

Essays on Byron  
in Honour of  
Dr Peter Cochran



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Dr Peter Cochran:

*Breaking the Mould*

Edited by

Malcolm Kelsall, Peter Graham  
and Mirka Horová

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## EDITORS' INTRODUCTION

*Natura il fece, e poi rope la stampa*

Ariosto's words (*Orlando Furioso* X, 84) are an appropriate epigraph for this volume in memory of Dr Peter Cochran. His was a unique voice in an age in which the academic professionalism of literary studies shapes most scholarly criticism into an over-managed, bureaucratized, assessment-focused mould. Not Peter, a striking actor who once played with the RSC, and later a popular drama teacher, who changed course, *nel mezzo del cammin*, and announced his presence to the world of Byron studies by presenting a doctoral thesis in five volumes and some half a million words on *The Vision of Judgment*, a poem of merely 848 lines. The five volumes were thrown down as a kind of challenge to Jerry McGann's edition of the poem for the Clarendon Press, which occupies merely some 48 pages.

Perhaps the attraction of Byron for Peter was that, like the poet, he was "born for opposition", albeit with typical eccentricity, Peter claimed that he disliked Byron but nonetheless was fascinated by him. No publisher, of course, would contemplate printing the extraordinary doctoral thesis – a normal step in the academic *curriculum vitae* – and even less Peter's further project, an edition of John Cam Hobhouse's extensive ms journals. This was available previously "only" in the six, carefully excised, anodyne volumes published by John Murray. The copiousness of the journals and Peter's commentary match, pro rata, the five volumes of the PhD. Fortunately, this massive eruption on the scholarly scene coincided with the establishment of the internet, and it is to the Cochran website that the reader must turn to savour the special quality of the work.

Peter was fortunate also to discover in Cambridge Scholars Publishing a printing house which recognized his talent, as well as, in the Newstead Abbey Byron Society, unstinting support and a publishing platform in the form of the *Newstead Review (Newsletter)*, which provided another outlet both for his immense scholarship and editing skills, but also for his wit and, like Byron, his "gadfly" tendency. The editors have endeavoured to gather together in a bibliography (edited by David McClay) as much of this material as possible, and are especially grateful for the assistance of Peter's daughter, Abi. Although there may still be gleanings which we have missed, nonetheless, here is God's plenty.

Jack Wasserman has provided, appropriately, a memoir and a testament of friendship for Peter later in this volume. He is a noted Byron bibliophile, and like Peter, has a distinguished career outside academia. His memoir gives the colour of the man, and there is no need to add further biographical information to this introduction. All of the contributors here were friends and admirers of Peter, frequently meeting on the conference circuit of the international Byron societies, or at conferences organized by Peter himself. Several of us have been “on stage” together at dramatic events he arranged, with Bernard Beatty as a divinely unctuous St Peter; Shobhana Bhattacharji as an inspired choice for the role of Julia, and even the current Master of Balliol sporting a stage Scots accent specially refined for the occasion. This is merely to run through the alphabet no further than “B”.

The brief given to our contributors was to “break the mould” – as Peter had done – either by showing how Byron challenged conventional attitudes in his own era, or to challenge conventional interpretations of Byron in our own period. Peter is a hard act to follow and it is for the reader to determine how far we have succeeded. It would be untrue to Peter and unfair to our contributors to merely summarize the contents of the following essays. This would savour too much of the academic lamp. By way of introduction no more need be said except that the editors have tried to reflect both the diversity of Byron’s stature as a European Romantic and the range of Peter’s scholarly interests in Byron and his circle.

Some essays take a wide perspective setting Byron in the context of Romanticism (McGann) or seeking to reach the central ground of his ideology (Beatty). Mirka Horová explores the rich dialogue between Byron and Lucretius, and ephemera of Regency society. Other essayists seize upon major but neglected aspects of his work: his attitude to child abuse, for instance (Gardner), to animals (Kenyon Jones) or the importance of the *mise en scène* to the meanings of his dramas (Bhattacharji). Certain topics are familiar, but given unfamiliar treatment: Byron and political prisoners (Graham); feminism (Stabler), and, inevitably, the Balkan wars of the 1820s (Kelsall). Itsuyo Higashinaka turns a close eye to the verbal similarities of Byron and Wordsworth in an essay on “catalogues” and Maria Schoina ranges widely over Byron’s role as a translator. The poet’s influence on European literature informs Mirosława Modrzewska’s coverage of the narrative poems of Juliusz Słowacki. Towards the end of the volume Peter’s editorial concerns are reflected by Andrew Stauffer in an addition to Marchand’s edition of the letters and journals and by Drummond Bone in a retrospective essay which

takes up issues raised by Peter's remarkable doctoral edition of *The Vision of Judgment*.

The exigencies of the Press have meant that as many close friends of Peter have had to be omitted as are included. It is a pity also that the volume does not include a Russian contribution. Nonetheless the volume brings together contributors across the globe, from the east Pacific to the west Atlantic. Byron was always a European rather than a Brexit-British poet. He is now, in true Enlightenment style, a citizen of the world.

## NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

**Bernard Beatty** is Senior Fellow in the School of English at the University of Liverpool and Associate Fellow in the School of Divinity at the University of St Andrews. He is the author of two books and has edited four collections of essays on Byron, and was editor of *The Byron Journal* from 1986-2004. Pending essays include Byron and Italian Catholicism, Byron, Pope, and Neoclassicism, and Byron's "dramatic monologues" and improvisation in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*. He first met Peter Cochran at Trinity College Cambridge during the Byron bicentenary conference of 1988. Peter was writing his doctoral thesis on *The Vision of Judgement* and was full of the iniquities of previous editions of the poem. He and Bernard were friends from then on.

**Shobhana Bhattacharji** taught at Jesus and Mary College, University of Delhi, for over forty years. She wrote her PhD on Byron's drama, and has presented and published on Byron. In addition to student editions of *Othello*, *The Heart of Midlothian*, *Mansfield Park*, and romantic poetry, she has written on travel writing, Salman Rushdie, and Kamila Shamsie. She is currently working on Byron's early poetry. She first met Peter Cochran via snail mail in the late 1990s when he asked her about Indian translations of Byron.

**Professor Sir James Drummond Bone** is Master of Balliol College Oxford and Chair of the Arts and Humanities Research Council. He is the author of the "Writers and their Work" volume on Byron, edited *The Cambridge Companion to Byron* (2004) and was a former editor of *The Byron Journal*. With Nick Roe and Tim Webb, he founded the journal *Romanticism*. Peter Cochran was attracted by Drummond's reviews of Jerry McGann's edition of Byron's poems, and recommended by Anne Barton, became Drummond's doctoral student at Glasgow University.

**John Gardner** is Professor of English Literature at Anglia Ruskin University. He is the author of *Poetry and Popular Protest* (2011). In 2003 his essay, "Hobhouse, Cato Street and *Marino Faliero*" appeared in the same issue of *The Byron Journal* 31 as Peter Cochran's "Did Byron Take Money for his Early Work?". The following year on his arrival in

Cambridge, he was personally introduced to Peter by his new colleague Mary Abbott.

**Peter Graham** is Professor of English at Virginia Tech and Director of International Relations at the Messolonghi Byron Research Center in Greece. His work on Byron includes *Don Juan and Regency England*, *Byron's Bulldog*, and various essays and chapters. He is currently working on "Byron and the Novel" for the *Oxford Handbook of Byron*. PG met PC in Cambridge at one of Anne Barton's dinner parties and will always remember PC, thespian and Byronist, declaiming in the theatre of Epidauros.

**Itsuyo Higashinaka** is Professor Emeritus at Ryukoku University, Japan. He is the author of *Byron the Protean Poet* (2010), and translated into Japanese *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* and *The Vision of Judgement*, among others. He met Peter Cochran many times at Byron Conferences. Peter kindly read his papers before they got published, and elucidated for him difficult passages in *Don Juan*. He has been engaged in translating *Don Juan* for some years.

**Mirka Horová** is Senior Lecturer in English literature at the Faculty of Arts, Charles University, Prague. She has written on Byron and edited a number of volumes and journals on Byron and other topics, including a special issue of *The Byron Journal* ("Byron and the Bible", 2015). She is currently working on a monograph on Byron's plays and continues to organize the traditional spring Byron conferences (currently at Newstead Abbey) that Peter handed on to her in 2012. She first met Peter at the Nottinghamshire County Hall, where he asked her to be "an eloquent *persona muta*" in the evening's dramatic reading of "The Blues"; they remained friends from then on.

**Malcolm Kelsall** is Professor Emeritus at Cardiff University. He is the author of *Byron's Politics* (1987), wrote the essay on the same topic for *The Cambridge Companion to Byron* (2004) and is an advisory editor for *The Byron Journal*. He is currently writing an essay on *Das Ewig-Weibliche* in the paintings of David. He first met Peter Cochran while examining his doctoral thesis.

**Dr Christine Kenyon Jones** is a Research Fellow in the Department of English at King's College London. Her publications include *Kindred Brutes: Animals in Romantic-period Writing*, *Byron: The Image of the*

*Poet and Byron: The Poetry of Politics and the Politics of Poetry*. She was the joint organizer of the International Byron Conference at King's in 2013 and a fellow attendee with Peter Cochran at dozens of Byron events from the early 1990s onwards.

**David McClay** is currently a freelance writer and history curator with Edinburgh Museums and Galleries. From 2006 to 2016 he curated the John Murray Archive, with its extensive Byron papers, at the National Library of Scotland where Peter Cochran was a frequent visitor and researcher as well as a remote user of the collections. In 2016 the National Library of Scotland acquired by donation Peter's archives and a selection of his library.

**Professor Jerome J. McGann** has taught at the University of Virginia since 1986. He is a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and has received honorary degrees from the universities of Chicago (1996) and Athens (2009). He was the editor of *Lord Byron: The Complete Poetical Works* for the Clarendon Press, Oxford (volume VI with Barry Weller) and author of *The Romantic Ideology* and *A Critique of Modern Textual Criticism* (both 1993). Professor McGann first met Peter Cochran at a tea party in the rooms of Professor Anne Barton at Trinity College, Cambridge in the mid 1980s.

**Mirosława Modrzewska**, President of the Polish Society for the Study of European Romanticism, is professor of British literature as well as theoretical literary and cultural studies at the Institute of English and American Studies of The University of Gdańsk, Poland. Peter Cochran's pen-friend, co-editor and translator, they worked together on the Polish version of the *donjuanesque* narrative poem *Beniowski* by Juliusz Słowacki which was published with other translations by Bill Johnston and Catherine O'Neil as *Poland's Angry Romantic. Two Poems and a Play by Juliusz Słowacki* (2009).

**Maria Schoina** is Assistant Professor at Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece. She is the author of *Romantic "Anglo-Italians": Configurations of Identity in Byron, the Shelleys, and the Pisan Circle* (2009) and co-editor of *The Place of Lord Byron in World History: Studies in His Life, Writings, and Influence. Selected Papers from the 35<sup>th</sup> International Byron Conference* (2013). She is currently working on a book project on Mary Shelley and Greece. She first met Peter at the 31<sup>st</sup> International Byron Conference in Dublin in 2005.

**Jane Stabler** is Professor of Romantic Literature and Head of the School of English at the University of St Andrews. She has written *Byron, Poetics and History* (2002) and *The Artistry of Exile: Romantic & Victorian Writers in Italy* (2013). She is currently working with Dr Gavin Hopps on the Longman Annotated English Poets Edition of Byron's poetry. She first met Peter at the home of the University of Glasgow PhD supervisor they shared – Professor Sir Drummond Bone (Peter was like the older brother who was always ahead).

**Andrew Stauffer** is Associate Professor of English at the University of Virginia and the President of the Byron Society of America. He is the author of *Anger, Revolution, and Romanticism* (2005), and has published a number of articles on Byron and other poets of the nineteenth century. He is currently editing a selection of Byron's works for Oxford University Press. He got to know Peter Cochran at the Byron conferences starting in the 1990s.

**Jack Gumpert Wasserman** is a retired lawyer. He is a current director and former President of the Byron Society of America, and a card-carrying member of the MLA. He has lectured and written on Byron (and international trade law) in America and other countries. While often looking at the academy with horror, he admits he has many friends who are academics. I met Peter at the 1988 conference when one of the speakers used three polysyllabic words in a row, and I asked Peter if he understood the speaker's point, and Peter responded, "I don't care". We instantly became great pals, and I miss him terribly.

## ABBREVIATIONS

*BJ*: *The Byron Journal*

*BLJ*: *Byron's Letters and Journals*, ed. Leslie A. Marchand, 13 vols (London: John Murray, 1973-94).

*CHP*: Byron, *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*.

*CMP*: *Lord Byron: The Complete Miscellaneous Prose*, ed. Andrew Nicholson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991).

*CPW*: *Lord Byron: The Complete Poetical Works*, ed. Jerome J. McGann and Barry Weller, 7 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980-93).

*DJ*: Byron, *Don Juan*.

*DJV*: *Byron's Don Juan*, ed. Truman Guy Steffan and Willis W. Pratt, 4 vols (Austin and London: University of Texas Press, 1957-71).



# POETICS

## STRUCTURE AND STYLE IN THE GREATER BYRONIC LYRIC

JEROME MCGANN

Romantic studies since 1960 have made great recoveries, not the least being the recovery of Byron's work. But such recoveries also always involve certain corresponding losses. "Blindness and Insight" has aesthetic and historical, as well as hermeneutic, applications. I mention Paul De Man's famous scholarly rubric to recall another book in which De Man figured prominently. *Romanticism and Consciousness*, published in 1970, was perhaps the single most influential volume in Romantic Studies of the past fifty years.<sup>1</sup> It achieved its eminence for two reasons. First, the book's editor, Harold Bloom, grouped his own and other advanced critical work, including De Man's, in an eclectic anthology with essays by important academic precursors of the previous generation. Second, it organized the collection so that the new work established the intellectual context for the earlier work. In this instance the child was very much father of the man. Still, for all its importance, this book by no means set the course for the succeeding twenty-five years of Romantic Studies. It was majestically silent about women writers and feminist issues, it had little sense that an historical perspective would soon become imperative, and it was clueless about how important Byron and Byron studies were soon to be. But its conceptual and philosophical approach – "Romanticism and Consciousness" – would inflect much of the most important work that was coming.

Here I want to focus on an influential essay in Bloom's anthology. It clarifies much of what we came in the past fifty years to know *and* to forget about Romantic poetry. This is Meyer Abrams' celebrated essay on the "Greater Romantic Lyric", first published in 1965, but reprinted in Bloom's anthology.<sup>2</sup> It is a beautifully constructed essay – no small reason for its influence. But it says things that, in certain cases, are not in fact true, and in other, more important respects, are so misleading that they

obscure what Abrams calls his principal subject: “the manner of proceeding in Romantic poetry” (203). One of its key ideas, for instance, is seriously debatable: that Abrams’ Greater Romantic Lyric was “the earliest Romantic formal invention”. Various poems in Burns’ Kilmarnock volume might claim priority here, as might Sir William Jones’ Hindi transliterations, or – even more clearly, perhaps – the sophisticated literary ballads that began to break across the last decades of the eighteenth century.<sup>3</sup>

As to matters of fact, consider the last sentence of Abrams’ first paragraph: “Only Byron, among the major Romantics, did not write in this mode at all” (201). In fact, the one canonical Romantic poet who did not write in this mode at all was William Blake, not Lord Byron, and Blake’s highly innovative lyric writing figures not at all in Abrams’ essay. His absence is completely understandable, however, since Blake regarded Nature as the whore of Babylon and a “delusion of the perishing vegetable Memory”.<sup>4</sup> But for Abrams’ “Greater Romantic Lyric”, Nature is an essentially benevolent force.

As to Byron, even if we take Abrams’ specialized formal view of a “Greater Romantic lyric”, he produced notable examples. “To the Po” undertook the form seriously, “Churchill’s Grave” parodically. Abrams perhaps overlooked the latter because – like the closely related *Manfred* – it satirized the form of Greater Romantic lyricism. Why “To the Po” slipped from his attention is not clear. But the differential of Blake and Byron exposes a much more serious fault line in Abrams’ argument about the distinctive “manner of proceeding” in Romantic poetry, including Romantic lyric poetry. The poems that illustrate Abrams’ “Greater Romantic Lyric” are indeed period-original, and he tracks their formal precursors with great skill, though applying the term “Greater” is mostly a rhetorical move against more rhetorical and performative styles of lyric poetry. Whether Abrams’ lyrics exhibit a “New lyric form” (203) is arguable. That they represent “the manner of proceeding in Romantic poetry” (203) is plainly wrong, though it is certainly a manner of proceeding.

Moreover, it is manifestly not the most prevalent manner of proceeding, nor the one that had the greatest impact on subsequent practice. That distinction falls to the wildly proliferating variations on ballad and narrative that the Romantics invented. Wordsworth’s *Lyrical Ballads* would later emerge as the normative instance of such forms.<sup>5</sup> But that emergence had a paradoxical result in the academic reception of Romanticism. The period’s clear obsession with the poetic opportunities

offered by ballad and narrative slipped from attention, as did the influential aftermath of those obsessions and achievements.

Abrams' Greater Romantic Lyric is not the feeding source for the most important work of Tennyson, the Brownings, the Rossettis, or Swinburne, nor for the innovative work in nineteenth-century European poetry from Pushkin and Heine to Mallarmé, and least of all for twentieth-century poetic practices. Indeed, if one were to hazard a single notable precursor for that eclectic narrative masterpiece, *The Waste Land* – surely the paradigmatic work of the last century – it would be *The Giaour*.

Some years ago I tried to open this general subject of Romantic poetry with an essay on “Byron and the Anonymous Lyric”.<sup>6</sup> The essay took its point of departure from the theory of lyric that Baudelaire constructed out of his reading of Pindar, Byron, and Tennyson. Reviewing a scholarly work on Pindar, he proposed that these three poets found ways of translating intense personal experiences into non-subjective and impersonal registers. A poetry of masks and theatricalities, their lyric address succeeded when the center of poetic attention shifted from a subjective, authorial source – Byron or Keats, say – to an impersonal register, the *form* of expression as such. In this line of poetic style, Poe is a decisive figure because his theory and practice are so inseparable. Writing this way Rimbaud would later declare: “Je suis un autre”. In that non-subjective but decidedly personal poem, “Thalassius”, Swinburne wrote even more to the point of becoming “now no more a singer, but a song”. All of Blake's poetry has a similar structure and style, and it is historically pertinent to remember that his work only became culturally accessible when it was mediated by the next generation of British writers – the Pre-Raphaelites and their (Symbolist) Circles. The first important book on Blake was written by Swinburne, and it has lost none of its force even today.

Baudelaire's way of reading Byron – impersonally – was not Abrams' way, nor has it been commonly followed. It was Poe's way, however, as well as the way of many excellent more recent readers.<sup>7</sup> And given Byron's personal fame and flamboyant life, it can seem a counter-intuitive way. But it has much to recommend it. I will be able to explain that thought better if we remember something else about Abrams' essay on the Greater Romantic Lyric. The essay is an explicit reprise on Louis Martz's celebrated 1954 study of the seventeenth-century *Poetry of Meditation*.<sup>8</sup> Abrams' description of his Romantic lyrics mirrors Martz's description of certain seventeenth-century poems that shaped themselves to the structure of formal religious exercises, especially the exercises of St. Ignatius. But Abrams rightly points out a “conspicuous and significant difference” (228)

between Martz's seventeenth-century poems and his Romantic poems. Though "composition of place" is in each case essential, the Romantic "landscape" of meditation is "present, particular, and always precisely located" (228). In Martz's poems, "composition of place" is "not a specific locality ... but ... a typical scene or ... allegorical landscape" (228). Abrams' Romantic poetry is rather "a sustained dialogue" between a reflecting mind and a specific natural scene.

A famous passage from Wordsworth's *Recluse* project describes this Romantic reciprocity.

How exquisitely the individual Mind  
 (And the progressive powers perhaps no less  
 Of the whole species) to the external World  
 Is fitted:--and how exquisitely, too--  
 Theme this but little heard of among men--  
 The external World is fitted to the Mind;  
 And the creation (by no lower name  
 Can it be called) which they with blended might  
 Accomplish:--this is our high argument. (*The Recluse* Part I. Home at  
 Grasmere, 816-24)

I note in passing that when Blake read those lines he annotated them severely: "You shall not bring me down to believe such fitting & fitted I know better & Please your Lordship". The structure and style of Blake's poetry, even his short lyric poetry, is a highly critical revelation of human illusions about "the external World", both natural and artfully re-shaped. For Blake, Wordsworthian reciprocity was not benevolent, it was demonic. He called the reciprocity an action of "dark Satanic mills".<sup>9</sup>

Blake's "manner of proceeding" with Romantic narrative would eventually become important – indeed, at least as important as the special form of lyric that interested Abrams, and arguably far more important. Those remarkable poems, "Auguries of Innocence" and "The Everlasting Gospel", look like nothing so much as forecasts of Wallace Stevens or Hart Crane or William Carlos Williams.

But I set that interesting subject aside and focus on the general subject of Romantic and post-Romantic lyric form. When Abrams remarked that Byron alone of the Romantics did not cultivate the "Greater Romantic Lyric", he neglected to consider a work that was staring him in the face – *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*.<sup>10</sup>

The neglect is important because it obscures a different and, historically speaking, an even more consequential approach to Romantic expression. Abrams summarizes the "structure and style" of his "new form" in this way:

Wordsworth's *Prelude* can be viewed as an epic expansion of the mode of "Tintern Abbey", both in overall design and local tactics. It begins with the description of a landscape visited in maturity, evokes the entire life of the poet as a protracted meditation on things past, and presents the growth of the poet's mind as an interaction with the natural milieu by which it is fostered, from which it is tragically alienated, and to which in the resolution it is restored. (203)<sup>11</sup>

Crucial to this poetic model is the "resolution" it drives toward. *Childe Harold* is different, and its four cantos exemplify the structure and style of Byron's lyrical work in general. *Childe Harold's* extended meditations on "the external World" move seriatim, being marked affectively by eruptive moments of fury, satisfaction, boredom, insight, despair, disgust, and even a kind of ecstatic self-annihilation. The list of feelings, like the experiences they reflect, could be indefinitely extended because they do not yield to philosophic or theological resolution. Byron's interminable determination in his poem is, as he declares, to "ponder boldly" (*CHP IV*, 1135).

Romantic scholars understand all of that. What we have not studied with sufficient care is the special kind of structure and style, Romantic as well as post-Romantic, that emerges from this "manner of proceeding". It is not often enough observed that, with some notable exceptions, Byron's greatness as a lyric poet is incompletely realized in contained set piece poems, whether they might be poems in his own style, in Blake's style, or in the style explicated by Abrams. Like *Don Juan*, *Childe Harold* is a glorious anthology of lyric writing, with a host of discrete passages that rise out of its loose narrative, run for some uncertain time, and then cease, sometimes gradually, sometimes abruptly. Nineteenth-century editors who gathered selections of poetry regularly raided Byron's longer works for set-piece lyrical verse, not least of all *Childe Harold* and *Don Juan*. "The Incantation" in *Manfred* is one of the period's (and one of Byron's) greatest and most complex lyric works. Lucifer's arresting reflections on intellectual freedom at the end of Act II scene 2 of *Cain* in another, and so is the dreadful curse that Eve hurls at her surviving son at the end of Byron's play. The scorpion passage in *The Giaour* is only the most famous of that poem's many lyrical effusions, and the other tales generate similar examples.<sup>12</sup> *Parisina* yields two passages that Byron would lift out for inclusion in *Hebrew Melodies*: "It Is the Hour" and "Francisca".

A distinctive feature of these lyrical passages is their relation to the immediate literary context, typically a narrative context, that generates them. But a dramatic context, as in *Manfred*, Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound*, or Beddoes' *Death's Jest Book*, will do as well. I mention

*Prometheus Unbound* and *Death's Jest Book* because both have some of Romanticism's most astonishing lyric triumphs – the antiphonal exchange in the former being to my mind perhaps the period's greatest single lyric passage (the lyrical exchange of "Life of Life" and "My soul is an enchanted boat"). But the key point to see is the decisive importance of the dynamic textual context on those verse passages. For Byron in particular, running narrative or plunging dramatic action function much like what Abrams calls, after Martz, the "composition of place". But in such lyrical environments, the poetic place is not only highly volatile and morphogenetic, it is primarily historical and trans-historical rather than natural or transcendental.

Abrams rightly speaks of his Wordsworthian lyrical mode as a "dialogue of the mind and landscape". Out of such dialogues comes an experience of what Wordsworth called a "central peace subsisting at the heart / Of endless agitation" (*The Excursion* Book IV, 1146-47). Thinking of Canto III of *Childe Harold*, Abrams briefly remarks that "Even Byron" wrote of having an experience "as if the surrounding universe were absorbed into [his] being" (224). But "central peace" does not characterize the Byronic geosphere, which is always uncertain and brinked to sudden change. That is the Nature into which Byron is occasionally "absorb'd" (*CHP* IV, 689). The experience makes him what he calls "A sharer in [the] fierce and far delight" (*CHP* IV, 871) of an endless agitation subsisting at the heart of the volatile natural order.<sup>13</sup>

Even when Byron's verse assumes a naturalist setting – by no means his most characteristic move – the result is a structure and style of recurrent and agitated experiences. In Romantic verse, these passages in Byron are supreme examples of what Heidegger meant by being thrown into the world (*Geworfenheit*). Thoughts on Nature come intermittently to *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* and they settle nothing. Indeed, they keep sharpening our sense of the historical crises, past and present, that are Byron's tormenting preoccupation. So the restless narrative keeps moving until it finally comes to a halt in that stoical vision of endless mortal passage, the "Stanzas to Ocean" (*CHP* IV, 179-84).<sup>14</sup>

Roll on, thou deep and dark blue ocean – roll!  
 Ten thousand fleets sweep over thee in vain;  
 Man marks the earth with ruin – his control  
 Stops with the shore –

Although Byron's verse is sometimes thought to be word-impooverished, it is not so. He is a cunning poet, slipping in nuances that can escape the inattentive. "Fleets sweep": two slight words come to sweep away the

fleeting and vain shows of imperial glory. In 1818 – when Byron wrote the Address – empire had taken the name “England”. So when Childe Harold sings:

Assyria, Greece, Rome, Carthage, what are they?  
Thy waters washed them power while they were free,  
And many a tyrant since ...

we may hear in the poem’s music, as we know that Byron did, “Assyria, Greece, Rome, England”. So true it is what Faulkner once famously said: “The past is never dead. It’s not even past”. And so might we well now hear in Byron’s line a sobering new inflection: “America, Greece, Rome, Carthage”. For Byron, poetry sings a song of ourselves, whoever we are. The “Address to Ocean”, like all poetry, always “stop[s] somewhere waiting for [us]” (Whitman, “Song of Myself”).

*Childe Harold’s* lyricism is built from that kind of music. Because in its view what is past is also what is present and what is to come, the verse unfolds a structure of resolute irresolutions. Narrative is useful for sustaining the effect. Byron installs and then propagates a set of discrete and recurring expressive units, each of which emerges from what has been previously lifted to instability, each of which then drives on to a succession of ensuing unsuccesses. Once initiated, the narrative augments itself through such an intense lyrical dilation that the narrative line gets engulfed in a process that Byron describes as

The unreached paradise of our despair,  
Which o’er-informs the pencil and the pen,  
And overpowers the page where it would bloom again. (*CHP IV*, 1096-98)

The style is also well illustrated in Byron’s greatest and most modern lyrical ballad, that “snake of a poem”, *The Giaour*, which grew, literally piecemeal, from 344 lines in the first fair copy MS to 1334 in the seventh edition. One might say, correctly, that these extensions augment the reflective depth of the poetry. But significantly, the extensions do not turn the action toward closure and resolution. In this respect we can see why lines 68-102, *The Giaour’s* famous meditation on the fatal gift of beauty (“He who hath bent him o’er the dead”, etc.), fairly define the poem’s lyrical style. The passage is a sentence fragment of thirty-four lines cast in an impersonal third-person syntax (Baudelaire’s “*lyrique anonyme*”). Trailing out a never-to-be-completed lament for all never-to-be-mitigated experiences of loss, the lines illustrate his lifelong preoccupation for what he called “defeated care” (“Lines Written Beneath a Picture”). The

extensive late additions that comprise the Giaour's tortured memories – the poem's structural climax – speak for themselves, as does the narrator's enigmatic final reflection on Leila, Hassan, and the Giaour: "This broken tale was all we knew / Of her he loved, or him he slew." So while *The Giaour* might well be characterized, like Wordsworth's "Michael", as a lyrical ballad, its structure is entirely different from Wordsworth's poem – as different as the structure of *Childe Harold* is from *The Prelude*, that epic version of the Greater Romantic Lyric.

These distinctively Byronic verse procedures help to illuminate the character of Byron's shorter, set-piece lyrics. Compare, for example, the structure and style of his "Prometheus" lyric with Wordsworth's "The Solitary Reaper". Both open with an arresting expressive immediacy:

Behold her, single in the field,  
Yon solitary Highland lass!  
Reaping and singing by herself;  
Stop here, or gently pass!

Wordsworth uses the occasion to extrude a tense internal colloquy. When the last stanza shifts to the past tense, we recognize the structure and style of Wordsworthian lyrical ballad: having begun in a gesture of spontaneous overflow, the poem resolves to a final state of tranquil recollection: "The music in my heart I bore / Long after it was heard no more".

"Prometheus", however, never leaves its tense present tense and imperative mood. "Titan!" the first stanza begins, and again the second stanza:

Titan! to thee the strife was given  
Between the suffering and the will,  
Which torture where they cannot kill;  
And the inexorable Heaven,  
And the deaf tyranny of Fate,  
The ruling principle of Hate,  
Which for its pleasure doth create  
The things it may annihilate,  
Refus'd thee even the boon to die:  
The wretched gift Eternity  
Was thine – and thou hast borne it well.

The scale of Byron's visionary pretense here is very grand. The poem is a literary parody of an ancient Greek Chorus, recalling what might have been a speech from Aeschylus' lost play *Prometheus Unbound*. In the equally rhetorical third stanza, the poem's impersonal choral voice turns

its address from the ancient Titan to the contemporary audience. The poetic daring of the first two stanzas has licensed the “impenetrable spirit” that fills the last, where Prometheus gains his long-delayed cosmic triumph through an act of modern poetry that Edward Bostetter long ago called “poetic ventriloquism”.<sup>15</sup>

“Prometheus” illustrates in brief lyric form what Baudelaire had in mind when he discussed Byron’s “anonymous lyric” style. The first person singular address is constantly slipping into the second or third person or aspiring to the rhetoric of a first person plural. Because the first person singular never appears in “Prometheus”, the poem does not have to undergo the transformation to first person plural that occurs so often in Byron’s work. His regular moves to narrative and dramatic forms signal this “way of proceeding” in his work, and it can be tracked as well in certain key short lyrics like “Prometheus”. Begun anonymously, as an imitation choral fragment from ancient Greek drama, the poem creates another impersonal voice able to speak at large “To Mortals of their fate and force”.

Or consider “Messalonghi, 22 January 1824. On This Day I Complete My Thirty-Sixth Year”, one of Byron’s signature lyrics. It pivots at line 22 on just such an impersonal transformation. The first person singular organizes the address of the poem’s first five stanzas. But in stanza six the poem turns.

The sword, the banner, and the field,  
 Glory and Greece, around us see!  
 The Spartan, borne upon his shield  
 Was not more free.

For over one hundred and fifty years that passage was printed “Glory and Greece around me see”. But that first person “me” was a mistaken transcription of Byron’s MS.<sup>16</sup> The shift to a first person plural signals the dramatic change that overtakes the five concluding stanzas, where the poem moves to claim allegiance with certain imposing Western cultural authorities.

The first of these is Sappho, with whose love-passion Byron identifies. Figuring his heart as an extinct “volcanic isle” in stanza three references Sappho’s legendary home, Lesbos. But these psychic connections have less consequence than the verse form that has summoned them. Byron’s poem is an anglicized recovery of Sappho’s signature prosodic form, the Sapphic stanza. Besides, her suicidal “fire” points Byron and his poem in a very different direction: toward the tradition of martial self-extinction that descends to Byron primarily from Homer. The third stanza of the poem

recalls not only Sappho's Lesbos but the ancient Greek method of communicating by signal fires. Homer alludes to this practice in *The Iliad* (Book 18). He imagines men fighting to save their city from an enemy, and

but as the sun goes down signal  
fires blaze out one after another, so that the glare goes  
pulsing high for men of the neighbouring islands to see it,  
in case they might come over in ships to beat off the enemy  
so from the head of Achilleus the blaze shot into the bright air. (*Iliad* 18,  
210-14)<sup>17</sup>

Like "Prometheus", the literary background of this poem is the mythic history of Greece, with which Byron so persistently identified. Imagining the two greatest poets of ancient Greece calling out to him, Byron responds with his answering verses. Here the identification climaxes with the reference to "the Spartan, borne upon his shield". Byron locates himself among the legendary 300 taking up their suicidal mission at Thermopylae. He has come to this poem to "give/ Away *thy* breath".

Notice what he writes: "*thy* breath". That second person – ambiguously singular or plural – is fulfilling the rhetorical shift that began in line 22. Sappho and Homer are moving Byron to summon an absent presence, his impersonal self – "Awake, my spirit". And Byron is speaking less for himself than for "us": "Glory and Greece around *us* see". Keying off a play on a keyword ("borne"), the four final stanzas veer sharply into their second person rhetoric ("thee ... thy ... thy ... thee ... thy ... thy"). The stanzas come as if both Byron and his readers were being addressed by the poem, or perhaps as if that summoned "spirit" now had license to speak on its own, without Byron's mediation.

If thou regrett'st thy youth, why live?  
The land of honourable death  
Is here:--up to the field, and give  
Away thy breath!

These kinds of move toward lyric anonymity reflect Byron's lifelong preoccupation with what he perceived as the "malady" of "egoism".<sup>18</sup> The attitude shapes juvenilia like "Lachin Y Gair" and "A Fragment" ("When to their airy hall") and is explicit in poems like "The Isles of Greece", a splendid example of Byron's polyphonic lyric. Because the ballad is simultaneously "spoken" by three very different voices – Lambro's camp poet, the hated Robert Southey, and Byron – it shifts into a different register: anonymous, linguistically absolute.

A supreme example of this way of poetic proceeding comes at the end of Act I of *Manfred* when “A voice” speaks an “Incantation” over the prostrate body of Manfred. This new, impersonal voice is the formal cognate of the “spirit” wakened in Byron’s thirty-sixth year poem. The Incantation declares that “a magic voice and verse” haunts the action of *Manfred*, a fatality we glimpse in the poem’s uncanny textual moments: the moment when we discover that the “one word, for mercy” that Manfred begs is his own name, “Manfred”; the moment when prosody conjoins the words *desert* and *desert*; most dramatically, the moment when the final word of the “Incantation” has its concealed import exposed in the final line of the poem. “A magic voice and verse” finally invests an otherwise simple wordplay, “Wither” and “whither”, with Nietzschean significance.

All these poems show why Byronic lyric style is, paradoxically, so impersonal, why Baudelaire called it an “anonymous” style, and – most important of all – why it requires the continuities of narrative and dramatic action to discover its full potential. The composition of place in “Prometheus” and “On This Day” is not Nature (as in Wordsworth) or an allegorical design (as in Donne), it is the poetic inheritance of Greek antiquity (in the one case, Aeschylus, in the other, Sappho). “Prometheus” and *Manfred* mirror each other not simply in their arguments about “making death a victory”, but through their respective appeals to dramatic form. “Prometheus” is as much “A Dramatic Poem” as *Manfred*, though only *Manfred* names itself such. Not without reason was Byron, far more than the other English Romantics, so committed to translation and transliteration. The “Tambourgi” ballad in Canto II of *Childe Harold*, like “The Isles of Greece” in *Don Juan* (III, 698-784), are complex acts of lyric ventriloquism – lyrical ballads in a Byronic mode. They emerge through a process that Keats called “negative capability” and that Byron called “mobility”.

Byron finds his own voice by channeling voices that call out to him from his poetic inheritance. What are the epic similes in *The Giaour* but acts of homage to the Western tradition of heroic verse? The scorpion passage is nothing but a fearfully dark commentary on Byron’s world and the poets who were born to reflect upon it. It is worth quoting in full:

The mind that broods o’er guilty woes,  
Is like the scorpion girt by fire;  
In circle narrowing as it glows,  
The flames around their captive close,  
Till inly searched by thousand throes,  
And maddening in her ire,

One sad and sole relief she knows,  
 The sting she nourished for her foes,  
 Whose venom never yet was vain,  
 Gives but one pang, and cures all pain,  
 So do the dark in soul expire,  
 Or live like scorpion girt by fire;  
 So writhes the mind remorse hath riven,  
 Unfit for earth, undoomed for heaven,  
 Darkness above, despair beneath,  
 Around it flame, within it death!

Byron's "anonymous" style works to depersonalize the voices of poetic tradition because he wants to recover not literary precursors but literary forms. His imitations and translations from Ariosto, Tasso, Dante, Berni, Pulci, Martial, Horace, Sappho, and Aeschylus all show this. Shakespeare is a looming presence in all the dramas. A medieval Spanish ballad will draw his attention as quickly as Martial's epigrams or a vulgar Italian street song. That the forms can be modern as well as ancient is clear from cases like the Suliote song "Tambourgi", the Wordsworthian "Churchill's Grave", or the homage to Augustan tradition in *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*. Or consider *The Siege of Corinth* where we watch Byron trying to mimic the prosodic innovation that Coleridge introduced with his experimental masterpiece *Christabel*.

But *The Giaour* is perhaps the most brilliant and complete example. Like Wordsworth's "Michael", *The Giaour* is a lyrical ballad. Unlike "Michael", Byron is not trying to show with his poem "that there neither is, nor can be, any essential difference between the language of prose and metrical composition" ("Preface" to *Lyrical Ballads*). Wordsworth's quarrel with "poetic diction" drove his revolutionary prosodic experiments to establish "a plainer and more emphatic language" for poetry. This move is without question a signature innovation of Romantic verse practice – a move that Byron would himself make when *Beppo* began to unroll the colloquial manner of *Don Juan*. For its part, *The Giaour* is Byron's attempt to mimic the epic mode, that massive act of redacting an archive of ballad verse. Crucially, Byron does not take Homer as his model. He turns instead to the latter-day inheritors of oral epic whom he heard at first hand reciting their verses in Levantine coffee houses in 1809-10.<sup>19</sup> What fascinates Byron is that this ancient tradition of oral verse is still being practiced in post-Enlightenment Europe. And yet, as he reflects in his lyrical prelude to *The Giaour*: "'Tis Greece, but living Greece no more". *The Giaour* is Byron's attempt to revive the dead by saving certain of their cultural appearances in transliterated English forms.

As an amateur classicist, Byron recognizes that the contemporary Levantine coffee house performers are perpetuating an oral practice dating back to the “Singers of Tales” of ancient Greece. *The Giaour* therefore involves a thankless and even a ludicrous pretension, a fact amply demonstrated through the poem’s inimitable and ironic prose notes. As his alter-ego, the ballad singer on Haidee’s island, laments: “And must thy lyre, so long divine, / Degenerate into hands like mine?” (*DJ* III, 988). Yet if Byron mocks his own poetic effort, as he often does, *The Giaour* undertakes the effort still, and the poem has some of his finest lyric verse, not least in its three great epic similes: the butterfly passage, the scorpion passage, and the breathtaking description of the mortal combat between Hassan and the Giaour. Each is a lyrical set-piece addressing three of Byron’s central preoccupations: love as an unreachable paradise, guilt as a self-crucifixion, and Romantic will as a struggle to the death. While the figural terms in each case are drawn from the natural world, the composition of place is not Nature. It is rather anti-nature, it is art, it is finally what a poetic “mind can make when nature’s self would fail” (*CHP* IV, 439). Here, strictly: what Byron’s mind makes from its reciprocal exchange with both Nature and his poetic inheritance.

What distinguishes Abrams’ greater Romantic lyric and Byron’s anonymous lyric gets sharply exposed when we realize that, in Byron’s view, “nature’s self” *can* fail – that is to say, can fail the best aspirations of human beings, which can also fail. Byron’s Nature neither betrays nor keeps faith with human minds and hearts. More than that, Byron thinks the human “mind can make” forms that throw Nature’s into eclipse. He cites the Venus de Medici as one such form, and he spends the fourth canto of *Childe Harold* citing many others. But the canto is itself a performative demonstration of the difference, and the indifference, between Nature and what Hannah Arendt in *The Human Condition* (1951) called “Mind” or the “vita activa”. So far as Nature is concerned, Krakatoa (or Chernobyl) simply represent morphogenetic change. But so far as Byron is concerned – the “Stanzas to Ocean” are his climactic argument – human beings intervene in those processes of natural change to build, rebuild, or unbuild human worlds. In each case, Byron’s Nature could, as it were, care less. That is why Nature can be important for Byron. Nature’s power over and indifference to human endeavor turns the screw on Byron’s desperate humanism and his commitment to his defeated care for all that human beings love and lose. In Byron, Nature has no interest in or capacity for human endeavor. It is Byron who watches over the rise and fall of “Assyria, Greece, Rome, Carthage”. Indeed, in Byron’s view of the reciprocity between Man and Nature, the obligation of care is all on our