisting the invasion of the Muslims (1.394-95), but he keeps silent about and remains blind to the cooperation of the Spanish government with Napoleon. He does not condemn the Spanish people and the natural beauty there as he has done in Portugal.

Nevertheless, Byron does not totally sympathize with Spain as the people struggle against Napoleon:

Fall'n nations gaze on Spain; if freed, she frees

More than her fell Pizarros once enchained:

Strange retribution! now Columbia's ease

Repairs the wrongs that Quito's sons sustained,

While o'er the parent clime prowls Murder unrestrained. (1. 913-17)

Francisco Pizarros (1471-1541), a Spanish colonist as a governor in Peru, conquered the Inca Empire with schemes and enslaved the people. Therefore, the subordination of Spain to Napoleon signifies a “[s]trange retribution,” a “divine vengeance” for Spain’s imperialism and colonization. The “Quito’s sons,” the Incan people, must be revenged, so the Spanish people must suffer for the sin of their ancestors—the poet suggests. This an-eye-for-an-eye interpretation ironically justifies Napoleon’s conquest: the emperor just fulfilled God’s will to “punish” Spain. By the end of Canto I, Harold acknowledges “the inevitable defeat of the Spanish, the perpetuation of bloodshed inherent in the Spanish character, and a continuation of false chivalry in the modern world” (Sánchez 460). Byron confronts the taken-for-granted chivalric

romance of Spanish War “primarily through the use of irony and burlesque, adopting the language and rhetoric of the form only to undermine it with empirical and experiential observations of the disastrous effects of war on all those involved” (Sánchez 447). Byron’s assertion of the “retribution” manifests the “elaborate complex of shifting emotions and attitudes” (McGann, *Fiery Dust* 50) of an exile—in other words, the pluralistic view of the poet. This view prevents him from holding a consistent opposition to imperialism.

### **C. Us and them: The assumed superiority of imperialists**

Byron’s criticisms of Portugal expose his imperialist tendency. “As an (sic.) hereditary legislator of the British Empire, he had hoped to sway the destiny of nations by the power of oratory” (Kelsall, “Byron’s politics” 44). His descriptions of this nation correspond to the imperial narrative: “The imperial narrative of history” rests on “rewriting and eradication”; being “complicit in an exercise of global power,” such narratives assert “the stereotyping of ethnic groups” (Punter 166). His judgment of the “ingratitude” of Portuguese people represents his sense of superiority as an Englishman to them. The conquered races “would serve as the dark lining on the back of a mirror in which the polite classes would continue to see their own civilized reflection” (Keen 207). In other words, the imperialist superiority depends on a stereotypical understanding of an ethnic group; it serves as the basis for interfering in the affairs of other nations or for conquering them. Imperialism asserts an ideological discrimination between “us” and “them,” while at the same time assuming its dominance as one of the “virtually universally agreed truths” (Ashcroft and Ahluwalia 98). The “white man’s burden” proposed by Kipling exemplifies this sense of racial superiority, while the imperialists may justify their invasions and hegemony with the “agreed truths.”

Byron's sense of racial superiority may be nourished in a nationalist culture. This is a matter of ideology, which is "less a question of ideas than of feelings, images, gut reactions" (Eagleton, *Ideology* 149). Emotion conveys one's ideology more directly than reasoning or arguments. British nationalism was emotionally spurred: "Hatred of despotism pushed Romantic poets to an accommodation with the established British order of which they had been so critical"—fearing to be colonized by Napoleon, "they turned to defend the British Empire" (Fulford 184). After the abolishment of the slave trade in 1807, the British Empire was viewed as one "in which native people received liberty and law, in contrast to their enslavement and exploitation in the empires of Spain, Portugal, France and the Ottomans" (Fulford 185). In short, the British imperialism was regarded as politically correct to bring Christian civilization and liberty all over her realm. For Byron's contemporaries, "Britain was viewed by many as the most recent incarnation of political formations whose constitution and practice exemplified the progressive spread of freedom . . . . Its imperial ambitions were thus also viewed, in such a perspective, as embodying the potential for liberty's further expansion" (Martin 92). Britons might justify their interference in the affairs of other nations with the name of liberation, just as Napoleon did. This "patriotism" contributed to Byron's self-contradictory attitude toward imperialism.

Like the orient world in the East-West conflict, Spain and Portugal were treated as inferior and backward for Napoleon and Byron. Both countries were debased as those which "were considered to be naturally subservient to a superior, advanced, developed" empire (Said, *Culture and Imperialism* 72). As the "Other" of the Napoleon Empire and the British Empire, both Spain and Portugal were not viewed as autonomous and independent. Byron is guilty of ethnocentrism in his condemning of Portugal. He claims that Portuguese people "lick yet loathe the hand that waves the word / To save them from the wrath of Gaul's unsparing lord" (1.223-24); their "salvation" justifies

the meddling of the British Empire with the Portugal's resistance against the Napoleon Empire. However, Byron's taken-for-granted attitude normalizes the political oppression and colonial ambition of the British Empire in Portugal. "Representing colonized cultures as inferior implicitly justified the process of colonization"; "the discourse about colonialism being a 'benevolent task' became current especially in the nineteenth century" (Wurth and Rigney 336). Imperialism as "a form of symbolic violence . . . relies on a relationship of constrained communication to extort submission" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 2). Byron's anticipation of the "submission" of Portugal derives from his sense of racial superiority and obscure imperialist inclination.

The sense of superiority, boosted by nationalism or ethnocentrism, worsens the self-other dichotomy, and hinders the racial and cultural communications on equal terms. This "particular imposed 'truth,'" created and maintained by the conquerors, must be resisted for a consistent fighter for freedom. Yet Byron and imperialists become "blind" to the truth about imperialism because of their sense of superiority. Byron speaks to the audience imbued in imperialist culture, taking the inferiority of foreign countries for granted. Nationalism "elevates a subject-object relation over a subject-subject one, forgetting that the expression and formulation of needs are always a dialogical affair, that needs and desires are always in some sense received back from an 'other'" (Eagleton 29). Imperialist culture is assumed to be understood and defined as against the Other's "splendour and/or decay" (Makdisi, "Romantic cultural imperialism" 604). Imperialists only see what they desire, not the truth or essence of the colonized. The lack of genuine dialogue leads to a misunderstanding of self and others. "In most cases, the negative traits we attribute to others are traits we cannot bear to recognize in ourselves" (Wurth and Rigney 345). Byron sees Napoleon as predatory and domineering, but he fails to highlight that these features also characterize the British imperialists. This blindness deprives him of the awareness and support of

the Portuguese resistance to Britons. The poet never criticizes Britons' sense of racial superiority.

Sometimes, though he sympathizes with the sufferings of the oppressed, he cannot see the pains of the colonized, as his praise of Rome implies: "Alas, for Earth, for never shall we see / That brightness in her eye she bore when Rome was free" (4.737-38). Rome was free only when the Roman Empire flourished—in other words, when all the other nations and races were not free under the dominance of Roman imperialism. Byron "sees" the bright eye of nature in this imperialist culture. He uses "the imperialist' strategies" to "take advantage of Italy's culturally privileged status among the English reading public and its politically weakened status as a militarily occupied country" (Ogden 120). He "sees" the time "when Rome was free," but remains blind to the slavery of the other contemporary races. Though calling Rome his country and seeing her tortures, Byron does not (and perhaps cannot) fully feel the excruciating pain of the conquered—after all, an exile lacks the sense of belongingness to any place. His report of the decline of Rome may serve as a warning to Britons, but he never calls for the liberation of Italy from imperial invasion and dominance.

In addition, Byron's "Philhellene ambition to champion Greece as a bastion of freedom and democracy against 'Oriental despotism'" also carries "an undercurrent of imperialism and Eurocentrism" (Meyer 661). Byron fought for the independence of Greece from the Turks, but the Greek revolution "represented the beginning of the end of the Turkish Empire and the definitive emergence of European imperialism—at the head of which was England—into world history" (McGann, *Romantic Ideology* 124-25). Byron's death for the Greek independence was widely mourned and lauded in his native land because his support of Greece, corresponding to the interest of the

Britons in fighting against the Turks, catered to the pride and ambition of the British imperialist culture.<sup>37</sup>

Empires are doomed to fall because they violate the key to survival, which depends on “the connections between things”—to treat the others “concretely and sympathetically, contrapuntally, about others than only about ‘us’”; besides, survival also means “not trying to rule others” and not to assume one’s superiority to others (Said, *Culture and Imperialism* 336; see Chapter One). Imperialism fostered the mixture of cultures and races on a large scale, but “its worst and most paradoxical gift was to allow people to believe that they were only, mainly, exclusively, white, or Black, or Western, or Oriental. Yet just as human beings make their own history, they also make their own cultures and ethnic identities” (Said, *Culture and Imperialism* 336). Ethnocentrism, the basis of imperialism, eradicates the possibility of valid communications on the one hand and promotes hegemony on the other. Byron opposes tyranny all his life, but ironically, he sometimes sides with the force which he detests. This self-betrayal parallels Napoleon’s violation of Rousseau’s ideal.

#### **D. Byron’s problematic praises of the Albanians**

Byron’s ambivalent attitude toward imperialism also comes to the fore while he stays in Albania, manifested especially in his comments on Ali Pacha and the Suliotes. Ali Pacha, a crucial figure in Albania on the eve of the Greek War of Independence, is praised as the most glorious chief since the day of Muhammed (2.683-84). He also

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<sup>37</sup> Britons’ imperial ambition toward Greece emerged in 1830, when the Protocol of London was signed by France, Russia, and Britain. This treaty determines Greece to be a monarchy, while Greek people were not allowed to choose their monarch. When Prince Otto of Bavaria became the new King of Greece in 1832, the British Empire showed disagreement. Besides, the Greek people protested against their appointed territory arranged by the United Kingdom. Greece still could not enjoy total freedom and independence after the war of independence because of the interference of the British government.



becomes a paradigm for Byronic hero-villains such as the Giaour, Conrad, Seyd, and Alp (Leask, "Byron" 113). For Byron, this oriental chief has the potential to liberate the Greeks from the Ottoman Empire (Leask, "Byron" 114). Pacha's ascendancy "marked a growing decentralization in the Ottoman Empire" (Zhou 257). The valor of his son Muchtar vanquished the Russians "in blood" (2.687-88); under his leadership, the Albanians would rather die if they could not beat the enemies (2.692). In short, Byron admires his Albanian hero because of his resistance to the Turkish tyranny.

Yet Pacha does not act as a devoted anti-imperialist. This hero, Byron discerns, has the potential to be a tyrant: "Blood follows blood, and, through their mortal span, / In bloodier acts conclude those who with blood began" (2.566-67): Pacha's "violence, strength, and ruthlessness secures his power" (Zhou 263). This chief resisted the Turks because the Albanians were suppressed, but he ruled like a terrorist—not unlike an imperialist who oppresses the conquered nations. His "dread command/ Is lawless law; for with a bloody hand / He sways a nation, turbulent and bold" (2.418-20). As a despotic governor, Pacha enslaved the "modern offspring of ancient Hellas" (Fleming 28). This "man of war and woes," though greeting Byron/Harold with a gentle, venerable face, actually commits "deeds that lurk beneath, and stain him with disgrace" (2.554-58).<sup>38</sup> He raids Previs, a coast city in Greece, as voraciously as an imperialist: "The shrieks of the conquered, the conquerors' yell; / The roofs that we fired, and the plunder we shared, / The wealthy we slaughtered, the lovely we spared" (2.678-680). Therefore, this Albanian hero appears as controversial as Napoleon in terms of his deeds—eager to fight for the national freedom as well as for his profit and authority.

Pacha's characteristics remain ambiguous. He was neither a colonial subject nor an ally of the West. Byron presents this leader in the "strange ahistorical place of

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<sup>38</sup> In his journal ("November 12, 1809), Byron feels quite pleased by his meeting with Pacha, who treats the poet as his son, though the poet's love of pacificism contradicts Pacha's "bloody" dominance.

otherness,” and the court of Ali Pacha contains “exotic inhabitants,” who have “no fixed country or place” (Martin 87). This “Albania’s Chief” served as the ruler of Albania for the Ottoman Empire, but then he betrayed the Turks. In his contrast between “Christian” and “infidel” governments, “Byron suggests a profound disappointment with the former” (Zhou 252). Pacha symbolizes less the barbarian culture under the suppression of imperialism, but more “a mirror image of that left behind” (Martin 88)—that is, the civilized Europe. In this light Pacha and the western imperialists form a contrapuntal relationship: they resemble each other in terms of their thirst for power and their heterogeneous features. Like Byron the exile, Pacha belongs neither to the East nor to the West; furthermore, the Albanian chief opposes the imperial rule and shows complicity with imperialism simultaneously. Pacha’s polite manner to Byron and his ferocious fights on battlefield indicate his embrace of culture and barbarism in his personality. His heterogeneous nature epitomizes the situation of his people: “Albanians, caught between the binaries European Christianity and Turkish Islam, are all the more menacing for their distinction from both” (Zhou 264). Pacha and his fellowmen ostensibly yielded to the Turks, but racially and spiritually they resisted the Ottoman Empire. Perhaps his ambiguous status and controversial deeds fascinated Byron the exile.

In addition, Albanians did not form a united force under the Turkish reign—Pacha and the Suliotes did not reconcile. Both Ali Pacha and the Suliotes were Albanians, yet the latter fought against the former, who suppressed his fellowmen on behalf of the Ottoman Empire. Pacha launched successive attacks on the Suliotes and finally forced them into exile. Byron/Harold also admires the military prowess of the Suliotes and their struggles against the Turks (2.650-56). Yet Suliote’s “valor” may look more terrible than imperialists. “But those scarfs of blood-red shall be redder, before / The sabre is sheathed and the battle is o’er” (2.663-64). They delight in

vanquishing the feeble (2.670) and compel a maid to sing after they have killed her father (2.671-76). Byron describes their bloody penchant and actions without further comments, and his silence contradicts his declaration to oppose tyranny of all forms. Their “resistance” renders them almost as brutal as the imperialists that they despise. Therefore, Byron/Harold remains alienated from them (2.640-41) even though he supports their revolutionary spirit.

The separation and conflicts between Pacha and the Suliotes negate the us-them relationship held by the imperialists. One essential feature of Orientalism is the assumption that “the orient is essentially monolithic, with an unchanging history,” and that “the Orient and the Orientals are seen to be passive, non-participatory subjects of study” (Ashcroft and Ahluwalia 64). Albanians, the conquered race, do not exist as a homogenous entity in Byron’s observations. The Turks recognized the conflicts between Pacha and the Suliotes, and therefore governed Albania by manipulating their relationships—the imperial power indeed operated in “knowledge.” Though located in Europe, Albania was treated as oriental because of its subordination to the Ottoman Empire. As a wanderer among empires, Byron generally did not speak and behave like an Orientalist. Orientalism means “a western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient” (Said, *Orientalism* 3). Byron indeed “restructures” the Orient, but he does not “dominate” it like an imperialist. He remains an outsider to both the West and the East. For traditional imperialists and Orientalists, “[t]he West is the actor, the Orient a passive reactor. The West is the spectator, the judge and jury, of every facet of Oriental behavior” (Said, *Orientalism* 108-09). Byron/Harold subverts this East-West relationship by acting as a passive spectator and a judge of the empire at the same time. He remains an outsider throughout his journey: he may sometimes affiliate himself with the oppressed Albanians and appreciate their competence, but he still alienates himself from them.

He can never identify any group as *his* own, just as he finds no permanent “home.” Transgression of roles works as the “norm” in his criticism of empire.

Byron’s descriptions of the Albanians present the heterogeneous characters and situations. Yet he glorifies their military prowess and bloody attacks—this contradicts his life-long opposition to tyranny. His exile from his homeland did not wipe out his sense of racial superiority, and therefore he judges the sufferings of the Spanish and Portuguese people as the divine retribution, presuming Napoleon’s invasion as the fulfillment of God’s will. As he intends to expose the truth about empire, he also fails to see his complicity in imperialism.

## **V. Conclusion**

### **A. The vanity of empire**

The revelation of “truth” for Byron does not mean to present the panorama of the universe, but to demonstrate what is usually neglected or suppressed in imperialism from the eyes of an exile. The ignored “truth” includes the inevitability of change, the decentering of the imperial authority, and the heterogeneity as the norm of reality. The imperialist ambition means to establish a stable, centralized regime, but the consequence leads to a “decentralized” situation, manifested in the disintegration of empires. Besides, the status quo always comprises heterogeneity, while imperialism tends to negate, abolish, or neglect it. Empire itself suppresses and even destroys the subjectivity of the conquered people, yet it yields to the conquering power of time and looms in “ruined splendor” after its collapse. All the struggles for the doomed enterprise are futile, while imperialists rarely know their own finitude and absurdity.

Imperialists assume the necessity for the Europeans to “know” the exotic world to dominate it (Ashcroft and Ahluwalia 8, 49, 65). Knowledge and power are closely

linked in the imperialist enterprise, and colonial discourse “is the system of knowledge and belief about the world within which acts of colonization take place” (Ashcroft and Ahluwalia 62). The imperialists, far from following Socrates’s self-recognition (to acknowledge one’s insufficiency and ignorance), acquire and manipulate knowledge for the sake of self-interest and self-aggrandizement. “Knowledge” facilitates the easy and profitable management: “knowledge gives power, more power requires more knowledge, and so on in an increasingly profitable dialectic of information and control” (Said, *Orientalism* 36). Yet the imperialists’ “knowledge” does not correspond to truth. The conquerors usually fail to understand the colonized people, and their intention to “enlighten” the conquered nations turns out to be ridiculous and impractical. Socrates would mock the imperialists since they claim to know what they do not know—so does Byron.

In “Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage,” Byron’s criticism of imperialism is mostly directed to the Roman Empire and the Napoleonic Empire, the two grand “melodies” in “counterpoint.” Both empires occupied or ravished almost all Europe and brought “universal Deluge.” This “Deluge” of imperialism turned Europe into a vanity fair, to which Byron the pilgrim speaks truth. Faithful and Christian, proclaiming themselves “pilgrims and strangers,” propose “truth” and then take pride in such identities as they are investigated in vanity fair (Bunyan); Socrates dares to confront the authority of Athens by proclaiming the significance of truth. Likewise, Byron the exile exposes the absence of “truth” in imperialism throughout his “pilgrimage.” Many modern professionals and scholars, Said judges, remain silent or blind to the crimes of their nations but eager to criticize those of their enemies (*Representations of the Intellectual*)—because they stick to *realpolitik* and lack the “freedom” of outsiders. A genuine intellectual and critic must be an “amateur,” never “denatured by their fawning service to an extremely flawed power” and ready to “speak the truth to power” (Said,

*Representations of the Intellectual*). A critic is always supposed to oppose the authority, as Byron claims that he was “born for opposition.” Therefore, the examples of Rome and Napoleon can serve as Byron’s warning to the aspiring British Empire; furthermore, the “fugue” based on the “counterpoint” of both Rome and Napoleon exists as the “rehearsal of the past” for the future.

Besides, Byron’s disclosure of “truth” is related to his yearning for freedom. The vanity fair as Christian and Faithful witness is a land without truth, and therefore without freedom, since “ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:32). Europe in the “Deluge” of imperialism yielded to tyranny, oppression, and exploitation. The liberation of the oppressed people had to start with the knowledge of the truth.

### **B. Byron’s ambivalent attitude as a contrapuntal insight**

Fulford regards romantic poetry as anti-imperialist in origin (183). This judgment fails to catch the complexity of Byron’s pluralistic vision about imperialism. He resisted imperialism more blatantly and vehemently than his “romantic” peers, yet he did not abandon his sense of racial superiority. The poet might stand with anti-imperialists, but not unreservedly of them—commitment to either his homeland or a cause remained impossible for him. Byron’s ambiguous relationship with imperialism echoes Said’s argument about the role of the intellectual—who is “not really a neutral figure” but “somebody who is really somehow involved in it” (“An Interview” 3). “Byron, as ever, was on both sides of this divide” (Clubbe, “Byron, Napoleon” 191)—he condemns but supports imperialism unawares.

This self-betrayal marks the contrapuntal insight of an exile. As he criticizes empires and imperialism, he is simultaneously defining himself as a self-contradictory critic. An exile as a “traveling figure cannot belong to any one nation” (Wohlgemut 95). Childe Harold, a “restless and aimless modern pilgrim,” “never arrives at a

definitive world view because things are everchanging” (Lessenich 185). The centripetal attraction of the imperialist ideology and centrifugal inclination of the individual coexist in “Childe Harold.” The contrapuntal insight highlights the irony of imperialism. Irony, “a trope of doubleness,” characterizes both “the complicitous critique of the post-modern” and “the twofold vision of the post-colonial” (Hutcheon 134). Byron himself, with a love of power, criticizes “the government of the world” in “the form of Titanic cosmic self-assertion” and “of Satanism” (Russell). When Byron criticizes imperialism, it is impossible not to be biased by the imperialist ideology—just as Hutcheon considers, “the entire post-colonial project usually posits precisely the impossibility of that identity ever being ‘uncontaminated’” (135). Resistance “is always necessarily complicit in the apparatus it seeks to transgress” (Slemon 108). The “liberationist ethic requires the hegemonic tendency to justify its opposition” (Kelsall, “Byron’s politics” 54). One can never exist without the other. He “hymns empires whilst hating the wrongs of tyranny” (Knight 48). The real liberation is perhaps that of all mankind from imperialism (Said, *Culture and Imperialism* 274), but Byron’s resistance and involvement in it reveals the all-too-powerful impact of imperialism on his creativity. Empire or imperialism the “context” is exposed to be self-subversive, so is Byron the individual critic.

### **C. Worldliness versus the self-other dichotomy of imperialism**

Despite his complicity in imperialism, Byron differs from imperialists in displaying “worldliness.” Literature carries traces of the circumstances in which it was written, an idea that corresponds to “worldliness” proposed by Edward Said (Rigney 305). This resembles the concept of hermeneutical circle. The voice to speak the truth is lonely, “but it has resonance only because it associates itself freely with the reality of a movement, the aspirations of a people, the common pursuit of a shared ideal” (Said, *Representations of the Intellectual*). This affiliation with the

others displays the “worldliness” of a critic. Moreover, the interpretation from the worldliness must “identify the things to which it is blind as well as its potential to break through old habits of thought and patterns of identification” (Rigney 305). Therefore, Byron’s pilgrimage demonstrates his continual reconstitutions of his identity in different contexts. “Byron felt himself to be a part of the hegemonic center, with the burden of telling the complacent English reader what was really going on in the world” (Strand 529).

Despite his *Weltschmerz*, Byron/Harold does not delineate the world in a nihilistic tone. Said rejects Derrida’s view of the deferral of signification, a view in which the meaning “always tends towards meaninglessness because it can never be satisfactorily situated in the world”; however, “[t]exts are in the world, they have various kinds of affiliation with the world” so that interpretations and meanings can be grasped (Ashcroft and Ahluwalia 23). “The text is produced by the world, a concert of the material forces of power in that world, and the situatedness of which it specifically speaks” (Ashcroft and Ahluwalia 24-25). Though Byron exiled himself from his homeland, he finds the whole world his new “home.” The discussion of “Childe Harold” in this light can never be exhaustive: the exploration of its worldliness “in a network of non-literary, non-canonical and non-traditional affiliations” (Ashcroft and Ahluwalia 25) may continue endlessly. “Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage” survives now when all the empires that Byron observed has either disintegrated or vanished—because, in Said’s words, the poet stresses “the connections between things” contrapuntally (*Culture* 336). Byron’s worldliness and his affiliation with others save him from vanity (in the sense of “pride” and “emptiness” simultaneously) though merely to some extent, since he still retains some sense of racial superiority, while imperialism denies the connection of each culture with its origin by exerting supreme power over them. The strict hierarchical self-other relationship blinds the imperialists about the truth of



empire and leads to their downfall.

The civilized Europe after the Napoleonic wars has been seriously damaged, and nature may bring comfort and restoration. Therefore, the poet intends to “search for a form of greatness in the modern world that will not be so destructive” (Cantor 393)—in other words, he also concentrates on probing into the relationships between nature and human beings. The next chapter is meant to explore Byron’s views on nature, another “context” in which he can also reconstitute his self-identity.

## Chapter Five

### Nature, Worldliness, and a Secular Exile

Happier in this than mightiest Bards have been,  
Whose Fate to distant homes confined their lot,  
Shall I unmoved behold the hallowed scene,  
Which others rave of, though they know it not? (1.630-33)

#### I. Introduction

##### A. The significance of the love of nature

###### i. Byron's failure to obtain comfort in nature

It is natural for one to escape from the source of sufferings to maintain his/her mental peace, but Byron simply can neither recover from nor forget his trauma through such an escape. After leaving Spain, Byron/Harold feels “[h]appier” than the other “mightiest” exiled poets when visiting Parnassus, the sacred mountain of Apollo and the Muses and the emblematic “home” of all poets. “Happier”—the word manifests his contrapuntal views as he compares himself and the other wandering poets: he is “moved” since he, as a poet, has now “moved” to this “home,” while the “mightiest Bards” have been compelled to move to “distant homes.” As an exile, he can fully understand their sorrow. His awareness of those “mightiest Bards” stems from his “worldliness”: he does not merely immerse himself in nature; the historical, political, and cultural considerations may flood in his meditations on nature and push him to view her in a larger “context.” Although Apollo and Muses can no more be found here, some “gentle Spirit”—the power of nature—“still pervades the spot, / Sighs in the gale, keeps silence in the Cave, / And glides with glassy foot o’er yon melodious wave”

(1.636-38). The “silence” indicates the “absence” of Apollo and the Muses and their “isolation” from the mundane world; they are supposed to exist in an ideal realm. Byron’s “vision” of their “presence” reveals his approaching this realm—the home supposedly located in transcendence.

Yet “such peaceful shades” in Greece cannot eliminate his memory of “the land, the sons, the maids of Spain” (1.655, 641). Nature’s “sighs” exposes her incapacity to heal the tormented, moody poet: he has just witnessed the sufferings of the Spanish people under the invasion of Napoleon, and the beautiful landscape of Delphi seems unable to soothe the exile’s pain. In Greece he wished “to achieve a symbolic union with an oppressed people” (Strand 529). He even utters that “Glory [may] fly her [Greek] glades”—since Greece in the early nineteenth century still prostrated under the reign of the Ottoman Empire, while the local resistance to the Turkish tyranny seemed hopeless. Therefore, “nature” does not exist as a utopia for the wandering poet though he may find some temporary relief and delight in “the hallowed scene.” His worldly concerns follow him even in the bosom of mother nature.

In this light, with worldliness Byron does not achieve “transcendence” in nature like Wordsworth and Keats. The juxtaposition of Spain and Greece in “the hallowed scene” manifests the poet’s contrapuntal awareness, which deepens his observation of the world, and which also bars him from the pure enjoyment in nature. His journey here leads not to relaxation but to reflections.

## **ii. The love of nature: Rousseau’s influence on English romantics**

For many Byron’s contemporaries, however, the “romantic turn to nature is a turning away from politics; their enchantment with nature follows . . . especially their disappointment with the French Revolution and the Napoleonic despotism that resulted from it” (Cantor 376). Thus, their love of nature can be treated as an escape from the “Deluge” of imperialism. In the late eighteenth century, “moral and philosophical

poems [were] inspired by physical nature” and “a simple life in the out-of-doors” was glorified (Mayo 490). As Rousseau judges, “[m]en are devoured by our towns. Humanity in the state of nature was pure and innocent, while the emergence of society and civilization corrupted it. In a few generations the race dies out or becomes degenerate; it needs renewal, and it is always renewed from the country”; “Society has enfeebled man . . .” (*Emile*). Nature and humanity are consequently held as antagonistic in Rousseau’s philosophy: mankind “forces one soil to yield the products of another, one tree to bear another fruit” and “destroys and defaces all things; he loves all that is deformed and monstrous; he will have nothing as nature made it . . .” (*Emile*). The connection with nature means the rejection of society’s imposition of identity on the self. The salvation of humanity lies in one’s separation from society and then in the union with nature.

Under Rousseau’s influence, romantics usually view society and its institutions as the source of corruption, while nature can restore and purify humanity (Magill 92-93; Sánchez-Arce 140; Jones 174). Romanticism advocates the return to nature that could be found within everyone, and hence the glorification of nature, often accompanied by the condemnation of society, prevails in English romantic poetry. Romantics who follow Rousseau impose meanings on nature to cure their own “metaphysical isolation” and “social alienation” (Magill 92). The “transcendence” of both the poet and nature presupposes the corruption of human society. Charlotte Smith depicts that the “misguided Man” destroys “the fair work” of nature and “makes himself the evil he deplores” (*The Emigrants* 1.32-34); a dweller in a “populous City” forgets and fails to appreciate “Nature’s genuine beauty” (*The Emigrants* 1.261-67). Coleridge, recognizing the failure of his “genial power,” can still delight in “the spirit and the power, / Which wedding Nature to us gives in dower / A new Earth and new Heaven” (“Dejection” 39; 67-69); and he can still rely on “abstruse research” for solace

("Dejection" 89); a "night-wandering Man" can "share in nature's immortality" since "Nature's sweet voices" always bring love and pleasure (Coleridge, "The Nightingale" 16, 31, 42-43). Percy Shelley, with his Platonic view, glorifies the Intellectual Beauty—whose power is "like the truth / Of nature"—for liberating "[t]his world from its dark slavery" and bestowing mysterious "Loveliness" on mankind ("Hymn to Intellectual Beauty" 69-71, 78-79); in Mont Blanc, where "all seems eternal," human beings may reconcile with nature and forget "works and ways of man, their death and birth" ("Mont Blanc" 75, 78-79, 92). His various images of nature—the west wind, the cloud, the skylark—all exist far beyond the mundane world but can exert impact on human beings. Keats, by contrast, feels the presence of nature with his keen senses: in a little hill, he finds, the air is "cooling" and "still," the buds are "sweet," and the clouds are "pure and white" ("I stood tip-toe upon a little hill" 2, 3, 8); he prefers the solitude in "Nature's observatory" to "the jumbled heap / Of murky buildings" ("O Solitude" 2-4); nature, through the song of a nightingale, carries him far away from "[t]he weariness, the fever, and the fret" of the miserable world to the state of ecstasy ("Ode to a Nightingale" 23, 58); he desires "to find, with easy quest, / A fragrant wild, with Nature's beauty drest, / And there into delight my soul deceive" ("Sonnet: Oh! how I love" 6-8); he discovers comfort in the beauty of nature: the personified autumn is seen "sitting careless on a granary floor" ("To Autumn" 14). In short, nature, a panacea in the turbulent and hazardous age, was believed to heal all sufferers and bring hope to them.

Nature as "a Romantic *Weltanschauung*" serves as "a scene of fundamental innocence and sympathy; conceptually opposed to the urban and the artificial, Romantic nature is the locus of what Wordsworth paradigmatically called 'feeling'" (McGann, "Rethinking Romanticism" 239). This "feeling," far from being stagnant and fixed, is expected to grow: "Romantic nature is a cultural account of the biological

order of things. The ‘meaning’ it ascribes to this order is perpetual development and growth . . . . Such a vision translates ‘death’ back into a phase or moment of a benevolent or splendid process of life” (McGann, “Rethinking Romanticism” 248). The contrast between nature and society, in brief, is treated as that between life and death; consequently, the only redemption for all fallen creatures relies on questing for the former and abandoning the latter.

For many romantic poets, “the poet’s true subject is his own emotional responses to the world around him, particularly to the beauty of nature” (Cantor 376). In other words, “nature” for some romantic poets means the main or even the only “context” to define themselves. Wordsworth and Coleridge “agree in picturing the mind in perception as active rather than inertly receptive, and as contributing to the world in the very process of perceiving the world” (Abrams, *The Mirror* 58). Their exploration of nature also nourishes and highlights their identity simultaneously. Nature appears “transcendentalized” in their perception because of their dream to be elevated above this corrupted world. Romantics “sought an earlier state within the mind, which was supposed to contain an inner truth obscured by entry into society. The Romantic use of nature has as its main motivation the desire to access an inner self that is supposed to contain a ‘supernatural’ truth” (Sánchez-Arce 140). The uncorrupted self is allegedly endowed with divinity, which must be revived by the close association with mother nature. As they worship nature, they anticipate reaching transcendence and becoming mighty. The affirmation of nature’s divinity presupposes the belief to acquire or to revive this divinity in humanity.

The nourishment of the ability to access the “transcendental” truth depends on the long-term commitment to nature. The rootedness in a landscape means the isolation from the world and the supposed transcendence of the self. Wordsworth and Coleridge “are dwellers in the landscape of the Lake District,” and their voices are

“inflected by the local and personal history of the place”—such poetry assumes the Earth as “a dwelling-place” for all living things (McKusick 28-29). A true ecological writer “must be ‘rooted’ in the landscape, instinctively attuned to the changes of the Earth and its inhabitants” (McKusick 24). The union with nature for Wordsworth starts with his “rootedness.” “Wordsworth bases his commitment on home ground,” but Byron focuses “on outside and even on remote ground . . .” (Cooke 12). Though Wordsworth and Coleridge wandered in their early ages, their “rootedness” in nature, a sharp contrast to Byron’s nomadic life, sustained their devotion to a transcendental vision found only in the deified mother.

## **B. Byron’s wandering between nature and society as the source of his inspiration**

### **i. Byron’s wandering versus the Laker’s rootedness**

The veneration of nature as transcendental, the anticipation of becoming powerful, and the rootedness in nature are all alien to the worldview of an exile like Byron. His exile negates Rousseau’s dream to reach happiness through the love of nature: the poet cannot stick to any place, neither can he be cured by the acclaimed healing power of nature. Transcendence means a status untouched by mutability, decenter, and heterogeneity. An exile, being nomadic and contrapuntal, cannot accept an unchanged, unified belief. Being decentered, an exile denies any monolithic, single authority. These features stem from the absence of “rootedness” in nature in the life of exile. Wandering among “contexts” leaves his wounds unhealed but nourishes his creativity, which resists rootedness in nature. Under the impacts of his own past, of his historical awareness, and of imperialism, Byron does not seek for this “supernatural’ truth. He almost always affiliates himself with the world. Escapism is impractical and impossible since he always remains conscious about his position in a larger “context” with his “double vision,” his contrapuntal insight.

This insight marks Byron's unique poetic creativity, quite unlike Wordsworth's deistic vision. "Nature herself seems to take the pen from him [Byron] as she took it from Wordsworth, and to write for him as she wrote for Wordsworth, though in a different fashion, with her own penetrating simplicity" (Arnold, "From Preface" 802). This "different fashion" insinuates Byron's style of an exiled poet. Byron was not viewed as an eco-poet because of his identity as an exile (Hubbell, "Question" 15). Wordsworth and Coleridge were merely short-term wanderers; Byron endured half-life-long wandering. In his poetry he needs to reconstitute his broken self and his worldview, while the "transcendence" of nature or of his poetic self remains out of the question. Byron treats nature as simply one of the "contexts," or a portion of the whole world. Unlike Wordsworth, Byron seldom celebrates wild, sublime nature *per se*; as an outcast, he can "transcend place and refuse belonging" in his observation of nature (Hubbell, "Byron's" 184). Wordsworth exemplifies the "move towards interior" (Day 50)—towards human mind; Byron always wanders between the "interior" and the "exterior"—the mundane world. He composes under the influences of the Miltonic Satanism and the graveyard school as well as those of the cavalier poets and the Dryden-Pope heritage (see Chapter One). His learning familiarizes him with the diverse heritages and enhances his ability to link heterogeneous elements in his composition. He never "roots" himself in any "context"; wandering among "contexts" is the norm of exile. The presence or absence of "rootedness" marks the radical difference between Byron and the Lakers in terms of creativity.

**ii. Byron's perception of nature: The canonical romantic theme explored by an "uncanonical" romantic poet**

Critics like M. H. Abrams and Harold Bloom have excluded Byron from the canonical Romantic writers because he has been regarded "as a poet primarily concerned with social, political, and cultural subjects"—while "the legacy of Romantic



criticism . . . used to define Romanticism as nature poetry” (Hubbell, “Byron’s” 184, 199). Yet the wandering poet, with his “uncanonical” romantic spirit, also explores the significance of mother nature with unique, brilliant creativity. “Byron sought relief from the trauma of exile in 1816 by turning . . . to a Wordsworthian confidence in nature . . .” (Randel 306). His “ecological consciousness” made its first appearance in “Childe Harold” (Hubbell, “Byron’s” 183). Although nature is hardly Byron’s “view of the world” (McGann, “Rethinking Romanticism” 238), many readers find “Childe Harold” III “an unacknowledged and second-rate Wordsworthian ‘feeling of Nature’” (McGann, “Byron and Wordsworth” 176). Even Wordsworth himself discerned the resemblance of this canto to his “Tintern Abbey” and thought Byron “more a damned plagiarist than an imaginatively mature lyricist” (Soderholm, “Byron’s Ludic Lyrics” 743). Byron often mocks Wordsworth, but “Childe Harold” III exposes the poet’s “brief flirtation . . . with Wordsworthian ‘naturalism’” (Thorslev 100). Byron asserts that “I have been accustomed to entwine / My thoughts with Nature rather in the fields, / Than Art in galleries . . .” (4.545-47). With a craving for the comfort of nature, he feels no solitude even though wandering lonely; rather, it is “to hold / Converse with Nature’s charms, and view her stores unrolled” (2.224-25). On the other hand, he feels lonely “midst the crowd, the hum, the shock of men”—“With none who bless us, none whom we can bless” (2.226-34). The finest parts of this poem “disclose the lofty sympathy which binds the despiser of Man to the glorious aspects of Nature. It is in these, we think, that the great attractions of the work consist, and the strength of the author’s genius is seen” (Jeffrey, [Francis], “Review of *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage* III” 789). Byron, like the romantic nature poets, can “read meanings into the landscape,” meanings that are “summoned out of the very surface of nature itself” (Wimsatt 31)—yet he “reads” nature as no Laker poets do.

The afore-mentioned “flirtation” implies some similarities between Wordsworth

and Byron in terms of their interpretations of nature. For D. H. Lawrence, both Wordsworth and Byron “established a *new* connection between mankind and the universe, and the result was a vast release of energy” (“Aristocracy”). In other words, their interpretations of man-nature association are dynamic and revolutionary. Byron, as the “evil twin” (Soderholm, “A Tale of Two Citizens” 75) and “a younger version” of Wordsworth (Shaw 49), seemed to follow the Laker poet in his passionate craving for mother nature. Yet Byron mockingly complains that Wordsworth “perplex[es] the sages” with the new “system” displayed in “The Excursion,” which can bring chaos and confusion like the Tower of Babel (“Don Juan” Dedication 25-32); Wordsworth himself, being “crazed beyond all hope, composes poems which “prove unintelligible” (“Don Juan” 1.720, 1635). Byron finds Wordsworth’s poetry “silly” and “many of his ruminations on Nature incomprehensible” (Ellis 63). As a worldly poet and critic, Byron evaluates Wordsworth’s “failure” in terms of reader’s response, not of the Laker’s “spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings” toward mother nature. These satirical and disapproving remarks presuppose Byron’s radical rejection of Wordsworth’s poetics of nature. Thence, it is interesting to explore the extent and the validity of Byron’s supposed “brief flirtation” with Wordsworthian naturalism in “Childe Harold.”

## **II. Wordsworthian nature: An alien presence in “Childe Harold”**

### **A. The deification of nature**

#### **i. The heritage of the Christian belief**

In addition to Rousseau’s philosophy, Wordsworth also owes greatly to Christianity in his portrayal of nature. Noted for his “spontaneous overflow of

powerful feelings,” he deifies nature and holds her as the center of his worldview: he “has described all these objects in a way and with an intensity of feeling that no one else had done before him, and has given a new view or aspect of nature” (Hazlitt). His demonstration of an unrivaled power acknowledges nature as both a divine being and the source of his power. Wordsworth identifies himself as “[a] worshipper of Nature” (“Tintern Abbey” 153) and recognizes the youth as “Nature’s Priest” (“Intimations of Immortality” 72). These descriptions assume nature as a deity and thus nature-man relationship as a religion. Besides, nature “is the breath of God, / Or his pure Word by miracle revealed” (*Prelude* [1850] 5.221-22). “Word” in the Christian belief indicates Jesus Christ: “In the beginning was the Word, & the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1:1); “the Word of life . . . was with Father” (1 John 1-2). Thence, Wordsworth’s deism is modelled on Christianity—he “borrowed both narrative and rhythms” from the Bible (Mason 100); mother nature becomes the supreme being and the creator in his poetics. His religious commitments grew “through a mature nature-version whereby God is merged into objects in the natural world”; “religion offered him a language of suffering, redemption and love that allowed him to write poetry” (Mason 40). With her divinity, nature bestows salvation, comfort, and blessing on all her followers.

With this belief, Wordsworth preaches the gospel of nature to redeem the fallen humanity:

Nature through all conditions hath a power  
 To consecrate – if we have eyes to see –  
 The outside of her creatures, and to breathe  
 Grandeur upon the very humble face  
 Of human life.                    (*Prelude* [1805] 12.282-86)

Such a scene echoes that in the Book of Revelation: the redeemed believers in the new

heaven and earth enjoy glory with God. Indeed, romantic writers maintain traditional concepts which have been “based on the relation of the Creator to his creature and creation” revealed in “the human mind or consciousness and its transactions with nature” (Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism* 13). Worshipped as the creator of human beings, nature “is endowed with the attributes and powers of a mother, father, nurse, teacher, lover, as well as a deity (or deities) who seek out, incite, guide, and discipline the individual . . .” (Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism* 92). Nature “consecrates” and empowers all creatures, whereas Wordsworth displays her divinity with lively inspiration. His poetic creativity depends on his religious fervor toward nature. The deification of nature enriches his observations of commonplace and reveals a new heaven and earth to his contemporaries.

**ii. Nature as the new savior after the loss of the apocalyptic expectation incurred by the French Revolution**

Nature can allegedly do almost everything just like the Christian God except the Last Judgment. Her deification was accepted because Wordsworth and his contemporaries had long been perplexed and frustrated by the message of the French Revolution as a sign of the end of the world. The declaration of the consecration of all creatures in the revolution belongs to the prevalent eschatological expectations in the romantic era.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, the Second Coming did not follow the supposed

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<sup>1</sup> It is common for romantic poets to interpret the French Revolution as the destruction of the old world and the prelude to the coming of the new heaven and earth, as predicted in the Book of Revelation. William Blake asserts that the old feudal system of France will be burned up: “Fires enwrap the earthly globe, yet man is not consumed” (“America” 73), and that “the son of fire . . . stamps the stony law to dust, loosing the eternal horses from the dens of night, crying: Empire is no more! And now the lion & wolf shall cease” (“A Song of Liberty” Pl.27). This apocalyptic vision initiates a universal transformation: “The dead brood over Europe, the cloud and vision descends [sic.] over cheerful France,” while the world will be awakened “from slumbers of five thousand years,” surrounded by “flames of red wrath” (“The French Revolution” 1.1, 8, 67). Wordsworth speaks to France: “Rejoice, brave Land,

Armageddon. This revolution and Napoleon's enterprise failed to invite the coming of the new heaven and earth. Rather, the ravage of imperialism later rendered the continent as a terrible, miserable fallen world, while the "redemption" of mankind could no longer be anticipated from Napoleon and any other superheroes.

Like his contemporary intellectuals, Wordsworth himself underwent this disillusion.<sup>2</sup> At first, he was lured to visit France because of her "Revolutionary Power," which was believed to build a republic (*Prelude* [1850] 9.50, 226). He bore witness to the prevalent revolutionary spirit ("Guilt and Sorrow"). "A glorious opening, the unlooked-for dawn, / That promised everlasting joy to France" ("Excursion" 2.212-13); "France standing on the top of golden hours" ("Excursion" 6.353; *Prelude* [1850] 6.340). The "Gallic zeal," he announces, "[k]indled and burnt among the sapless twigs / Of my exhausted heart" ("Excursion" 3.743-45); therefore, "human nature seem[s to be] born again" ("Excursion" 6.354; *Prelude* [1850] 6.341). Then he felt frustrated by the consequence of the revolution: the Frenchmen "become

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though pride's perverted ire / Rouse hell's own aid, and wrap thy fields in fire" ("Descriptive Sketches" 2.150.780-82). Their use of the image of fire signifies the destructive power revealed in the Bible: the old world must be purged by fire so that the new heaven and earth may emerge. The inevitability of universal change is widely believed by their contemporary poets. Robert Southey proclaims that with virtue, equality, and love, the "Earth shall once again / Be Paradise" ("The Vision of the Maid of Orleans" 3.233-34). Percy Shelley claims that after some destruction "[a] garden shall arise, in loveliness, / Surpassing fabled Eden" ("Queen Mab" 4.88-89). The biblical message of the eschatology exerted so great impact as to push the romantics to view the French Revolution as the Battle of Armageddon.

<sup>2</sup> About the French Revolution, for example, Coleridge changes from expectation to exasperation. In the beginning, he adores the spirit of "divinest Liberty" with "deep worship" ("France: An Ode" 20-21); "Exultation waked the patriot fire" and "strode in joy the reeking plains of France! / Fallen is the Oppressor . . ." ("To a Young Lady" 23, 26-27). However, learning the French invasion of Switzerland, he attacks the imperialist ambition: "O France, that mockest Heaven, adulterous, blind, / And patriot only in pernicious toils" ("France: An Ode" 78-79). Shelley also utters his despair about the consequence of the French Revolution: "When the last hope of trampled France had failed / Like a brief dream of unremaining glory, / From visions of despair I rose . . ." ("Revolt of Islam" 1.1-3). Disillusion haunted romantic poets and thus the apocalyptic vision became untenable.

oppressors in their turn” and change “a war of self-defence / For one of conquest” (*Prelude* [1850] 11.206–08). France became “a land / Unfit for Men” because liberty was threatened (“One Might Believe” 2-3, 13-14). The object of the French Revolution won his “hearty approbation” at first, but he “did not approve of the means by which the first revolution was effected in France” (“Apology”); the “earlier proceedings of the French Revolution no doubt infused health into the country,” yet the tyranny of Napoleon, “an intoxicated Despot,” could not “have the credit of it” (“The Convention of Cintra 1809”).

The loss of the apocalyptic hope led Wordsworth to search for salvation elsewhere. Nature turned out to be an accessible haven for those who felt frustrated by their contemporary politics. “Tintern Abbey” may represent Wordsworth’s change from apocalyptic vision to nature worship: this poem, published on the eve of the Bastille Day, suggests that “the social hardships . . . might be solved, not by a violent revolution such as that which failed in France, but by a revolution in feeling . . . to nature” (Mason 76). “The Ruined Cottage” “elevates the spontaneous blessings offered by nature and human benevolence to those shattered by the social effects” (Mason 34). The new savior enlightened and comforted the once disappointed poet, and his “revelation”—the gospel of nature—consoled his contemporaries<sup>3</sup> and offered them “a steadying hand” (Mason 100) since he connected “the very trees and stones of a particular spot of earth with the great events of life” (Pater). He rewrote the apocalyptic vision: the new heaven and earth, already found in nature, did not emerge because of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic wars. Redemption of humanity was still possible in our union with mother nature.

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<sup>3</sup> For instance, Percy Shelley felt fascinated by Wordsworth’s “love and knowledge of nature” (Shelley, Mary). John Stuart Mill comments that Wordsworth’s poetry of nature arouses “states of feelings . . . under the excitement of beauty” which can remove “all the greater evils of life” (575).

Wordsworth's deification of nature may reflect the escapism of romantic poets under the impact of imperialism: humanity needs redemption in the "Deluge," while nature as the new savior can bring rejuvenation, comfort, and glory. He believes her to be more reliable than any hero, knowing "that nature never did betray / The heart that loved her" ("Tintern Abbey" 123-24). This deification derived from the metamorphosis of the apocalyptic expectation: as Wordsworth would not and did not publicly recognize the absurdity of this expectation, he created another "savior" and the new heaven and earth.

### **iii. Byron's comparative apathy to the deification of nature**

On the other hand, Byron as an exile seldom releases "energy" in his meditations on nature. Wordsworth's relaxation in nature, based on his separation from the secular politics, does not wipe out the existence of imperialism. Byron holds no apocalyptic vision of the French Revolution, while his views on Napoleon embrace hope and despair (see Chapter Four). In his young adulthood, the Revolution itself had already turned awry and Napoleon began to threaten Europe; therefore, he never underwent the disillusion of Wordsworth and Coleridge. The need for a savior rarely impressed him. Though acknowledging Rousseau's "fire" and honoring nature, he does not deify nature as frequently and fervently as Wordsworth does. He recognizes that "Nature's realms of worship" are wider and larger than the Persian, Gothic, or Greek shrines (3.851-58); in his journey he intends to meditate "in wonder-works of God and Nature's hand" (3.90); in the valley of the Rhine, "Earth [is] paved like Heaven" (3.448-49). Without religious fervor and commitment, Byron "flirts" with Wordsworth by briefly imposing divinity on nature. These traces of divinity, however, do not bring forward a purely transcendental image of nature in Byron's poetry. His awareness of the secular world almost always overwhelmed his veneration of nature. His cynicism and satirical inclination did not drive him to wait for any Godot—there was no exit for visionaries

in the “vanity fair.” He neither worships any redeemer nor expects the coming of the new heaven and earth. The consequences of the French Revolution and Napoleonic imperialism pushed Wordsworth to deify nature; under the same historical impact, however, Byron did not hold nature as permanent, unchanged, and transcendental.

Never speaking as a prophet like Blake and Wordsworth but as a bystander or a spectator, Byron simply highlights the awesome, apathetic power of nature; his poetic “energy” lies not in lyrics but in satires. In short, nature as a deity is at most one role among many others with which Byron presents her; he does not impose a stable, unchanged feature on her—nature/ocean is “[u]nchangeable” (4.1636) in the sense that no creature can alter her will. Human beings are insignificant under the absolute, irresistible force of nature. The coexistence of contradictory features in Byronic nature, indicating the mutability of nature’s roles, will be further investigated in the discussion of Byron’s expression of Lucretian nature.

## **B. The emphasis on the separation of nature and society**

### **i. The biblical idea about the opposition between God and the world**

The deification of nature presupposes her separation from the mundane world: sacredness and secularity fundamentally oppose each other. Wordsworth the poet-prophet, clinging to his divine vision, unsurprisingly intends to detach himself from the secular world. This separation of nature and society stems from the opposition between God and the world revealed in the Bible: God “shall judge the world in righteousness” (Psalms 9:8, cf. Psalms 98:9) and “punish the world for their evil” (Isaiah 13:11); “whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God” (James 4:4); “the world knew him [Jesus] not” (John 1: 10), while Jesus declares that he is “not of this world” (John 8: 23, cf. John 18:36); “For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth



the will of God abideth for ever” (1 John 2:16-17); Jesus admonishes his disciples: “If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you” (John 15:19). The world is predominated by sin and corruption; therefore, human beings need grace and redemption from God.

Also, the opposition between nature and society, a crucial argument in Rousseau’s philosophy, runs through all Wordsworth’s work (Cole). In the English romantic convention, an artist “must die to involvement with the world in order to be reborn to the detachment of the artist” (Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism* 82). “Death” signifies the resolution to disconnect oneself from the world with the biblical connotation: “How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?” (Romans 6:2); “. . . we, being dead to sin, should live unto righteousness . . .” (1 Peter 2:24). An individual poet, similarly, must isolate himself/herself from human society to break up with “sin” and therefore to obtain redemption. The separation of nature and society presumes the fall of mankind and the need for redemption.

## **ii. The transcendence of Wordsworthian nature versus the depredation of society**

In Wordsworth’s vision, “unity with himself and his world [nature] is the primal and normative state of man, of which the sign is a fullness of shared life and the condition of joy” (Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism* 278). This blessing is secured because of the transcendence and seclusion of nature: the “Presences of Nature” can never be blasphemed with the “vulgar hope” of the world (*Prelude* [1850] 1.464-68). With the thirst for the divine blessing of nature, Wordsworth intends to escape from the “vast city,” where he finds himself a “discontented sojourner” (*Prelude* [1850] 1.6-8); he recognizes himself as a “captive” set free from “a house / Of bondage” and a “prison” once he can enjoy the comfort in nature (*Prelude* [1805] 1.6-8). Echoing Rousseau

and the Christian belief, he laments for the corruption of humanity: “The world is too much with us; late and soon, / Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers: / Little we see in nature that is ours” (“The world is too much with us” 1-3). Human beings and nature, in this light, should have been One, a Neo-Platonic concept; we have lost our blessing because of the corruption brought by the world, while our redemption relies on the restoration of the One, our original union with nature. Wordsworth, though mourning for the loss of “a glory from the earth,” can still find comfort in mother nature (“Ode: Intimations of Immortality” 9, 179-86). He contrasts the healthy life in nature and the depredations of humanity:

To her fair works did nature link

The human soul that through me ran;

And much it griev’d my heart to think

What man has made of man. (“Lines written in early spring” 5-8)

Wordsworth affirms that “nature is beautiful and full of joy, that man is corrupted by civilization” (Mayo 490). Percy Shelley also adores Wordsworth’s transcendence: “Thou hast like to a rock-built refuge stood / Above the blind and battling multitude” (“To Wordsworth” 9-10). This blessing is acquired only if one can remain alienated from society. The “genuine human society” exists only in nature (Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism* 291), where he finds that “Society is here / A true community—a genuine frame / Of many into one incorporate” (“Recluse” 614-16). His love of nature, paralleling Christian’s’ worship of God, is always accompanied by his detest of society. The estrangement from society is indispensable to reach the grace of nature.

### **iii. The “transcendence” of Byronic nature and his condemnation of the world**

Never motivated by any transcendental goal, Byron exiled himself because of his own delinquency and incestuous relationship with his half-sister—not because of social

corruption. While Harold starts his pilgrimage, he does not hold nature as his haven as Rousseau or Wordsworth may do. Although Byron essentially rejects the separation of nature and society, he sometimes acquiesces in it like Wordsworth. The transcendence of nature presumes her separation from human beings:

All Heaven and Earth are still—though not in sleep,  
But breathless, as we grow when feeling most;  
And silent, as we stand in thoughts too deep:—  
All Heaven and Earth are still: From the high host  
Of stars, to the lulled lake and mountain-coast,  
All is concentered in a life intense,  
Where not a beam, nor air, nor leaf is lost,  
But hath a part of Being, and a sense  
Of that which is of all Creator and Defence. (3.833-41)

In this passage, Byron achieves transient forgetfulness: there is neither the hint of painful memory nor the reference to his traumatic self; a new vitality emerges in “a ‘Wordsworthian’ communion” with nature (Rawes, “1816-17” 123). “Silence” is quite unusual in his poetry since he is often pestered by the voices of the world while meditating on natural scenery. The silence of heaven and earth presumes the separation of nature and society. In silence, Byron receives the revelation from nature and obtains “a life intense,” deep feelings and thought, and a divine being. The recognition that everything “hath a part of Being” sounds Neoplatonic as well. In addition, he encounters an unidentified “Creator”—a situation unimaginable in the secular world. Such a mysterious, quasi-religious experience approximates Wordsworth’s transcendence but violates Byron’s worldliness, while this ‘revelation’ never turns him into a mighty poet-prophet. He generally neither claims himself an atheist nor holds religious devotion; his self-exile, nevertheless, refreshes and

“enlightens” him with a divine grace in nature, a transcendental experience rarely found in his “pilgrimage.”

In his Wordsworthian meditation, Byron emphasizes the nature-society dichotomy, an attempt that is seldom found in his discourse. Nature is thus supposed to last longer than culture: he considers that all will perish except nature (2.809-18); “Art, Glory, Freedom fail, but Nature still is fair” (2.827). The imperial “deeds of prowess” always die unrecorded (3.434); many ruins fall under contest and destruction, while “the discoloured Rhine” runs beneath them (3.439-41). The beauty and power of nature becomes apparent only when Byron stays far away from society: nature in the Rhine “[i]s to the mellow Earth as Autumn to the year” (3.571), and then he feels that his own mind is colored by her “every hue” (3.574); in Lake Lemman, with “the feeling infinite,” Byron/Harold experiences some “source of Music,” which reveals “[e]ternal harmony” and binds “all things with beauty” (3.842-49). Nature is assumed to be greater than culture: the ruins, “[f]all’n states and buried greatness,” Byron judges, “must ever be / The master-mould of Nature’s heavenly hand . . .” (4.220-23), while Byron/Harold feels that “earth, and earth-born jars, / And human frailties, were forgotten quite” (3.120-21). The insignificance of culture is emphasized when he sees the “transcendence” of nature: “Each hill and dale, each deepening glen and wold / Defies the power which crushed thy temples gone: / Age shakes Athenæ’s tower, but spares gray Marathon” (2.834-36). Here Byron may resound with the escapism of his contemporary Europeans. Athena’s aggressive temperament symbolizes culture and imperialism: while “age” may crush imperialism, nature remains untouched and even “defies” the power of time. As Napoleon ravished the whole continent, those who had anticipated the coming of the new heaven and earth could only turn to nature for comfort. In nature one may enjoy true liberty, symbolized by Marathon. Nature seems uninjured by the woes of Greece under the reign of the Turks: the “vales of evergreen” and “hills of snow” both proclaim

Greece to be “Nature’s varied favourite now” (2.803-04). Byron can indeed praise nature with the Wordsworthian flavor.

Facing the disorder of the contemporary Europe, Byron meditates on his relationship with nature:

I live not in myself, but I become  
Portion of that around me and to me  
High mountains are a feeling, but the hum  
Of human cities torture; I can see  
Nothing to loathe in Nature, save to be  
A link reluctant in a fleshly chain,  
Classed among creatures, when the soul can flee,  
And with the sky—the peak—the heaving plain  
Of Ocean, or the stars, mingle—and not in vain. (3.680-88)

This is the most Wordsworthian and unByronic announcement about the poet’s relationship with the world. His glorification of nature simultaneously belittles the mundane world and carries the Wordsworth’s tone, which often stresses the contrasts between the divinity and transcendence of nature on the one hand and the despicability and downgrading of human society on the other. The “torture” in the hum of cities may include the voice of imperialism, the memory of his profligate youth, and the awareness of sufferings of numerous victims in history. If possible, he would like to abandon his physical body, the “fleshly chain,” which always connects him with the materialistic world. Here Byron does not praise any “earthy community”; he would be “separated from the object that he can imagine conjunction with it” (MacLeod 269). The affirmation to become portion of that around him—to mingle with plain, ocean, and stars—echoes the ideal of nature-man union proposed by Wordsworth.

Byron’s self-exile, assuming the separation of nature and society, sometimes

allows him to gain the blessing of nature without religious connotations. He yearns to go to the place where “mortal foot hath ne’er or rarely been” so that he may witness “Nature’s charms” (2.220, 225)—this is not solitude (2.224), while among crowd he feels lonely (2.234). Finding his companions in nature (3.109-15), Byron/Harold realizes that he “is the most unfit / Of men to herd with Man, with whom he held / Little in common . . .” (3.100-02), and that “in Man’s dwellings he became a thing / Restless and worn, and stern and wearisome” (3.127-28). Comparing himself to “a wild-born falcon with clipt wing,” he treats “the boundless air” as his home (3.129-30). It is better for him to be alone in nature than “join the crushing crowd, doomed to inflict or bear” (3.671-79); he would rather “live and die unheard” (3.912). He worries that with the decline of his mortal body, corrupted by the mundane world, he may be barred from heaven (3.123-26); “in Man’s dwellings he became a thing / Restless and worn, and stern and wearisome” (3.127-28). Like Wordsworth, he has found himself “doomed” in human community, so he loves nature and would like to mingle with her (3.671-88, 707-08). This “pure passion” drives him to love nature more than any other things (3.710-11); cities, “the peopled desert” (3.690), bring him tortures (3.683), “agony and strife” (3.691), and “sorrow” (3.692). People may “deplore and struggle” in “a contentious world, striving where none are strong” (3.659, 661). He and the world do not love each other since the world is haunted by “rank breath” and “idolatries” (3.1049-51). He envisions his union with nature to continue after death (3.702). His yearning for nature does not come from his worship of nature, but from his detest of sorrow and bondage in the world. As he wanders alone in nature, his abhorrence of society sometimes comes to the fore and seemingly “justifies” the judgment on his “flirtation” with Wordsworth’s naturalism.

Yet this “flirtation” carries some subversive tone: Byron acknowledges the power of nature, but his Wordsworthian expressions expose his unwillingness to follow the

Laker poet. Wordsworth views nature with religious awe and piety, while Byron often minimalizes and even abolishes the tinge of divinity in nature. Nature, far from being a sacred shrine for his permanent dwelling, serves as only one station in his journey. Indeed, his eulogy of nature appears more like a “flirtation” with than a “commitment” to Wordsworthian naturalism. His wandering life prevents him from clinging to mother nature; his relief in her bosom means more a matter of personal choice than a response to the divine calling.

### **C. The ideal union of nature and an individual**

#### **i. The nature-man marriage metaphor in Wordsworthian redemption**

The redemption anticipated by Wordsworth culminates in the nature-man marriage—a metaphor that derives from the marriage of Christ and his believers (Revelation 19:7, 21:2, 21:9, 22:17). The emphasis on the separation of nature and society supposes the requirement for an individual to alienate himself/herself from society and then to be united with nature. The aforementioned “true community” and “genuine human society” both indicate the human unification with nature. With the deification of nature, Wordsworth identifies himself as a poet-prophet and preaches the gospels of nature. Following the union of Christ and the redeemed people, Wordsworth’s “gospels” anticipate the marriage of nature and man. Identifying himself as “a chosen son” in his vision, Wordsworth believes himself endowed with “holy powers” to “work and feel” (*Prelude* [1805] 3.82-84); his spirit, “thus singled out, as it might seem, / For holy services” (*Prelude* [1805] 1.63-64), can ascend to “community with highest truth” (*Prelude* [1805] 3.120). The Man, when “wedded to this goodly universe / In love and holy passion, shall find these / A simple produce of the common day” (“The Recluse” 806-08); he “communes with the Forms / Of Nature” and may feel joy in love (“The Excursion” 4.1207-13)—such a union is the way of

redemption in his nature-inspired belief. “The true Eden is the child of the common day, when that day dawns upon the great consummation of the reciprocal passion of Man and Nature” (Bloom, *Visionary* 126). His union with nature appears so remarkable that Hemans honors his poetry as “a part / Of those high scenes, a fountain from their heart” (5-6), and that Arnold approves that “Nature not only gave him the matter for his poem, but wrote his poem for him” (“Preface to The Poems of Wordsworth” 580). He achieves “the union between the mind and the external world,” and therefore his mind grows “as a direct transaction between that mind and nature” (Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism* 79, 92). The poet’s mind “[i]s lord and master, and that outward sense / Is but the obedient servant of her will” (*Prelude* [1805] 11.276-77). Only with such a power can the poet enjoy genuine freedom.

The nature-man marriage, “a prominent period-metaphor” in the romantic age, assumes the visionary poet to be “herald and inaugurator of a new and supremely better world” (Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism* 31); “We need only to unite our minds to the outer universe in a holy marriage, a passionate love-match, and paradise is ours” (Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism* 27). For Wordsworth, “the individual Mind and the external World are exquisitely fitted, each to the other, even as man and wife . . .” (Bloom, *Visionary* 127). This “marriage” means the redemption of humanity through “a reconciliation with nature” since “at the core of the modern malaise” lies the “fragmentation, dissociation, estrangement, or . . . ‘alienation’” (Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism* 145). The corrupted world has crushed humanity, and consequently, through the alienation from the source of corruption, one may finally achieve salvation in the “marriage” with nature.

## ii. The companionship of nature for Byron the exile

Like Wordsworth, Byron affirms the need for an individual to associate with nature. Yet this similarity does not reveal the whole truth about Byron’s worldview. As an



exile, he can merge with various “contexts”—culture, imperialism, and nature—but Wordsworth devotes himself only to nature. Byron does not endorse Neo-Platonism, and his “union” with any “context” is never Hegelian—he does not identify himself totally with his antagonists, while aloofness always exists in his association with the “contexts.”

Byron tends to describe his relationship with nature more as “companionship” than as “marriage.” More than once, he depicts his “rebirth” in the nature-man association: the Rhine’s “is like a scene alike where souls united” (3.565); Lake Lemman “woos” the poet so that “[t]here is too much of Man here” (3.644, 648)—a community more lovely than human society. He becomes a part of nature (3.680-81, 707-10); hence, “the feeling infinite”—the “soul and source of Music”—reveals “Eternal harmony,” “[b]inding all things with beauty” (3.842, 846-47, 849). The lonely wandering hero, isolated from his homeland, would be “[a] sharer in thy (night’s) fierce and far delight,— / A portion of the tempest and of thee” (3.871-72). These Wordsworth-like praises of nature do not redeem him from the remembrance of his juvenile delinquency, nor enable him to become a mighty poet-prophet.

Asserting his alienation from cities (3.682-83), in addition, Byron also delineates an ideal attachment to nature:

Where rose the mountains, there to him were friends;  
Where rolled the ocean, thereon was his home;  
Where a blue sky, and glowing clime, extends,  
He had the passion and the power to roam;  
The desert, forest, cavern, breaker’s foam,  
Were unto him companionship; they spake  
A mutual language, clearer than the tome  
Of his land’s tongue, which he would oft forsake

For Nature's pages glassed by sunbeams on the lake. (3.109-17)

In one word, nature is treated as his "companion." Spouses need the life-long commitment, but companions can part company anytime, a relationship that caters to the taste of a wanderer. She transforms the moody, bored exile into a passionate nature-lover. This image is radically different from that of the lonely wanderer at the beginning of his journey. Nevertheless, Byron's view of nature is nurtured from his exile. Unlike Wordsworth, who cultivates his "rootedness" in the Lake District, Byron embraces mountains, ocean, sky, deserts, forests, caverns, and lakes, enjoying nature's companionship wherever he wanders. However, Byron does not devote himself solely and wholly to this companionship: his worldly concern usually occupies his meditations in solitude, a situation that will be further discussed in his Lucretian view on nature.

Hence, Wordsworth and Byron display different styles of "union" with nature: the former maintains a stable, pious, and hermit-like manner, while the latter holds a dynamic, casual, and roamer-aware vogue. In the Wordsworthian man-nature marriage, humanity finally ascends to the transcendence and acquires the ultimate peace and power; in the companionship of Byronic nature, the exile can still wander toward the unpredictable future without the sign of lying at anchor. Byron may taste the Wordsworthian blessing in nature for a while; his willful self-exile, without disrupting his "union" with nature, leads him to know her various facets.

#### **D. Nature's nourishment of a mighty poet-prophet**

##### **i. The powerful poet-prophet: Wordsworth's another rewriting of the biblical revelation**

The revival of an individual by uniting with nature usually features the acquisition of a tremendous power. In Wordsworth's poetry, "the presentation of nature is structured according to the inward motions and transitions of the observing consciousness. The thoughts, reflections and memories of the individual mind are the

subject and theme “with nature as a token” (Day 45). The individual human subject “is identified with a transcendent subjectivity,” while the objects of the material world “may be read as emblems of a profounder, spiritual reality transcending nature, time and space” (Day 58-59). Such poetry presumes a mighty, authoritative creator, who is endowed with “the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings.”

The union with nature makes Wordsworth a potent poet-prophet—this is another rewriting of the biblical revelation in addition to (1) the recognition of nature as the savior as well as the new heaven and earth, and (2) the nature-man marriage. He enhances his capacity by responding to “whate’er of Terror or of Love, / Or Beauty, Nature’s daily face put on” (*Prelude* [1850] 3.136-37). He recounts his development of the “intellectual power from stage to stage / Advancing hand in hand with love and joy” (*Prelude* [1805] 11.43-44); “the discipline / And consummation of the poet’s mind / In every thing that stood most prominent / Have faithfully been pictured” (*Prelude* [1805] 13.271-74). Therefore, “I had a world about me; ’twas my own, / I made it; for it only liv’d to me, / And to the God who look’d into my mind” (*Prelude* [1805] 3.142-44). Hence, “life pervades the undecaying mind” and “the immortal soul with God-like power / Informs, creates . . .” (*Prelude* [1850] 4.165-66). Inspired by nature,

poets, even as prophets, each with each

Connected in a mighty scheme of truth

Have each for his peculiar dower a sense

By which he is enabled to perceive

Something unseen before . . . . (*Prelude* [1805] 301-05)

The subtitle of *The Prelude*—Growth of a Poet’s Mind—presumes the poet as increasingly potent. This growth, relying on the divine power of nature, is manifested in his keen perception and brilliant imagination. As a “[t]rue bard, and holy,” he “[s]ees where the springs of living waters lie” (Hemans 25, 28). The identity of a

poet-prophet signifies the sacredness of his poetic creativity: he must be sanctified because nature is sacred. The recognition derives from the Bible: “For I am the Lord your God: ye shall therefore sanctify yourself, and ye shall be holy; for I am holy” (Leviticus 11:44, 45); “Ye shall be holy: for I the Lord your God am holy” (Leviticus 19:2; cf. 1 Peter 1:16); “For thou art an holy people unto the Lord thy God” (Deuteronomy 7:6; 14:2; 14:21); “In the body of his [Jesus’s] flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unreprouvable in his sight” (Colossian 1:22); “For God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but to holiness” (1 Thessalonians 4:7). A redeemed Christian, when united with God, gains power in holiness; likewise, a poet in Wordsworth’s poetics matures and becomes mighty when associated with nature in sacredness.

Furthermore, Wordsworth explores the divine power which one may gain from nature. Human beings are regarded “as natural beings in the strength of nature,” existing in “the world / Of all of us, the place in which, in the end, / We find our happiness, or not at all” (*Prelude* [1805] 3.194; 10.726-28). An inspired poet may also convey this power to the others: “Something which power and effort may impart; / I would impart it, I would spread it wide: immortal in the world which is to come”; he is “divinely taught” to speak of “what in man is human or divine (“The Recluse” 689-91, 700, 702). He discerns how nature “by extrinsic passion first / Peopled the mind with forms of sublime or fair” (*Prelude* [1850] 1.545-46); he sees the scene “[t]he perfect image of a mighty mind, / Of one that feeds upon infinity” (*Prelude* [1805] 13.69-70). The poet-prophet will reveal that “the mind of man becomes / A thousand times more beautiful than the earth” and that this mind is “[i]n beauty exalted, as it is itself / Of quality and fabric more divine” (*Prelude* [1850] 14.450-51, 455-56). Finally, the poet acquires “absolute strength / And clearest insight, amplitude of mind, / And reason in her most exalted mood” together with “[t]he feeling of life endless, the

one thought / By which we live, infinity and God" (*Prelude* [1805] 13.168-70, 183-84). Hence Wordsworth transforms the biblical revelation by proclaiming that one may obtain in nature the "absolute strength" like God.

Yet Wordsworth deviates from Christianity: Christians crave for holiness, but Wordsworth promises "omnipotence"—the ultimate demonstration of "the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings." This Neo-Platonic ideal assumes that human beings can acquire divinity in nature, and that they can be nature's equal. Wordsworth's poetic "power" has won some critical approvals. Coleridge praises his might: "Strong in thyself and powerful to give strength!" ("To William Wordsworth" 107). Though displeased by Wordsworth's inferior work, Arnold still affirms his "great and ample body of powerful work" and his "bare, sheer, penetrating power" bestowed by nature ("Preface to *The Poems of Wordsworth*" 577, 581). In his union with nature, "Wordsworth comes to a full understanding of his poetic self" and discovers "a likeness between man and Nature" (Bloom, *Visionary* 132). As nature is believed to be transcendental and almighty, so will human beings be as they are united with nature. Wordsworth's ideal poet is supposed to grow into a mighty, divine, glorious being under the patronage of nature. He adapts the biblical ideas for his deistic poetics.

**ii. Byron's quasi-Wordsworthian demonstration of power versus his confession of weakness**

Byron indeed acknowledges the transformative power of nature and a poet's acquisition of her power. The beauty of nature can bring rejuvenation: in nature one may feel that "the heart can never all grow old" (3.93-94). "Nature formed at first the inward man, / And actors copy Nature—when they can" (3.151-52). "She gave our mind's interpreter—the tongue, / Who, worn with use, of late would fain dispense / (At least in theatres) with common sense" (3.156-58). Thence, despite his suffering and frustration, he can still "remount at last / With a fresh pinion" and feel "waxing vigorous

as the Blast” (3.693-95). Byron’s repeated calling “All Heaven and Earth” (3.833-41) reminds us of the tone of the prophets in the Old Testament: this is the moment when he obtains “a life intense” and feels the presence of an unknown Creator. To some extent, he echoes Wordsworth’s assertion about the growth of a poet’s power through the nature-man “union.”

Nevertheless, such a vitality, merely sparkling briefly, fails to maintain for Byron an image of a mighty poet-prophet. As he restarts his pilgrimage at the beginning of Canto III, he compares himself to a “weed”: “Flung from the rock, on Ocean’s foam, to sail / Where’er the surge may sweep, the tempest’s breath prevail” (3.16-18). Like a weed, he can only endure hardships pathetically. Despite the inspiration of nature, he still acknowledges his own weakness after many “journey years”: with “dried-up tears,” he sees merely “a sterile track behind,” “the last sands of life—where not a flower appears” (3.24-27); his “heart and harp have lost a string,” and consequently he finds no wonder “in his world of woe” (3.29, 37-39). He recognizes himself as nothing (3.50). Knowing that his “springs of life were poisoned,” he discovers his own change after taking his journey; nevertheless, this discovery comes too late and does not invigorate him (3.60-63). He still suffers from “the wounds which kill not, but ne’er heal” (3.68). Though still a young man, he bemoans that “years steal / Fire from the mind as vigour from the limb” (3.70-71); he remains bounded by “a chain / Which galled for ever” (3.77-78). He even questions the healing power of nature by asking: “What deep wounds ever closed without a scar? / The heart’s bleed longest, and but heal to wear / That which disfigures it . . .” (3.788-89). Canto III ends with the memory of his own daughter, as it starts; he cannot disguise his fragility and vulnerability. Byron lacks Wordsworth’s religious devotion to nature, and consequently can never pose as a poet-prophet. Wordsworth also criticizes Byron for his lack of creative power: “The true way of dealing with these men [like Byron] is to

shew that they want genuine power. That talents they have, but these talents are of a *mean* order” (William and Dorothy Wordsworth 305). The Laker poet judges the exile as merely an awkward, impotent imitator or plagiarist.

The poet-prophet image opposes Byron’s fractured, broken self as an exile. Both Wordsworth and Byron wandered in Europe. Yet the former focuses on his growth in the interaction with nature, while the latter views nature as merely one of the “contexts” in which he defines his own identities. The poems that Byron praises in Wordsworth’s *Poems, in Two Volumes* are “all lyrics about loss, grief and insecurity” (Stabler, “Byron” 139)—since these correspond to the younger poet’s feelings. Wordsworth displays his maturity in his “self-educative” journey (Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism* 285), but Byron strives to “reconstitute” his broken self in his “pilgrimage.” In addition, without the religious piety and commitment to nature, Byron can hardly mature as a second-rate Wordsworth.

Byron recognizes the might and sacredness of nature, and he does not deny the possibility of attaining power from her—yet he simply chooses not to follow the Laker poet. Amazing is his fortitude when he suffers from his memory: “Byron’s deeply un-Wordsworthian method is that his melancholy is openly heroic” like “that of Prometheus” (Murphy, “Glory” 671-72). This capacity does not belong to the Wordsworthian nature-inspired force; Byron is “heroic” in confronting his own tremendous trauma, but he is not “powerful” enough to shake off his painful memory. Prometheus must suffer daily from the hawk’s gnawing of his liver, so must Byron always bear his guilt-ridden recollection—both “bound” heroes exert their unyielding will, yet they can never neglect their weariness and weakness in their resistance. As a portion of nature, he does not become a mighty poet-prophet; rather, his weakness, sadness, pride, and unyieldingness are all symbolized in natural scenes. His steadfast endurance can abolish neither the memory of his guilt nor his bitter sense of loss.

Byron may flaunt his indomitable will as he depicts the landscapes, but he owns no Wordsworthian strength.

Wordsworth gains “spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings” by composing from his “recollection in tranquility,” while Byron’s recollection in guilt, sorrow, and boredom can enfeeble and frustrate him. As a poet of worldliness, he sees his own weakness more frequently than his “strength.” His honest and confessional illustrations of his sparkling power and of his inherent weakness manifest his contrapuntal view and his worldliness as well.

### **E. Byron’s resistance to his Wordsworthian meditation**

To sum up, Byron’s “flirtation” with Wordsworthian naturalism exposes more their differences than their similarities. The younger romantic’s perception of nature’s divinity does not assume her consecration of mankind. His recognition of the separation between nature and society, devoid of Wordsworth’s religious passion and commitment, stems from his exile. His companionship with nature—not assumed as Wordsworth’s life-long devotion—means only one way of life among many others. The expectation to become a mighty poet-prophet, fully approved by Wordsworth, seldom touches him; rather, he confesses his own inherent weakness. As it is pointed out earlier, Byron frequently and deliberately displays contradictory elements without reconciling them. Thence, Byron resists the Wordsworthian naturalism but does not renounce it in his poetry.

Byron’s resistance to Wordsworth reflects his “decentered” penchant as an exile: the Laker poet has been honored as “the authority figure” in the contemporary England (Cooke 11), while Byron’s satirical remarks on this authority may assert his own poetic independence. To view Byron as enjoying the Wordsworthian redemptive promise “is to ignore the purgatory of his self-exile in 1816, his general disdain for nature poetry and piety, and especially his dislike for Wordsworth’s lakelocked poetry” (Soderholm,



“Byron’s Ludic Lyrics” 744). Wordsworth, as a poet of nature (Shelley, “To Wordsworth” 1), speaks with the religious language and poses himself as a poet-prophet. Yet Byron, a poet of worldliness, probes into various aspects of nature in a secular tone and perspective.<sup>4</sup> Both are frustrated by Napoleon’s imperialism; however, Wordsworth finds his paradise in nature, while Byron still mourns for the mundane world in secluded beautiful scenes. His “absorption into a sense of nature’s transcendental processes is not a culminating or defining event, it is one experience among many” (McGann, “Byron and Wordsworth” 176). Wordsworthian ideal features the “rootedness” of the poet, the apotheosis of nature, and the separation of nature from the mundane world. Byron, by contrast, perceives the changing roles of nature, the decentering of nature, and the heterogeneous, contrapuntal relationship between nature and society.

### **III. Lucretian nature in “Childe Harold”: The features of nature perceived by an exile**

Byron believes that “the poet is a man like other men but endowed with more lively sensibilities,” while his “gods” turn out to be “Lucretian” (McGann, “Byron and the anonymous lyric” 97-98). “Byron’s Nature is more Lucretian than Rousseauist – as dangerous as it is dependable, and marked more by indifference than by love or benevolent ministries” (McGann, “Byron and the lyric of sensibility” 161). This judgment holds Byron and Wordsworth as antithetical in terms of their interpretations of nature.

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<sup>4</sup> By identifying Byron as “Elijah in the wilderness,” William Blake, in *The Ghost of Abel*, insinuates that Byron does not gain the vision of “the union of man and God” (Tannenbaum 353)—a refusal to commit himself to the Creator. Similarly, he cannot devote himself to nature. This refusal prevents him from “redemption” and dooms him to endless exile.

Lucretius explicates the physical principles of the universe in *On the Nature of Things* (*De rerum natura*). “Nature all creates, and multiplies / And fosters all” (*On the Nature* 1.92-93); she “decreed / What each can do, what each can never do” (*On the Nature* 1.673-74). As “the steersman” and “guide” (*On the Nature* 5.146), nature here includes “the law behind / The wandering courses of the sun and moon,” “the powers that speed all life below,” and “the mind, of what the soul is made” (*On the Nature* 1.150-52, 154)—in other words, this concept refers to both mother nature and humanity. Human beings and the natural world, therefore, should be viewed as One at first. Like Wordsworth, Lucretius affirms the healing power of nature: following Epicureanism, the philosopher assumes the disappearance of pain and conflict in nature; it is sweet to stay away from evils and wars (*On the Nature* 2.5-9); nature can protect our mind from care and fear; her law can dispel terror and darkness of the mind (*On the Nature* 2.21-24, 75-78). Yet, unlike Wordsworth, he believes that the physical nature is infinite—in her scope, not in her power (*On the Nature* 1.1158-86). This infinity, nevertheless, assumes her as neither omnipotent as Christian God nor transcendental as Rousseavian nature. Lucretius proposes an atheistic worldview. The poet’s “lively sensibilities,” in this worldview, do not come from nature or any transcendental power; the so-called nature-man association does not guarantee the growth of a poet-prophet.

Byron may owe the presence of Lucretian nature in his poetry to his wandering. The nomadic exile does not find a permanent home in a particular place, and consequently everything in his perception is always changing. Thus, nature does not remain transcendental and untouched by the world in “Childe Harold.” Wordsworthian nature for him represents merely one of many roles she assumes. As nature in “Childe Harold” appears more Lucretian than Rousseauist, as McGann judges, Byron mainly portrays her with three features—mutability, de-apotheosis, and plurality—which parallels his characteristics as an exile: nomadic, decentering, and

contrapuntal respectively.

## **A. The mutability of nature**

### **i. From a mother to a companion**

Lucretius anticipates Byron in his descriptions of nature. Firstly, nature is incessantly changing. Nothing is permanent in nature; she can always dissolve and revive everything continually (*On the Nature* 1.240-41, 252-56, 282-83, 298-300). Nature “changeth all, compelleth all / To transformation . . .” (*On the Nature* 5.1178-79). Wordsworth also assumes several roles on nature: in addition to a deity, he asserts: “Let nature be your teacher” (“The Tables Turned” 16). As Wordsworthian nature “is endowed with the attributes and powers of a mother, father, nurse, teacher, lover, as well as a deity (or deities)” (Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism* 92), her multiple and changing roles are recognized as inevitable. Nevertheless, her “change” in Wordsworthian poetics involves no essential transformation—mother, father, nurse, teacher, lover, or deity are merely various names for the same benevolent and patronizing supreme being. By contrast, Lucretian/Byronic nature displays radically different characteristics in “Childe Harold.”

Like Wordsworth, Byron may compare nature to a mother. In Rome, Byron perceives that Arno the river contributed to the commercial prosperity, and consequently the Renaissance flourished: “buried Learning rose . . . to a new Morn” (4.424-32). Arno, the incarnation of mother nature, fostered the development of human culture. In “the arrowy Rhone,” as he meditates on the benefits of a solitary life in nature, Byron also emphasizes her image as a mother: the “nursing Lake [Geneva]” nourishes the Rhone as a mother feeds an infant (3.673-76). This role presumes nature as a protector and a patroness.

In addition to being a kind mother, nature in “Childe Harold” may appear as a companion. As it has been pointed out, Byron’s treatment of nature as a companion

opposes Wordsworthian deistic poetics. Nature as a mother is believed to be majestic, revered, and superior to all creatures; nature as a companion is assumed to stand on equal terms with human beings. In Albania, Harold is fascinated by nature: “Where rose the mountains, there to him were friends” (3.109); “desert, forest, cavern, breaker’s foam” were his “companions” (3.113-14). His intention to mingle with nature (3.680-88) assumes her as a companion—not as a deity that can make him transcendental because he still remembers his sin and sorrow even though he is “absorbed” in nature (3.689-92). In Switzerland, Lake Lemman (Geneva) woos him (3.644); its “soft murmuring / Sounds sweet as if a Sister’s voice reproved” (3.803-04). Speaking as a “sister,” nature here merely utters a complaint, a suggestion, or a protest, not demanding the poet’s unconditional submission to her. He enjoys “a populous solitude” in Clarens (3.949)—a paradoxical feeling that renders nature as a friend.

The companionship represents the poet’s intention to associate himself with nature as a partner. Nature as a companion can still maintain a friendly, beneficial relationship with mankind, but her alleged divinity and transcendence almost vanish or become diminished. Without featuring mysticism, this role divulges the poet’s anxiety in loneliness and his yearning for a devoted friend. Changes of roles presuppose some fundamental alterations of nature in the poet’s understanding; nature is expected to remedy his deficiency in his selfhood.

## **ii. The mutability of nature and Byron’s exile**

Moreover, the specific role “mother” still assumes nature as ever changing:

Dear Nature is the kindest mother still!  
Though always changing, in her aspect mild;  
From her bare bosom let me take my fill,  
Her never-weaned, though not her favoured child.  
Oh! she is fairest in her features wild,

Where nothing polished dares pollute her path:  
To me by day or night she ever smiled,  
Though I have marked her when none other hath,  
And sought her more and more, and loved her best in wrath. (2.325-33)

To declare nature as “the kindest mother” presupposes the existence of other “mothers.” In other words, the poet suggests that “nature” be one of the homes or “contexts” by which he can reconstitute his self-identity. Her “changing” status indicates her multiple roles in Byron’s perception. His observation of her smiles “by day or night” reveals his multiple, contrapuntal insight: nature must not be simplified to a monolithic image. This ever-changing status parallels Byron’s relationship with her. Identifying himself as her “never-weaned” child, Byron implies not only his burning passion to be associated with her but also his never-healed wounds incurred by his memories of history and of personal life. These “wounds” always push him to find cure in nature. Yet as her unfavored child, he confesses his ambiguous relationship with this “kindest mother”: he loves to refresh himself in nature, but he cannot belong to her unreservedly because, as a radical exile, he refuses any commitment, despite his intention to seek her “more and more.” Her ultimate beauty, besides, appears in “her features wild”—the multiplicity of her roles means her incorporation of various antithetical features, and may trigger the contrapuntal interpretations of her essence. Detecting her “mild” aspect and “wild” features, he prefers the latter to the former—a taste different from Wordsworth’s. Her beauty “in wrath” is the “fairest”: her “wrath” may arouse terror and shock, yet such terrible scenes can be aesthetically delightful, a situation that embrace both sublimity and beauty. Mother nature, in other words, must be viewed as a round character; antithetical features constitute her being contrapuntally. Byron’s perception of her diversity was nurtured by his nomadic life: the lack of “rootedness” pushed him continually to know her various aspects.

Nature remains ever-changing, so does Byron's dwelling places. If nature signifies an ideal state, then Byron, a man of the world, involves in secular affairs too much to embrace "the kindest mother" wholeheartedly. Rather, his perception of her diverse images may simultaneously echo his various personal feelings—her mutability reflects less Byron's desire for revival than his nomadic life. Nature in Byron's poetry is far from being stable, harmonious, and unified. The following discussions will explore some other roles of Byronic/Lucretian nature.

## **B. The de-apotheosis of nature**

### **i. Lucretius's atheistic perspective**

Secondly, nature is "decentered" and de-apotheosized. As Lucretius asserts, nature as the creator of the world was not an omnipotent power (*On the Nature* 2.264-65). Chance, not a supreme being, predominates in the world, while nature exists, being "[r]id of all gods" (*On the Nature* 1.173-83, 2.1373-75). This is a universe without God, ultimate order, and absolute stability. People fear because they presume that deities are manipulating the universe, while the revelation of the reality of nature can dispel this fear (*On the Nature* 1.165-68). All incidents are "accidents," not the designs or plans of deities (*On the Nature* 1.531-32). In addition, since the world is boundless, there is no so-called "center" (*On the Nature* 1.1280-81, 1292-94). Nature, though fostering the movement of the world, exists merely as the "artificer of the world" (*On the Nature* 5.317); therefore, "the whole nature of the world itself / Must be conceived as perishable too" (*On the Nature* 5.323-24). Byron's "decentered" worldview matches Lucretian discourse on nature.

The changing roles of nature presume the decentering of her status as well. God in Christianity never yields to any transformation, while mutability essentially contradicts transcendence. An exile, being "decentered," is usually skeptic. Consequently, Byron does not insistently treat nature as God, neither can he persistently

deify nature as Wordsworth does: he “has strayed into a wilderness of ‘doubt’ and apprehends only the physical world of ‘Nature’, which ‘dissolves’ . . .” while “he has lost sight of the eternal” (Howe, [Anthony] “Voice” 44-45). The “de-apotheosis” of nature means that she, not definitely a deity separated from the mundane world, may reflect human feelings—or “pathetic fallacy” proposed by John Ruskin (*Modern Painters*). Yet this “fallacy” illustrates his peculiar “union” with nature—not in the Wordsworthian or Rousseauist style, but in the Lucretian—and Byronic—mode.

## ii. Nature as a mirror of human feelings

The “pathetic fallacy” violates the deification of nature. Deified nature exists as the *subject* in Wordsworthian poetics, but in the “pathetic fallacy” she becomes merely an *object*: nature plays the role of “mirror”—in this case, human feelings become the focus of the poet’s discourse. A decentering exile cannot maintain a stable subject-object relationship. While he venerates nature like Wordsworth, nature is the subject; while he indulges in the “pathetic fallacy,” his self becomes the subject. His wandering contributes to his perceptions of nature and the world as ever-changing; his decentering, skeptical view deprives him of the possibility to be rooted in a place or a belief. The lack of rootedness accompanies his nomadic life, and thus he is obsessed with the awareness of deficiency in his self or in the world. “Childe Harold” is “a poem of places *for* the self as well as places *of* the self. The former are [sic.] those where the self seeks location, the latter the locations within the self” (Garber 44). This argument echoes Byron’s continual reconstitution of selfhood in his traveling. As he searches for various places for sightseeing, he is simultaneously seeking for his identity. Culture, nature, empires, and his selfhood can all be intertwined in his poetry, but none of them is treated as the absolute, permanent subject. He incessantly judges various “contexts,” but he also evaluates himself under these “contexts.” Byron’s frequent use of fragmentary images implies that his “reconstitution” of self-image and his

judgment of the “contexts” can never be finished and consummated. Self-sufficiency is not found in nature, culture, or the poet’s identity—rather, their affiliation is indispensable to create meanings. This affiliation, a contrapuntal relationship proposed by Edward Said, presupposes the mutual dependence of all elements and thus negates the existence of a transcendental, unchanged subject. Therefore, the counterpoint of all “parts” brings forward a mutable subject-object relationship.

Byron may often delineate human feelings—especially his own—by describing natural scenes. At the glance of the “barren spot” in Ithaca, Harold turns to lament for Penelope and Sappho (2.343-49), implying his sense of bitter loss. Here “sad Penelope o’erlooked the wave” (2.344). The poet at this moment is lamenting for his loss of connection with his beloved half-sister and daughter, and this “barren spot” arouses his memory of Penelope’s excruciating waiting for her husband Odysseus. His sense of loss also echoes that of “Dark Sappho,” who, an exile from Sicily, could not quench her “immortal fire” in her bosom with her immortal verse (1.347-48). Byron, Penelope, and Sappho all suffer because of their disconnection from their beloved ones, and therefore this scene looks “barren.” Culture (represented by the two women), nature, and Byron’s personal emotion are interwoven in this “barren spot.” In addition, this spot has witnessed the destructions brought by the Ottoman Empire and the Napoleon Empire: numerous dead warriors also lost connections with their beloved ones. Countless battles have rendered this spot “barren” as well. Indeed, Byron “often tends to overshadow this environment, exploiting its imaginative, spiritual and personal possibilities alongside its historical ones” (Pala 78). Nature as a “mirror” presumes a contrapuntal relationship among these multiple elements. This “fallacy” looks “pathetic” since Byron—in his association with Penelope, Sappho, and dead warriors—exposes his inability to shake off his own past or human history even if he wanders alone, for nature always triggers his memory and historical consciousness,



leaving him to suffer the “slings and arrows of outrageous fortune” (Shakespeare, *Hamlet* 3.1.58). His depictions of landscapes, “as complex, heterogeneous and personal negotiations with real places and their attendant histories . . . realign self, other, imagination, the physical, the metaphysical, past and present” in ways that embrace the poet’s observing consciousness and the places (Pala 90). In brief, Byron’s contrapuntal view on nature, with his “pathetic fallacy,” affiliates himself also with historical, autobiographical, cultural elements. Nature herself as a “mirror” of the poet’s thoughts and feelings tended to be neglected. Byron often foregrounds his selfhood in his descriptions of nature.

The examples of Byron’s “pathetic fallacy” prevails in “Childe Harold.” As he moves across Albania, he sees “weary waves retire to gleam at rest” (2.623) when feeling tired, and he enjoys this atmosphere since he is “received as a welcome guest” by nature (2.628-630). While staying in Clarens, he enjoys the air there as “the young breath of passionate Thought” (3.924). Byron links Mount Athos with “godly Eremite” (2.235-43): nature, in other words, can be as estranged and lonely as a hermit in a “hallowed spot,” isolated from human society (2.240) like the poet himself. The Rhone flows between mountains “which appear as lovers who have parted / In hate . . .” (3.878-80): the craggy, lofty mountains, separated by the river, are compared to a pair of lovers, who bear grudges against each other and who refuse to reconcile—a relationship not unlike that between Byron and his half-sister. The thunder scene is likened to that of people’s playing (3.889-90): the poet must be in good mood, and therefore he feels no shock by the thundering. While visiting Leucadia, where Sappho supposedly committed suicide, Harold sees “far-projecting rock of woe” (2.362) and “the billows’ melancholy flow” (2.367) as if nature were lamenting for the “fruitless love” of the Greek poet (2.363). As he leaves England, “[t]he waters heave around me; and on high / The winds lift up their voices” (3.6-7): nature at this moment reflects

his anxiety. In Ardennes, the forest near Waterloo, nature sheds “tear-drops” when the soldiers pass, “Grieving, if aught inanimate e’er grieves, / Over the unreturning brave . . .” (3.236-38): actually, Byron is mourning for the dead soldiers. By Lake Lemman, moreover,

. . . the Starlight dews  
All silently their tears of Love instil,  
Weeping themselves away, till they infuse  
Deep into Nature’s breast the spirit of her hues. (3.820-23)

The poet is weeping for his half-sister Augusta, while nature is also shedding the “tears of Love.”<sup>5</sup> Byron’s “pathetic fallacy” flourishes in weaving the counterpoint of natural beauty and his own feelings. His “reconstitution” of selfhood can thus be discerned in an allegorical reading of nature. He is “united” with nature as his descriptions of natural scenes symbolize his own emotion.

In Mount Jura, moreover, Byron symbolizes his satirical temperament with “Lightning”:

Could I embody and unbosom now  
That which is most within me,—could I wreak  
My thoughts upon expression, and thus throw  
Soul—heart—mind—passions—feelings—strong or weak—  
All that I would have sought, and all I seek,  
Bear, know, feel—and yet breathe—into *one* word,  
And that one word were Lightning, I would speak;

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<sup>5</sup> Byron commits the “pathetic fallacy” in observing Lake Lemman again in “Sonnet to Lake Lemman”: he believes that “the lore / Of mighty minds doth hallow in the core / Of human hearts the ruin of a wall / Where dwelt the wise and wondrous . . .” (6-9). Rousseau, Voltaire, Gibbon, and de Staël can make the banks of Lemman lovely (6). Nature becomes significant and beautiful because of the “mighty minds” of these masters.

But as it is, I live and die unheard,

With a most voiceless thought, sheathing it as a sword. (3.905-13)

This exemplifies the poet's blatant "pathetic fallacy": Byron compares his thought, "which is most within" him, to "Lightning"—an aggressive and terrifying force, which usually permeates in his satire and criticism; this comparison also demonstrates his willingness to become a portion of nature. This comparison is "Byron's deepest and most savage feelings," more powerful than the storm of Jungfrau; "Byron's savage desire in this passage is therefore literally beyond nature, an *unnatural* response to the behavior and the desire of his antagonists. Theirs is the anti-nature of moral virtue, Byron's is the anti-nature that demands a morality beyond the order of moral virtue" (McGann, "Byron and the anonymous lyric" 104). Byron's "savage desire" is "unnatural" when judged by Rousseau's philosophy: for the philosopher, the "unnatural" arises when human beings interact by emphasizing the individual rather than the mutual benefit (Rousseau, *Discourse* 14). In other words, Byron's satire of his enemies is "unnatural" in the sense that it satisfies *his whim* to mock the others. Moreover, this aggressive force also means to challenge imperialism and all his "enemies": his satires may attack his "antagonists" like lightning, a natural force that appears "anti-natural." Nature for Byron "supplies emblems of his already existent condition and not independent, lasting, spiritual solace" (Manning, [Peter] "Sublime" 902). Whether he appears unnatural or anti-natural, his secularism fundamentally opposes Wordsworthian religious zest to nature. Byron's "merge" into nature exerts no sacred, lofty ideal, but functions as a sharp satirical "sword"—a blasphemous and self-aggrandizing gesture because the poet manipulates this "kindest mother" for pouring out his bitter attack. Claiming himself as a portion of nature, he can even justify his satire (Lightning) though his force may look unnatural or antinatural. Consequently, the sacredness of nature is totally subverted and mocked: the satirist intends to "employ"

nature for his own purpose.

Byron the satirist is doomed to be lonely, but he still attempts to tell the world his own pain in solitude: his solitude is meant to be shared to the world, not to elevate his spirituality. He reveals his own isolation by describing the Tannen trees in the Alps: they grow

Loftiest on loftiest and least sheltered rocks,  
Rooted in barrenness, where nought below  
Of soil supports them 'gainst the Alpine shocks  
Of eddying storms; yet springs the trunk, and mocks  
The howling tempest, till its height and frame  
Are worthy of the mountains from whose blocks  
Of bleak, gray granite into life it came,  
And grew a giant tree;—the Mind may grow the same. (4.173-80).

The description of the scene amounts to his self-expression. His alienated image is symbolized in the “loftiest and least sheltered rocks,” “barrenness,” “nought,” and “bleak, gray granite.” The withered trees in the Alps may symbolize “Byron’s morally blasted family connections” (Soderholm, “Byron’s Ludic Lyrics” 744). Feeling despair about his “morally blasted” family, the poet compares himself to “a giant tree”—a portion of nature, a being separated from the others and mocking the harsh environment. The whole natural scene epitomizes Byron’s situation in human community: he always finds himself excluded and ill-treated in his homeland, and he usually counterattacks his enemies by ridiculing them. Nature therefore becomes a mirror of his own life, not an almighty deity to be worshipped. Neither barrenness nor storms can destroy his unyielding will, and he finally becomes one with nature, as he declares that “the Mind may grow the same”—bleak and gray. Therefore, ennui and *Weltschmerz* brand him and the Byronic heroes.

Byron's journey in nature leads to the heart of humanity simultaneously. A wounded wanderer may find temporary comfort not because of the presence of a new savior in a secluded area, but because of pouring out his own grief to a "companion." Such a technique, integrating both natural scenery and human feelings, is dialogic and contrapuntal. The poet sees more the reflections of his moods than natural beauty, while his intentional imposition of personal feelings on the scenes, far from worshipping nature as a deity, assumes himself as the "center" of his poetry—and obviously contradicts his "decentered" view of an exile. As he wishes to reconstitute his self-identity in nature, he should have remained consistent in his "decentering." Though echoing Lucretius in his presentation of nature, Byron still holds his selfhood as his central concern. His disregard of self-contradiction perhaps resounds with his nomadic life: as rootedness in a context cannot be sustained and mutability prevails, he does not maintain the consistency of his views.

Byron's association with nature is not essentially Wordsworthian: his "union" with the "kindest mother" appears in his imposition of personal satirical temperament and anxieties on nature. His "pathetic fallacy," furthermore, represents instantaneously the "downgrading" of nature. Byron the exile, experiencing the mysterious "revival" in nature, continues his wandering without any sign of settling down. He finds "friends" and "home" everywhere in his journey, but this "companionship" does not yield a long-term haven for this stubborn, solitary wanderer. This attitude parallels his relationship with Augusta and Ada: despite his memory of his half-sister and daughter, he can never fully commit himself to them. Indulging in but refusing to be bound by a stable relationship, Byron is doomed to wander in a paradoxical mentality. Alienation lies too deep in his mind to be eliminated, while the so-called "union" with nature serves as one aspect of his worldliness.

### **iii. Nature as a sufferer under the impact of imperialism**

Nature as a mirror of human feelings manifests Byron's subversion of her supposed sacred, lofty status. Additionally, he even portrays her as a victim in the imperialist enterprise. For many romantics, the love of nature may result from their frustration about imperialism and signifies their escapism: "The retreat from London to the country—the essential element of Romanticism—was a retreat to an idealized rural periphery not just from the urban centre but also from the effects of empire" (Fulford 179). However, Byron's worldliness prevents him from involving in such escapism even when he enjoys the beauty of nature: "Wherever he looks, the landscape reveals battlefields and the ruins of past civilizations: it is the book not of God or of womanly fostering but of man's depredations" (Manning, [Peter], "Sublime" 901). The secular world looms larger than nature in Byron's poetry. His emphatic worldly suggestion of "man's depredations," which culminate in imperialism, makes Byron "unromantic." The sacredness of mother nature undergoes dramatic subversion.

Nature can be exaggeratively threatened by Napoleon's imperialism. As Byron laments: "Ne barrier wall, ne river deep and wide, / Ne horrid crags, nor mountains dark and tall, / Rise like the rocks that part Hispania's land from Gaul" (1.366-68). The Pyrenees is praised here not for its sublimity or beauty, but for its symbolic resistance to the French invasion. The poet evaluates the mountain by regarding it as the dividing line between Spain and France, a separation that marks the independence of Spain. "And *all* must shield their *all*, or share Subjection's woes" (1.359)—since Spain was conquered by Napoleon at last, the Pyrenees had to bear the woes with the Spanish people. "Europe's flowers long rooted up before / The trampler of her vineyards," while "death, depopulation, bondage, fears" haunted the continent (3.174-76). Moreover, in Ardennes, a forest near Waterloo, the "green leaves" are covered with dews, "nature's tear-drops" (3.235-36)—the mother nature is weeping when the war breaks out. Earth "trembles" at Napoleon the imperialist (3.326). "A thousand

battles have assailed” the banks of the Rhine, but its waves “would vainly roll” (3.451, 459)—in other words, nature cannot wipe out imperialism and bloody records of wars. “The castled Crag of Drachenfels / Frowns o’er the wide and winding Rhine” (3.496-97): the personification of the “castled Crag” reveals the powerlessness of nature—symbolized by the Rhine—in resisting invasion. In Lake Thrasimene, the plain nearby is “[r]ent by no ravage save the gentle plough” (4.579), but “[a] name of blood from that day’s sanguine rain; / And Sanguinetto tells ye where the dead / Made the earth wet, and turned the unwilling waters red” (4.583-85). Nature is compared to a heavily wounded character, with her blood running till death. Then immediately the poet contrasts this bloody scene with the serenity and purity of Clitumnus River (4.586-94): “that stream was unprofaned by slaughters . . .” (4.593), and fish “revels” in its water (4.601). Byron “downgrades” nature as he sighs for the destructive force of imperialism and manifests the inseparability of nature and the world in his artistry.<sup>6</sup> Nature as a victim of imperialist wars can save neither herself nor mankind—a pathetic image that arouses pity and fear.

This pathetic, victimized image appears quite often in Harold’s pilgrimage. The “Land of Albania,” as a “rugged Nurse of savage people,” could not redeem them from the tyranny of the Ottoman Empire (2.338-42); when Turks occupy the Balkan, Ithaca becomes “the barren spot” (2.343). The crag of Drachenfels “[f]rowns o’er the wide and winding Rhine” (3.496-97) because this area has witnessed numerous wars. Yet no one can really feel the rejuvenating power of nature. This is “the absorbing hate when warring nations meet” (4.568): “None felt stern Nature rocking at his feet, / And yawning forth. A grave for those who lay / Upon their bucklers for a winding sheet”

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<sup>6</sup> Shelley echoes Byron while portraying nature as the suffering mother earth because of Napoleon’s imperialism. She bemoans: “I was cloudy, and sullen, and cold, / Like a frozen chaos uprolled” (“Written on Hearing the News of the Death of Napoleon” 29-30).

(4.564-66); the warring states are blind to “Nature’s law” (4.571-72). Alien and unimaginable are the sacredness of nature and the need of redemption through the nature-man marriage.

In Spain, Nature is also depicted as a sufferer of the Napoleonic War: a rustic would not view his “vineyard desolate” in the “hot breath of War” (1.497-98). The life-giving mother nature becomes lifeless at the mercy of Napoleon. Moreover,

On yon long level plain, at distance crowned  
With crags, whereon those Moorish turrets rest,  
Wide-scattered hoof-marks dint the wounded ground;  
And, scathed by fire, the greensward’s darkened vest  
Tells that the foe was Andalusia’s guest:  
Here was the camp, the watch-flame, and the host,  
Here the bold peasant stormed the Dragon’s nest;  
Still does he mark it with triumphant boast,

And points to yonder cliffs, which oft were won and lost. (1.513-21)

This description of war-ravaged scene deliberately ridicules the escapism of the contemporary Europeans and rejects the transcendence of Wordsworthian nature. The “Moorish turrets” mark the presence of the Muslim forces: the Iberian Peninsula was conquered by the Umayyad Caliphate in 718, when the Visigothic Kingdom fell as a result. The “hoof-marks” of the imperialist armies have left the level plain “the wounded ground,” while fire has damaged “the greensward’s darkened vest.” Similarly, in the early nineteenth century, nature still looked powerless under Napoleon’s invasion. The “Andalusia’s guest,” an understated term, refers to invaders of all kinds. The ignorant local farmer, unable to appreciate the beautiful natural scenes, recounts the invasions with “triumphant boast,” echoing the thousand-year-long triumphant voice of imperialists; wars for the farmer serve as merely wonderful stories



of heroic adventures. Nature here fails to provide protection and comfort.

The Napoleon War, in addition, turns the landscape in Spain into piles of fragments:

The mountain-howitzer, the broken road,

The bristling palisade, the fosse o'erflowed,

The stationed bands, the never-vacant watch,

The magazine in rocky durance stowed,

The bolstered steed beneath the shed of thatch,

The ball-piled pyramid, the ever-blazing match . . . . (1.534-39)

Nature totally vanishes in the list of isolated images of Morena. All the items are related to war: they “[p]ortend the deeds to come” (1.540). Desperation and despair haunt this scene, while redemption is never anticipated. Nevertheless, these images link nature with Byron the exile. The pilgrimage, far from leading Harold to a secluded haven, exposes to him the bloody, monstrous battlefields. With the scene of the piles of fragments, nature signifies symbolically Byron’s alter ego, almost forgotten in his lament for the destruction, while the ruined, isolated images embody the poet’s despair and anxiety. These images, in this light, negates the Wordsworthian deification of the “kindest mother.” Byron’s de-apotheosis of nature matches Lucretius’s atheistic view: chance predominates in the universe; nature can perish accordingly.

#### **iv. The downgrading of nature in Byron’s obsessive care for human account**

The multiple images of Byronic nature owe greatly to the poet’s inability to forget his connection with society. This “inability” is displayed in his de-apotheosis of nature: with his “pathetic fallacy,” he characterizes nature as a mirror of human feelings and as a victim of imperialism—both oppose the deified, idealized image of Wordsworthian nature. His de-apotheosis of nature results from his secularism.

Harold's "pilgrimage"—traditionally presumed to be a process to purify and elevate one's soul by retreating from the mundane world—is always marked by the poet's "secular" apprehension even when he feels refreshed by the landscape. Canto III, supposedly the most "Wordsworthian" episode of "Childe Harold," starts with his lament for his own daughter Ada while he watches "Albion's lessening shores" amid waters and winds (3.1-8). Besides, this canto also displays Byron's severe criticism of Napoleon's imperialism as the poet wanders on the battlefield of Waterloo, where the Wordsworthian rejuvenation of nature becomes absent or ineffectual to the lonely sufferer. His secular concerns overwhelm his desire to be healed in nature; "self-oblivion," as Manfred desperately craves for ("Manfred" 1.1.144), remains therefore impossible for either Byron or Harold.

In the same canto, while he wanders in the glens of the Rhine, he lapses into his memory of his half-sister Augusta with the incongruous feelings. Nature is downgraded because of her lack of rejuvenating power for the sufferers. Blessed is he while wandering in nature, but only his creation of Harold—neither nature nor Augusta herself—can give him "[a] being more intense" (3.46-47). In other words, he denies nature as the source of his inspiration. As he visits Waterloo, Byron sees not nature but "an Empire's dust" and the "place of skulls" (3.145, 154). Imperialism and the cruelty of wars are foregrounded, while nature retreats or vanishes. Wandering by the Rhine, he only yearns for Augusta's accompaniment (3.514-15): her presence can "sweeten more these banks of Rhine" (3.535); the "soft murmuring" in Lake Lemman sounds as sweet as Augusta's voice" (3.803-04). Therefore, deficiency is found in nature: for the poet, she "needs" Augusta to be "complete." The ascension to mountain-tops reminds him only of the imperialist's ambition (3.396-400), not of nature's sublimity and transcendence. In Coblenz, he notices more the warriors' ashes and François Séverin Marceau's glorious battles than the "verdant mound"

(3.539-53). In Alps, the “Palaces of Nature,” he grieves for numerous dead soldiers who fought for freedom (3.599-607). As he feels himself united with nature, he still criticizes Rousseau’s “foolish quest” for glory (3.719-69). Byron commits “sacrilege” by imposing his incestuous love, his detest of imperialism, his memory of bloody wars on nature. His worldly concerns loom larger than his veneration of nature. Nature in the above-mentioned cases mainly plays a minor role in Byron’s critical accounts; she alone cannot satisfy his need for relief of grief. Nature yields to the secular anxieties of Byron the secular critic.

Byron continually “blasphemes” against nature as he wanders. On seeing the beautiful scenes in Portugal, Byron worries that human beings may destroy them (1.210-11). He blames nature in Portugal: “Poor, paltry slaves! yet born ’midst noblest scenes-- / Why, Nature, waste thy wonders on such men?” (1.234-35). The Portugal stanzas “are dignified by lyrical and philosophical disquisitions on the harmony of nature and the cruelty of man, on the barbarity of mutual destruction” (Diakonova 549). This “mutual destruction,” a contrapuntal relationship between nature and man, characterizes nature as a prey of imperialist invasion in Portugal. Here the beautiful scenes of Cintra look like “glorious Eden” and “Elysium’s gate” (1.236, 242). Byron’s complaint, as I argue in Chapter Four, stems from his ambiguous attitude towards imperialism: he detests Napoleon’s imperialism, but he also grieves for the loss of financial interest of the British Empire in the Convention of Cintra. He attacks the “ingratitude” of the Portuguese people by blaming mother nature.

Byron’s portrayal of nature as a satirist, furthermore, contributes to his downgrading of nature:

The negligently grand, the fruitful bloom  
Of coming ripeness, the white city’s sheen,

The rolling stream, the precipice's gloom,  
 The forest's growth, and Gothic walls between,—  
 The wild rocks shaped, as they had turrets been,  
 In mockery of man's art; and these withal  
 A race of faces happy as the scene,  
 Whose fertile bounties here extend to all,  
 Still springing o'er thy banks, though Empires near them fall. (3.581-89)

The “downgrading” in the exile’s consciousness echoes his de-apotheosis of nature. “The negligently grand” refers to “the glories of old days” (3.580). Nature’s glory here means not to be worshipped or extolled, but to mock “man’s art” and “Empires.” Byron, without celebrating the divinity of nature, turns her into a satirist or even a mocker—this downgrading carries more the Byronic taste than the Wordsworthian devotion. Nature, never sticking to the transcendental status, can deride the worldly affairs. In other words, Byron imposes his satirical temperament on mother nature again, just as he displays “pathetic fallacy” by portraying nature as a mirror of human feelings. Besides, his perception of natural scenes, haunted by “Empires near them,” divulges his incompetence to separate nature and society, and to free himself totally from anxieties brought by the world. The recognition of the “downgrading” of nature also echoes his “pathetic fallacy”: he sees not only beautiful natural scenes but also his own traumatic soul.<sup>7</sup> Nature as a mirror of human feelings suggests her downgrading and heterogeneity, reflecting mostly the poet’s disturbing and paradoxical self-identity.

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<sup>7</sup> This is also Manfred’s problem. The hero, unable to find relief in the natural beauty of the Alps, lapses into the meditation on the paradoxical, powerless human nature: “Beautiful! / How beautiful is all this visible world! / ... / But we, who name ourselves its sovereigns, we, / Half dust, half deity, alike unfit / To sink or soar . . .” (“Manfred” 1.2.36-37, 39-41). He “downgrades” nature by comparing the clouds in the Alps to “foam from the roused ocean of deep Hell” (“Manfred” 1.2.87). Like Byron, Manfred downgrades the power of nature while foregrounding his own sufferings.

The poet's "pathetic fallacy" presents nature as purely pathetic, powerless, and pulverized—a radical subversion of the dynamic, mighty, and all-rejuvenating image of Wordsworthian nature. With this "fallacy," Byron becomes affiliated with nature and imposes fear, anxieties, and pains on natural scenes, weaving the autobiographical, political, and satirical elements together in his "contrapuntal" creativity. Nature is not regarded as a secluded realm or a transcendental power, but a mirror of human feelings or as a silent sufferer at the mercy of imperialism. The de-apotheosis of nature means not only the denial of her transcendence and sacredness but also her downgrading, enfeeblement, and trivialization.

### **C. The plurality and heterogeneity of nature**

#### **i. Plurality and heterogeneity of nature in Lucretius's argument and traditional western thinking**

Thirdly, nature contains multiple lives; her image thus appears plural and heterogeneous. All things grow with "the mingling of the living seeds" and "exist by intermixed seed" (*On the Nature* 1.204-05, 2.867). The "primordial parts" of all lives "[a]re put together diversely" (*On the Nature* 1.278-79)—all creatures are necessarily affiliated. Being "mingling" and "intermixed" implies a contrapuntal relationship: the association of various lives means no confusion; it can create some harmony. As nature is "decentered," the four elements—fire, water, air, earth—are always "[b]reathing such vasty warfare" but they maintain "[i]n balanced strife" (*On the Nature* 5.552-53). Furthermore, the world is not chaotic because "by Nature, each / Slowly increases from its lawful seed," while some "fixed law" governs the growth of all living beings (*On the Nature* 1.209-10, 2.881). Lucretius, in other words, holds a contrapuntal view on the existence of all things: "All nature," far from being monolithic, contains "twain of things: of bodies and of void / In which they're set, and where they're moved around"—this is "twofold nature" (*On the Nature* 1.473-75, 571). This

“twofold nature” presupposes the interconnection of antithetical elements. Therefore, human body and soul must be conjoined; their “live powers / Only in union prosper and enjoy” (*On the Nature* 3.410, 640-41). The “primal germs of things” can “work more combinations still, / Whence divers things can be produced in turn” (*On the Nature* 1.963-65). Counterpoints can bring alterations: changes emerge because of the interaction between bodies and void; whatever exists “[m]ust either act or suffer action on it” (*On the Nature* 1.496-97). Therefore, slavery and freedom, poverty and wealth, war and peace always coexist (*On the Nature* 1.515-17). Changes, conflicts, and contradictions do not ruin nature since contrapuntal relationships can be found between/among various voices or powers. Nature can move on because of the “counterpoints” of heterogeneous forces.

Traditional western thinking has already presented nature in miscellaneous images. The so-called mother nature “presents itself as the best antidote to our human selves, a refuge we must somehow recover . . .” (Cronon 7) and “offers us the illusion that we can escape the cares and troubles of the world in which our past has ensnared us” (Cronon 16). As Thoreau describes, “there is a subtile magnetism in Nature, which, if we unconsciously yield to it, will direct us aright”; “in Wildness is the preservation of the World” and “[l]ife consists with wildness” (“Walking”). However, nature has also long been “a place to which one came only against one’s will, and always in fear and trembling” (Cronon 9). Nature does not necessarily represent the sweet, amiable, and life-rejuvenating force found in pastorals. Human beings do not *naturally* accept “nature” as their comfort zone. The anti-pastoral aspect of nature “presents a harsh, unidealised picture” and “shows the tensions, ruptures and inequalities inherent in rural life” (Rangarajan). Nature can not only nourish lives but also endanger human survival. Both the pastoral and the anti-pastoral constitute the whole picture of nature; it is partial to identify her merely as an amiable mother.

In the biblical context, “nature” also contains contradictory images. Eden was a garden, a carefree paradise for Adam and Eve; God’s “holy mountain” is a perfect pastoral scene: “The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them” (Isaiah 11:6); Jesus often went to pray alone in a mountain, far away from the crowd. Yet “wilderness”—a place far away from community—often bears a negative image. Hagar and Ismael are banished by Abraham to dwell in the wilderness of Paran; Moses, David, and Elijah were compelled to escape to wilderness for fear of persecution; moving out of Egypt, the Israelites were punished to wander in the wilderness for forty years because of their lack of faith; Jesus was tempted by Satan in wilderness. However, “wilderness” also anticipates God’s grace: “The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God” (Isaiah 40:3); God says: “I will even make a way in the wilderness, and rivers in the desert. The beast of the field shall honour me, the dragons and the owls: because I give waters in the wilderness, and rivers in the desert, to give drink to my people, my chosen” (Isaiah 43:19-20). In brief, both curse and blessing are found in wilderness/nature; God’s omnipotence is never bound by the circumstance. The “Book of Nature” is thus far from being “linear, syntactically well organized, unified work” (Morton). The so-called “all-unifying Nature” does not exist; the image of nature as a benevolent mother is an idealized myth. Plurality and heterogeneity are the “norm” of nature.

In this light, Wordsworth is revolutionary in rejecting the heterogeneity of nature, while Byron returns to the western tradition by displaying this heterogeneity.

## **ii. The juxtaposition of sublimity and beauty in nature**

Following the traditional western thinking in embracing heterogeneity, Byron sees the coexistence of sublimity and beauty not only in St. Peter’s Basilica but also in nature.

The beautiful landscape, he comments, can inspire poets “to rave” though they cannot understand it (1.633). To “rave” means to talk incoherently as if one were mad, or to speak enthusiastically. Therefore, nature can inspire various, antithetical feelings and anticipates some contrapuntal interpretations.<sup>8</sup>

Byron’s observations of nature may contain sublimity and beauty. In Portugal, the “horrid crags,” “the scorching skies,” the “tender azure of the unruffled deep”—all are “[m]ixed in one mighty scene, with varied beauty glow” (1.251). This “mighty scene” incurs both fear (“horrid” crags, “scorching” skies) and pleasure (“tender” azure). In Albania, Harold passes “o’er many a mount sublime” (2.408): he sees not only “the dark barriers of that rugged clime” (2.406), but also “lovely dales” (2.410) and “bluest skies that harmonise the whole” (2.429); the “tufted hill” is “deemed of dignity,” while the convent on this hill glistens “fair on high” (2.433-37)—in short, nature now in the eyes of the exile contains both sublimity and beauty, scenes “that shock yet please the soul” (2.432). In Rhine, where many wars have broken out, nature demonstrates “[a] blending of all beauties” (3.408, 411) and “[s]ome fresher beauty varying round” (3.529). The terror of wars and the pleasant scenery intermingle with each other. In the Alps, the “Palaces of Nature” (3.591), the poet

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<sup>8</sup> Burke and Kant, as I point out in Chapter Four, differ in their arguments about sublimity and beauty: for Burke, both can be identified as features of objects, and therefore nature can be described as either sublime or beautiful; however, for Kant, the sublime only refers to human feelings and thoughts. As natural beauty can bring pleasure, nature is judged “sublime in those of its phenomena, whose intuition brings with it the Idea of their infinity”; as a phenomenon, nature “would be infinitely comprehended” (Kant). The natural scenes “exhibit our faculty of resistance as insignificantly small in comparison with their might. But the sight of them is the more attractive, the more fearful it is, provided only that we are in security . . .” (Kant). Nature may inspire the feeling of sublimity in the spectators and “raise the energies of the soul above their accustomed height” (Kant). Human beings find their own finitude in the judgment of the sublime, and thus must passively accept the elevation of their imagination from nature. Nevertheless, since Byron, with his “pathetic fallacy,” often mixes his feelings and thoughts with the descriptions of nature, the distinction between Burke and Kant is not emphasized here.



feels awed by the “icy halls / Of cold sublimity” (3.593-94), and the avalanche appalls him (3.595-96); this awe is intensified by the “ghastly trophies of the slain” on Morat, a battlefield nearby. Nevertheless, the “[i]mperishably pure” Alpine snow also delights the poet at the same time (3.643). In Mount Jura, storm, darkness, and “the live thunder” are supposed to arouse terror and sublimity, but simultaneously this strength appears “lovely” and makes Alps “joyous” (3.861-68). In the tempest “the glee / Of the loud hills shakes with its mountain-mirth, / As if they did rejoice o’er a young Earthquake’s birth” (3.875-77). Byron’s “pilgrimage” in nature brings not merely joy and relief but also shock and horror; heterogeneous feelings prevail as the “norm.” He does not ignore the “negative” emotion to create a “harmonious” picture of nature.

In Velino River, Italy, Byron also perceives the combination of the sublime and the beautiful:

The fall of waters! rapid as the light  
 The flashing mass foams shaking the abyss;  
 The Hell of Waters! where they howl and hiss,  
 And boil in endless torture; while the sweat  
 Of their great agony, wrung out from this  
 Their Phlegethon, curls round the rocks of jet  
 That gird the gulf around, in pitiless horror set . . . . (4.615-21)

The scenery arouses terrible feelings: in the “Hell of Waters” Byron sees “endless torture” and “great agony” that can be found in Phlegethon in Greek mythology: sinners are supposed to suffer in this burning river. Yet simultaneously the scene looks like “an eternal April” with “gentle rain (4.624-25); the water runs as if “[t]orn from the womb of mountains by the throes / Of a new world . . .” (4.633-34). This also symbolizes beauty and new life. This landscape is “[c]harming the eye with dread”

(4.639); “[h]orribly beautiful” (4.640). This “infernal surge” of the stream is like “[h]ope upon a death-bed”; its “brilliant hues” are especially remarkable in “the torture of the scene” (4.642-48). In other words, it juxtaposes the sublime and the beautiful; the whole scene thus becomes dynamic, vivacious, and impressive.

In Rome, Byron sees the “contending” of day and night in sunset—and of sublimity and beauty as well:

The Moon is up, and yet it is not night—  
Sunset divides the sky with her—a sea  
Of glory streams along the Alpine height  
Of blue Friuli’s mountains; Heaven is free  
From clouds, but of all colours seems to be,—  
Melted to one vast Iris of the West,—  
Where the Day joins the past Eternity;  
While, on the other hand, meek Dian’s crest  
Floats through the azure air—an island of the blest!           (4.235-43)

The sunset means the death of a day—to join “the past Eternity” which “would be infinitely comprehended,” in Kant’s words. The sea “heaves brightly” and “[r]olled o’er the peak of the far Rhætian hill” (4.246-47): this description of the sea displays “Shakespearian vastness” (Knight 52)—vastness, which indicates the idea of infinity in Kant’s argument. Yet this is also a beautiful sight: heaven shows multiple colors and the moon, “the meek Dian’s crest,” is shining on “an island of the blest.” The “face of heaven” comes down “upon the waters” (4.253-54). The hues contain both “the rich sunset” and “the rising star” (4.255). As the sun is setting, the “parting Day” appears with “a new colour” (4.258-60). The sea and the hill, day and night all signify the “contending” powers in nature. Their “contending” does not mean confusion and anarchy; instead, nature would be ruined without their “contending.” Nature

continually operates not by suppressing either one of them, but by holding them in a contrapuntal relationship—they are separately independent but also mutually interdependent. Day and night, two aspects of nature, were “contending” in the sunset, but she “reclaimed her order” (4.248-49). To “reclaim” the order means that order does not exist as permanently fixed and unchanged. The possible loss of order implies that “order” is not ultimate and transcendental. Therefore, Byron does not deviate from Lucretius in his observation of nature as “reclaiming” her order. Plurality and heterogeneity of nature depend on her mutability. This is the moment when the poet feels the infinity (sublimity) of the passing day and the beauty of the coming night. Byron does not hold the Hegelian dialectics here since nature does not operate with the synthesis of day and night or of sublimity and beauty. It is *natural* to retain both “contending” forces and not to resolve their differences. Their “contending” exists as counterpoint and consolidates the operation of nature.

Sublimity and beauty, though essentially antithetical, does not mutually exclude each other in Byron’s view of nature. This is a contrapuntal relationship—the opposing elements compete in their mutual interdependence without cancelling out each other, while their individual characteristics, without being repressed or eliminated, become more remarkable and contribute to the harmony in their unmerged union. Nature neither predominates nor restrains both contending forces—the removal of either the sublime or the beautiful leads to disasters—rather, she embraces both and endorses their dynamic interactions.

### **iii. Nature as a destroyer: Her hostility and indifference**

The juxtaposition of sublimity and beauty reveals the heterogeneity of Byron’s portrayal of nature—so does the coexistence of both Lucretian and Wordsworthian elements. Both deification and de-apotheosis are imposed on the “kindest mother,” while the contradictory, inconsistent, and oxymoronic demonstration of nature prevails

in “Childe Harold.” Byronic nature, neither Christian nor Wordsworthian, displays not only benevolence but also hostility. In Shelley’s words, she can be both “[d]estroyer and preserver” (“Ode to the West Wind” 14). Nature as a “preserver” means her role as a mother or a patroness, so this section will illustrate her role as a destroyer.

Nature with her sublimity may frighten humans and threaten their existence. “The wild rocks” on the banks of the Rhine appear “[i]n mockery of man’s art,” and nature’s “fertile bounties here extend to all . . . though Empires near them fall” (3.585-89). The menacing, destructive force, though directed mainly to imperialists, can hardly shelter wounded wanderers. This image also contradicts that of a victim under the impact of imperialism: Byron portrays her as both a pathetic sufferer of imperialist invasion and a ruthless destroyer of empires.

Nature as the “deep and dark blue Ocean,” far from protecting and consoling mankind, portends and endangers human subsistence instead. Ocean is portrayed as God-like: “[u]nchangeable” (4.1636), “Almighty” (4.1639), “boundless, endless, and sublime” (4.1643), with the “image of Eternity” (4.1644). Before her divine power, human beings are “like a drop of rain” (4.1609) and warships are like toys (4.1627). Her divinity does not guarantee her willingness to patronize human beings nor promise the possibility of redeeming them.

As Byron/Harold hails nature as a benign mother in Rhone, besides, he also laments for his “hopeless flight” in darkness there: without finding the Wordsworthian haven in nature, the eternal wanderer feels his own self as a boat which “drives on and on, and anchored ne’er shall be” (3.666-70). The benign mother simultaneously appears merciless and cold, rendering the hero desperate—an image that manifests her essential heterogeneity.

Nature for Byron rarely “consecrates” or breathes grandeur on all humble

creatures—a sharp contrast against Wordsworthian nature, which always protects, comforts, and guides mankind. His observations of ocean expose the terror and threat of nature.<sup>9</sup>

#### iv. Heterogeneity and incongruous feelings

The plurality and heterogeneity of Byronic nature correspond to those in the traditional western thinking. The changing roles of nature in Byron's perception represents her plurality; nature as a deity is merely as one of many images that Byron portrays. These images, such as the destroyer and the preserver, may contradict each other and thus nature is inevitably heterogeneous. With heterogeneity, nature may arouse incongruous feelings. For instance, night, storm, and darkness—usually viewed as negative images—are “lovely” as “the light / Of a dark eye in Woman” (3.860-63). Enjoying the “glorious Night,” Byron wishes to share her “fierce and far delight” and her tempest (3.869-72). His delineation of both the positive and negative images of nature, paralleling his juxtaposition of sublimity and beauty, reflects his “contrapuntal” insight of an exile and his view of nature.

The ocean passages (3.10-18; 4.1594-1656) also arouse such feelings. Ocean in “Childe Harold” contains sublimity and beauty. Viewing the marine vision, Byron feels “a pleasing fear”—sailing for him brings him delight and terror simultaneously (4.1652-53). Sailing is compared to riding a horse (3.11-12; 4.1656). Yet Byron's image as a “rider” on ocean appears paradoxical, since ocean/nature in the concluding stanzas of Canto IV is terrible, unconquerable, and sublime; the “rider” image exposes

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<sup>9</sup> Such hostility of nature is also found in Percy Shelley: a “flood of ruin” with irresistible power destroys the dwelling places of mankind and some other creatures (“Mont Blanc” 107-20). Although appreciating Wordsworthian nature, Shelley the atheist lacks the Laker poet's religious devotion in portraying nature. Such an image anticipates the naturalism found in Frank Norris, Stephen Crane, Jack London, and Theodor Dreiser: for them, nature appears almighty but indifferent and human survival is merely a matter of chance.

his desire to dominate or to manipulate this mysterious and awesome power. The role of nature and the poet's relationship with her appear mutable and uncertain. The veneration of ocean coexists with the de-apotheosis of nature. This self-contradiction stems from his acknowledgment of the heterogeneity of nature's image. In short, the ocean passages reveal three features of Lucretian nature at the same time: mutability, de-apotheosis, and plurality/heterogeneity.

Byron's presentations of the heterogeneity of nature does not indicate his preference for the incongruous, paradoxical emotion. In the convent "Our Lady's house of Woe" in Portugal, monks lead a life of penance with the hope to win the blessing of heaven in the afterlife—they build a "hell" in a heaven-like environment (1.252-60). Symbolically, "heaven" and "hell" coexist in this isolated area. Besides, the convent is built in a place of "loveliness" (1.254); however, many tombs in the celestial scenes mark the history of "murderous wrath": the dead suffered from persecutions and died in misery. The quest for heavenly life is accompanied by the vision of death. "Law secures not life" (1.269)—either the natural or the social law fails to protect the innocent from misery and oppressions. He also laments for the "ruined Splendour" of some domes in this peaceful, beautiful region (1.271-73). The picturesque buildings are deserted among "giant weeds," a situation that parallels the poet's paradoxical plight: "Vain are the pleasaunces on earth supplied; / Swept into wrecks anon by Time's ungentle tide" (1.286-87). He denies the transient pleasure aroused by watching the landscape here, since time will deprive him of this blessing soon. Also, the poet attempts to flee from the beautiful scene in Cintra because he cannot forget the shame brought by the Convention of Cintra: "Sweet was the scene, yet soon he thought to flee" (1.317). That "his aching eyes grew dim" (1.323)—solitary wandering, though unbearable, serves as the only way to flee from the "aching" joy aroused by the landscape. In other words, Byron cannot bear the Keatsian

paradoxical feelings.

Likewise, the Rhine is like heaven because of her beauty (3.449), but “[a] thousand battles” have turned her banks into hell: “Slaughter heaped on high his weltering ranks” (3.451, 453). The glance of the beautiful river reminds the poet of her bloody history. Though her tide “washed down the blood of yesterday” (3.455), “o’er the blacken’d memory’s blighting dream / [her] waves would vainly roll . . .” (3.458-59). Nature may wash away all the bloody traces of wars, but not the poet’s memory. As a result, he maintains “graven lines austere” and “tranquil sternness” on his face even though hearing “the jocund birds” in glens (3.462-66); his fiery feelings burn up although his passion has been consumed to dust (3.466, 470); his “Disgust” of “all worldlings” still coexist with his “soft Remembrance” of his beloved sister (3.473-75). Nature in Wordsworth’s poetry yields essentially to a monolithic deification, while Byron illustrates her multiple aspects which arouse inharmonious moods. Unlike Wordsworth, he fails to experience pure pleasure while pondering the pretty natural scenes. Unlike Keats, he does not enjoy the combination of pleasure and pain. The world maddens him to poetry and inspires incongruous feelings.

The three features of Lucretian nature—mutability, de-apotheosis, and plurality—are interconnected in “Childe Harold”: the ever-changing of nature presumes her lack of transcendence and divinity, while her various roles, some of which are antithetical or even paradoxical, demonstrate her diversity and contrapuntal essence. Nature, in Byron’s poetics, belongs to the world; therefore, her beauty continually triggers the poet’s memory of his pain, of human feelings, and of the imperialist conflicts.

## **IV. Worldliness: The basis for Byron to perceive nature**

### **A. The counterpoint of nature and society**

**i. Worldliness demonstrated in the nature-society connection**

Byron's incorporation of both Wordsworthian and Lucretian elements in his descriptions of nature manifests his "contrapuntal" artistry. The juxtaposition of heterogeneous facets of nature exposes the reality of this contradiction-ridden world. Wordsworth complains in "The World Is Too Much with Us": "Little we see in Nature that is ours" (3); consequently, the natural beauty "moves us not" so that he would rather be a pagan (9-10). Indeed, the world is too much with Byron, and thence he sees in nature predominantly his worldly anxieties and sufferings; moreover, his presentation of the multiple, diverse images of nature is indeed pagan-like, just as Lucretius denies the existence of a transcendental, omnipotent being. Yet he feels touched by nature not because of his non-religious, pagan belief, but because of his worldliness nourished from his exile. McGann's judgment of Byronic nature as Lucretian, to sum up, matches the poet's characteristics as an exile: nomadic, decentered, and contrapuntal. He reveals his selfhood in his description of nature, and his incongruous feelings also echoes the plurality and heterogeneity of the world.

The multiplicity of nature represents the poet's worldliness: far from being a unified, static being, nature cannot be completely separated from human society. The "judgment upon the Sublime in nature needs culture" (Kant)—nature and culture do not essentially oppose each other. Even Wordsworth, the poet of nature, cannot evade worldly concerns and communities (see Chapter One). His religious meditation on nature prompts him to "reflect back on his emotional responses to the world, material and immaterial alike" (Mason 40). Yet he cannot acknowledge his "worldliness" as honestly and thoroughly as Byron does: the transcendence of nature and the nature-society dichotomy are carefully maintained in his discourse. "What Mr Wordsworth had said like a recluse, Lord Byron said like a man of the world" (Macaulay, "Byron" 308-09). The sacredness of nature rests on her separation from the world, but Byron



manifestly imposes his secular concerns on her. “Byron knew what was going on in the world” (Monroe 33)—the progressive tense highlights his deep and close involvement in the worldly business. The world guides Byron’s understanding of nature though it can be too much with him.

Byron’s “strategy of knowing is wandering,” and this earns him “an ecological awareness of the interdependence of humans and the natural environment, and of the interdependence of environments” (Hubbell, “Byron’s” 198). In “many of his writings, Byron represents human culture and the environment as dynamically interconnected . . .” (Hubbell, “Question” 14). Nature and society/culture for him remain interdependent. As “‘nature’ is represented in art, it becomes part of culture; there is no ‘nature’ in art”; “the external world is always already constructed by the human gaze . . .” (Hubbell, “Question” 16). Their interdependence means a contrapuntal relationship, which constitutes the panorama of the world. Byron, in short, proposes the marriage of nature and society/culture as opposed to Wordsworthian nature-man union. Wordsworth intends to escape from society and then to merge with nature, while Byron’s pilgrimage denies the possibility of this escapism: the social impact always haunts his contemplation on nature, while his worldly view persistently incorporates both nature and society.

## **ii. The intertwined nature-society connection in “Childe Harold”**

Human community and culture penetrate deeply in Byron’s appreciation of nature, shown in his “pathetic fallacy.” He proclaims: “I love not Man the less, but Nature more” (4.1598)—meaning that he loves and cares for both, though the latter sometimes deserves to be favored than the former. Moreover, he wishes to “mingle with the Universe” (4.1601), not merely with nature. In other words, the whole world—which contains nature, society, and many other beings—must be foregrounded. Rousseau, Byron praises, peoples the beautiful landscape with affections: “he found / It was the

scene which Passion must allot / To the Mind's purified beings" (3.969-71). The philosopher devotes mainly to the growth of humanity with nature as the most important "teacher." Yet in Byron's view Rousseau combines nature (the scene) and humanity with his passion—an ideal directed toward "worldliness." Nature can enrich human spirit and emotion, while humanity can also enhance the beauty of nature: Lousanne and Ferney win "perpetuity of Fame" because their natural beauty has been praised by numerous "gigantic minds" such as Voltaire and Edward Gibbon (3.977-81). In other words, nature can be elevated because of culture, represented by those masters. Byron believes that "[m]ore blest the life of godly Eremite, / Such as on lonely Athos may be seen" (2.235-36). "To be seen" presupposes the relationship between the viewer and the viewed—a "community" in the world. His yearning for Nature sets himself in a "community"—worldliness is manifested in this relationship despite his praise of the solitary life of hermit.

Byron the exile always "sees" the world in nature. The happiness in nature ironically reminds him of his hatred of "a world he had almost forgot" (2.243). While wandering alone in Albania, Harold witnesses the mixture of heterogeneous beliefs: "Idol—Saint—Virgin—Prophet—Crescent—Cross" (2.393). The traces of the pagan belief, Catholicism/Christianity, and Islam are juxtaposed in the same scene; history, culture, and religion are interwoven in his observations of nature. The heaven-like beauty of the Rhine, besides, would last forever if war could be wiped out (3.444-45). Yet he sees this river as "Lethe" now, insinuating that numerous soldiers have been killed and forgotten here. While enjoying himself in nature, moreover, he is reminded of his half-sister Augusta Leigh (3.475-76). He also intends to send lilies plucked in the Rhine so that they can be symbolically united (3.516-25). In his vision he sees the Rhine more beautiful with Augusta's presence (3.532-35). On the banks of Rhine, in addition, "Ruin[s] greenly dwell" in nature (3.414) and thus become part of nature.

The Rhine, in short, triggers his reminiscence of wars, of his relationship with Augusta, and his love of nature at the same time. In Lake Lemán, the complicated feeling occurs again: “[t]here is too much of Man here, to look through / With a fit mind the might which I behold” (3.648-49), while loneliness pushes him to mingle “with the herd” (3.650-52). The pastoral scene presents both the landscape and a “community.” In Clarens, the poet praises this little town as “birthplace of deep Love” (3.923); the existence of love always assumes a community—an isolated hero finds no one and no object to love. At the end of Canto III, Byron blesses his daughter; his journal at that time also testifies that the human world never escaped his interest and attention (McGann, “Byron and Wordsworth” 177). In isolation, he felt that “[n]or was all Love shut from him” (3.469). Nature does not really push him to genuine isolation; Byron cherishes nature not sheerly for her own sake. The contrast between nature and society, enriched by Byron’s overflow of feelings, assumes their integration. The importance of nature is ruined when this integration is denied or ignored; her significance must be considered in the “context” of the world.

Byron’s unique understanding of nature derives from his exile. “He is not, any more than Shakespeare, subdued to nature-mysticism. Yet he can . . . turn it to a far finer, because more human, account . . .” (Knight 51). That is, he does not deify nature as Wordsworth does; he frequently mixes “human account” with nature in his meditation. Nature and society, for green writers in the nineteenth century, are often held as antithetical: “Nature refers to wild, unspoiled backcountry, the antithesis of the modern, anthropocentric city,” while one may achieve “environmental consciousness” by stripping off “corrupting layers of culture” (Hubbell, “Question” 14). Yet Byron resists this Rousseavian vogue. Nature and culture often coexist in his contrapuntal perception (see Chapter Four): he juxtaposes Tiber and some ruins in his lament for downfall of the Roman Empire, while the river, a synecdochic being of nature, has

witnessed the rise and fall of the empire. In addition, oceans confine human beings “with the shore,” while the explorers may sink “unknelled, uncoffined, and unknown” (4.1606, 1611). Nature sometimes appears more powerful than society in resisting the destruction brought by time. On the other hand, society is not viewed as the root of evil despite his blame of its corruption. Byron’s grand tour initiated his “ecological understanding of human culture” and contributed to his conception of “nature” and “culture” in his later writings (Hubbell, “Byron’s” 186). This conception refers to the necessary nature-society connection based on his “worldliness.” Exile pushes him to know the world. “Understanding the world as an ecological whole means understanding culture and nature as part of the environment” (Hubbell, “Question” 16). Worldliness, without exalting society or culture above nature in terms of importance, encompasses both nature and society. Both exist merely as two aspects of the world. This understanding makes him a poet of worldliness, as opposed to Wordsworth as a poet of nature.

## **B. Descriptions of nature as Byron’s political/social criticism**

### **i. Byron’s criticism of imperialism and wars**

Wordsworth’s love of nature, with her supposed separation from the mundane world, may impress Byron as escapism. By contrast, Byron’s observation of nature usually insinuates his social or political comments, and therefore he may sound as didactic and satirical as Alexander Pope:

He who ascends to mountain-tops, shall find  
The loftiest peaks most wrapt in clouds and snow;  
He who surpasses or subdues mankind,  
Must look down on the hate of those below.  
Though high *above* the Sun of Glory glow,  
And far *beneath* the Earth and Ocean spread,

*Round* him are icy rocks, and loudly blow

Contending tempests on his naked head,

And thus reward the toils which to those summits led. (3.397-405)

This can be viewed as a criticism of imperialists. The descriptions of nature function as the poet's critical strategy. The ascension to "mountain-tops," signifying the imperialist ambition to reign, can arouse the hatred of the "subdued"; however, being "wrapt in clouds" may prevent the imperialist from learning the truth—as it has been pointed out, the imperialists in the vanity fair do not know the truth. The sun-like glory, obtained by surpassing and subduing mankind, never yields any pleasure, since "icy rocks" and "[c]ontending tempest" always accompany him. "Measure for measure" is the reward for his unrestrained ambition. The descriptions of the mountainous scenes carry Byron's moralizing warning to all imperialists. Their attempt to ascend to the mountain tops—to establish their own absolute authority—means their ignorance or disregard of affiliation in the secular world. Tyranny always incurs the resistance to it—this is the "reward" to the "toils" of all imperialists. The moral lesson in this message, weighed more than nature herself, displays the poet's worldly concern even when he wandered far away from the civilized realm. This comment on the mountain climbers also exemplifies the counterpoint between nature and society.

Moreover, the ascension to the lofty Alps is assumed to mock the vanity of the imperialists and social climbers:

Above me are the Alps,

The Palaces of Nature, whose vast walls

Have pinnacled in clouds their snowy scalps,

And throned Eternity in icy halls

Of cold Sublimity, where forms and falls

The Avalanche—the thunderbolt of snow!

All that expands the spirit, yet appals,

Gather around these summits, as to show

How Earth may pierce to Heaven, yet leave vain man below. (3.590-98)

The mentioning of the “vain man” exposes Byron’s obsession with the world—vain, in the sense of the futility of imperialism discussed in Chapter Four. “Here the purpose of the distinction between Earth and Heaven is specifically moral. Earth (humanity) can reach Heaven, but only by leaving its vanity behind” (MacLeod 268). The glorification of the sublime Alps, the “Palaces of Nature,” insinuates his criticism of Napoleonic imperialism. Attempting to conquer Italy in May 1800, Napoleon Buonaparte crossed the Alps, a scene painted by Jacques-Louis David in 1801. Byron finds greatness in the mountains when he becomes disillusioned by both Napoleon and Rousseau; he places the Alps episode between his portraits of Napoleon and Rousseau, and thus demonstrates that nature represents “a greatness uncorrupted by baser human passions” (Cantor 395). “The sublime mountain scenery works to dwarf would-be political titans like Napoleon” (Cantor 396). So impressive are the height of the Alps and the ambition of the emperor; so destructive are the avalanche and imperialism—yet now the poet would rather adore the landscape than praise Napoleon’s deeds. The Alps and Napoleon form a contrapuntal relationship in Byron’s description: the former appears cold, sublime, and appallingly lofty, while the latter looks callous, ambitious, and imposingly suppressive. Both are symbolically connected but simultaneously contrasted: the Alps “leave the vain man below,” but this “vain man” crossed over the Alps and exerted the “avalanche” to Italy. Nature can last longer than imperialism, but the memory of the world always hangs around the beautiful scenes in Byron’s contrapuntal views.

Stars also trigger his denunciation of the imperialist threat:

Ye Stars! which are the poetry of Heaven!  
 If in your bright leaves we would read the fate  
 Of men and empires,—'tis to be forgiven,  
 That in our aspirations to be great,  
 Our destinies o'erleap their mortal state,  
 And claim a kindred with you; for ye are  
 A Beauty and a Mystery, and create  
 In us such love and reverence from afar,  
 That Fortune,—Fame,—Power,—Life, have named themselves a Star.

(3.824-32)

Byron again highlights the counterpoint of nature and human account: many astrologists have associated stars, which are nature herself incarnates, with human beings; therefore, “Fortune,—Fame,—Power,—Life” can be interpreted through the observations of stars. The poet acknowledges their sacredness: it is blasphemous to subordinate them to divination and simultaneously to “claim a kindred” with them—this practice places human beings as the subject and nature as the object, just as Byron employs nature as a “mirror” of human feelings—therefore, he asks for their forgiveness. Stars might demonstrate “the fate / Of men and empires,” but actually the stars are “a Mystery,” unknown to the mundane world. In this light, it is futile to predict one’s fortune or life by astrology. Nevertheless, Byron still upholds the nature-society association: stars, “the poetry of Heaven,” create “love and reverence” in humanity. This is an indirect criticism of imperialism: stars or nature must be reserved for poetry, not for “the fate of men and empires.”

Also, natural scenes can awaken his memory of imperialist wars. Albuera, “glorious field of grief” (1.459), is where the British army, together with that of the Spanish and Portuguese, fought against the French in the Napoleonic War. The

incongruous term, combining “glorious” and “grief,” insinuates the poet’s satirical attack on this imperialist conflict: the “glory” of the imperialists is established on the grief of numerous victims. This also exposes the poet’s “pathetic fallacy”: he weeps for the dead soldiers, who died in their defense of their countries, and he imposes his sorrow on nature.

Byron continues his criticism of Napoleon’s imperialism by assuming the counterpoint between nature and wars:

Away with these! true Wisdom’s world will be  
Within its own creation, or in thine,  
Maternal Nature! for who teems like thee,  
Thus on the banks of thy majestic Rhine? (3.406-09)

After witnessing the battlefield and feeling shocked by Napoleonic wars, he turns to nature for comfort. Nature, honored here as a compassionate mother, is tinged with the Wordsworthian hue as she can rejuvenate the suffering poet. The imperative “Away with these,” addressed to him “who ascends to mountain-tops” (3.397), connects and contrasts the restoration in nature and the destruction of imperialist wars. The counterpoint formed by this contrast suggests that one may experience the rejuvenation in the “majestic Rhine” more thoroughly and profoundly after enduring the cruelty in wars, and that those who grow up in a carefree environment may not be aware the grace of nature so deeply. This recognition assumes the poet as a wounded child, who seeks for the protection of his mother: Canto III was composed in 1816 when Byron took the journey from England to Switzerland in quest of “spiritual and psychic stability” (McGann, “Byron and Wordsworth” 176). The quest for this stability, symbolized in the child’s yearning for maternal love, exposes the poet’s desperate need for redemption in nature—a Wordsworthian ideal without the “rootedness” in her. At last, nonetheless, the “never-weaned child” fails to acquire “redemption”—since nature herself impresses



him as fundamentally diverse and changing. Wars and nature, often juxtaposed in his meditations on either ruins or landscapes, neither reach “synthesis” nor disappear. Nature can be more than just “the kindest mother,” the helper, or the patroness. Byron does not blame her for being unable to cure him; his “poisoned” springs of life (3.60) and his loss of passion (3.70-71), he discerns, can resist the healing power of nature, and deteriorate his “wounds which kill not, but ne’er heal” (3.68). An invisible chain torments him eternally (3.77-78)—an unchanged pain in his changing life since exile renders him physically free but spiritually bound. Yet he is “bound” with all the victims of imperialism as well—his revelation of the failure to find restoration means to accuse the invaders and warmongers. He speaks willingly for those who are “bound” with him.

Seeing Ambracia’s gulf in Greece, besides, Harold is reminded of Anthony’s quest for Cleopatra (2.397-98) and Augustus’s imperial enterprise:

Look where the second Cæsar’s trophies rose!

Now, like the hands that reared them, withering:

Imperial Anarchs, doubling human woes!

God! was thy globe ordained for such to win and lose? (2.402-05)

Beautiful scenery, connected with the beautiful love story, is plagued by wars: here Augustus defeated Anthony and became the first emperor of the Roman Empire. The poet’s contrapuntal insight brings forward the theme of the Spenserian epic here: fierce wars and faithful love. Nature in Byron’s pilgrimage does not simply contain stunning scenes, but also prompts his political or historical criticism. His rhetorical question to God—did He ordain victory and defeat? —means to condemn the “Imperial Anarchs,” who have brought misery to the world. Augustus, “the second Cæsar,” indeed doubled Anthony’s woes—defeat in the war and loss of Cleopatra. Byron’s accounts of Ambracia’s gulf, with the counterpoint of nature and history, signify simultaneously

his criticism of imperialism as well. Nature merely exists as a silent, indifferent witness of Augustus's victory and Anthony's defeat, while Byron weaves these diverse elements in his travelogue.

Byron's worldly concerns include his condemnation of wars: his depictions of nature may sometimes be interpreted as an anti-war allegory. By Lake Thrasimene, for example, the poet claims that he is "more at home" with nature (4.552), and that natural beauty attracts him more than the artworks in galleries, while at the same time he is reminded that this is also the battlefield where the Carthage defeated Roman army: "Where Courage falls in her despairing files, / And torrents, swoll'n to rivers with their gore, / Reek through the sultry plain, with legions scattered o'er" (4.556-58). The peaceful scene ironically reminds him of the bloody battle. War and peace, life and death, serenity and chaos all intermingle each other in the poet's contrapuntal consciousness. Earth, traditionally viewed as a life-giving nursing mother, now looks like a huge grave for the dead soldiers, or "as a rolling bark / Which bore them to Eternity" (4.568-69). The living creatures all retreat (4.573-76). The "rolling bark" suggests the dynamic of the world, operating in the "counterpoint" of antithetical forces (life versus death, war versus peace), which will interact to "Eternity." Now by the same serene lake, the "aged trees rise thick as once the slain / Lay where their roots are . . ." (4.580-81). Trees symbolize death, and they grow by a running brook (4.581-82), a symbol of life. This grotesque image also highlights the contrapuntal relationship: both the running water (life) and the slain trees (death) constitute the whole picture of this world. Life and death, as well as nature and society—the living world embraces various contradictory and opposing elements. Besides, this grotesque image also carries Byron's anti-war message: the ravage of wars may deface the natural beauty, but the world still moves on to eternity. His worldliness belittles the recurrent bloody conflicts in history here. The victory of Carthage and the glory of the Roman

Empire, incurred and maintained by numerous wars, now both vanish. Nature bears the “scars” and traces of wars, but Byron can still feel “at home” in this battlefield because of his perception of the vanity of wars.

The nature-society counterpoint in Rome also carries Byron’s anti-war message. While wandering among the ruins there, the poet sees that nature appears seemingly untouched by the rise and fall of the empire:

. . . the green hills  
Are clothed with early blossoms—through the grass  
The quick-eyed lizard rustles—and the bills  
Of summer-birds sing welcome as ye pass;  
Flowers fresh in hue, and many in their class,  
Implore the pausing step, and with their dyes  
Dance in the soft breeze in a fairy mass;  
The sweetness of the Violet’s deep blue eyes,  
Kissed by the breath of heaven, seems coloured by its skies. (4.1045-53)

This quotation exemplifies Byron’s “pathetic fallacy” again. In the field where ruins are scattered, nature still shows life and energy: the “early blossoms” on the “green hills,” the “quick-eyed lizard,” the summer birds all manifest the power of nature. “Ruins in the Byronic landscape are an instrument of nature . . . and . . . mark the limits of human action” (Pala 83). In other words, ruins exist as the result of the nature-culture counterpoint. Ruins are not ruined—they become timeless like nature and merged into the landscape. All creatures in this alleged battlefield seem undisturbed by the vicissitude of the empire. Life and energy permeate in this apparently Wordsworthian vision.

In this beautiful scenery, nonetheless, the shadows of the Napoleon invasion and the Roman imperialism still haunt his quasi-Wordsworthian meditation. “Like

Wordsworth's, the nature he sees is 'half-created' by the perceiving mind, but it can therefore never be free of his projected anxieties and ambitions" (Manning, [Peter], "Sublime" 902). Rome, as "the field of Freedom—Faction—Fame—and Blood" (4.1009), had conquered the whole Europe by the second century and endured the threatening of Napoleon's invasion in the early nineteenth century. This city has witnessed the best of times and the worst of times as well. Set in this background, the whole scene exposes Byron's negation of the Wordsworthian separation of nature and society: these lively beings and the ruins—the signs of cultural heritage—coexist in Rome. Nature is not found in a remote area but entwined with the traces of human civilization. Viewing the "early blossoms" on the green hills, the "quick-eyed lizard," and the singing summer-birds, Byron ponders on the rise and fall of Rome. The Caesars expanded the territory of the empire through wars, but the imperial glory is now alien to the blossoms, lizards, or summer birds. Those broken, antique buildings illustrate the vanished imperial glory. Yet by employing the ruins as the metaphor, the poet belittles the destruction of time and wars, and displays his creativity to the later generations. Wars may be forgotten in the future, but Byron's contrapuntal arrangement of ruins and images of lively beings highlights the vivacity of the world. The presence of ruins in the landscape mocks the futility of imperialism and wars.

Thus, Byron's descriptions of nature assert the value of culture and serve as an anti-war allegory. This natural beauty is juxtaposed with some ruins that remind the poet of Egeria (4.1027-44), queen of Numa Pompilius (753 B.C.-673 B.C.), a legendary King of Rome. Egeria, with "sweet creation of some heart / Which found no mortal resting-place so fair / As thine ideal breast" (4.1027-29), contributed to the establishment of the early Roman culture. She embodies the immortal cultural heritage, which may rival the eternal natural beauty. Her "unwrinkled" face "[r]eflects the meek-eyed Genius of the place" and thence nature can now "no more erase / Art's

works” (4.1038-41). Nature moves on, so does culture. Culture here can resist the power of time and become immortal—this contradicts manifestly the poet’s assertion that “Art, Glory, Freedom fail, but Nature still is fair” (2.827). Egeria’s contribution, praised by Byron in his appreciation of nature, reveals that nature and culture are “[f]antastically tangled” in Rome (4.1045), and forms a sharp contrast against the devouring, destructive imperialism of Julius Caesar and Octavius, who often attempted to maintain the imperial glory by waging wars. Byron’s “pathetic fallacy,” showing his feelings and memory of history by descriptions of nature, contributes to the counterpoint of nature and society; his allegorical readings of nature simultaneously denounce wars.

Byron creates “a complex and heterogeneous reality” of Italy with a “double perspective”—his perception of Italy (of being here) and his awareness of England (of not being there); in his depictions of Rome, “‘self-making and text-making’ are ‘parallel acts’” (Pala 80). His presentation of the exotic scenes, in other words, means his reconstitution of his selfhood. The so-called “double perspective”—a form of contrapuntal insight—contributes to the illustration of the real world and of the poet’s worldliness. His broken, fragmentary self matches the ruins on the plain. His reconstitution of self-image and the destruction brought by wars and imperialism also contrast sharply. His critical perceptions of exotic scenes are conveyed to his English readers, displaying the world to them with his text.

Byron’s pilgrimage does not drive him away from human society: always reminded of his own experiences in his homeland, he intends to criticize society and politics by allegorizing nature. Even his Wordsworthian meditation on nature cannot entirely exclude his obsession with the mundane world. His worldliness, fulfilling in his association of nature with society, involves inevitably in characterizing the “kindest mother” with heterogeneity. As it is discussed earlier, nature and culture are

associated in Byron's descriptions of Rome; nature, reflecting human feelings, is also presented as a victim of imperialism. If Byron/Harold always becomes portion of that around him, then he also reconstitutes his identity in various "contexts"—be it nature, human community, or ruins. The "fleshly chain, / Classed among creatures" insinuates Byron's unbroken association with the mundane world.

## **ii. The paradoxes in Byron's allegorical readings of nature**

### **a. Nature and the quest for freedom**

As Byron's self-image usually appears paradoxical and he tends to impose his own feelings and thoughts on nature, his political criticism, symbolized in his descriptions of nature, can be self-contradictory. On the one hand, nature may represent the spirit to quest for freedom:

But these are deeds which should not pass away,  
And names that must not wither, though the Earth  
Forgets her empires with a just decay,  
The enslavers and the enslaved—their death and birth;  
The high, the mountain-majesty of Worth  
Should be—and shall, survivor of its woe,  
And from its immortality, look forth  
In the sun's face, like yonder Alpine snow,  
Imperishably pure beyond all things below. (3.635-43)

The "Alpine snow," a synecdoche for Nature, represents the deeds to struggle for liberty, which carries the "high, the mountain-majesty of Worth." The lofty mountain, symbolizing the immortality of freedom fighters, belittles all empires and "enslavers." Imperialism will perish, but the resistance to it will be extolled as the "true glory." Byron's allegorical interpretations of the "Alpine snow" venerates the revolutionary resistance to all forms of tyranny and affirms the value of freedom.

On the other hand, this glorification of freedom contradicts Byron's eulogy of ocean (4.1594-1656). The weakness and insignificance of empires are exposed when compared with the power and glory of oceans (see Chapter Four). Yet Byron also intends to highlight the triviality of human deeds in general with his praise of ocean. Ocean, another alter ego of nature, assumes "the Almighty form" (4.1639), which is "boundless, endless, and sublime-- / The image of Eternity" (4.1643-44). "Man marks the earth with ruin—his control / Stops with the shore" (4.1605-06). Many glorious ancient civilizations leave nothing but historical remains and relics now, while ambitious emperors never conquered the sea—voyage remained risky before the emergence of modern shipbuilding. Ocean in the poet's eyes remains indifferent and life-threatening to human beings—as he recognizes, man "sinks into thy depths with bubbling groan-- / Without a grave—unknelled, uncoffined, and unknown" (4.1610-11). The nearly drowned man is "shivering in thy playful spray" (4.1617): this indifference of ocean "establishes the bounds of human freedom" (O'Neill 48)—their deeds appear trivial before almighty, infinite, and sublime nature. This image runs counter to that of a benevolent mother or deity emphasized by Wordsworth as well as to that of the immortal freedom fighters extolled by Byron himself. Human beings and their enterprises appear petty as ocean can wash them away (4.1632). Ocean curbs the imperialist's ambition as well as the yearning to gain horizon and freedom. Nature may appear indifferent and hostile to all human deeds, but she can also symbolize the struggle for freedom as well. She acts as both the destroyer and the preserver.

#### **b. Byron's ambiguous association with imperialism**

Ambiguous is the poet's attitude towards imperialism (see Chapter Four), while his delineation of mountain scenes also highlights this ambiguity. He criticizes imperialists by figuratively describing them as standing on the "loftiest peaks" (3.398).

They are blind to the conquered people and the subversive, contending forces (3.404); it is “vain” for them to intend to “pierce to Heaven” (3.598). However, Byron also compares himself to the Tannen trees in the Alps: “Loftiest on loftiest and least sheltered rocks,” his mind, like “a giant tree,” “may grow the same” (4.173, 180). The keyword “loftiest” associates Byron and all imperialists: they are all proud, ambitious, and unyielding to any superior forces. Besides, the poet recognizes that both he and imperialists must encounter a harsh, hostile environment: “icy rocks” (3.403), “[c]ontending tempests” (3.404), “Avalanche” (3.595), “barrenness” (4.174), “eddying storms” (4.176), “howling tempest” (4.177), “bleak, gray granite” (4.179). His denunciation of imperialists therefore turns out to be self-mockery. The unintentional paradox, however, reflects his attitude toward Napoleon: he identifies the emperor as his alter ego (see Chapter Two) despite his frequent criticism of Napoleon’s imperialism. Byron and the imperialist can both stand on the “loftiest” mountain and endure hostility and difficulties. As the “grand Napoleon of the realms of rhyme” (“Don Juan” 11.440), Byron composes a sharp but self-subversive satire through the sketches of scenery.

Therefore, nature as a figure of speech does not contribute to the consistency of Byron’s political/social criticism. This inconsistency—also found in his personality (see Chapter Two), his views on freedom (see Chapter Three), and his attitude towards imperialism (see Chapter Four)—reflects here the multiplicity of nature’s roles in the poet’s perceptions. Byron echoes traditional western thinking in exposing this multiplicity: nature must be viewed as a round and dynamic character, not a flat and static one. He does not attempt to reconcile this contradiction, just as he leaves all his other paradoxical views unresolved. His awareness of mutability, the “norm” of this world, is cultivated and enforced in his exile.

### **C. Byron’s “secularism” and nature**

#### **i. Secularism as the demonstration of Byron’s rejection of “idolatry”**



By “secularism,” Said means to oppose the “transcendental” (“An Interview” 3; *Power, Politics, and Culture*) and the “otherworldly” (“Representing the Colonized” 212). The concept of being “the secular critic” is “Said’s most central term of approbation and self-identification” (Howe, Stephen 57). To be “secular” also means to be “amateur.” An “amateur” critic, antithetical to the “official” and the “professional” scholar, must find the “location in the secular world” and insist on the “[u]ncompromising freedom of opinion and expression” (Said, *Representations of the Intellectuals*). In other words, to be either “secular” or “amateur” for Said signifies the independence of a critic, while the “transcendental” or the “professional” indicates one’s submission to the authority.

As Wordsworth meditates on nature, “social and political matters are pushed to one side and ignored”; he “offers a visionary solution to problems he does not confront, and avoids dealing with society, politics, and history . . .” (Rawes, “Visionary” 135). By contrast, Byron speaks as a “secular” critic and remains affiliated with the world while wandering in nature. He “expresses an ecological consciousness by deconstructing the false binary, nature-culture, and replacing it with the more inclusive ‘environment’”; yet Wordsworth stresses this binary (Hubbell, “Question” 15). With secularism, Byron de-apotheosizes and downgrades nature by considering her in the context of the whole world. Byron as an “amateur” and “secular” critic essentially resists the transcendental vision of Wordsworth and Coleridge; his independence stems from his worldliness and becomes fulfilled in his contrapuntal views. Secular concerns are therefore implicated in his views on nature. The rejection of “monocentrism” enables a critic to fully realize the “worldliness” (Ashcroft and Ahluwalia 35). Nature is not the only “center” for the secular critic. With his “secularism,” Byron refuses to idolize nature and displays her multiple roles; his “de-apotheosis” of nature could appear “blasphemy” for Wordsworth.

**ii. Byron's mixture of secular concerns and nature: His independence from Rousseau and Pope**

The separation of nature and society was not held self-evident in the traditional western thinking. Raymond Williams considers that the idea of landscape “implies separation and observation”: the eighteenth-century landlord, supported by poets and painters, “invented natural beauty” (*The Country and the City*). This invention presupposes the separation of nature and society, since the “natural beauty” means something uncontaminated by human civilization. In other words, Rousseau must be blamed for advocating this separation. Furthermore, the Enlightenment separates human from nature, mind from body—consequently, cities and most social organizations “stand for the ills of modernism, anthropocentrism, and a techno-rational domination over nature,” while nature is treated as “unspoiled, pristine, and mostly empty of human presence” (Hubbell, “Byron’s” 184-85). Yet Byron rejects this nature-culture binary because of his pluralistic insight: in his eyes, nature and culture do not clearly separate from each other; he oscillates between them, and never sticks to either of them. His creativity often combines both.

Byron’s secularism marks his deviation from Rousseau’s ideal. Although the philosopher proposes the opposition between nature and society, he asserts “a state of savagery intermediate between the ‘natural’ and the ‘social’ condition, in which men may preserve the simplicity and the advantages of nature and at the same time secure the rude comforts and assurances of early society”; he “recognizes society as inevitable and is already feeling his way towards a justification of it” (Cole). Despite his glorification of nature, Rousseau always intends to illustrate an ideal human relationship that follows nature: “As nature has set bounds to the stature of a well-made man . . . similarly, for the constitution of a State to be at its best, it is possible to fix limits that will make it neither too large for good government, nor too small for self-

maintenance”; “I see nothing in any animal but an ingenious machine, to which nature hath given senses to wind itself up . . . . I perceive exactly the same things in the human machine . . .” (“What is the Origin”). This argument holds both nature and society in a contrapuntal relationship. Yet “nature” for Rousseau remains “an ideal,” “a pure ‘idea of reason,’ a working concept reached by abstraction from the ‘state of society’” (Cole). Rousseau argues for the inevitability of the development from the state of nature to that of society. Yet this development incurs a self-contradiction in his philosophy: if the state of nature is perfect, then the history should remain in this original state (Zhang, [Kefei], 230); the so-called improvement or development does not make sense. Worldliness is irresistible, yet Rousseau still believes in the transcendence of nature, which is assumed to guide human beings. In other words, Rousseavian “nature” rejects the “worldliness” proposed by Said. Byron does not propound the necessity to build an ideal human relationship by following nature; his mental trauma remains unhealed at the end of his “pilgrimage.” As Rawes argues,

Rather than isolate a moment of visionary insight and offer it as evidence of an ability to transcend the ‘weight’ of existence, Byron places the recollection of spiritual “converse” with the natural world alongside the recollection of its opposite. For Byron, to write about moments of “transcendental” experience is *insufficient*, aesthetically or otherwise, and he does not isolate and hold up such moments. (“Visionary” 133).

The insufficiency of the “transcendental” experience or “visionary insight” is the problem of Rousseau’s philosophy and Wordsworth’s poetics, while Byron promotes the interaction between “the natural” and “its opposite.” Exile has taught him the impossibility to achieve transcendence. The whole world operates in counterpoints and dialogue, while nature must not be barred from the other parts of the world. Though inspired by Rousseau, Byron cultivates his unique views on nature by casting

his eyes on the world.

Always haunted by the human account, therefore, Byron cannot turn away from society and forget the world even when wandering in nature. This attitude derives from Alexander Pope. Pope's description of nature in *Windsor Forest* "has very little to do with nature itself and a great deal to do with humankind and society" (Day 44). Nature "is ruthlessly arranged"; "there is no attempt to engage directly with natural detail"—instead, Pope focuses on "generalization" and "classical allusion and personification," whereas nature exists "as a token of the social values of order and prosperity" (Day 44-45). However, Pope also deifies nature and calls all would-be poets and critics to follow her: as "the source, and end, and test of Art," she is "divinely bright" and imparts "[l]ife, force, and beauty" to all creatures ("An Essay on Criticism" 1.70-73). Though following Pope's instruction to learn from tradition and to assert the social and cultural values, Byron rejects transcendentalized nature and creates by following "worldliness" instead. "Nature is not opposed to culture, but is rather the larger phenomenon from which culture evolves" (Hubbell, "Byron's" 185). Byron can never escape from human culture; the beautiful scenery is always overshadowed by his memory of the secular world. This "worldliness" contradicts the transcendentalized nature proposed by Pope. Byron's inclination belongs to the heritages of the cavalier poets and of the Augustan literature. Yet, without copying his predecessors slavishly, he maintains his individual "secular" style in portraying nature.

Byron's "secular" treatment of nature corresponds to his "decentered" inclination. No authority—Rousseau, Pope, or Wordsworth—is so sacred as to be apotheosized. He learned from these models, but then he went his own way.

## V. Conclusion

The opposition between sacred nature and corrupt society prevails in English romantic literature. Yet as “Romantic nature is a cultural account of the biological order of things,” (McGann, “Rethinking Romanticism” 248), the nature-society association should have been presumed to be essential in romanticism. Wordsworth intends to reject this association; by contrast, nature, without separating Byron from his painful memory, incurs his awareness of human society even more keenly. If we intend to appreciate Byron’s ingenuity, we must see his “resistance and ‘perversity,’ fastening on what Wordsworth found so repellent but what we can recognize as powerfully revising Romantic sentiment and sincerity” (Soderholm, “Byron’s Ludic Lyrics” 750). Repellent to Wordsworth were Byron’s secularity and worldliness. His “wandering” in nature reveals his consciousness of human society at the same time. His “secular” inclination, rejecting the single, unifying perspectives, interprets nature by connecting her with society, culture, or human community. In the exile’s worldview, culture is never fixed, stable, and transcendent (Said, *Culture* 111-12)—nor is nature. As he travels, he maintains “a surprising openness to all experiences” (Hubbell, “Byron’s” 186)—an ability that is nourished as his “pluralistic view” of an exile. This “pluralistic view” comes from the poet’s learning from Miltonic Satanism and the graveyard school on the one hand, and from the cavalier and the Augustan poets on the other: he may alienate himself from his homeland and meditate in isolation, but at the same time he still clings spiritually to society. Byron does not totally negate Wordsworth’s reverence of nature, but he also highlights her constant changing, her de-apotheosis, and her contrapuntal relationship with society.

Byronic nature is more Lucretian than Rousseauist, as McGann proposes, because Byron negates the absolute, transcendental, unchanged status of nature in Rousseau’s

philosophy. Nature herself displays a heterogeneous image. She neither cures Byron of his world-weariness nor comforts him in his sufferings, since worldliness, a more powerful force, always predominates over his memory of his own past, of history, and of the contemporary imperialist warfare. He fulfills Said's argument about worldliness: "we see ourselves as part of a larger whole, that we recognize the commonality of our human condition and that we act in solidarity with those who suffer and struggle" (*The World* 19). Worldliness itself presupposes the necessity of contrapuntal relationship among various voices—cultural, historical, political, and personal as well. With the contrapuntal view, Byron sees not only nature herself but also a larger context—the world—simultaneously. His memory and feelings are implicated in nature, so is nature in historical, political, and social struggles. His ennui and trauma mark the presence of these voices as well as their "counterpoint" with nature; consequently, in Said's words, his expressions are inevitably "hybrid, mixed, [and] impure" (*Culture and Imperialism* 14). With his "double vision," he brings forward his unique understanding of nature and of the world, and challenges Wordsworth's poetics. Therefore, Wordsworthian redemption through nature can never occur in Byron's pilgrimage. A lover of nature does not necessarily follow Rousseau or Wordsworth.

Besides, in representing Nature in different aspects, Byron is also exposing his own self. "Bereft of the illusion of finding an absolute 'truth,' or indeed of the existence of a unified self, the Romantic inward search for the self becomes the use of that 'self' to justify the value of its actions" (Sánchez-Arce 141). Byron's description of nature's mutability, de-apotheosis, and plurality reflects his identity as an exile—being nomadic, decentered, and contrapuntal. As he explores the significance of nature, he simultaneously imposes his being on nature. His representations of nature—also his "reconstitution" of self-identity—do not mean to be unimpeachable

and authoritative. Said indicates the necessity of representations despite their inevitable distortion, because they are as basic as language; rather, it is the critic's job to eliminate repressive systems of representation that allows no room for interventions (Said, *Power, Politics, and Culture*). Perhaps the best representation assumes a non-coercive, non-manipulative view to the represented objects. Byron's non-manipulative view to nature emerges in his incorporation of Wordsworthian view in "Childe Harold": he never constructs an authoritative, consistent, and unifying image of nature, nor reconstitutes his self-identity as a mighty, commanding, and austere poet-prophet. Byronic nature is a fugue formed on the counterpoint between Lucretian and Wordsworthian voices, with worldliness as the theme.

## Chapter Six

### Conclusion: The Inconclusive Ending of Harold's Pilgrimage

But there are wanderers o'er Eternity

Whose bark drives on and on, and anchored ne'er shall be.

(3.669-70)

In one sense no text is finished, since its potential range is always being extended by every additional reader.

(Said, *The World, the Text, and the Critic* 157)

#### I. The image of an eternal wanderer

##### A. The unconventional ending of Byron's narration

"Childe Harold's Pilgrimage" highlights the poet's constructions of the world and of his self-identity. Both usually go hand in hand and shed light on each other in Byron's narration and description. I attempt to explore the SCENE in "Childe Harold's Pilgrimage": S (self), C (culture), E (empire), N (nature), E (Ending)—the various "contexts" in the world of this travelogue. Before the conclusion of the whole argument, I will discuss the particularity of "ending" in this travelogue.

The significance of the world can be understood in terms of the "hermeneutical circle": the meanings of the whole (the world) depends on those of its parts (selfhood, culture, empires, nature, and many others), while those of the parts must also be evaluated in the whole. Various parts may be implicated in a single scene and form a contrapuntal relationship. Therefore, the poet's personality can be imposed on culture, imperialism, and nature in his descriptions. "Byron's poetic purpose . . . is the



dramatization of his titanic Self” (Murphy, “Glory” 661). As the poet proclaims that Harold “is no more” (4.1471), the SCENE—his self, culture, empires, nature, and the ending itself—collapses as well. In other words, “worldliness” may fail if the self is neglected. Rousseau displays this hermeneutical understanding when he claims that the real object of *Emile* is “man and his environment” (*Emile*). Likewise, I endeavor to explore the reconstitution of a wanderer’s identity and his perception of various “contexts” in the light of Said’s viewpoints on worldliness and exile.

Yet “ending” as a “context” for Byron’s self-reconstitution incurs some problems. Unromantic is Harold’s termination of his journey since romanticism is “primarily a metaphysics of integration, of which the key principle is that of the ‘reconciliation,’ or synthesis, of whatever is divided, opposed, and conflicting” (Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism* 182)—yet at the end Byron does not reconcile or synthesize the conflicts and contradictions in his personality, culture, empires, and nature. Being “born for opposition,” he “consistently” holds the contradictions in these “contexts” unresolved—he presents a contradictory worldview because of his self-oppositional characteristic. The last section of “Childe Harold” merely stops with no sense of resolution.

This unconventional ending echoes his desire to “wander” aimlessly and endlessly. As Harold’s journey is directed to no destination (1.192), the “ending” of his “pilgrimage” does not appear conclusive: it presents neither a linear nor a circular view of time, and consequently this “ending” remains open to endless possibilities. The Prodigal Son does not acquire any redemption, salvation, or reunion. In the world of the exile, paradise does not exist in any form summarized by Abrams: whether it is the Hegelian synthesis, in which “consciousness repossesses and comes to be at home with itself in its otherness,” or Höderlin’s “supreme moment” in which the hero “realizes his living community with a hitherto alien and lifeless milieu,” or Novalis’s vision, in

which all creatures become a single family or society, or Blake's ideal, in which all natural objects "reunite, without loss of individuation, into the Human Form Divine" (*Natural Supernaturalism* 264). All these "endings" presuppose an ideal resolution of all tension and conflicts after a process of sufferings, adventures, or purgation. Yet Byron does not compose with a transcendental vision, and Harold does not mature like the heroes in *Bildungsroman*. He simply disappears at the end—with no promise from the poet to become sadder and wiser. The Prometheus-like hero is never unbound because no Hercules-like savior exists. Harold's disappearance may suggest his refusal to be rooted in a certain condition. He remains "consistent" in undertaking an aimless journey.

Neither does the hero follow a circular or spiral process — "the journey in search of an unknown or inexpressible something which gradually leads the wanderer back towards his point of origin" (Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism*, 193). Abrams argues for a Christian pattern of romantic philosophy: a hero begins with the fall or separation from home but ends in redemption in the form of reunion with "home" (*Natural Supernaturalism* 179-95). Wordsworth's poetical journey in *The Prelude* begins and ends with "home." Yet Byron merely bids farewell to his readers, without revealing whether Harold will return to his homeland or move to another place. This gesture presupposes perpetual wandering and nomadic life, a revelation of his identification with the "wanderers o'er Eternity." The possible candidates of such "wanderers" are the poet's alter egos: Dante, Tasso, Rousseau, and Napoleon, who exemplify the eternal homeless exiles.

As an "eternal wanderer," Byron tends to resist any form of ending. "Ending" connotes closure, restriction, and bondage that contradicts his yearning for liberty; "ending" also presumes the acquisition of some certain goal, which opposes his decentered inclination. Therefore, being "born for opposition," he presents an

inconclusive ending to fight against the “tyranny” of ending. “Byron’s writing resists the totalizing discourse of any one theoretical model” (Stabler, *Cambridge* 17). The unconventional ending indicates the unfinished formation of his selfhood. His exaggeration proclamation to be an eternal wanderer means to defy even death. The unconventional ending of Harold’s pilgrimage manifests Byron’s unyielding spirit and resolute alienation.

## **B. The consequences of homelessness**

### **i. The everlasting pain**

Harold does not return to his homeland at the end, and his persistent rejection of rootedness means the everlasting homelessness of the “eternal wanderer.” The poet always foregrounds the pain of his hero. Near the end of the poem, Byron still stresses Harold’s sufferings: “with him alone may rest the pain” (4.1673). Literature about exile mostly presents anguish and predicaments because exile “is the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home: its essential sadness can never be surmounted”; moreover, exile “has torn millions of people from the nourishment of tradition, family, and geography”; exiles treat homes as provisional, and borders and barriers as prisons; consequently, exiles “cross borders, break barriers of thought and experience” (Said, *Reflections*). This corresponds to the image of an eternal wanderer.

The “true home” exists only in the poet’s memory; its absence in the nomadic life always stings him. The poem “does not really allow for ‘home’ space”: the hero “must remain in motion both geographically and intellectually” with “existential restlessness” (Wohlgemut 102). Harold’s arrival in Greece, the “home” of western culture, insinuates the disintegration of one’s origin: Apollo and the muses are absent from Parnassus, while the “home” becomes ruins. Homelessness highlights the hero’s willful alienation and endurance, haunted by his unhealable trauma.

## ii. The ingrained paradoxical alienation

This alienation and endurance often accompany the poet's memory of and longing for home. A wanderer of perpetual alienation stays away from any shelter of home. "For Byron, as for Harold, pilgrimage entails more than a singular journey to a particular destination and back to a home space. The repetition of the rhyme 'home'/'roam' in the stanzas dealing with each of their returns underscores this point" (Wohlgemut 103). Byron excels in setting up oppositions. More than once in the poem, Byron juxtaposes "home" and "roam" in rhyming (1.101, 104; 2.864, 866; 3.110, 112; 4.550, 552): this highlights his paradoxical alienation. The yearning for home and the pain of roaming always coexist in his consciousness. Harold's disappearance at the end implies that "homelessness" still follows the eternal wanderer. "The pathos of exile is in the loss of contact with the solidity and the satisfaction of earth: homecoming is out of the question" (Said, *Reflections*). An eternal wanderer must bear the tension between the yearning for stability (home) and the lack of rootedness (roaming). The changing of residence is the only unchanged condition in exile. The unique pair of rhyming also form a contrapuntal relationship in Byron's worldview: the past (the presence of home) and the present (the absence of home) are linked in his consciousness. "This discontinuously continuous relationship with England colours Byron's life history and also his poetics" (Stabler, *Cambridge* 1). Worldliness, the urge to restore the *gestalt*, pushes the poet back to memory and tantalizes him with the yearning for home, but his will to be an eternal wanderer opposes this urge. The unsettling force of exile always holds Byron in paradox.

## iii. The incomplete formation of selfhood

Homelessness means the lack of a specific identity, while wandering represents an incomplete formation of selfhood. If the object of Harold's travels "is to recover his loss, then his is a journey that goes nowhere. . . . [T]he process of transformation is

incomplete” (Zhou 262). Because of his lack of a fixed identity, “Childe Harold does not show any clear narrative structure or closure” (Schweizer 190). Since all cultures are changing constantly, one’s identity, especially that of an exile, are necessarily “processes” (Ashcroft and Ahluwalia 5). “Child Harold’s Pilgrimage,” therefore, displays Byron’s uncertain, mutable identity. The poet would also declare to own “composite identity habitually out of place” without “recognizable profile” and “particular direction” (Said, *Out of Place*). With identity “as a cluster of flowing currents,” an exile enjoys “[a] form of freedom” and remain “not quite right and out of place”—a feature that requires “no reconciling, no harmonizing” (Said, *Out of Place*). This may explain Byron’s confession of his being “born for opposition.” He was “out of place” either in his homeland or on the continent; to boast of his “freedom” to wander is an understatement of his endurance of homelessness and unstable identity. The formation of his selfhood is always an issue of “becoming,” torn between presence (being in place) and absence (being out of place).

#### **iv. The persistent fragmentation in Byron’s self-image**

The incomplete formation of selfhood, deriving from his homelessness, indicates Byron’s inability to piece together the “fragments” of his self. The poet of worldliness, despite his affiliation with others and with multiple “contexts,” can never acquire the panoramic understanding of the whole world once for all. The part-whole relationship anticipates an on-going expansion of one’s horizon. Homelessness, ruins, incomplete formation of selfhood—all these are fragmentary images of the poet. As the full knowledge of the world is always developing, Byron’s reconstitution of his self-identity is never finished—consequently, the images of fragments and fracture will always haunt our understanding of Byron and his heroes. Fracture and fragmentation are of considerable import “because we are still situated in a Romantic framework” (Regier 4), while both fragmentation and Romanticism “are unable to provide an exhaustive

account of one another” and any attempt to explain fragmentation exhaustively will definitely fail (Regier 5). The abundant images of ruins in “Childe Harold” suggests that all the “contexts”—culture, empires, nature—are all “fragmentary” like Byron’s self-image. None of them is self-sufficient to generate meanings and significance by themselves alone. Their affiliation and mutual interdependence (counterpoint) are necessary to nourish one’s worldliness. In the on-going expansion of his horizon, however, the poet’s persistent fragmentary image(s) will always accompany his homelessness.

Hence, the perpetual homelessness of the hero results in his eternal pain, his ingrained paradoxical alienation, the incomplete formation of his selfhood, and his persistent fragmentary self-image. He is “out of place” in culture, empires, and nature; in “ending” he still lacks belongingness to any “context.” His abrupt disappearance suggests the essential void of “ending” as a “context”—no reconciliation, no synthesis, and no reunion. Byron’s attitude toward the “ending” exposes his oppositional personality.

## **II. Beyond ending: “Posterity” as another “context” for the reconstitution of selfhood**

### **A. Byron’s self-oppositional attitude toward his posthumous fame**

Byron is a “protean” poet and figure: his “multiple nature, while uncomfortable with any one view, is comfortable with all” (Bone, “Introduction” 4). This asserts the poet’s worldliness as an exile, since exiles have “cross-cultural and transnational visions” (Said, *Reflections*). He does not stick to a specific “context”; his contrapuntal insight is directed toward the whole world. His intention to “part fair foes” with the

world (3.1059) never eliminates his recollections of the worldly affairs.

The eternal wanderer, unwilling to be bound by the “ending,” naturally looks beyond it for other possibilities of his “reconstitution” of self-image. Ending indicates the “disconnection” from the world and “rootedness” in oblivion, a condition that runs counter to the poet’s characteristics as an exile. Rootedness is unByronic: “I stood / Among them, but not of them” (3.1054-55)—thus can the poet judge as he wanders among various “contexts.” He would remain a genuine exile, who belongs to no particular “context.” As Byron meditates on cultures, empires, and nature, his reconstitution of self-identity also follows. The changing “contexts” renders this reconstitution open-ended. The “ending” may prompt him to anticipate another “context” for the “reconstitution” of his selfhood: posterity. This corresponds to Said’s argument that “no text is finished” since its potential significance can be extended by “every additional reader.” As meanings of a text cannot be exhausted, in some sense he can “wander” eternally in posterity and his selfhood can be “reconstituted” endlessly. He would be glad to affiliate himself with future readers, but, still, he never belongs to posterity.

The early nineteenth century “saw a *reinvention* of posterity—posterity as the necessary time of reception” (Bennett 41-42). Poets usually yearn for fame in posterity—this is a way to transcend death and reach immortality. *Veni, vidi, vici*—with the publication of “Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage,” Byron could also boast of his own “achievement” by quoting Julius Caesar: he came to many exotic scenes, saw them, and then “conquered” his contemporary English readers. As the “grand Napoleon of the realms of rhyme” (“Don Juan” 11.440), then, he may wish to “conquer” readers in the future generations. The “ending” cannot stop his dream to “wander” among readers in the future—Dante, Tasso, Rousseau, and Napoleon still “speak” to the future generations with their works or deeds; Byron would like to do the same. By

identifying with “wanderers o’er Eternity,” Byron anticipates the “immortality” of his exile.

Yet Byron lapses into self-opposition again about his “reconstitution” beyond ending. On the one hand, nihilism haunts the ending of his pilgrimage:

He is no more—these breathings are his last—  
His wanderings done—his visions ebbing fast,  
And he himself as nothing:—if he was  
Aught but a phantasy, and could be classed  
With forms which live and suffer—let that pass—  
His shadow fades away into Destruction’s mass . . . . (4.1471-76)

Byron insists on separating himself from Harold, though most readers tend to treat both as the same character. The problems of his alter ego amount to his own as well. At the end he seems to deny any meaning in his life. The termination of exile also indicates the end of Harold’s contact with the world—this turns him into “nothing,” a “phantasy,” and “shadow.” The disconnection from the world symbolizes the death of a critic of worldliness. Harold “is no more” as his “wanderings” come to an end. With a pathetic tone, the poet judges that Harold’s journey ends in a pessimistic awareness of life, which “spreads the dim and universal pall / Through which all things grow phantoms” (4.1479-80). He laments for the quick loss of his “visions”—the contrapuntal insight and creativity. The contacts with nature and culture eventually bring him no comfort, and his tone reveals a nihilistic mood. Moreover, he speaks to all readers:

My task is done—my song hath ceased—my theme  
Has died into an echo; it is fit  
The spell should break of this protracted dream.  
The torch shall be extinguished which hath lit



My midnight lamp—and what is writ, is writ,—  
Would it were worthier! but I am not now  
That which I have been—and my visions flit  
Less palpably before me—and the glow  
Which in my Spirit dwelt is fluttering, faint, and low. (4.1657-65)

The poet bids farewell to his readers with a series of dying images: as he will stop his narration, his theme is turning to “an echo”; the ending portion of his poetry, like a “midnight lamp” kindled by an extinguishing torch, will fade away like a “protracted dream”; his visions are diminishing, so is the “glow” of his spirit. He mentions the loss of his visions twice (4.1472; 4.1663-64), a sign of his anxiety for the deterioration of his creativity and health simultaneously. Byron’s poetry discovers “that there is no refuge, not in desire, not in the mind, not in imagination” (McGann, “Romanticism” 599)—a recognition that corresponds to his decentered inclination. At the end, he sees nothing but “Destruction’s mass”: “[c]omposure and serenity are the last things associated with the work of exiles” (Said, “Reflections on Exile”). Moreover, Said summarizes three dimensions of time found in György Lukacs, George Poulet, and Martin Heidegger: “an unrecoverable yearned-for unity in the past, an intolerable disjunction between present ideals and present actualities, an all-conquering and all-destroying future” (*Reflections*). Byron and his hero share the same consciousness to some extent: they are obsessed by their sinful yet desirable past, strong-willed against the present difficulties, but powerless to change anything for the future. With this temporal consciousness, Byron can hardly become optimistic about his impact on posterity; his yearning can be nothing but “a protracted dream.” If Byron were consistently decentered, then he should have abandoned the dream to be immortal or canonized. Oblivion, as Manfred devoutly wishes, suits an exile best.

On the other hand, Byron, far from surrendering to desperation and despair,

insinuates his confidence to win an immortal fame. His awareness of ending appears in a paradoxical image: a “melancholy halo” shines with “rays / Sadder than saddest night . . .” (4. 1483-85). His painful memory, presented in his typical paradoxical style, may impress the future generations with a “halo,” which usually appears above a saint in ancient western paintings—a suggestion of the canonization of his poetry. In addition, it will “not [be] in vain” for his reader to entertain the recollection of Harold (4.1670-71). He wishes that his poetry “were worthier” (4.1662)—the subjunctive mood of the verb exposes his longing for immortal fame in the unpredictable future. The pain may rest with Harold the exile, but reader must cherish “the Moral of his Strain” (4.1674). Byron’s awareness of reader’s response, an indication of his worldliness, may sound like cliché—yet this reveals his expectation for the continual attention of posterity to his poetry.

Therefore, it is impossible to conclude Byron’s attitude toward the so-called immortal poetic fame. He wavers between nihilistic pessimism and oblique expectation about his posthumous fame. As an exile, Byron would agree with Said’s argument that “no text is finished, since its potential range is always being extended by every additional reader.” Arbitrary is the “ending” of Harold’s pilgrimage: his reconstitution of self-identity is never finished and accomplished. Self-contradictory is Byron’s view toward the future evaluation of his poetry.

### **B. Byron’s mockery of the desire for posthumous fame**

Moreover, Byron teases those who hold the desire for posthumous fame. While meditating on the same topic in “Don Juan,” an unfinished masterpiece that leaves the hero’s future blank, the poet becomes more provocatively ambivalent: he who yearns for the “laurels for posterity” has nothing to offer and may be injured accordingly, while the fame of “some glorious rarity” can vanish (“Don Juan,” “Dedication” 65-72). It is futile, he implies, for Wordsworth or Southey to quest for immortality because their

poetical works provide nothing valuable for readers. Byron here “argues that the appeal to posterity and rejection of contemporary opinion does not necessarily result in posthumous fame, and even that those who appeal to the future may indeed be those who have little to offer” (Bennett 195). Speaking as a drunkard, he utters that “the future is a serious matter”; yet he wishes for nothing but more “hock and soda-water” (“Don Juan,” Fragment on the Back of the MS. of Canto I, 7-8) as if his posthumous fame were insignificant. His serio-comic tone renders the issue of immortality uncertain: the future as a serious matter is juxtaposed with “hock and soda-water,” while he seems to mock the serious matter for fun. Besides, he quotes Robert Southey’s lines to tease the intention to win recognition in future generations:

‘Go, little book, from this my solitude!

I cast thee on the waters, go thy ways!

And if, as I believe, thy vein be good,

The world will find thee after many days’            (“Don Juan,” 1.1769-72)

The desire for immortality, Byron reminds his reader, comes from Southey; the poet laureate is turned into a laughingstock for holding such a desire. Therefore, Byron “deconstruct[s] Romantic posterity”: “his writing both question and disturbs the logic of posthumous fame and . . . inscribes that logic within this very rejection”; he satirizes the yearning for immortality in others “while celebrating its possibility, albeit ambivalently, for himself” (Bennett 198). Byron’s imitation and incorporation of Wordsworthian nature in “Childe Harold” testify his affirmation of the value of the Laker poet’s creativity to some extent. Nevertheless, his mockery of Wordsworth and Southey for their wish for immortality reveals the rejection of the desire for immortal fame, while simultaneously he “emphasizes its centrality to the project of Romantic poetry and poetics” (Bennett 199). His pluralistic voices expose his own self-opposition toward “Romantic posterity”: he wavers between expectation and ridicule.

This pluralistic, ambivalent attitude toward immortal fame echoes his paradoxical feelings toward the ocean. His ambiguous praise of ocean (see Chapter Five) may also symbolize his anxiety for his self-image in the future: he intends to master the ocean as a rider, but he also recognizes her invincibility.

After all, this reconstitution of his own self-image stands beyond his control. The survival of a “masterpiece,” besides, “has been cut off from its human and historical context,” while this survival is “contingent upon the accident of rediscovery and the arbitrary interpretations of historians . . .” (Bennett 197). Not every reader can cultivate his/her “worldliness” and recognize the implications of various voices in Byron’s poetry. Immortal fame itself is a transcendental ideal, which essentially contradicts the decentered penchant of the exile. Byron’s desire for such a posthumous fame exemplifies his self-opposition again.

### **III. The worldview of Byron the exile and his selfhood**

#### **A. The “new world” in “Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage”**

Byron’s “pilgrimage” can be treated as his “creation” of an “other world.” That is, the world presented in his poetry cannot be literally and historically treated as the early-nineteenth-century Europe. As an exile, Harold intends to reconstitute the “broken images” and bestow meanings on his “new world.” “Much of Exile’s life is taken up with compensating for disorienting loss by creating a new world to rule. . . . The exile’s new world, logically enough, is unnatural and its unreality resembles fiction” (Said, “Reflections on Exile”). For Byron’s contemporaries, “Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage” was new because of the poet’s ability “to unite so many diverse features as they had never been united before and, in so doing, generate and represent a new world” (Beatty 247), the unification which depends on the poet’s contrapuntal creativity.

“Creation” bestows values and meanings on his existence (see Chapter Two). In the reconstitution of an exile, “other worlds” always exist (Said, “Reflections on Exile”)—in other words, “Childe Harold” present only Byron’s perceptions of the world; he does not deny the validity of other interpretations of the same world.

Byron’s perception of the world reflects his selfhood: nomadic, decentered, and contrapuntal. Byron “wants continually to merge and fuse with people, with nature, and even with time” (Cooke 12). In “Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage,” he casts his eyes on his contemporary world; in addition, he learns from tradition and expects “the Moral of his Strain” will leave its impact on the future. Therefore, his temporal consciousness contains the past, the present, and the future. He interprets/creates the world from the perspective of an exile.

## **B. The exile’s characteristics reflected in his created world**

### **i. Nomadic life and the ever-changing world**

Being nomadic, he suffers from dislocation and isolation. Yet the lack of rootedness also nourishes his creative worldliness: exile pushes him to contact various aspects of the world. Because of his nomadic life, he sees cultures, empires, and nature as ever-changing. Many historical buildings underwent construction and destruction, while their ruins, matching the poet’s fragmentary self-image, survive under the conflicts between tyranny and the quest for freedom; he sees rise and fall of empires as well as the mutability of nature. The ending of Harold’s journey cannot stop his “protracted dream,” to “wander” among future readers.

### **ii. Decentered inclination and the resistance to authority and tyranny**

Being decentered, he believes in no ultimate authority in cultures, negates the dominance of imperialists, and denies the transcendence of nature. As a permanent marginalized figure, he holds some ideas equivalent of postmodern or postcolonial views: “truth as relative, nature and reality always changing, reality as contradictory

and complex—incomprehensible, untotalizable—aptly: fragmentary” (Magill 101). Remaining “skeptical and always on guard,” an exile must reject “the blandishments of power” and “the quietism of non-involvement” (Said, “Introduction: Criticism and Exile”). Being “untotalizable” and “fragmentary,” he composes an unconventional, inconclusive ending of Harold’s journey.

Byron’s decentered penchant is displayed in his resistance to tyranny and his quest for freedom. His worldliness opposes to his contemporary imperialism despite his ambivalent attitude toward it (see Chapter Four). Imperialism errs in imposing a supreme dominance on various parts of an empire by separating them from their original culture, but cultural experience and cultural forms are “radically, quintessentially hybrid” (Said, *Culture* 68). The cultural hybridity challenges the assumed supremacy of the imperial “center.” “Culture is never just a matter of ownership, of borrowing and lending with absolute debtors and creditors, but rather of appropriations, common experiences, and interdependencies of all kinds among different cultures. This is a universal norm” (Said, *Culture* 217). Byron rejects to view and interpret things from a monolithic, authoritative perspective. For the same reason he cannot accept Wordsworthian nature wholeheartedly. As nature is praised to be infinite and boundless, there must logically be no “center” for it. An exile, without holding a “center” in his worldview, tends to take an aimless and endless journey. The “permanent state” of being a decentered exile can benefit a critic to resist tyranny of all forms (Said, *Power, Politics, and Culture*).

### **iii. Contrapuntal insight: The interaction of contradictory voices**

Being contrapuntal, he demonstrates and emphasizes the affiliation of pluralistic, contradictory views in depicting himself and the world. He characterizes himself by affiliating himself with his alter egos. His non-fictional alter egos—Dante, Tasso, Rousseau, and Napoleon—are marked with paradoxical features; the portrayal of

Napoleon exposes the poet's self-contradictory personality most obviously. Said's argument about the "interdependencies" of various forces can also be applied to all "contexts" as well. The recognition of the "interdependencies" depends on the critic's contrapuntal insight. "Said's call for studying 'intertwined and overlapping histories'" can highlight "the connections between things" (Bilgin 7). "The worst thing ethically and politically is to let separatism simply go on, without understanding the opposite of separatism, which is connectedness"—Said is interested in "how everything works together" (Viswanathan). Byron's interpretations of the world and his selfhood work in the same manner.

Moreover, he embraces paradoxes and contradictions in cultures, rejects but resounds with imperialism, and incorporates Lucretian nature and Wordsworthian nature. "For an exile, habits of life, expression, or activity in the new environment inevitably occur against the memory of these things in another environment. Thus, both the new and the old environments are vivid, actual, occurring together contrapuntally" (Said, *Reflections*). The contrapuntal view, working as a form of irony, sometimes exposes the self-contradiction of a system, belief, or even the poet himself. The critic "always stands between loneliness and alignment" (Said, *Representations of the Intellectual*). This mode of perception, like "double-talking" or "forked-tongued mode of address," is popular in postmodern and postcolonial discourse; it becomes "a powerful subversive tool in the re-thinking and re-addressing of history . . ." (Hutcheon 133). An exile can "recognize these multiple independent lines while also appreciating the harmony" (Bilgin 6). Byron sees not only himself, but also the connection of different "contexts." The identity and experience of an exile contribute to Byron's pluralistic vision. He maintains the contrapuntal relationships of various voices without abolishing their conflicts.

Byron's pluralistic vision excels in a "contrapuntal reading" of the world—that is,

the contradictory forces must be maintained so that they can “counter” each other’s “point” continually. He does not mean to eliminate imperialism on the one hand and to exalt nationalism and his individuality on the other—neither does he eliminate Wordsworthian nature to create a “consistent” view of Lucretian nature. His “reconstitution” in “Childe Harold” reveals the issues of selfhood, culture, empire, nature, and ending woven together. This is the “counterpoint” of the SCENE which constitutes the poet’s worldview. Exile compelled Byron to contact various cultures and landscapes, and therefore it cultivated his awareness of plurality of culture and nature, an awareness that led to his worldliness. The plural vision of a poet with “contrapuntal awareness” aims to “interweave, mutually qualify, and above all, superimpose the legitimate claims of internal or intrinsic readings of a work, and the claims of various forms of external critique, on the other” (Wilson 265). Therefore, contradictions prevail in Byron’s contrapuntal perceptions of the world.

### **C. The enrichment of discourse and the rejection of “systems”**

Contradictions may arise in Byron’s incorporation of diverse voices, while they also enrich the meanings of Byron’s poetry. As it is pointed out in Chapter One, he learned from Miltonic Satanism and the graveyard poets on the one hand, while he also followed the cavalier and the Augustan poets on the other. Besides, he always attended to the public taste: “He got up rapture and enthusiasm with an eye to the public” (Thackeray 343). Byron’s inspiration “comes as a response to fashion—to the superficial clamor of ‘the public’” (Strathman 363). Consequently, he cultivated a pluralistic vision, which contains his own and those of others, to constitute his world in poetry. Only with the pluralistic view can Byron the exile portray the relative, changing, untotalizable reality. Belonging to different cultures “can only be enriching” (Barenboim 48), as Said argues:

Worldliness is not just a general awareness of the world, but a way of being in it



that is at once active, receptive, curious, and patient. Worldly criticism is criticism that knows about competing alternatives, that can put a local event or expression in the widest possible context, that is equipped to think about power, struggle, and conflict between different societies, classes, and groups. (*Humanism* 8)

The awareness of “others” involves the “active, receptive” responses to “competing alternatives”; consequently, conflicts and contradictions in the “secular” critic’s discourse may emerge. This pluralistic awareness bestows on the exile “the benefit of challenging the system, describing it in language unavailable to those it has already subdued” (Said, *Culture* 334). The pluralistic vision contributes to the decentered worldview, and therefore “Byron’s world is not a system; it is a net-work of systems and orders, some of which may overlap in some ways, some of which do not” (McGann, *Don Juan in Context* 103). The poet embraces contradictions since “[c]ontradiction is life’s mainspring and core. . . . If there were only unity, and if everything were at peace, then truly nothing would want to stir, and everything would sink into listlessness” (Schelling 210, 230). With the claim to be “born of opposition,” Byron constructs “a poetics of indeterminacy, one that accepts neither the complete truth nor falsehood of either romance or realism” (Sánchez 449). This poetics is “Byron’s mature vision of doubleness and fragmentation” (Kucich 115), a pluralistic vision of an exile. He “manifested in a single striking figure all the contradictory energies” of his own age (Beatty 247). Worldliness assumes the open-mindedness of a critic to explore different perspectives and contexts, and hence Said emphasizes the significance of the contrapuntal reading.

These three characteristics bring forward his unconventional views on “ending.” A nomadic exile, recognizing his disconnection from home, anticipates no conventional termination of his wandering. A decentered skeptic, believing in no ultimate authority,

does not yield to the loss of the possibility to constitute his self-image. A contrapuntal critic, unable to accept the closedness of a discourse, still intends to arouse some controversial arguments so that the future generation may not forget him. His contrapuntal views on selfhood, culture, empires, and nature may involve imperialism, but these views manifest his worldliness.

#### **IV. Coda: The tension between a decentered exile and a contrapuntal creator**

An exile, according to Said's formulation, falls necessarily into self-opposition. On the one hand, being decentered, Byron must reject all forms of authority in his discourse. The decentered inclination, if pushed to the extreme, will deny the significance and meanings of discourse and tend to be nihilistic. It corresponds to many postmodern and poststructuralist arguments: incredulity toward metanarrative, deconstruction, the denial of objective or universal truth. On the other hand, being contrapuntal, he must establish and maintain the mutual interdependence of antithetical forces—he himself must occupy the center of his contrapuntal composition and create values. Although the contrapuntal insight may correspond to the decentered worldview in resisting “systems” and the authority, “counterpoints” can also oppose “decentering.” “Counterpoints” affirm harmony and creativity, and consequently order must be affirmed under the management of the poetic self. As the poet's self is “no more,” as it is pointed out earlier, his created world collapses accordingly. In musicology, the atonal music may match the “decentered” voice better than “counterpoint.” Being “decentered” and being “contrapuntal” may contradict each other. Therefore, Byron's recognition of his being “born for opposition” proves to be a frank confession and can explain the abundant self-contradictions in his poetry. His

self was formed by exile, while the “world” in “Childe Harold” was created by his paradoxical self.

Byron’s “oppositional” stance does not derive from slackness or resentment; it displays his brilliant, distinctive creativity. It differs from modern structuralism and deconstruction; rather, it echoes the “contrapuntal” awareness praised by Edward Said. Counterpoint arranges distinctive voices in a harmonious relationship, and never reduces the whole piece into homophony. This corresponds to the “Romantic ideal,” which “is that of a controlled violence, of a self-ordering impetus of passion” (Abrams, “Correspondent” 52). It requires a creator to portray a harmonious relationship between/among various voices. Structuralism disregards the importance of the author, and poststructuralist arguments generally incline to be nihilistic and decentered. The contrapuntal artistry of the pluralistic vision, however, rejects “death of the author” and “deferral of meanings.” The status of the author/hero must first be acknowledged so that the “harmony” or meanings can emerge. Byron displays both the decentered inclination and contrapuntal artistry: this “disharmony,” nevertheless, highlights a changing world with his pluralistic views of the SCENE in “Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage.” His obsession with his selfhood, a sign of his romantic spirit, contributes to his “antithetical” creativity and contrapuntal worldview.

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