Byron, Celebrity and Blasphemous Resistance to Authority

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Abstract

This thesis argues that the central concern of Byron's poetry lies in his multifaceted resistance to tyrannical authority—whether political, religious, legal, aristocratic, literary, or cultural. Across his poetic output, Byron consistently challenges the oppressive mechanisms of these systems. Blasphemy functions in Byron's poems as one rhetorical weapon among others—provocative, destabilising, and directed against prevailing orthodoxies. In the meantime, Byron's self-fashioning in the context of celebrity culture is inextricable from his antagonism towards the authorities of his time. The poetry becomes a theatre of rebellion, in which Byron enacts political, moral, and aesthetic defiance. Byron's celebrity thus became a performative strategy that mobilises literary form, persona, and public scandal to expose and unsettle repressive systems of control.

This thesis starts with a sketch of Byron's developing self-identification within his celebrity, seen throughout his creation of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* and his political concerns, as revealed in his three parliamentary speeches. The second chapter works on Byron's five 'Oriental Tales' to emphasise Byron's juxtaposition between human love and human liberty to reveal the common ground for him to build a connection with his readers and his appeal for blasphemous concerns to his readers. Chapter 3 examines *Manfred*, *The Vision of Judgment* and *Cain: A Mystery* to analyse the expansion of Byron's celebrity in a broader context of blasphemy and popular radicalism in the long eighteenth century. The thesis ends by examining Byron's representations of real human life in *Don Juan*, which concludes with abandoning the binary morality-based social order and a public appeal for real human life of various possibilities and lively subjectivity free from hierarchical systems.

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Statement of Copyright

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Introduction. Representing the Public: Byron, Blasphemy, Celebrity

Because
He is all-powerful, must all-good, too, follow?
I judge but by the fruits[1]

You have so many '*divine*' poems, is it nothing
to have written a *Human* one?[2]

In practice, blasphemy suggests a prosecution based on public belief. The primary concerns in blasphemy debates are usually to persuade and represent the public, which justifies prosecution against the blasphemers. As a battlefield for public trust, blasphemy is inherently capable of functioning as a tool for discussing social order, power, and morality within the public context. In 1775, 'an able disputant, and "a most zealous son of the Church of England"', Robert Hill wrote *Christianity the true Religion: An Essay, in answer of the Blasphemy of a Deist* and 'submit[ted] it to the judgment of the public' to argue for 'true miracles, wrought by the power of God in confirmation of truth and goodness'.[3] He starts his argument with an established 'constant and uninterrupted belief of all Nations' that 'there is a GOD'.[4] Miracles are used to confirm 'the Law and the Gospel', and then the 'divine power' and God's being.[5] The public must confirm the miracles, which Hill defines as 'the joint consent of a populous nation, all eye-witnesses'.[6] Can a deist 'destroy all his flesh, and not hurt his skin'?[7] Hill

[1] George Gordon, Lord Byron, 'Cain: A Mystery', in *Lord Byron: The Complete Poetical Works*, vol. 6, edited by Jerome McGann, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), p. 234: 76–78. The primary source citations from *The Complete Poetical Works* hereafter will be noted as: (*CPW*, volume number: page number or line numbers) in parenthetical in-text or footnotes.
[2] George Gordon, Lord Byron, 'To Murray, on 6 April 1819', in *Byron's Letters and Journals*, vol. 6, edited by Leslie A. Marchand, (London: John Murray, 1974), p. 106. References from *Byron's Letters and Journals* hereafter are noted as: (*BLJ*, vol. number: page number).
[3] Robert Hill, *Christianity the true Religion: An Essay, in answer of the Blasphemy of a Deist*, (Chester, 1775), pp. 4, 6.
[4] Hill, p. 5.
[5] Hill, p. 6.
[6] Hill, p. 10.
[7] Hill, p. 8.

suggests that if the deist's reason would still 'support his craving appetite half the time…only let him try the experiment to support his newfound blasphemy'.[8] Here, Hill urges a performance in front of the public that he believes could not happen. Blasphemy here suggests more than simply 'profane speaking of God or sacred things' (*OED*). A system of binary morality is framed, ostensibly 'by the power of God in confirmation of truth and goodness', but in practice 'to receive confirmation by future public miracles'.[9] Those who were considered less powerful appeared inferior within, or even excluded from, this publicly sanctioned framework. When Christian belief constitutes social belief, committing blasphemy is framed as a challenge to established notions of truth and goodness. 'The joint consent of a populous nation' is both imagined and manipulated to support the authority of those deemed to speak on behalf of God. David Nash observes that 'challenges to the supremacy of God were theorised as damaging all secular authority', and vice versa in eighteenth-century England.[10] *Commentaries on the Laws of England, Book IV* confirmed blasphemy as a crime 'for Christianity is part of the laws of England'.[11] This aligns with what Lord Chief Justice Hale declared: 'Christianity is parcel of the laws of England; and therefore to reproach the Christian religion is to speak in subversion of the law'.[12] In this way, due to 'the belief that the king was god's earthly deputy, ...impugning his dignity was a form of blasphemy'.[13] Blasphemy thus became formally illegal in both religious and political contexts. Yet the definition remained ambiguous, since orthodoxy was not intrinsic but rather confirmed as such. At its core lay the notion of ' joint consent'. To represent this 'joint consent', Hill includes quotations from a 'friend of the author', a 'Doctor Swift', and an 'Earl of

[8] Hill, p. 9.
[9] Hill, pp. 6, 8.
[10] David Nash, 'Analyzing the History of Religious Crime. Models of "Passive" and "Active" Blasphemy since the Medieval Period', *Journal of Social History*, vol. 41, No. 1 (2007), 5-29, 7.
[11] William Blackstone, *Commentaries on the Laws of England, Book IV: Of Public Wrongs*, edited by David Lemmings, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 33. Blackstone was an English jurist in the eighteenth century, whose *Commentaries* is the best-known description of the doctrines of English law.
[12] '1 Ventris 293', in *English Reports*, vol. 86: King's Bench 15, edited by M. A. Robertson and Geoffrey Ellis (London, 1908), p. 189. This is from Lord Chief Justice Hale's opinion on John Taylor's trial for blasphemy in 1676.
[13] Blackstone, *Of Public Wrongs*, p. 33. This statement is a note of the piece that Footnote 11 comes from.

Clarendon', presenting them as the contemporary 'good eyes and ears' for his previous arguments about the Almighty.[14]

The law, too, asserts belief, ideally confirmed in a publicly recognisable way. But, with the rise of print culture, an increasing number of 'eyes and ears' turned toward books and pamphlets of 'newfound blasphemy', along with new competing beliefs.[15] Blasphemy gained public attention and even popularity within the printing industry, forming a new system that likewise sought confirmation from public opinion. It enriched itself in both content and form, fuelling broader cultural conflicts.

To curb 'the power of print culture upon the minds of the populace', the divine and royal powers formed a stronger alliance.[16] In the 1790s, as Kenneth Johnston notes, William Pitt's 'reign of alarm' devastated a generation of writers.[17] By 1819, The Blasphemous and Seditious Libels Act allowed transportation as a punishment for a second such offence. Blasphemers were still judged in the people's name, but as Sir Francis Burdett complained in 1813, 'the only criterion [of libel] was whether any matter was or was not pleasing to his Majesty's Attorney General'.[18] The core of the debate was not piety but power: Who has the authority to define good and evil, and to represent public opinion? For loyalists, the state, church, and king—forming a centralised moral origin—define all deviation as blasphemy.

Blasphemy thus became a contested symbol in a broader ideological war in the eighteenth-century. Paul Whickman describes Percy Shelley as a 'blasphemer'.[19] Not only did Shelley claim himself to be 'Democrat, Philanthropist and Atheist' and his destination 'Hell' when checking in hotels in the Vale of Chamonix, but more importantly, Whickman thinks, Shelley reconfigured God as a metaphor that revitalised 'the language that shapes humanity's political and religious life'.[20] Blasphemy is

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[14] Hill, pp. 4, 12-14.
[15] Hill, pp. 4, 9.
[16] Nash, 12.
[17] Kenneth R. Johnston, *Unusual Suspects: Pitt's Reign of Alarm and the Lost Generation of the 1790s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. xvii.
[18] 'Sir Francis Burdett', *The Times*, February 13, 1821. See <http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/archive/>.
[19] Paul Whickman, *Blasphemy and Politics in Romantic Literature : Creativity in the Writing of Percy Bysshe Shelley* (New York: Springer, 2020) p. 12.
[20] Whickman, p. 10.

invoked by orthodox authorities as a tool of imposition in the name of God. When blasphemers respond from the opposite standpoint, even when their aim is primarily to challenge those authorities, political and religious forms of blasphemy often become naturally intertwined in their response, given the origin of the crime. Frome the orthodox perspective, 'blasphemy' named the crime; from the poets' perspective, it enacted resistance. Intrinsically, blasphemy indicates instead denying a God and His attachments in practice but a symbolic tool. Shelley's 'Hell' would not exist in a purely atheistic worldview, while Byron does not need Heaven for the judgement of George the Third. For both, theological symbols are repurposed to critique human institutions. In this sense, blasphemy is not a core principle but a weapon in the larger resistance to tyranny.

Byron's own reputation for blasphemy has frequently been simplified. Robert Southey accused him of harbouring 'a Satanic spirit of pride and audacious impiety'.[21] Critics such as Clara Tuite link *Don Juan* to 'Romantic Satanism', describing it as 'an epic affront to institutional Christianity'.[22] More broadly, she argues, 'what Byron's contemporary critics called Satanism also went by the name of libertinism, a political and philosophical ethos that had long promoted free-thinking and experimentation in fields as diverse as science, religion, politics, and sexuality'.[23] However, as Jason Goldsmith notes, the term 'radical' had become so vague that 'anyone dissatisfied with the status quo' could be labelled as such.[24] In Byron's case, it is essential to trace how his perceived blasphemy functioned as a specific critique of established authority.

Byron's poems often prioritise human judgement over divine command. He questions loyalists like Hill of their system that the Almighty decides what is goodness. In *Cain: A Mystery*, he writes: 'Because | He is all-powerful, must all-good, too, follow? | I judge by the fruits'.[25] Byron overturns the binary of divine good and evil by insisting

[21] Robert Southey, *The Life and Correspondence of Robert Southey*, (London, 1832), pp. xx–xxi.
[22] Clara Tuite, *Lord Byron and Scandalous Celebrity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), p. xx.
[23] Tuite, p. xxii.
[24] Jason Goldsmith, 'Byron, Radicals and Reformers', in *Byron in Context*, edited by Clara Tuite (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), pp. 265–72, 265.
[25] *CPW*, vol 6, p. 234 (76–78).

on human experience as the basis of moral judgement. Bertrand Russell in *History of Western Philosophy* viewed Byron as a type of 'aristocratic rebel', by which he meant to emphasise Byron's hope of 'intangible and metaphysical good'.[26] Byron's protests, while spiritual, was grounded in worldly injustice. Emily A. Bernhard Jackson adopts the concept of the 'universal outsider' to further explain Byron's 'view of the world that acknowledges the relativism of all its creeds and beliefs'.[27] In Chapter Three, when discussing Conrad's family, I argue there is in fact no 'outsider'. Social belief composes the universe, while the so-called outsider just means that Byron imagines a new order. In *Childe Harod's Pilgrimage*, 'The Paynim turban and the Christian crest | Mix'd on the bleeding stream, by floating hosts oppress'd (I. 385–6)' depicts Christian and Muslim dead intermingling in the river, suggesting religious differences collapse in death. In his parliamentary speeches, Byron puts the conflicts of faiths aside and pleads for Catholic rights, sarcastically remarking that 'I pity the Catholic peasantry for not having the good fortune to be born black'.[28] In his 'Oriental Tales', Byron puts his familiar political, religious, and moral stories in Islamic guise without Christian superiority. He wants Manfred to die like a mortal in spite of his power. He makes George slip into Heaven no longer as a King but with human subjectivity. He designs Don Juan to save an Islamic girl without caring about her refusal to convert to Christianity. Jackson is right to emphasise the 'open air of possibility' in Byron's view of the world.[29] I view these as a sign of Byron's insistence upon blasphemous humanity, and the recurring theme is beyond theological scepticism, but defiance of imposed structures.

Yet Byron's defiance is never simple. He wrote:

> I do not know what to believe—which is the devil—to have no religion at all—all sense and senses are against it—but all belief and much evidence is for it—it is walking in the dark over a rabbit warren. (*BLJ* 5: 216)

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[26] Bertrand Russell, *History of Western Philosophy* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1946), p. 747.
[27] Emily A. Bernhard Jackson, *The Development of Byron's Philosophy of Knowledge: Certain in Uncertainty* ((London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 5.
[28] George Gordon Byron, *The Parliamentary Speeches of Lord Byron* (London, 1824), p. 20.
[29] Jackson, p. 12.

Gilbert Phelps sees 'Byron's essential greatness—his struggle, fierce, sometimes desperate but always courageous, [was] to make some sort of sense out of a world which it seemed to him was utterly "out of joint"'.[30] From my perspective, this 'greatness' lies in a tragic sublime and in his struggle to find meaning in resistance against the fractured world. Peter Thorslev notices Byron's world of darkness and believes that we 'are left with human love as the one sure value in a world of irrational conflict'.[31] The core of humanity in Byron's blasphemy thus urges a unification based on this human love. From *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* to *Don Juan*, this humanistic emphasis is at the heart of Byron's use of blasphemy.

The third canto of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* reflects Byron's attempt to relocate power in nature when he tries to undermine the social and religious authorities. As I argue in Chapter One, that the lightning in Stanzas 95–97symbolises his blasphemous energy. In the next canto, Byron asks: 'Can tyrants but by tyrants conquered be' (IV: 856). Byron wishes to overcome tyranny without reproducing it. His 'Oriental Tales' extend this impulse by valorising empathy and love as routs to liberation, demolishing despotism to avoid its alienation over human minds. From the last canto of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* to *Don Juan*, Byron moves from dark despair to lively hope. Especially in Chapter Four, I argue that Byron further mediated nature to get involved in human life, making all powers, including religious ones, part of human life. As Laurence Lockridge puts it, Byron has 'an indefatigable interest in the human fact of things'.[32] Through prioritising human thinking and human feelings, Byron attacks the exploiting system led by tyrants. In a practical way, Byron turned his sorrow for the nihilistic darkness of the world to the actively shining human life in *Don Juan* like 'bubbles; as the old burst, new emerge' (XV: 790). He gets rid of the recurring tyrannical systems and insists power must serve human liberty.

Poetry is Byron's principal means. To make it clear, Byron's expectation of

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[30] Gilbert Phelps, 'Introduction: The Byronic Hero', in *The Byronic Byron: A selection from the poems of Lord Byron*, edited by Gilbert Phelps (London: Longman, 1971), pp. 1-38, 37.
[31] Peter Thorslev, *The Byronic Hero: Typres and Prototypes* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1965), p. 199.
[32] Laurence S. Lockridge, *The Ethics of Romanticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 449.

public reading of poetry greatly influenced his poetical representations of blasphemous resistance. This is not only because of the sharing of human feelings and love, but also because of the natural conflicts he saw between public beliefs. David Stewart comments that 'reading poetry represents a danger that must be contained and societies which foster free discussion are a risk that must be controlled carefully'.[33] This is not new. Plato in *Republic* condemns the unnecessary and unreasonable empathy and intimacy poetry can create, which can be harmful for the state.[34] Byron's poetry holds even more risk: As Ghislaine McDayter claims, 'Byron's fame, built on the foundation of a massive "popular" readership, was seen to have the potential to create a new kind of "mob"'.[35] The danger lay not in theology, but in poetry's capacity to provoke collective feeling. So we can deduce that writing can be blasphemous because the writing outcomes will be read by the public. With this basis, the reason I still emphasise how Byron wrote instead of how these writings were read is that Byron marks a new connection between poet, poetry, and readers. In modern context, critics view this under the concept of celebrity culture. Tom Mole views Byron to be 'one of [the] earliest examples and most astute critics' of celebrity culture and builds up an individual–audience–industry apparatus to indicate Byron's position in the construction of his celebrity.[36]

I believe that Byron's celebrity brings a new way of reflecting public opinions and even belief. With a retrospective angle, celebrity culture and blasphemy seem naturally complementary. Byron's poetry, embedded in a commercial and affective network, exposed the instability of social belief and imposed structures. Leo Braudy's claim that 'hope of heaven, hope of immediate fame, and hope of fame in posterity were becoming difficult to distinguish' meant that celebrity culture itself could be a long-term challenge against traditional religious belief because it downgrades its

[33] David Stewart, 'The End of Conversation: Byron's "Don Juan" at the Newcastle Lit & Phil', *The Review of English Studies*, vol. 66, 274 (2015), 322–41, 329.
[34] Plato, 'Book X', in *Republic*, trans. Paul Shorey (MA, Cambridge University, 1969), <http://data.perseus.org/citations/urn:cts:greekLit:tlg0059.tlg030.perseus-eng1:10>.
[35] Ghislaine McDayter, *Byromania and the Birth of Celebrity Culture* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2009), p. 26.
[36] Tom Mole, *Byron's Romantic Celebrity Industrial Culture and the Hermeneutic of Intimacy* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp. 158, 1.

sacredness.[37] Corresponding to the belief that '[f]ame […] is the spirit of a man surviving himself in the minds and thoughts of other men, undying and imperishable', G. Wilson Knight's comment on Byron can be viewed as a typical conduct of apotheosis that '[Byron] lives that eternity which is art. He is more than a writer [...]. He is poetry incarnate. The others are dreamers: he is the thing itself'.[38] Further, built upon criticisms like Russell's on Byron's rebellious popularity, Tuite declares that 'Byronism is a new mode of enchantment that not only solicits people to resist divine majesty and teaches them how, but also displaces divine majesty with what became known by its contemporaries as Byron's "Satanic Majesty"'.[39] Thus, Byron challenges not just political and religious power through his writings, but also the very mechanism by which public authority is conferred through his celebrity.

Before I explore Byron's engagement and negotiation with celebrity culture, I want to argue that his use of popular language and form—often criticised by literary elites—is itself a challenge to literary authority. William Makepeace Thackeray, for example, mocks Byron's 'immortality' in *Don Juan* by lamenting that 'woe be to the man who denies the public gods'.[40] This hierarchical disdain for mass culture mirrors religious orthodoxy's suspicion of the blasphemer. Byron's poetic language, rooted in the vernacular, challenged all the authorities, including both religious and literary elites. Olivia Smith notes that 'to speak the vulgar language demonstrated that one belonged to the vulgar class; that is, that one was morally and intellectually unfit to participate in the culture'.[41] However, T. S. Eliot's standard of language still leaves Byron in a column of 'dead or dying language', just like an artisan's words about 'his work' in a 'public bar' or in a 'painfully written' letter.[42] Byron's work posed against such claims, and Byron's celebrity was itself a form of cultural heresy. In the following chapters, I will introduce more criticisms of religious and political orthodoxy, which combine to

[37] Leo Braudy, *The Frenzy of Renown: Fame and Its History* (New York: Vintage, 1997), p. 379.
[38] G. Wilson Knight, *The Burning Oracle* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1939), p. 198.
[39] Tuite, p. xx.
[40] William Makepeace Thackeray, *Notes of a Journey from Cornhill to Grand Cairo. 1844*, in *The Works of William Makepeace Thackeray*, vol. 16 (New York: Scribner's, 1911), p. 321.
[41] Olivia Smith, *The Politics of Language, 1791–1819*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), p. 2.
[42] T. S. Eliot, *On Poetry and Poets* (London: Faber and Faber, 1957), pp. 200–1.

represent the lasting war between social authorities and public variety.

In fact, more recent critics tend to approach Byron's poetry through multiple avenues in order to evaluate its characteristics more objectively. For example, Anthony Howe specifically points out and praises Byron's liberative innovation in writing that 'it was Byron among the major romantics who came to insist that one should be able to make a poem about a fried egg as well as a sunset'.[43] Mole notices also Byron's unusual popularity and that popularity's enormous influence on both Byron's writings and the criticisms about them, recognising the tendency that 'writing appreciatively about Byron often meant rescuing him from his own celebrity'.[44] Mole believes that making Byron's celebrity the topic itself is a way of reevaluating this. I think, however, a further step is like Jackson's: to believe the 'Romantic reading public was more than capable of nuanced, even counterintuitive, readings of Byron's work', and that Byron's work deserved it.[45] The point is that I view Byron the poet and his target readers as bound together in a reciprocal tie, and I argue that Byron's poetry—along with the reflective development it exhibits—constitutes his representation of public thought and opinion. This way, studying '[Byron's] poetry at the level of the reading experience' is not sacrificed, but can be completed in a more spiritual as well as intimate way.[46] Byron's poetry realises its value in his representing the public and their equal connection, which is a mechanism refusing outside authoritative judgements. As Janice Radway suggests, 'we do not yet think clearly enough about the fact that mass culture and the middlebrow are concrete and specific challenges to our own authority as cultural custodians'.[47] To justify Byron's reader's position is an important part of justifying Byron's writing. Relating also to E. P. Thompson's claim that 'the very word "common" acquired significantly new notations: we are placed with the common against the [polite] culture'.[48] The conflict reflects the blasphemous dilemma involved in approaching and

[43] Anthony Howe, *Byron and the Forms of Thought*, (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013), p. 2.
[44] Mole, *Byron's Romantic Celebrity*, p. xiii.
[45] Jackson, p. 9.
[46] Jane stabler, *Byron, Poetics and History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 5.
[47] Cited in McDayter, p. 9.
[48] E. P. Thompson, *The Romantics: England in a Revolutionary Age* (New York: New Press, 1997), p. 28.

seeking to change the external world, while also helping this thesis to argue for the mutual support and influence between the mechanisms of celebrity culture and Byron's blasphemous writings, in comparison with blasphemy in political and religious contexts.

Even before the concept of celebrity culture was introduced into Byron scholarship, Byron's contemporaries and some later critics paid attention to the influence of popularity on his writings. The loyalist critic of *Quarterly* once accused Byron of 'pleas[ing]' his rebellious readers:

> The scandalous insults which Lord Byron offered to the late king were of course, mainly designed, and excellently well calculated, to please certain liberal circles in those days, condemned as such circles then were to the blackest rancour of hopelessness… Lord Byron had, in their view, degraded himself as a man, by lending his poetical talents to the purposes of a small exclusive knot of magnates, who, occasionally professing levelling principles on a wider scale—and perhaps well enough disposed to please the mob, if they could do so safely, at the expense of the people…[49]

Byron, poetry, and the divisions of British reading public: All parties are still placed within and judged from the orthodox angle. In this quote, confirmation of public goodness gives way to an accusation of mob mentality and hopelessness when the established belief is challenged widely. It is fair to say, however, that to 'please' means the reviewer was still conservative in identifying Byron's position instead of acknowledging widely his own revolutionary passion. I think this is because of Byron's lordship ranking among the ruling class. I shall come back to this point later. Catering to his reading public does not compose all of Byron's writing purposes, but this represents, just as mentioned when commenting on Hill's pamphlet, that a new cultural and literary mode was rising in the flourishing printing industry. Jerome Christensen thinks Byron to be the first famous author to 'belong to a fully commercial society'.[50] Mole marks a unification around the exact celebrated figure that 'celebrity was no longer something you had, but something you were'.[51] This is in accordance with the

[49] *Quarterly*, XLIV (January, 1831), 197
[50] This saying is paraphrased in Andrew Elfenbein, *Byron and the Victorians* (Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 48. See also Jerome Christensen, *Lord Byron's Strength: Romantic Writing and Commercial Society* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), pp. xiv–xvi.
[51] Mole, *Byron's Romantic Celebrity*, p. 12.

distinction Andrew Elfenbein makes between famous persons and celebrity, the latter of which is 'a figure whose personality is created, bought, sold, and advertised through capitalist relations of production'.[52] I think it is too modern and too far-reaching to overestimate the commercialism in Byron's celebrity. It is still necessary to distinguish famous persons from celebrities; what at least marks Byron's celebrity remains his direct but struggling connection with his readers. Like Howe, I also agree with Mole to call Byron 'a seminal figure respecting the modern obsession with celebrity', while I tend to admit it as a unique early mode which casts a shadow over celebrity history but free from many modern identifications.[53] I understand it to be important to place it in historical context, and I think the connection that the 'obsession' lies more in Byron's poetical representations.

As mentioned, Mole makes 'Byron's celebrity its subject' in his research.[54] Through examining the contextual characteristics between the 'two poles' of 'Lord Byron the cultural producer and Lord Byron the cultural product', Mole confirms the apparatus of celebrity culture based on Byron's engagement with such.[55] This process helps clarify celebrity culture as a battlefield within the industry, but I think it comes at the expense of Byron's subjectivity, since his writing must always remain constrained by the audience's position. McDayter views Byromania itself a 'symptom' of the larger cultural phenomenon and values it in examining individual (which I think is actually more public) expression of desire in political and cultural representations.[56] Byromania is viewed as a mirror to the broader public and risks smoothing the specific 'Byron' out. Tuite accepts but tries to reshape the orthodox perspective. Focusing on 'the power of the ambivalent force' between 'majestic inspirations' and 'perverted degraded genius', Tuite stages 'scandalous celebrity'.[57] This 'new form of fame that mediates between notoriety and older forms of heroic fame within Regency public culture' was born in

[52] Elfenbein, p. 47.
[53] Howe, p. 1. See Mole, *Byron's Romantic Celebrity*, pp. 27, 158.
[54] Mole, *Byron's Romantic Celebrity*, p. xiii.
[55] Mole, *Byron's Romantic Celebrity*, p. 42.
[56] McDayter, p. 20.
[57] Tuite, p. xiv.

'an economy of desire', as Tuite declared.[58] When modern researchers acknowledge that the connected pair of 'Byron' and 'celebrity culture' brought about great religious, political, and social influences, like what was published in *Quarterly*, Byron in scholarship is mainly viewed to be 'pleasing' the mob. It seems that this is because Byron was, in fact, constrained by his celebrity, so there exists a contradiction between Byron and his readers. However, I think the more important reason is that the public, or Byron's audience, is too vaguely represented when commentators discuss his celebrity. In other words, reviewers should be regarded as part of the general audience, or as readers, but they in fact occupy different individual positions. Byron's readers are usually represented negatively from an orthodox perspective, and people naturally accept this to this day. Byron and most of his readers have both been placed in the dock, but separated by their identities in judgement. To partly solve this complex problem, Mole introduces the '"hermeneutic of intimacy"—and examine[s] the understanding of subjectivity on which it was based';[59] while McDayter tries to justify the public desire in broader developmental contexts, Tuite, like Mole, 'engage[s] [an] ensemble of life, work, and reception…in its functions as an ambivalent spectacle and forum of public opinion'.[60] These behaviours function in explaining the influencing logic of celebrity culture, and partly justify the mob's position. In fact, in a twisted way, research on Byron's celebrity culture usually stages 'the movement in Byron's work that turns out to the world and then…relay[s] it back into and through the poetry'.[61] I want to take a closer look at poetry's predominating role through celebrity culture, which would present a new way of judging Byron's writing and celebrity.

By developing celebrity culture as a broader interdisciplinary concept, this thesis juxtaposes it with Byron's representation of blasphemy in examining the religious and political influence of his poetry.[62] Reception is important because it also influences

[58] Tuite, pp. xiv–xv, xviii.
[59] Mole, *Byron's Romantic Celebrity*, p. xiv.
[60] See McDayter, p. 28. Tuite, p. xix.
[61] Tuite, p. xx.
[62] For the interdisciplinary exploration of celebrity culture, apart from Leo Braudy's *The Frenzy of Renown: Fame and Its History*, see also P. David Marshall's *The Celebrity Culture Reader*

Byron to change his writing, which also reflects Byron's changing attitude and way of engaging with celebrity culture. To some extent, Byron's writing itself can even be eliminated in the celebrity culture context, by which I mean that part of recognised Byron's readers could be William Hone's *Don Juan: Canto the Third*, or other parodies at the time, as stated in Chapter Four.[63] However, this does not mean that Byron's poetry is not important. Because of the presence of the human core within Byron's blasphemy, his values—and his manipulation of those values within celebrity culture—are realised in his handling of his own celebrity and in the compromises made in relation to his personal identity. This core also exists in broader contexts, permeating Byron's celebrity and making it a stage upon which his political thinking concerning the public is reflected. In Byron's case, poetry appears labelled and replaceable, but it is, paradoxically, celebrity culture—with its blasphemous nature—that proves to be the factually replaceable element. The most compelling aspect is that the two become entangled, and that Byron endeavours to expose the blasphemous character of celebrity culture in its representation of the public, in order to embody his own ideological liberation. In this sense, Byron's blasphemous representations not only constitute his primary means of engaging with celebrity in the context of popular culture, but, more importantly, symbolise his reflections on social relationships, systems, and order. This thinking is based on his humanity core to prioritise human and desacralise political, religious and even his own authority, which naturally includes and even relies on an important party of celebrity culture: the public. In this case, Byron's poetic strategies—irony, blasphemy, satire—are not merely literary flourishes. They are tools in a war of cultural and political resistance.

It is also important to note that the relationship between Byron's celebrity and

(London: Routledge, 2006), *Celebrity Studies*, [See Su Holmes, and Sean Redmond, 'A journal in Celebrity Studies', *Celebrity Studies*, 1 (2010), 1–10], and the PMLA Special Issue on *Celebrity, Fame, Notoriety*, 126, 4 (2011).

[63] This thesis explores public reception and how it is reflected in Byron's responses within his writing, in part by acknowledging the existence of similar or critical parodies. One example is the targeted long poem 'Anti-Byron', which confirms the effectiveness of Byron's use of poetry to advance his politics, as it exposes loyalist anxiety over his public influence for his blasphemous representations. These examples help in understanding the connection between Byron and his readers within the context of celebrity culture. However, since their significance here lies in their existence rather than their detailed content, I do not undertake close readings of them.

his work is a dynamic one. In 1821, Byron claimed himself that 'Moore wrote to me from Paris months ago that "the French had caught the contagion of Byronism to the highest pitch"' (*BLJ* 8: 114). Tuite may think 'to enclose intimacy within a textual model' cannot represent the 'conceptual account of celebrity as a social and affective form'.[64] However, in Byron's case, his active response to his fame has always counted more than critics' imagined constructions of the public reception of a completed oeuvre. Viewing Byronism as a fixed and finalised entity makes it difficult to understand the corresponding changes among Byron, his work, and his name. McDayter thinks both 'the object of "erotic diabolism" for "squealing females"' and '[Byron's] appeal to legitimate (male) readers…based on his "rebellion against the old order of decorum, restraint, privilege, and absolutism"' cannot be so precise as to be called 'mass "mania"'.[65] Byron's celebrity seems 'strange', as Elfenbein believes: '[T]he equation between Byron and his heroes was established before the details of his personal life became public property. His scandalous aura arose almost as if to justify the qualities of his poetry'.[66] Within this strange enigma, Tuite, like McDayter, also tends to reflect 'the particularly imbricated relation between Byron and celebrity culture at this vital historical moment'.[67] And 'Byronism' is used to 'confound the protocols that ordered existing understandings of the relations between the authorial life and the work'.[68] The similar specification seems to justify Byron's uniqueness, but stops before touching the core. The really strange part is the continuous but unconnected communication between Byron and his readers, which leads to Byron's continuous experiments in his writing for his readers. No later than William Hazlitt, critics had already recognised Byron's aristocratic superiority in creation. However, I consider it unacceptable to dismiss the author–reader connection arbitrarily, as this simplifies the evolving dynamic reflected in Byron's poems.[69] This thesis argues that, typically in *Don Juan*, and as early as in the fourth canto of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, Byron mediated between his

[64] Tuite, p. xviii.
[65] McDayter, p. 2.
[66] Elfenbein, p. 14.
[67] Tuite, p. xvii.
[68] Tuite, p. xvii.
[69] See William Hazlitt, *The Spirit of the Age or Contemporary Portraits*, (London, 1825), p. 163.

aristocratic superiority and his equation with the public. As Howe also suggests, 'literary criticism, as has been recognized since at least Horace, thus needs to be an act of participation as well as an act of contextual investigation'.[70] In fact, as I view reviewers as part of the audience without special priority in celebrity culture, specific criticisms may help to reflect the ambivalence in public reception. Tuite remarks that:

> The scandalous styling of the radical Whig libertinism embodied in Byron's texts electrifies readers across the lines of class, gender, and political sympathy, but it is a privileged, specifically masculine, and often misogynistic form of transgression. Many women have nevertheless identified with and appropriated it, despite (or perhaps perversely because of) this exclusivity and misogyny.[71]

This piece poses the long-term problem with Byron's aristocratic identity in Byron criticism. It is impossible to deprive this identity of Byron, but it is important to evaluate its role in Byron's writing, especially in the celebrity culture context. Because of his inborn position within the social authorities, Byron criticism from his own age presents weird ambivalence. A certain number of loyalists hope to make a division between Byron and his blasphemous works. For *The Corsair*, *The Monthly Review* 'congratulate[s] Lord Byron on his return to the standard heroic measure'.[72] More bluntly, *Don Juan*

> would have been confined by its price to a class of readers with whom its faults might have been somewhat compensated by its merits… "Don Juan" in quarto and on hot-pressed paper would have been almost innocent—in a whity-brown duodecimo it was one of the worst of the mischievous publications that have made the press a snare.[73]

Some critics nowadays tend to thoroughly continue the appropriation by denying Byron's blasphemous resistance from its root. For *The Vision of Judgment*, Jake Philips claims that 'readers know that Byron is more concerned with writing good poetry, and

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[70] Howe, p. 5.
[71] Tuite, p. xxii.
[72] '*The Corsair*, a Tale. By Lord Byron', *The Monthly Review*, 73 (1814), 189–200, 190.
[73] [Robert Southey?], 'Art VI.—Cases of Walcot v. Walker; Southey v. Sherwood; Murray v. Benbow; and Lawrence v. Smith', *Quarterly Review*, 27 (1822), 123–38, 127.

showing that Southey wrote bad poetry, than with any moral, or political subject'.[74] Who are 'the readers'? The liberal circles, the mob, or Hill's good eyes and ears? Byron's aristocracy composes the main reason why there emerges so many escapes from his definite blasphemy (I mean many examples instead of most of Byron criticism). The appropriation indicates an imposing manipulation upon the individual mind into the so-called 'joint consent'. These remarks do not help to dredge the communication between Byron and his reading public, but instead further obscure Byron's humanitarian blasphemy and deepen the divisions between blasphemers and their potential allies. Byron's aristocracy confirms the hierarchical system's imposing belief. Until *Don Juan*, it was still the main advertising measure. The mislocated communication thereby confirms Byron, his blasphemy, and his celebrity's intended deconstruction of the system, as well as the system's rigid position in upholding social tradition and power. This thesis seeks to treat aristocracy and its criticism as a unified category through which to reflect the changes in both literary and social contexts surrounding Byron's celebrity.

To integrate both poetical and cultural representations, I aim to illustrate the changing position of Byron in relation to his readers. This thesis ultimately views Byron's celebrity as a theatre that hosts the various parties engaging with his poetry. Compared with a deliberate distance in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, Byron finally sits beside the audience in *Don Juan*, as is argued in Chapter Four, through the narrator, which is designed to indicate an equal communication between the author and the readers. According to Mole,

> Byron exploited his position in Romantic celebrity culture in order to critique its understanding of subjectivity just as that understanding was becoming the modern norm. […*Don Juan*'s] poetics of self-expression […marks] how commercial collaboration and creative compromise made a public profile possible.[75]

In fact, the collaboration is realised through poetical representation and supported by

[74] Jake Philips, '"The Art of Easy Writing": The Case of Burns and Byron', *Romanticism*, 28. 3 (2002), 222–32, 230.
[75] Mole, *Byron's Romantic Celebrity*, p. xiv.

Byron's blasphemy, by which I mean the commercial collaboration appears much later than expected. For example, Byron calls in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, *Canto II*, 'Can all saint, sage or sophist ever writ, | People this lonely tower, this tenement refit?' (53–54). Via both an imagery imagination and a possible invitation of his readers, Byron builds up a primary intimacy when guiding his readers among the Greek ruins. Until *Don Juan*, Byron could expertly strip away part of his experience in order to sit back among the audience and evaluate the representations of his blasphemy. Byron and his readers share the roles of participants, providers, and critics. Primarily in Chapters One and Four, I argue that this celebrated figure—the leading character on the stage, whom I call 'quasi-Byron'—represents most of the protagonists Byron created for his reading public: an objective mirror reflecting the outcome of both Byron's and his readers' efforts. I use this figure to represent the changing status of Byron's celebrity, as well as his persistent blasphemy. Byron adjusts it in order to better represent both himself and the religious and political consensus of his revolutionary allies. This thesis aims to reveal the complex mechanism of Byron's celebrity within the broader context of celebrity culture, and to serve as a lens for analysing and presenting Byron's poetical and political representations.

I believe that reading Byron requires a dynamic and evolving engagement with his major writings. In spite of the fact that, as Jackson suggests, what 'in Byron's work is a development of thought, with all the halts, pauses, and irritatingly confusing moments that mark any development,…there exist selves anterior to social construction'.[76] I read them in Byron's blasphemous representations of changing form but consistent core, just as Mole insists on the 'continuity' assured in Byron's textual changes.[77] This thesis thus spreads its attention to cover most of Byron's major works. To precisely reflect the development of Byron's poetry staged in the context of celebrity culture, I start from what made him famous overnight: the first two cantos of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*. Occasionally, I look back on his earlier prose writings when

[76] Jackson, pp. 3, 7.
[77] Mole, *Byron's Romantic Celebrity*, p. 139.

deducing the origin of his blasphemous thinking. In fact, because there appears 'sceptical, fragmentary and contradictory modes of thought characteristic of Byron's oeuvre', as Howe also puts it, this thesis involves much prose materials from Byron and his contemporaries.[78] Mainly through close reading and archival studies, this thesis aims to explore Byron along with his audience's role in Byron's poetical representations and how this further presented the broader public with a motive for ideological liberation.

Considering the important developing pattern and turning points of Byron's creation, this thesis is divided into four chapters.

Chapter One focuses on *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* and Byron's early political works, including his three parliamentary speeches. I mainly work on Byron's self-identification and his original human-centred concerns in this chapter. The long creation period of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* is usually viewed as a natural witness to Byron's maturity, especially concerning the protagonist's overlap with Byron's self. For example, Thorslev believes that before writing Canto III and after years of publishing the first two cantos, 'Byron must have grown as a man during those years, and certainly he grew considerably as a poet. […] The literary Childe […] has grown more mature'.[79] I argue against this maturity in Canto III, however, for Byron's failure in managing his aristocratic superiority. When examining Byron's position in the context of celebrity culture, Mole puts forward an individual–audience–industry apparatus to evaluate Byron's celebrity in response to the 'industrialised print culture'.[80] I find the 'individual' party does not work so well outside the market to reflect Byron's ambiguous celebrated self: Hazlitt remarked that 'in reading Lord Byron's works, he himself is never absent from our minds';[81] a fan letter from 'Anna' to Byron in 1812 suggested that the 'Byron' in her mind is an obscured image of Childe Harold.[82] Therefore, in this chapter, I first introduce 'quasi-Byron' to show that the celebrated figure is neither the real Byron nor

[78] Howe, p. 3.
[79] Thorslev, *The Byronic Hero*, p. 130.
[80] Mole, *Byron's Romantic Celebrity*, pp. 1, 10.
[81] Hazlitt, p. 166.
[82] Anna, 'To Lord Byron on 3 September 1812', in John Murray Archive, National Library of Scotland (Account 120664 folder 105), from a transcription courtesy of Peter Cochran.

any of his protagonists, but an ideal combinational image of both. This figure helps to reveal how Byron established his intimacy with his audience while struggling—yet ultimately compromising—with their imagination. That this man-made figure imitates God in both formation and belief serves to objectively question the figure of God, thereby enriching the blasphemous dimensions of celebrity culture. This chapter also demonstrates Byron's transition from politician to poet, and explains how he came to use poetry as a means to advance politics without abandoning his rebellious passion.

Chapter Two looks at Byron's five 'Oriental Tales'.[83] Following Chapter One, this chapter explores Byron's series of experimental writings after he recognising his flourishing celebrity but before he abandoned his systematic superiority. Before embracing a more profound non-binary morality, in the Tales, Byron adopted experimental forms and touching human feelings for his concerns. In the meantime, the exotic background helps survive the censorship, while the similar relationship between God and secular authorities can remind the readers of Byron's juxtaposing Christianity and Islam in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*. Byron develops his strategy in arousing empathy further in the Tales, and I argue that he views this as a way to shake the legitimacy of blasphemy crime imposed by the authorities. In the Tales, Byron questions the seemingly indisputable legitimacy of religion and of despots who intervene in ordinary human life, demonstrating how such intervention alienates life and leads to tragedy for all involved. I think that by emphasising the connection between love and liberty in the Tales, Byron appeals for the blasphemous freedom in love and by judging love, as Roderick Beaton asserts, '[t]hroughout the "Turkish tales", the political is very firmly subordinated to the personal'.[84] The public reaction to his creation, typically the long poem 'Anti-Byron', makes Byron realise his readers' recognition of his influence 'on civil society' (*BLJ* 4: 82). More precisely, Byron agrees with the blasphemous reading of his poems, because they were blasphemous. This confirms the feasibility and efficiency of his blasphemous call and consolidates his wish

[83] *Lara* is not included due to its connection with *The Corsair* to avoid overlapping arguments about Byron's poetical experiments on both form and content.
[84] Roderick Beaton, *Byron's War: Romantic Rebellion, Greek Revolution*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 34.

to use poetry to advance his political pursuits and appeal for his humanistic concerns.

Chapter Three works on *Manfred*, *The Vision of Judgment* and *Cain: A Mystery*. Following the first two chapters, this chapter explores Byron's deep thinking over blasphemy as a weapon to overthrow the tyrannical establishments. In the context of celebrity culture, this chapter places Byron's blasphemous works in the context of eighteenth-century radicalism to analyse Byron's direct confrontation with the arbitrary authorities, their representatives, and the tyrannical system they rely on. In *Manfred*, Byron deprives the abbot of St. Maurice's humanity from his position in the hierarchical religious system. In *The Vision of Judgment*, the poet names 'George the Third' five times to accuse the king as 'first opponent' against 'Liberty', but finally lets 'King George' slip into heaven to ultimately indicate the judging result on '[h]is duties as a king and *mortal*'.[85] In *Cain*, the first human murderer adopts human actions to pursue human life and truth against imposed belief. Byron thus unsettles the binary morality rooted in religious belief and values humanity above religious doctrines alone. This chapter also introduces the contemporary, arguable blasphemy prosecutions as a stage upon which Byron performs his accusation against the legal system that serves the authorities. Moreover, these blasphemy cases objectively contributed to the enlargement of Byron's fame through the mainstream press.

Chapter Four focuses on *Don Juan*. In the developing pattern Chapter One illustrates, this chapter views *Don Juan* in the same status as the poems in Chapter Three. For Howe, *Don Juan* 'does not put forward a coherent theory of universalized knowing, but it does think about (and through) poetry in terms of its collective, emancipatory and imaginative possibilities'.[86] I think the internalised hope represented in this poem is more important in representing the broader public, so I put *Don Juan* at the end to emphasise the unification of Byron's thinking of poetry and the social reality in his representation of the real human-centred life. For William Christie, Byron in *Don Juan* adopted life details which are 'more "real" than the life of other literature' to represent 'the truth of humanity […] without illusions about human perfection or

[85] *CPW*, vol 6, p. 326 (356), p. 324 (303).
[86] Howe, p. 7.

perfectibility'.[87] Following Chapter Three, I argue that Byron's unorthodox depictions signify resistance to the hijacking of imposed morality in contemporary society. When the poet started the first canto with 'I want a hero', he meant there was no true one (I: 1). Common people questioned the imperfect humans; Byron questioned the doctrines. Byron's celebrity, by then mature in his communication with his readers through the digressive narrator, though loved widely, involved nothing divine and incontestable. As Peter Cochran claims, 'you can dance round [the celebrity] if things go well, but if things go badly you can also spit on it, pooh all over it, or chop it to bits'.[88] When *Don Juan* debuted as both a sign and a stimulus to undermine stereotyped heroic figures and to celebrate 'real' human beings, Byron—armed with his notoriety—was actively redefining the unrealistic heroic tradition and singing for real human life. In doing so, he aimed to cancel the blasphemy debate grounded in the endorsed binary moral system of good and evil, as well as the authority structures that enforced it through their imposing power.

Across the four chapters, this thesis examines the development of Byron's poetical representations of the public, particularly those who share his hope for liberty from orthodox tameness—representations that are spread and enriched through his celebrity identity. This thesis aims to present how poetry, especially Byron's blasphemous writing as his major means to resist tyrannical authority—whether political, religious, legal, aristocratic, literary or cultural, helps in representing and appealing to the public for a society of human beings free from hierarchical systems.

[87] William Christie, *The Two Romanticisms and other essays: Mystery and Interpretation in Romantic Literature* (Sydney: Sydney University Press, 2016), p. 187.
[88] Peter Cochran, 'Review of *Byron's Romantic Celebrity: Industrial Culture and the Hermeneutic of Intimacy*', accessed from < https://petercochran.wordpress.com/>.

Chapter 1. 'Thy prison is a holy place': Byron's Celebrated 'Self' Through *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*

In February 1812, *Edinburgh Review* claimed George Gordon Byron's return with his new work *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* was 'really a volume of very considerable power, spirit and originality'. The anonymous reviewer predicted that 'we have little doubt that it will find favour…[with] a singular freedom and boldness, both of thought and expression, and a great occasional force and felicity of diction'.[89] The prediction was right, and the reality is that the first two cantos of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* were more than popular. According to Thomas Moore, Byron claimed that he awoke one morning and found himself famous.[90] This marked the beginning of Byron's self-realisation of his celebrity.[91]

For Stephen Minta, Byron's remark about his sudden fame 'suggests effortlessness, unselfconsciousness, and an aristocratic insouciance'.[92] However, even Minta cannot deny that in Byron's mind at that time, he was expecting to be famous 'as a political orator and statesman'.[93] More precisely, Malcolm Kelsall marks Byron's early ambition quite clearly '[a]s a hereditary legislator of the British Empire, [who] had hoped to sway the destiny of nations by the power of oratory'.[94] While it has been

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[88] Anonymous, 'Review of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage. A Romaunt*', *The Edinburgh Review*, 19 (1812), 466–77, 466–7.
[89] Thomas Moore, *Letters and Journals of Lord Byron with Notices of his Life* (London: John Murray, 1830), p. 347.
[91] Critics who notice Romanticists' differentiation between fame, popularity, and celebrity, including Mole and McDayter, tend to clarify Byron's celebrity against the usual criteria of fame, and then make fame in modern context part of celebrity culture. For example, see McDayter, p. 4. This thesis views celebrity or fame more as a sign of connection staging mutual influences between Byron and the public. From Byron's own use of 'fame' in *Don Juan*, Canto IV, 'Whether my verse's fame be doom'd to cease' (788), we can also see that Byron viewed his contemporary celebrity (which was argued not to be fame) centring on his poems as fame (that could cease). Thus, this thesis would not make further distinctions between the listed conceptions in existing arguments to avoid blurring the connection through which Byron might wish to 'strike / The public mind' (*Don Juan*, III: 853–4) and how the audience perceived Byron and his poems.
[92] Stephen Minta, 'Byron, Death, and the Afterlife', in *Constructing Charisma: Celebrity, Fame, and Power in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, edited by Berenson Edward and Giloi Eva, (Oxford, New York: Berghahn, 2010), pp. 119–33, p. 124.
[93] Minta, 'Byron, Death, and the Afterlife', p. 127.
[94] Malcolm Kelsall, 'Byron's Politics', in *The Cambridge Companion to Byron*, edited by Drummond Bone (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 44–55, p. 44. For Byron's

widely recognised that until his death Byron had 'presented himself to the public as a poet, presented his thoughts and beliefs publicly in the form of poetry, and is thought of today as a poet', it is crucial to answer what made Byron change his mind and become a poet more than a politician before examining him as a *celebrated* poet (this will compose the second section of this chapter).[95]

But first, let us return to Byron's celebrity—beginning with the publication of the first two cantos of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, followed by the third canto, which appeared after Byron's exile in 1816, and then the fourth, composed during his life in Italy. This final canto was written shortly before *Don Juan*, the long poem that triggered the major development of the legend of Byron as 'one of [the] earliest examples and most astute critics' of celebrity culture.[96] The creation, publication, and reception of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* recorded honestly how Byron fit in as a celebrated poet. Meanwhile, this chapter argues that the reason Byron was able to transfer his passion from the House of Lords to the realm of rhymes is that, through poetry, he could continue to appeal for the same human-centred, blasphemous concerns with liberty from social, political, and religious tyranny that he had once advocated as an aspiring politician.

The writing of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* saw the connection of Byron's identification of his self, the narrator, and the protagonist and helped reflect Byron's unchanged blasphemous pursuits, as well as his changing attitudes towards poetry, his readership, and celebrity identity. Even when Byron was not writing as a self-recognised poet, the first two cantos of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* revealed Byron's experimental concerns. Alan Rawes believes that they 'explore new ways of writing and imagining, and progress without a fixed sense of where they will lead to, or of what they will become'.[97] I think Byron did indicate a free, if not disordered, sequence when

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early inclination to 'the power of oratory', see also David Francis Taylor, 'Byron, Sheridan, and the Afterlife of Eloquence', *The Review of English Studies*, vol. 65, 270 (2014), 474–94. I shall also examine this point in Chapter Four.

[95] Jackson, p. 9.

[96] Mole, *Byron's Romantic Celebrity*, p. 158.

[97] Alan Rawes, *Byron's Poetic Experimentation: Childe Harold, the Tales, and the Quest for Comedy* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2000), p. 1.

he said ‘a fictious character is introduced for the sake of giving some connexion to the piece’ (*CPW* 2: 5). The connection, if it existed at all, was thus realised through the fictitious Harold’s shifting viewpoints. From this very perspective, Byron—through the narrator—was able to comment and express himself freely on various issues of concern, without other restraints. In the first two cantos, moreover, Byron makes it quite clear that the narrator describes and develops what Harold sees. Since Harold never critiques and only the narrator does, Byron, the writer who positioned his opinion behind the narrator, remained several steps removed from the subjects of representation. This tactic enabled Byron to speak from a distance, thereby shielding the young Lord from unnecessary trouble. However, the actual narrative operation was rather casual, and Byron was overly confident in his claim that there was no ‘real personage’ in Harold, ‘the child of imagination’ (*CPW* 2: 4). So, the audience, due to Byron’s story-telling tone in passages like ‘the following poem was written, for the most part, amidst the scenes which it attempts to describe. It was begun in Albania…’ (*CPW* 2: 3) recognised there was some person, probably the writer himself, behind the protagonist. The image was vague yet real to those unfamiliar with Byron. To better understand Byron’s development into a celebrated poet, I introduce a new party into Mole’s apparatus of celebrity culture in order to illustrate the celebrated figure within Byron’s celebrity.[98] I call it ‘quasi-Byron’ to indicate that it only seems to be Byron but also can be viewed as Byron in a broader sense.

After the young Lord got famous upon the publication of the first two cantos, the Byron readers admired was a Harold-like Byron. This can be seen in a fan letter from ‘Anna’ to Byron. She was careful in stating her familiarities with Byron, praising him that ‘the language of genius & of nature must be felt & never makes its appeal in Vain to my heart’, her intimacy with Byron in Childe Harold’s form extends quite careful concern:

> [D]o not my Lord, if I may entreat you, suffer your mind to be so affected by those evil Spirits who have been the cause of your sufferings, as to think of

[98] Mole, *Byron’s Romantic Celebrity*, p. xi. As mentioned, Mole’s apparatus of celebrity culture consists of the relations between three parties: individual, industry, and audience.

> with drawing…yourself from your native Land, from that Land which once was dear to you, from that Country which proudly owns you for one of her most favor'd Sons, & of which you were formed to be the ornament & the pride. Remember that your talents were not given you for yourself alone, & that you must account for them hereafter. Think not that it is because I cannot feel for your wrongs, I know they have been great or that I do not sympathize with you, because I am so earnest on this subject, I do most deeply enter into your feelings, peculiarly so perhaps because I have felt the same {cause} in some respects, to despair.[99]

When Anna tried to comfort Byron against 'those evil Spirits who have been the cause of your sufferings', she intended to console the isolated and melancholy Harold. The sensitive girl must have believed she had read Byron's heart and felt an obligation to encourage him by affirming his talent. By shifting the responsibility for Byron's melancholy onto the evil Spirit, she sought to comfort—if not to implore—him not to misuse this talent, not for his own sake, but for the country's blessings on 'her most favor'd Sons'. I do not aim here to explore Anna as a morally upright or possibly religious reader, but rather to emphasise that she had confused Byron with his protagonist in terms of character. She even wishfully imagined herself a natural ally of Byron, believing that they both struggled against the same melancholy in daily life. This especially makes it obvious that, just as McDayter asserts, 'what we find "buried" is not Byron at all, but the phantasmatic embodiment of our own desire'.[100] The vague image as a combination of Harold and the readers' expectation fantasised Byron's experience, and even his self.

On the contrary, Walter Scott, who knew Byron in life, pointed out 'the novelty of an author speaking in his own person' in a conclusive tone after the publication of Canto IV.[101] And, not limited to *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, Hazlitt claimed that 'in reading Lord Byron's works, he himself is never absent from our minds'.[102] In these readers' minds, Harold is like Byron, and the celebrity is Byron. Here lies a problem. The difference between the common audience's reception of Byron's celebrity and the

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[99] Anna, 'To Lord Byron', 1812.
[100] McDyter, p. 181.
[101] Walter Scott, '*Childe Harold's Pilgrimage. Canto IV.* By Lord Byron', *Quarterly Review, XIX* (April & December 1818), 215–32, 219.
[102] Hazlitt, p. 166.

acquainted readers', including that of most scholars, should be vital in celebrity culture context especially in the Romantic period when most readers could not see and learn about Byron in life. It did not work that the Harold-like Byron shared many of Byron's features so it can be Byron himself. What was celebrated in common readers' mind can be distinguished as the following:

> Byron's suavity of manner surprised and delighted me…[M]y own previous conceptions, supported by common rumour, having prepared me to expect to find in him a man of morose temper and gloomy misanthropy, instead of which, from his fecundity in anecdote, he was a most delightful associate.[103]

It should have been noticed that Byron here mutated into a new figure, not the 'the phantasmatic embodiment of our own desire'. When the audience met Byron in person, they learnt the difference. And for the majority of the audience, because of the limited forms of media in the Romantic period, the celebrated figure always remained the specious Byron or the protagonist-like Byron, with Byron's appearance and the protagonists' characteristics. Therefore, in Byron's celebrity, the celebrated figure was neither simply Byron nor any of his protagonists, but rather a wishful combination of both. This figure is recognised as Byron, but not the real Byron. I thus call it the 'quasi-Byron'. I believe this celebrated figure emerged unexpectedly, as readers would not have anticipated its unreality, which contradicted their 'previous conceptions, supported by common rumour', while Byron himself claimed a clear distinction between himself and his protagonists. However, after the first publication of Cantos I & II, Byron must have realised the existence of such a figure—this quasi-Byron—from his experimental creation. His reaction and intervention into this figure, then, from my perspective, would provide us with the most direct information of his engagement with the celebrity culture apparatus. The celebrated figure throughout the four cantos of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* was born and growing up together with a disjointed but lively representation of Byron's poetry writing, his human-centred blasphemous concerns, and his celebrity.

This chapter is thus divided into four sections. The first section explores Byron's

[103] James Hamilton Browne, 'Voyage from Leghorn to Cephalonia with Lord Byron', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, 35 (Jan 1834), 56–67, 57.

experimental representations of blasphemy and also his poetry writing in the first two cantos of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, which leads to the emergence of his celebrity and prepares his later two career transitions. The second section examines Byron's parliamentary speeches and early political poems to explain his first career transition from politics to poetry, driven by both external and internal factors. In the third section, I argue that Byron's poetic career involves a second transition concerning his self-identification within the context of celebrity culture: a shift in his position toward his readers, from an aristocratic giver to an intimate appealer. This second transition took place around the publication of the third canto and is revealed through a comparison between the third and fourth cantos. The fourth section completes this comparison and affirms Byron's compromising position and evolving self-identification within the context of celebrity culture.

1. Byron's poetical experiments and blasphemous representations in Cantos I and II

Before talking about the great success, the first two cantos of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* brought to Byron, I think it important to tell what Byron revealed in them before he knew he would be so famous for them. This is why I put this section before a further examination of different editions of these two cantos and also the following two. Scott read *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* as 'certainly the most original poem which we have had this many a day'.[104] This may indicate that Byron put his personal experience in the poems but is more likely to suggest that Byron presented his poems in an unusual and experimental way. The unique representations come mainly from two places: Byron's self-recognised aristocracy and his passionate revolutionary humanistic concerns about blasphemy and liberty. The former point of view urges Byron to keep a distance from his readers, so Harold, the protagonist, is introduced into this *Romaunt*; the latter drove him, however, to eventually reveal his self and even appeal for his

[104] Walter Scott, *The Letters of Sir Walter Scott 1811–1814*, edited by H. J. C. Grierson, (London: Constable, 1932), p. 135.

readers to share his feelings. This conflicting nature can be integrated under Plato's poetics. As previously mentioned, Byron kept several steps away from the fictional narrative and its objects to emphasise his distance from them. This structure is similar to what Plato developed to argue against some poetical works. In Book III of *Republic*, Plato argues that poets are imitators because they imitate to be others when they express in others' tongues.[105] In Book X, Plato, with this premise, using the making of objects and the idea or the truth, establishes a system which consists of '[t]he painter, then, the cabinet-maker, and God' to indicate the different producers' distances from the idea or the truth.[106] When painters are producers who can only imitate the 'appearance' of the objects which are made by craftsmen according to the exact ideas created by God, they are a 'producer of the product three removes from nature'.[107] Poets' and tragedians' work is the same. Plato uses this analogy to disparage poets' work and then argues that poetry, far away from the truth, has an effect of corruption on the audience and evokes irrational emotional eruption, putting the city at risk of being out of control, which brings chaos and produces a detrimental effect on the audience's life.[108] The young Lord's adoption of the 'removes' secures the safe distance needed to avoid any effect on his future political career—but this did not work as well as he expected. Meanwhile, his poetical performances accordingly and really evoked some emotional eruptions. For example, Samuel Chew suggested that the great success of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* might be explained by 'the traditional and genuine English love of liberty' revealed in the poems.[109] Russell might think it more accurate to point out that it is from an English aristocrat, though. Thorslev also points out that 'the Childe of the first two cantos, in many of his poses, is a Man of Feeling', and, he adds, 'in spite of his often-confessed preference for solitude and his dislike for mankind, he is a humanitarian sternly against

[105] Plato, 'Book III', in *Republic*, <http://data.perseus.org/citations/urn:cts:greekLit:tlg0059.tlg030.perseus-eng1:3>.
[106] Plato, 'Book X', <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=urn:cts:greekLit:tlg0059.tlg030.perseus-eng1:10>.
[107] Plato, 'Book X', <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=urn:cts:greekLit:tlg0059.tlg030.perseus-eng1:10>.
[108] Plato, 'Book X', <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=urn:cts:greekLit:tlg0059.tlg030.perseus-eng1:10>.
[109] Samuel C. Chew, *Byron in England and After Fame* (London: John Murray, 1924), p. 10.

war and tyranny in all its forms'.[110] Thorslev's use of 'unrequited love' to emphasise Harold's sufferings is a retrospective prophecy, as we know to reveal Byron's reluctance in his connection with his readers at this stage.[111] Nonetheless, Byron, through his mouthpieces of the narrator and Harold, introduced concerns which would be entwined with his life till the end. The fact that Byron was concerned about his oratorical support to the rebellions against tyrannies across both the spiritual and the real world also prepared him to complete his career transition. Hereafter, I shall focus on the poetical side to argue that Byron's call for freedom and liberty from those authorities who abused their power operates in conjunction with his use of geographical and historical narratives, as the unchanged core of the four cantos of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*.

The conflicting self is of coursed shared with Harold in a deliberately designed persona. After the narrator announces the beginning, Harold appears as 'one sad losel' of 'evil deeds' (I: 23, 27).[112] Some adversity drives him to melancholy and self-exile. Critics have repeatedly discussed his ambivalent personality which can arouse unusual interest. What I want to emphasise is that in his past story, especially when he is sceptical, talented, and has one true love, Harold is portrayed as a man who is tired of worldly issues, may hardly trust others, and can live well by himself. This helps to explain why Harold plays the role of an observer who always stands 'at a little distance' (II: 640) from the crowd. Juxtaposed with Byron, Harold's position indicates a sense of distance in the young Lord's mind. With such a position, Byron might feel it free and safe to express a bit further with Plato's comments on poetry's evoking effects. He writes:

> And must they fall? the young, the proud, the brave,
> To swell one bloated Chief's unwholesome reign?
> No step between submission and a grave?
> The rise of rapine and the fall of Spain?
> And doth the Power that man adores ordain
> Their doom, nor heed the suppliant's appeal?

[110] Thorslev, *The Byronic Hero*, p. 137.
[111] Thorslev, *The Byronic Hero*, p. 137.
[112] If not specified, any quoted poetical content of no more than four lines appeared with '(Canto Number: Line Number)' in this chapter is from *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, in *CPW, Vol 2*.

Is all that desperate Valour acts in vain?
And Counsel sage, and patriotic Zeal,
The Veteran's skill, Youth's fire, and Manhood's heart of steel? (I: 549–557)

The paralleled rhetorical questions bring about strong emotional ebullition. Between 'submission' and 'a grave', the poet inflames 'the young, the proud, the brave' to fight against the 'rise of rapine' with their desperate Valour and make use of 'Counsel sage, and patriotic Zeal, | The Veteran's skill, Youth's fire, and Manhood's heart of steel'. The rebellion against tyrannies is never peaceful, but always necessary, in accordance with Byron's revolutionary passion. That Byron likely hoped to accelerate certain political capital—or at least deliver influential presentations—in these poems suggests his intention to use poetry to influence and appeal to his readers. This operation thus constitutes an irony in relation to Plato's concerns about control over citizens' minds. Maybe not that appropriately but quite typically, the young Lord's rebellious claim 'I am no Platonist' several years later might find its origin here (*BLJ* 2: 89). This kind of indicative usage prepared a ground for the innovative and even revolutionary writings of all four cantos of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* concerning emotional manipulation.

It was true that, in the first two cantos, what helped the audience to be involved so much in the pilgrimage was Byron's sentimental discourses of geographical and historical narrative. 'Byron's descriptions of places', according to Helene Ibata, 'brought together a quest for authenticity, an awareness of historical continuity, and a romantic emphasis on subjectivity and imagination without which it was believed that the spirit of place could not be felt'.[113] The very crucial pieces concentrate in an elegy to the Greek sepulchre, where the narrator presents the readers a devastated Greece where her culture and religion compose the past glory of the nation:

Look on its broken arch, its ruin'd wall,
Its chambers desolate, and portals foul:
Yes, this was once Ambition's airy hall,
The dome of Thought, the palace of the Soul:
Behold through each lack-lustre, eyeless hole,

[113] Hélène Ibata, 'Visual Travels with Byron: British Landscapes of the Eastern Mediterranean in the Early 19th Century', *The British Art Journal*, 15 (3, 2015), 61–70, 61.

> The gay recess of Wisdom and of Wit
> And Passion's host, that never brook'd control:
> Can all, saint, sage, or sophist ever writ,
> People this lonely tower, this tenement refit? (II: 46–54)

From Harold's observatory viewpoint, when readers see the 'broken arch', the 'ruin'd wall', the desolated chambers, the fouled portals, and the 'eyeless hole', we cannot help feeling a sense of sorrow for the loss of part of human civilisation—and maybe one of the most glorious parts. Sophie Thomas thinks the narrator presents 'the shadow thrown by the past over the present, and more pointedly, the continuing action of the past, and of past human action, upon the natural and political landscape'.[114] From my perspective, this 'shadow' also bridges Byron's realistic depiction and his spiritual representation. When the narrator suddenly asks, 'Can all saint, sage or sophist ever writ, | People this lonely tower, this tenement refit?', this is definitely an invitation. Byron specifically creates a spiritual gathering of souls in the Greek sepulchre, for a deliberately designed intimate connection with his readers. When the place is 'broken' and 'ruin'd' and the geographical landscape has decayed, Byron in these lines reminds his readers of the past glory of this place and brings the place forward with new memory. Thorslev observes this piece to 'hold out no Christian consolation of an immortality beyond the grave' and views Harold as 'a secularized Gloomy Egoist'; I think this reasonable, as Byron did not place the dead or the non-existing above the living ones.[115] The writer's vivid depiction could bridge the readers to this scene for a classic and also contemporary human reunion. This may also be the origin of what William Wetmore Story wrote in 1863: that 'every Englishman [abroad] carries a Murray for information, and a Byron for sentiment, and finds out by them what he is to know and feel at every step'.[116] Also in this process, the audience can feel Byron's dissatisfaction with the current situation and his appeal for change, maybe with a recalled memorial energy rooted in the classical civilisation. Thus, for the powerful claim 'Art, Glory, Freedom fail, but Nature still is

[114] Sophie Thomas, *Romanticism and Visuality: Fragments, History, Spectacle* (London: Routledge, 2008), p. 7.
[115] Thorslev, *The Byronic Hero*, p. 137.
[116] William W. Story, *Roba di Roma, 2 volumes* (London, 1863), vol. 1, 7.

fair' (II: 827), Byron was not meant to eulogise 'the natural innocence' nor his 'melancholy awareness of historical irony which is only relieved by the natural beauty of Greece', but to emphasise a genuine experience represented throughout the history which cannot be covered but should be refreshed, since Nature is always 'fair' to embrace.[117]

If it is still risky to fall into a nihilistic reading of human history when approaching Greece, Byron represents contemporary Sevilla with a smart imaginative retrospect:

> But all unconscious of the coming doom,
> The feast, the song, the revel here abounds;
> Strange modes of merriment the hours consume,
> Nor bleed these patriots with their country's wounds:
> Nor here War's clarion, but Love's rebeck sounds;
> Here Folly still his votaries enthralls;
> And young-eyed Lewdness walks her midnight rounds:
> Girt with the silent crimes of Capitals,
> Still to the last kind Vice clings to the tott'ring walls. (I: 486–94)

These lines bring about so clearly a lordly contemptuous criticism over the imaginative carnival. However, as Pedro Javier Pardo has keenly realised , 'the poet is not the political enemy of Spain satisfied by the salutary effects of satire on that country… and promotes its renewal in the fight against the foreign tyrant', thus this imaginative picture represents typical scenes involving Spanish people of different classes and groups and suggests the reasons of their failure.[118] Alongside the subsequent images of other Spanish figures, Byron satirised Spain's domestic chaos to evoke a spirit of rebellion. By revealing truth through the medium of imagination, Byron involved his readers in the vivid scene—one that not only constructs a sense of reality, but also renders the ensuing appeal more powerfully persuasive.

The appeal, as has been mentioned, to fight against the tyrants (not only the

[117] Ibata, 63.
[118] Pedro Javier Pardo, 'From Hispanophobia to Quixotephilia: The Politics of Quixotism in the British Long Eighteenth Century', *Literary Hispanophobia and Hispanophilia in Britain and the Low Countries (1550-1850)*, edited by Yolanda Rodríguez Pérez (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2020), pp. 189–212, p. 208.

‘foreign tyrant’) is at the central position of Byron’s political pursuits revealed in the first two cantos. Byron wrote this as a call for freedom and liberty:

> Such be the sons of Spain, and strange her fate!
> They fight for freedom who were never free,
> A Kingless people for a nerveless state,
> Her vassals combat when their chieftains flee,
> True to the veriest slaves of Treachery:
> Fond of a land which gave them nought but life,
> Pride points the path that leads to Liberty;
> Back to the struggle, baffled in the strife,
> War, war is still the cry, ‘War even to the knife! (I: 882–90)

The claim ‘[t]hey fight for freedom who were never free’ uncovers a tragic reality that the Spanish, before the foreign tyrant’s invasion, had not been free domestically. Byron’s adoption of the word ‘liberty’ again indicates both foreign and domestic tyrants’ unbearable exploitation over the free people, who will ‘[w]ar even to the knife’ to achieve liberty. We see the narrator’s audacious satire, if not scolding, at what is established with the tyrants’ greed:

> There shall they rot—Ambition’s honour’d fools!
> Yes, Honour decks the turf that wraps their clay!
> Vain Sophistry! in these behold the tools,
> The broken tools, that tyrants cast away
> By myriads, when they dare to pave their way
> With human hearts—to what?—a dream alone.
> Can despots compass aught that hails their sway?
> Or call with truth one span of earth their own,
> Save that wherein at last they crumble bone by bone? (I: 450–8)

Noticeably, in this stanza, Byron unveils the essence of war and power struggles, that they are grounded in exploitation. Within the tyrannical hierarchical system, those ‘Ambition’s honour’d fools’ are merely ‘broken tools’ being used. Moreover, however brutally the despots impose their tyranny, Byron observes, they ultimately gain only ‘a dream alone’. In such a system of exploitation, there is neither hope nor liberty, as all participants eventually ‘crumble bone by bone’, having received almost nothing in return. Byron’s representation here forcefully unsettles the audience, compelling them

to reflect on war and the tyranny that underlies it. Although he maintains a degree of narrative distance, his opinion is unmistakably revealed. As Byron must be aware that, even if not for Plato's notion about poetry's influence on the audience, 'the biggest battlefield is the public mind, and any thought of victory depends upon its shaping'.[119] If the greatest problem lies in despots and tyrannies, then Byron himself feels an obligation to confront them. Because of kingship's particular connection with, or reliance on, religious authority, Byron's attacks on tyrants take various forms. He seeks to desacralise the origin of the sacred—from mythological gods and goddesses to religious authority—thereby challenging the legitimacy of tyrannies built upon hierarchical power systems. This strategy represents Byron's primary enactment of blasphemy.

From the very beginning, the narrator shows no specific respect to the mythological gods or goddesses, because they are not superior. Muse is 'form'd or fabled at the minstrel's will' (I: 2); the narrator shouts, 'Chivalry, your ancient goddess' (I: 406) to coin an imaginative figure in the poet's mind. As for the Goddess of Wisdom:

> … here thy temple was,
> And is, despite of war and wasting fire,
> And years, that bade thy worship to expire:
> But worse than steel, and flame, and ages slow,
> Is the dread sceptre and dominion dire
> Of men who never felt the sacred glow
> That thoughts of thee and thine on polish'd breasts bestow. (II: 3–9)

The expired worship under the dread rule has disenchanted readers from her power, which relies much on human attention. For the narrator here, the sacred glow is that of wisdom. To recall Athena is for 'thoughts of thee and thine on polish'd breasts bestow'. Byron establishes such a common recognition that the mythological figures are symbols or representations of certain human activities or characteristics—the Muse for arts, the ancient Goddess for chivalry, and Athena for wisdom and the past glory of a lost human civilisation—rather than them having an independent existence.

[119] Howe, pp. 146–7.

As for the more powerful religions, Byron treated them without bias through the narrator's depiction:

> But ere the mingling bounds have far been pass'd
> Dark Guadiana rolls his power along
> In sullen billows, murmuring and vast,
> So noted ancient roundelays among.
> Whilome upon his banks did legions throng
> Of Moor and Knight, in mailed splendour drest:
> Here ceas'd the swift their race, here sunk the strong;
> The Paynim turban and the Christian crest
> Mix'd on the bleeding stream, by floating hosts oppress'd. (I: 378–86)

When life comes to an end, nature does not separate the bodies of believers in different creeds. Whether covered with 'The Paynim turban' or 'the Christian crest', the dead bodies get crushed by the Dark Guadiana's power, which disenchants the religion's propagandising power of salvation in comparison with nature's ceaseless energy. It is in accordance with Byron's later assertion that 'Foul Superstition! howsoe'er disguis'd, | Idol, saint, virgin, prophet, crescent, cross, | For whatsoever symbol thou art priz'd, | Thou sacerdotal gain, but general loss' (II: 392–5). Byron questioned the salvation basis of religious authority in his genuine illustration of human death. They cannot save anyone from death but even exploit to let the 'sacerdotal gain' at the expense of making 'general loss'.

Recalling the greedy tyrants in the war, Byron's concern is after all human-centred. His blasphemy also works to weaken the value of the wars where common people were sacrificed for the authority's interest:

> Ambracia's gulph behold, where once was lost
> A world for woman, lovely, harmless thing!
> In yonder rippling bay, their naval host
> Did many a Roman chief and Asian king
> To doubtful conflict, certain slaughter bring:
> Look where the second Caesar's trophies rose!
> Now, like the hands that rear'd them, withering:
> Imperial anarchs, doubling human woes!
> GOD! was thy globe ordain'd for such to win and lose? (II: 397–405)

If fanes, temples, and surface bows ultimately commingle with heroic earth, there is no reason to sacrifice more for any one of them. Byron aligns the narrator's perspective with that of Death, who views all individuals equally and sees no justification for obeying abused authority. The narrator appeals to 'GOD' to act as a judge and to halt the waste of human life and the meaningless wars that so brutally exploit the common people. This 'GOD'—if not a religious one—can be understood as akin to Death, an objective universal law. It may also refer to the God. In this way, Byron employs the term to generate a sense of dramatic contradiction, creating a performative complaint intended to provoke in his readers a sense of empathetic dissatisfaction toward the tyrants who have wronged not only humanity but also God. In other words, Byron invokes God rhetorically to extend the reach of his appeal beyond the revolutionary.

2. Byron's career transition in the House of Lords

The first two cantos of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* reveal a careful demonstration of both the young Lord's travelling experience and his certain political concerns, though at a distance, as Byron was busy preparing for his future in the House of Lords. This section identifies Byron's parliamentary experience as a key phase in the complex transition of Byron's career choice from being a politician to a poet, mainly concerning the three speeches he gave in the House of Lords. Taking the publication of the first two cantos of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* also into consideration, I argue that three factors worked together to make this transition possible. Firstly, Byron's political ideas remained consistent across different forms of representation. In his three limited parliamentary speeches, he addressed topics similar to those he prioritised in his poetry—concerns which, as Kelsall points out, persisted even after he left the House of Lords and continued until the end of his life.[120] Secondly, the contemporary political situation stood in contradiction to Byron's political concerns. Thirdly, the broader stage afforded by his rising celebrity offered him hope for a new mode of self-realisation.

[120] Kelsall, 'Byron's Politics', p. 53.

Byron's interest in his political career was apparent. Two months before his maiden speech, in his letter to John Cam Hobhouse on 15 December 1811, he mentioned 'I presume ye. papers have told of ye. Riots in Notts, breaking of frames & heads, & out-maneouvreing the military' (*BLJ* 2: 148). Four days later, he left London for Nottinghamshire and spent two weeks there, preparing for the debate on the Frame-Work Bill. Byron's maiden speech, if compared to his following one on the Roman Catholic issue, showed a certain control over his talent for invective and insults. His technique was to persuade by arousing some empathy from his peers with the poor: '[W]hen death is a relief, and the only relief it appears that you will afford him, will he be dragooned into tranquillity'?[121] Byron tried to put these Lords in the shoes of the workers, which suggested he still thought they were all human beings and can empathise in terms of life and death. Even if empathy could not work, there were also interests:

> You call these men a mob, desperate, dangerous, and ignorant; and seem to think that the only way to quiet the "*Bellua multorum capitum*" is to lop off a few superfluous heads… Are we aware of our obligations to a Mob? It is the Mob that labour in your fields and serve in your houses,—that man your navy, and recruit your army,—that have enabled you to defy all the world, and can also defy…[122]

Byron adopts the word 'obligation' here, but what he states below both suggests and reminds his peers that these people's lives held significant value. This reminder turns the argument into a kind of bargain, urging others to weigh the worth of human life. It may appear to reveal Byron's indifference to human suffering, but in fact it shows that, to some extent, he recognised the aristocratic indifference surrounding him. He must have understood the weakness of empathy in the House of Lords, yet he still hoped that, for 'a life which your Lordships are perhaps about to value at something less than the price of a stocking-frame', his peers might see more profit to be gained from 'the Mob' than from machines.[123] The realistic argument reflected Byron's earnest effort to appeal

[121] Byron, *The Parliamentary Speeches*, p. 15.
[122] Byron, *The Parliamentary Speeches*, pp. 12–13.
[123] Byron, *The Parliamentary Speeches*, p. 16.

to his most basic humanistic concern: the value of human life. The failure of this speech thus becomes a tragic reflection of the contemporary political situation. It was not a coincidence that Byron mentioned 'that man your navy, and recruit your army' here, ironically echoing 'There shall they rot—Ambition's honour'd fools' (See I: 450–4). Byron points out the brutal essence of power struggles that, however the despots impose their tyranny, they ultimately get 'a dream alone'. The hierarchical system of exploitation not only undermines those unnamed people, but even those 'Ambition's honour'd fools' are only 'broken tools' being used and then abandoned. Byron unveils the descended indifference by completing the circle with 'the Mob' who would have their heads lopped off. When Byron ultimately failed in his maiden speech, the failure formed a complete irony, clearly exposing how cold and rigid the Parliament was in defence of its entrenched privilege. The speech, alongside his writing, also reminded Byron of how devastating the exploitative parliamentary system could be. Meanwhile, the connection may make it understandable that Benita Eisler asserts that 'all were "advertisements for myself"' when Byron 'ma[de] sure that each event [was] built on the other'.[124] However, before Byron's maiden speech, and even before he secured the seat in the House on 13 March 1809, he had 'sat in on House of Commons debates as an observer, and had already, as a boy, familiarized himself as a visitor to the Commons' and Lords' debates'.[125] I think it was not that Byron made this speech because it would be 'the best advertisement for *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*', but because he expressed everywhere what he had generated from the long-time listening and thinking, and consistently appealed to his audience and readers about his concerns for human life.[126]

These concerns centred on life and the liberty to claim basic human rights. Five days later, Byron anonymously published 'An Ode to the Framers of the Frame Bill', where he relentlessly lambasted the absurdity of the proposed Act. 'That the frames of the fools may be first to be broken, | Who, when asked for a remedy, sent down a

[124] Benita Eisler, *Byron: Childe of Passion, Fool of Fame* (New York: Random House, 1999), p. 325.
[125] Christine Kenyon Jones, '"I am not made for what you call a politician": Byron's silent parliamentary experiences', in *Byron: The Poetry of Politics and the Politics of Poetry*, edited by Roderick Beaton and Christine Kenyon Jones (London: Routledge, 2017), pp. 173-186, p. 173.
[126] Eisler, p. 325.

rope'.[127] More importantly, concerning Byron's recognition of 'life', these ironic lines provided an interesting angle about Byron's humanistic concerns:

> Men are more easily made than machinery –
> Stockings fetch better prices than lives –
> Gibbets on Sherwood will heighten the scenery,
> Showing how Commerce, how Liberty thrives![128]

Byron followed the majority of the Lords' logic and caustically praised them that 'Liberty thrives' for human 'lives' being cheaper than machinery, which definitely was an irony and reversely touted Byron's opinion that only when human lives were valued could liberty thrive. He realised there was a connection between life and liberty in that both ask for rebellion against the imposed authoritative power.

This is also reflected in his second speech on the Roman Catholic Claims. The speech continues Byron's humanistic concerns for life and liberty, while developing them further by eliminating less relevant affiliated issues, such as conflicts over religious belief. Notably, Byron's defence of Roman Catholics runs parallel to one of his lifelong concerns—his appeal for the liberation of Greece, as expressed in the first two cantos of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*. Byron abandons the technique he used in 'the Mob' argument with a delusion about the Lords' empathy. In both cases here, he proposes a square look at the exact group's oppressed situation, which was, very straightforwardly, to tell that the striking truth was not what the Lords or British people supposed, both with a comparison to the 'Negroes':

> The opponents of the Catholics may be divided into two classes; those who assert that the Catholics have too much already, and those who allege that the lower orders, at least, have nothing more to require. We are told by the former, that the Catholics never will be contented: by the latter, that they are already too happy… it might as well be said, that the Negroes did not desire to be emancipated, but this is an unfortunate comparison, for you have already delivered them out of the house of bondage without any petition on their part, but many from their task-masters to a contrary effect; and for myself, when I consider this, I pity the Catholic peasantry for not having the good fortune to

[127] *CPW*, vol. 3, p. 181 (31–32).
[128] *CPW*, vol. 3, p. 181 (13–16).

be born black.[129]

As for Greece, this piece is from Byron the writer's very own note:

> The English have at last compassionated their negroes, and under a less bigoted government, may probably one day release their Catholic brethren; but the interposition of foreigners alone can emancipate the Greeks, who, otherwise, appear to have as small a chance of redemption from the Turks, as the Jews have from mankind in general… the real or supposed descendants of these sturdy republicans are left to the actual tyranny of their masters, although a very slight effort is required to strike off their chains. (*CPW* 2: 202)

A slight difference is that the note in Childe Harold accompanies Byron's appeal to the Greeks by invoking their past glory to inspire revolutionary passion, whereas in the House of Lords, any direct appeal to rebellion is omitted. In both contexts, however, Byron strives to convey that the two groups—the Greeks and the Catholics—exist in equally hopeless conditions, tantamount to enslavement, and both require further emancipation, supported externally by the Lords and by Britain as a whole. Byron seeks to impress upon his audience and readers the urgency of liberation for both groups. These intertexts work together to satirise the contemporary tyranny under which both groups suffered. Byron's speech for the Catholics also constitutes an attack on the hierarchical establishment from a broader perspective, serving as a domestic echo of his elegiac Philhellenism, through which he sought to realise his political ideals of human liberty. Kelsall notes that Charles Fox's notion of liberty in *History of the Early Part of the Reign of James II* (1808) 'was the same "spirit of liberty which had animated and rendered illustrious the ancient republics" of Athens…' and the Whigs thought that England was linked to ancient Greece considering the Glorious Revolution.[130] It may also explain Byron's canonisation of a social system without absolute hierarchical tyranny to realise a civilised call-back and foresee Byron's life-long struggle with contemporary tyrannies.

Byron's consistent political concerns rejected involving religious belief as an issue,

[129] Byron, *The Parliamentary Speeches*, pp. 19–20.
[130] Malcolm Kelsall, *Byron's Politics* (Brighton: The Harvester Press, 1987), p. 10.

even in the Catholic case. He developed the issue of belief to a broader sense concerning freedom and property. In his view, the debate about different ceremonies of the religion, especially when they both worshipped the same God, were indeed 'petty cavils' like 'these Lilliputian sophistries [on] whether our "eggs are best broken at the broad or narrow end"'.[131] This allusion reveals Byron's blasphemous impatience at religious belief. This impatience also appears in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* when he describes that nature does not separate the bodies from different creeds. What Byron asserts to be important is the Catholics' personal freedom and property security as British citizens:

> Is it bringing up infants to be men or devils? Better would it be to send them any where than teach them such doctrines; better send them to those islands in the South Seas, where they might more humanely learn to become cannibals; it would be less disgusting that they were brought up to devour the dead, than persecute the living.[132]

Byron here takes the education the Catholic children received in the charter schools in an unusual comparison with what the gipsies received in their community to unveil the notorious crime that the Protestant stole and kidnapped children from their Catholic connections. He believes the systematic persecution upon a group of people from their childhood represents the indifference of the House of Lords over human beings, saying '[i]t is on the basis of your tyranny Napoleon hopes to build his own'.[133] Here, Byron poses a rhetorical question to assert that 'the fetters of the mind are more galling than those of the body', thereby highlighting his concern for mental as well as physical freedom, and expressing his anger at the tyranny represented by Parliament, which rendered such concerns meaningless.[134] The young Lord hopes to arouse certain empathy among the Lords with those living mankind to free them from persecution through this kind of accusations.

Alongside entrenched aristocratic indifference, the shifting political matrix also gave rise to new obstacles for the young Whig's career. Following 'the disappointment

[131] Byron, *The Parliamentary Speeches*, p. 19.
[132] Byron, *The Parliamentary Speeches*, p. 27.
[133] Byron, *The Parliamentary Speeches*, p. 38.
[134] Byron, *The Parliamentary Speeches*, p. 35.

of Britons who had anticipated relief for Catholics or other reforms became one of the distinguishing traits of the Regency', Byron failed his debate for the second time.[135] The milieu then, as Christine Kenyon-Jones suggests, was 'particularly unpromising […] for a young Whig peer'.[136] Given that the Regent had betrayed the Whigs and declared his intention to retain the Pittite ministers, Byron's future in the House appeared bleak. In his final attempt in Parliament, Byron's principal intervention was to challenge the conservative insistence on the presence of 'prayer' in Major Cartwright's case. Byron questioned: 'What was the necessity of a prayer? If that word were to be used in its proper sense, their Lordships could not expect that any man should pray to others'.[137] The untamed spirit expressed in this act of refusal reveals that, by this point, Byron had grown exhausted with the rigid and corrupt bureaucratic system of the House and the tyrannical establishment, which positioned itself in opposition to human dignity, privilege, and liberty. Although he continued to attend the House after this speech, he never spoke there again before leaving England.

In his three speeches, Byron struck at the crucial issue: the prioritisation of human life, and more specifically, of a free life. If one considers the political issues alone, what ultimately led Byron to give up was the prevailing indifference toward the lives of common people—a sentiment he could never share with others in the House—and his contempt for the tyrannical establishment, which his peers could scarcely share with him. He told Lady Melbourne about domestic politics that:

> the Government of the Governed – & the governed of their indifference towards their governors which you must have remarked as to all parties – these reflections expectorated as follows –…
> Tis said – Indifference marks the present time
> Then hear the reason – though 'tis told in rhyme –
> A King who can't – a Prince of Wales who don't –
> Patriots who shan't – Ministers who won't –
> What matters who are in or out of place
> The Mad – the Bad – the Useless – or the Base? (*BLJ* 3: 117)

[135] Gary Dyer, 'The Circulation of Satirical Poetry in the Regency', *Keats-Shelley Journal*, 61 (2012), 65–73, 65.
[136] Jones, p. 185.
[137] Byron, *The Parliamentary Speeches*, p. 44.

Byron believed the establishment itself was problematic. Worse still, the establishment would not help to nourish but would even corrode the human side of the people in power, as Byron indicated by this sarcastic remark on the King and the Bishop of Bristol: 'Cares of a Crown have addled George's skull, | And lo! a Mitre makes our Mansel dull' (*CPW* 1: 227). Byron confirms 'by the blessing of indifference, I have simplified my politics into an utter detestation of all existing governments' (*BLJ* 3: 242). Fortunately, outside the establishment, there is a new arena for this young Lord to propagandise his political notions, and even himself. It was also in this letter that Byron first mentions and boasts that 'Here lies the spoilt child of the world which he spoiled' (*BLJ* 3: 118). He said 'it is good short & true' to indicate that he was going to transfer his attention to solve the indifference of the establishment in some other way in which he had already got some edge (*BLJ* 3: 118). In the literary realm, Byron had been a spoilt child, not in imagination, but because he had felt the power of his poetry and the expansion of his readership. Against the failure of Byron's parliamentary speeches, the immediate success of his poetical work suggested a new way to advance his politics. After all, the humanistic concerns could also be vividly conveyed in his poems and arouse more pleasant receptions. Moore suggests that 'after the brilliant success of Childe Harold, [Byron] had ceased to think of Parliament as an arena of ambition'.[138]

Given the shared style and concerns evident in both his speeches and his poetry, this transition was grounded in a common origin. While the representations got criticised in the House (according to Lord Holland, Byron's speech was 'full of fancy, wit, and invective, but not exempt from affectation nor well reasoned, nor at all suited to our common notions of Parliamentary eloquence', similar ones did work well in the poems.[139] Byron consolidated his connection with his readers to augment his celebrity. In 1813, Byron made a piece of 'Addition to the preface'. He emphasised Harold as a 'fictitious personage' while also declaring that 'Childe Harold […] was so far perfectly knightly in his attributes' (*CPW* 2: 5) as a response to some accusations of this

[138] Moore, p. 403.
[139] *Further Memoirs of the Whig Party 1807–1821* (London: Murray, 1905), p. 123.

unconventional protagonist. The defence was very interesting, because Byron said:

> [I]t had been more agreeable, and certainly more easy, to have drawn an amiable character. It had been easy to varnish over his faults, to make him do more and express less, but he never was intended as an example, further than to show that early perversion of mind and morals leads to satiety of past pleasures and disappointment in new ones, and that even the beauties of nature, and the stimulus of travel are lost on a soul so constituted, or rather misdirected. (*CPW* 2: 6)

Tuite suggests that 'Byron's question is rhetorical, for even while insisting that "my figures are not portraits," he maintains a complex traffic between figuration and referential portraiture, between "real circumstances" and "poetry"'.[140] This statement can immediately remind readers of Byron's own life experience and his 'early perversion of mind and morals'. It is also apparent that Byron intended, at this point, to skilfully cultivate his public persona following the publication and popularity of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*. He said a more agreeable Harold would be more amiable, however, he should have learnt that Harold (as well as himself) was famous for disagreeability and that 'his beauty, shyness, social unpredictability, and refusal to dance (on account of his crippled foot) only made him more magnetic'.[141] In this case, he was not expressing regret; rather, he was publicising—or even boasting of—this form of unconventional attraction, particularly one shaped by an unusual melancholy which, from Stephen Minta's perspective, 'was the basis of Byron's initial contract with his readership, his form of "public intimacy"'.[142]

Byron must have noticed himself as an influential figure after the publication of the first two cantos of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*. Richard Lansdown points out that Byron's fame as a poet increased his romantic affairs.[143] In March 1812, Byron wrote to Moore to tell him he had been 'invited, by special and particular solicitation, to Lady C[aroline] L[amb]'s' (*BLJ* 2: 169). This may be a source of Moore's later concern about

[140] Tuite, p. xvi.
[141] Richard Lansdown, 'Childe Harold and Caroline Lamb', in *Byron's Letters and Journals, A New Selection*, edited by Richard Lansdown (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 83–85, p. 84.
[142] Minta, 'Byron, Death, and the Afterlife', p. 123.
[143] Lansdown, 'Childe Harold and Caroline Lamb', p. 84.

Byron's success that 'nor can it be denied that […] the allusions which he makes to instances or "successful passion" in his career were not without their influence on the fancies of that sex'.[144] This uncovers Byron's great female readership, though it goes a bit far on this. Nonetheless, Moore uncovered a mechanism in celebrity culture in his later words: that readers' affection can be 'easily won by those who come recommended by the greatest number of triumphs over others';[145] he was just too arbitrary to suppose it is for feminine 'weakness' instead of public will.[146] In fact, the influence was not limited in the circle of ladies. In June 1812, Byron wrote to Lord Holland that 'the other night at a Ball I was presented by order to our gracious Regent, who honoured me with some conversation & professed a predilection for Poesy' (*BLJ* 2: 180). It suggests that Byron's poetry not only granted him an advantage in love affairs, but also offered a shortcut to approach influential political figures and distinguish himself. The 'poet' Byron was becoming more influential than the 'politician' Byron.

After Byron added 'To Ianthe' before Canto I in 1814, his fame got more flourished. These stanzas are addressed to Lady Charlotte Harley, though the name 'Ianthe' can be taken by any female reader. They are all flattering lines:

> Nor, having seen thee, shall I vainly seek
> To paint those charms which varied as they beam'd—
> To such as see thee not my words were weak;
> To those who gaze on thee what language could they speak?
> …
> Such is thy name with this my verse entwin'd;
> And long as kinder eyes a look shall cast
> On Harold's page, Ianthe's here enshrin'd
> Shall thus be first beheld, forgotten last. ('To Ianthe': 6–9, 37–40)

It was Byron's operation then to cater to the public expectation to increase public reception of his name and also his appealing pursuits since no one could deny a lover's request. Mole believes that Byron 'cultivated the hermeneutics of intimacy' in these

[144] Moore, p. 159.
[145] Moore, p. 159.
[146] Moore, p. 159.

stanzas.[147] His success was because of the unique feature of a book as a commercial media. Despite 'a faceless commercial audience purchasing it, it is received by a single special reader, who accepts it as a billet-doux inviting her to a reading which is a kind of tryst'.[148] The quasi-Byron appears here as well. Byron was confident, even arrogant, in embracing this change, holding the belief that his fame was always under his own control. Under such circumstance, he returned to *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* in Canto III with some more aggressive representations after his scandalous exile from England in 1816.

Before stepping into Canto III of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, this section shall conclude with Byron's first career transition from politics to poetry. Jackson believes that '[Byron] is always occupied with the mind and will that might allow humans to change that existence for the better'.[149] This forms the foundation of Byron's political and religious endeavours in prioritising human values. Indeed, Byron certainly possessed the wit to address issues diplomatically; for instance, he could appeal to the interests of the greedy ruling classes by emphasising the useful and even indispensable roles played by workers and Catholics in wartime, thereby pressing the Lords to uphold basic human rights. Byron's career transition here demonstrates his subjectivity rather than passivity, representing his self-realisation through human-centred rather than God-centred or even power-centred social concerns.

It would be easier to understand Byron's transition and its meaning and essence with one girl's sigh twelve years later, when Byron died as a poet. John Clare took that down:

> A young girl that stood by me gave a deep sigh and uttered, 'Poor Lord Byron'…I looked up at the young girl's face. It was dark and beautiful, and I could almost feel in love with her for the sigh she had uttered for the poet…The common people felt his merits and his power, and the common people of a country are the best feelings of a prophecy of futurity. They are the veins and arteries that feed and quicken the heart of living fame…I believe that his liberal principles in religion and politics did a great deal towards gaining the notice

[147] Mole, *Byron's Romantic Celebrity*, p. 56.
[148] Mole, *Byron's Romantic Celebrity*, p. 58.
[149] Jackson, p. 2.

> and affections of the lower Orders. Be as it will, it is better to be beloved by those low and humble for undisguised honesty than flattered by the great for purchased and pensioned hypocrisies.[150]

Clare and this girl should agree with Anna that the Country 'proudly owns [Byron] for one of her most favor'd Sons' for his talent, and not for invectives. The broader group reached by Byron's poetry and blasphemous concerns is valuable in spite of their class. In the 'prophecy of futurity', even after he left the House of Lords and even England, he was beloved for his undisguised honesty through the sympathetic sighs from 'those low and humble'. Byron's humanistic concerns for life and liberty remained pure and powerful enough to evoke empathy in his readers. His appeal continues to resonate with audiences.

3. Byron's failure to perform as a superior revolutionary mentor

Back to the early development of Byron and his poetical career. Canto III of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* brought another transition concerning aristocratic superiority in Byron's self-identification in his celebrity. Mole places Canto III in the matrix of the scandalous breakdown of Byron's marriage, when Lady Byron and her adviser manipulated the public speculation against his lordship who had been unavoidably Harold-like in his readers' mind; because '[h]ints about concealed crimes were a recognisable motif' which had been 'already advisable in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*', Byron's own character became to blame for his self-evident surrogates because of his ambiguous writing and advertising.[151] For Mole, Byron's solution to this crisis in Canto III was to imagine a limited access of his readers to interpret the poem e.g., introducing Ada to close off the possibility of the advertised 'imaginary intimacy' represented by 'To Ianthe'.[152] Mole thinks Byron completed his privacy claim over the poem by 'enter[ing] into negotiations over the sale of copyright', which makes the publication

[150] J. W. and Anne Tibble, *John Clare: A Life* (Southampton: Cobden-Sanderson, 1932), pp. 226-227.
[151] Mole, *Byron's Romantic Celebrity*, p. 117.
[152] Mole, *Byron's Romantic Celebrity*, p. 124.

simply commercial to cut off his direct communication with the readers through the poems.[153] From my perspective, while Byron suffered from his 'creating morally ambiguous characters with secretive subjective depths', he further diminished the appearance of the 'morally ambiguous characters', but he did not give up the 'secretive subjective depths' or, in other words, close off his communication with the readers.[154] Byron hoped to remould his figure to establish a new connection between his charismatic self and the audience, but the result falls into chaos, mainly because Byron was too confident with his control over his very own celebrity and the audience. From the opening stanza, the poet invites his audience to attend to his subsequent portrayals of a heartbroken father, a frustrated lion, a tragic rebel, and an unyielding spiritual leader. Each representation reveals Byron's ambition to reshape his celebrated figure into a more acceptable form.

More than indicating this canto being a gift to stop the audience's intervention, the first stanza can be an invitation to know the poet himself:

> Is thy face like thy Mother's, my fair child!
> Ada! sole daughter of my house and heart?
> When last I saw thy young blue eyes they smiled,
> And then we parted,—not as now we part,
> But with a hope,—
> Awaking with a start,
> The waters heave around me; and on high
> The winds lift up their voices: I depart,
> Whither I know not; but the hour's gone by,
> When Albion's lessening shores could grieve or glad mine eye. (III: 1–9)

The first two lines distinguish the narrator in this canto from both the narrator in Cantos I & II and Harold. It is a very simple question, but it consists of great information. Byron claims that this is the real Byron, a husband and a father. Confirming Ada to be 'sole daughter of my house and heart', the daughter–father relationship is emotional (heart) and also has its realistic base (house). By recalling 'thy face like thy mother's', Byron skilfully guides the readers to another direction of his marriage—he knows it is

[153] Mole, *Byron's Romantic Celebrity*, p. 128.
[154] Mole, *Byron's Romantic Celebrity*, p. 118.

a disaster so he only adopts the 'husband' identity to emphasise his innocence as a father and make a play down to his notoriety. This is especially useful when 'we parted' but 'I' can never forget 'thy young blue eyes'. The readers can unavoidably feel lost when they realise that the separation has taken place, and now 'Albion's lessening shores could [no longer] grieve or glad mine eye'. When the empathy is strong enough, the next stanza can arouse considerable sympathy 'for I am as a weed, | Flung from the rock, on Ocean's foam, to sail' (III: 16–17). Until now, Byron at the beginning of Canto III has replaced Harold with his own character and the success of his newly established intimacy with the audience is expected considering his performance as such a delicate figure bringing out his private love. However, Byron is not satisfied with arousing sympathy only. With his 'self' more vivid behind the lines, Canto III represents Byron's intemperate employment of his influence to advance his political pursuits, in particular concerning fighting in the name of blasphemy.

Byron's continuous reference to Napoleon composes a noticeable feature throughout the four cantos. In Canto III, it plays an especially important role after the Napoleonic Hundred Days. The seeming self-contradiction and contrastive illustrations across the references represent Byron's pluralistic approaches towards certain political issues and how he insisted on sceptical objectivity when revealing the truth in the context of human experience.

The significant transition in Byron's use of Napoleon's image should be traced from his reaction to Napoleon's real-life failure. Kelsall puts forward two explanations for Byron's paralysis during the Napoleonic Hundred Days. The first is that Byron wanted to act in accordance with his stance in the British Whigs. The second is that he lost his guts to speak.[155] The first explanation may be partly reasonable, yet it is difficult to determine how much Byron still valued his political stance after realising that the House offered no hope for human freedom, especially given the political divergence between himself and the majority. The second explanation invites consideration from another angle—it was not that Byron lost his courage, but rather that he lost patience

[155] Kelsall, 'Byron's Politics', p. 50.

due to Napoleon's disappointing performance. Considering Byron's comparison between Prometheus and Napoleon, things could be clearer:

> Unlike the offence, though like would be the fate,
> His to give life, but thine to desolate;
> He stole from Heaven the flame, for which he fell,
> Whilst thine was stolen from thy native Hell. (*CPW* 3: 269)

As mentioned before, a primary concern of Byron is human life. The word 'desolate' brings about Byron's negative comments on Napoleon's tyranny. When Prometheus stole the flame from Heaven at the expense of his position and power, Napoleon was native to Hell and brought the destructive flame also from Hell. Simon Bainbridge suggests Byron's casting of Napoleon into the role of a Shakespearean hero mitigates Byron's disappointment that, in his abdication, 'Napoleon had failed to play the part of the Shakespearean tragic hero that [Byron] had scripted for him'.[156] Byron's projection onto Napoleon can be arguable of his own political pursuits. Napoleon was the form of Byron's core like Byron was the form of his major audience with Harold's characteristics. For Byron, Napoleon was like an 'imperial diamond hath a flaw in it, and is now hardly fit to stick in a glazier's pencil:—the pen of the historian won't rate it worth a ducat' (*BLJ* 3: 256–7). The flawed Napoleon was no longer a suitable embodiment of Byron's projection. This might help to understand Byron's strange attitude towards Napoleon. If Napoleon's life brought tragedy and was doomed to tragedy, Byron might suggest that a dead Napoleon is a good Napoleon.

The poet had introduced some less attractive representations of the 'bloated Chief' with his 'unwholesome reign' (I: 550):

> Portend the deeds to come:—but he whose nod
> Has tumbled feebler despots from their sway
> A moment pauseth ere he lifts the rod;
> A little moment deigneth to delay:
> Soon will his legions sweep through these their way;
> The West must own the Scourger of the world

[156] Simon Bainbridge, *Napoleon and English Romanticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 149.

> Ah! Spain! how sad will be thy reckoning-day,
> When soars Gaul's Vulture, with his wings unfurl'd,
> And thou shalt view thy sons in crowds to Hades hurl'd. (I: 540–8)

The 'feebler despots' self-evidently indicates Napoleon is also a despot. The narrator underlines his power by imagining how easy and casual it is for this despot to control and decide the war's proceeding. His 'nod' and 'rod' mark a contrast to the disaster of another country. And the result that 'thy (Spanish) sons in crowds to Hades hurl'd' makes it clear that this 'Scourger of the world' does not bring love and freedom but another round of tyrannical torture. However, in Canto III, Napoleon appears in a more complicated character. Stanzas 18 and 19 take a quite compassionate look at Napoleon's fall, while 19 brings about some especially ingenious lines:

> 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 Thraldom again be
> The patched-up Idol of enlightened days?
> Shall we, who struck the Lion down, shall we
> Pay the Wolf homage? proffering lowly gaze
> And servile knees to thrones? No; *prove* before ye praise! (III: 163–71)

If one views Waterloo only as a victory for European tyranny, it may result in some unnecessary misunderstanding, as if Napoleon represents something tragically heroic for his failure in the war. To be clear, it is undeniable that the winner 'the Wolf' represents (or simply belongs to) the forces of Europe-wide tyranny, however, the loser 'the Lion' is also part of the tyranny. The metaphorical comparison is to some extent the same as the indicative 'feebler despots' back in Canto I, and the poet confirms this by naming Napoleon as 'one fallen despot' (III: 172) in the next stanza. Byron's rhetorical question is more than inflammatory to appeal for an undaunted rebellious spirit against both kinds of tyrannies. Napoleon here as 'a Lion' again is like a flawed diamond to test the other despots out, but Napoleon is not accepted either because he is after all flawed (tyrannical). Through his denial to both parties of his comparison, Byron challenges his audience's conventional cognition that there must be a binary morality.

Byron paved a new path beyond the given options endorsed by long-established beliefs. In Donald H. Reiman's opinion, 'as a universal outsider, Byron self-consciously employed Academic or Pyrrhonist skepticism to distance himself from the creeds that competed for his allegiance'.[157] The outsider is not that far outside, he is just denying part of his contemporary social belief. Byron's knowledge of classical scepticism developed to 'create a vibrant pluralism', which made it a more powerful tool to rebel against 'an authoritarian establishment determined to assert its exemption from the threatening energies of variety'.[158] This is intrinsically a denial of the imposed system. Especially when Byron derived different features of the same figure to explore the meaning in different circumstances, the process emphasised the numerous possibilities of human experience and the genuine reflection of exact knowledge in human minds. As a 'universal outsider', Byron picked up an unchanged human-centred instead of power-centred basis, including in his projection assigned to Napoleon, as an anchor for him to respond differently to Napoleon in different situations. While the emotional response was spiritual, it mirrored the real position Byron situated himself within the cultural and political contexts. Napoleon was not important as a firm choice, but he was vital as a symbol in the exact situation where the rebellious spirit should always be posed against widespread tyranny.

Therefore, in the contexts of a sceptic's pluralistic representations, two points made Canto III a breakthrough of Byron's performance to reconstruct his relationship with his audience in his writing. Firstly, to respond to the crisis of his scandalous divorce, he took the narrator's place directly to reconstruct his connection with the audience, his ebullient emotion made the scepticism more infectious and his position more real to provoke empathy. In particular, when creating the third canto, he had been 'half mad during the time of its composition, between metaphysics, mountains, lakes, love unextinguishable, thoughts unutterable, and the nightmare of my own delinquencies' (*BLJ* 5: 165). When the writing was out of genuine mind reflection, as is mentioned in

[157] Donald H. Reiman, *Intervals of Inspiration: The Skeptical Tradition and the Psychology of Romanticism* (Florida: Penkevill, 1988), p. 309.
[158] Howe, p. 19.

Byron's contradiction with the Platonic poetry philosophy, Howe argues about Byron's standpoint that 'it is precisely in breaking free from the assumptions of philosophy that poetic writing finds its epistemological value'.[159] And the value is rooted in reliable human experiences and exact human reactions. Secondly, after his failure in the House, Byron developed his methods to advance his human-centred pursuits more systematically. In other words, he tried to find and undermine the basis of the 'authoritarian establishment' in a more efficient way. This is further uncovered in the following lines, which help explain what fundamentally makes Napoleon unacceptable:

> An Empire thou couldst crush, command, rebuild,
> But govern not thy pettiest passion, nor,
> However deeply in men's Spirits skill'd,
> Look through thine own, nor curb the lust of war,
> Nor learn that tempted Fate will leave the loftiest Star. (III: 338–42)

What Byron refers to as 'thy pettiest passion' is not only 'the lust of war' but more importantly 'the lust to shine or rule' (III: 387). This marks a development compared with the poet's reference in Canto I. In Canto I, he simply indicates and despises the despot's tyranny to appeal for human liberty against it. In Canto III, however, with Napoleon's case, Byron illustrates to his readers what makes a tyrannical life doomed to failure. The poet emphasises that not the individual but the hierarchical power system where the tyrants can abuse their power breeds oppressions and tyrannies.

It is said that power comes from God, but Byron was not trying to deny the God, which would be too absolute for a sceptic. In Canto III, Byron experiments a way of taking over the rights of interpreting God's will, which was targeted at the tyrants. While scepticism itself in the eighteenth century suggested some 'anti-religious ramifications', Byron did not intend to be completely anti-religious; his original position is for observation from a distance.[160] Scepticism at least made him not deny the possibilities. His letter to Lady Byron, when she was Annabella, indicated his long unchanged approach to God, and it should be put together with another alleged remark

[159] Howe, p. 33.
[160] Howe, p. 16.

from him:

> [I]n the midst of myriads of the living & the dead worlds—stars—systems—infinity—why should I be anxious about an atom? (*BLJ* 4: 78)

> [T]hey accuse me of atheism—an atheist I could never be—no man of reflection, can feel otherwise than doubtful and anxious, when reflecting on futurity.[161]

Byron, out of a sceptic's caution, would not admit to using a performative rhetorical question to suggest that there can be a new way to explain the universe. However, if he denied this, then there would really be no possibility of an explanation, so he must deny the impossibility to keep the result open. Then the stage is ready for a new blasphemous demonstration. In accordance with his illustration in Canto I & II, Byron makes it quite clear that his blasphemy is conducted to be against all tyrannies involving oppression and exploitations:

> While Waterloo with Cannae'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-entail'd Corruption; they no land
> Doomed to bewail the blasphemy of laws
> Making kings' rights divine, by some Draconic clause. (III: 608–16)

What is different in this stanza is that Byron tries to question the legitimacy of establishments who believe themselves orthodox. Byron's attack on the abuse of God's power is very acute thanks to his mastery over the Bible. He knows the Bible says, 'Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's' (Matthew 22: 21), so the law 'making kings' rights divine' might have conducted a blasphemy to the Bible.[162] He conveyed this message to his audience and

[161] *His Very Self and Voice: Collected Conversations of Lord Byron*, edited by Ernest J. Lovell Jr., (New York: Macmillan, 1954), p. 83.
[162] 'Chapter 22', *Matthew*, King James Version, 2021 <https://www.kingjamesbibleonline.org/Matthew-Chapter-22/>. The verse number will hereafter be noted with the quotation in the text.

sought to render the current orthodox authorities blasphemous. Byron attacked without attempting correction, as doing so would be risky if absolute dualism existed. The Catholic Church, however, fearing that scepticism threatened to create a 'crise pyrrhonienne' in religion, adapted the classical Pyrrhonist conformism into the stance that 'the only alternative to the chaos of absolute relativism is obedience to what is established'.[163] This is in accordance with lines in Romans 13 which are often cited in support of the divine legitimacy of earthly powers: 'Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God'. This uncovered the Church's—different from God's—essence as an establishment not for human freedom but for uniformity, which can be easily achieved if no one is sceptical and everyone believes in the existing doctrine. Tyrannical rulers hope to lead 'the government of God's people' which was maybe 'established by God' or not.[164] Moreover, they want to be equal to God by writing it in the law that 'the king, moreover, is not only incapable of doing wrong, but even of thinking wrong: he can never mean to do an improper thing: in him is no folly or weakness'.[165] Byron questions this closed system dominated by absolute power.

The weakness Byron experienced in attempting to defend himself on an equal footing against unrealistic perfection and rigid hierarchical systems compelled him to resort to elemental natural power. Following his direct accusation of the crime of 'blasphemy', described as 'bewail[ing] the blasphemy of laws | Making kings' rights divine', Byron turns to a more turbulent force for representation: lightning. In Stanzas 95, 96, and 97, the image of lightning functions both as an interaction between human action and natural phenomenon and as a symbol embodying impelling justice against tyrants. And Stanza 97 illustrates how the narrator is overwhelmed with the great calling of the nature:

> Could I embody and unbosom now
> That which is most within me,—could I wreak

[163] Howe, p. 24.
[164] William Blackstone, *Commentaries on the Laws of England, Book I: Of the Rights of Persons*, edited by David Lemmings, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 99.
[165] Blackstone, *Of the Rights of Persons*, p. 159.

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 breath—into *one* word,
And that one word were Lightning, I would speak;
But as it is, I live and die unheard,
With a most voiceless thought, sheathing it as a sword. (III: 905–13)

Susan J. Wolfson notes that 'in 1778, Jean-Honoré Fragonard, stoked on both science and politics, brought these brands together in a lightning charged apotheosis […] ("He tore the lightning from the sky and the scepter from tyrants") attributed to French Statesman', which brings an origin of lightning as a rebellious symbol.[166] In this stanza, the poet continues the very symbolic and indicative lines in Stanza 95 that 'in such gaps as desolation work'd, | There the hot shaft should blast whatever therein lurk'd' (III: 894–5); after being touched among '[s]ky, mountains, river, winds, lake, lightnings' with 'a soul | To make these felt and feeling' (III: 897–8), the narrator gets greatly emotional for there is something which 'is most within [him]' (III: 896) and bursting out finally as a call for a sword. The sword is the narrator 'I' and also everyone whom Byron actually 'have made watchful' (III: 899) through his poetical communication with his readers. This is a sword with a voiceless thought, which will arouse the brightest lightnings in the already broken hills. To advance this representation within the contemporary power and linguistic environment, Byron harnessed the power of nature to make the eruption of his political passion and call for freedom more compelling—much like the established power system that derives its authority from the Almighty. This method, however, falls into the same dilemma that blasphemy entails: to be justified is to be powerful.

Worse still, the metaphorical approach to power and blasphemy reveals aristocratic superiority as a major problem in Byron's poetical representations of his celebrity. Concerned that in this stanza 'the writer aspires to dominate the reader by the force of his subjectivity, expressed with symbolic violence, and claim exclusive control

[166] Susan J. Wolfson, '"This is my Lightning" or; Sparks in the Air', *Studies in English Literature, 1500–1900*, 55 (2015), 751–786, 752.

over the poem's meanings', Mole suggests Byron's lightning metaphor is at risk of stopping the readers from intervening in constructing the poem's meaning.[167] It reveals such a credibility crisis between Byron in Canto III and his readers that he might be understood in a tyrannical position himself, especially when he tries to match up to undermining the powerful hierarchical tyrannical system. This is a long-term problem from Cantos I & II when Byron had been used to an admonitory homiletic style. In Canto III, the intensity increases—not because of the lightning, but because Byron openly assumes the role of the narrator, infusing it with his private identity and relationship, with his lordly status vividly apparent in the lines. Moreover, as Byron's narrator persona becomes so dominant, and since the narrator has from the outset primarily represented the protagonist Harold, Byron in Canto III also takes on much of Harold's performative role; Harold's name appears only six times throughout the canto, four of those in the first twenty stanzas. When Byron tries to remould his intimate relationship with his readers and also reconstruct his celebrity with his own charisma, he gets too close to the audience and his arrogance and superiority become unbearable.

After the publication, Byron immediately gets his reception:

> The man who sends out into the world a single poem, the labour perhaps of years, may affect, with some pretence of probability, to scorn the choice of public censure or approbation, but he who, at intervals of only a few months, shall continue to court the expectations of the world with the successive fruits of his poetic talent, not only exists a pensioner upon public fame, but lives even from hand to mouth upon popular applause.[168]

This anonymous reviewer simply told Byron the truth: that no matter whether he liked to be judged, he still needed to 'court the expectations of the world' because he lived 'upon public fame…and popular applause'. The only objection is that, as is argued in the sections above, for Byron, writing poems was not 'to court the expectations of the world' but to appeal to the world to change. He did need the fame, not only for a living, but more importantly to advance to advance his humanistic concerns about life, truth,

[167] Mole, *Byron's Romantic Celebrity*, p. 122.
[168] Anonymous, 'Review of Byron, *Childe Harold*, III (1816); and *Prisoner of Chillon* (1816)', *British Critic*, 2nd Series, 6 (December, 1816), 608–17, 610.

and freedom. But he must have realised his own problem: two years after the publication of Canto III, when Thomas Love Peacock complained to Shelley in May 1818 that it is 'really too bad [that] I cannot consent to be an auditor tantum of this systematical "poisoning" of the mind of the reading public', as Howe notes, 'Byron took the criticism with good grace, even sending Peacock a rosebud with a message that he bore him no ill will for his satire'.[169] This reveals Byron's new effort to deal with his readership in a more pleasing manner.

Byron's performance throughout the writing and publication of Canto III is a mysterious, dramatic, and intimate live carnival show. In accordance with Byron's sceptical approach towards tyranny, power, and blasphemy, the free recording of human imagination and experience compose certain truths, since poetry's epistemological value is rooted in freedom. When introducing seemingly chaotic yet pluralistic representations of certain issues, Byron's sense of self is further challenged. His poetical portrayals suggest diverse ways for the audience to engage with the context and his celebrity culture, especially considering the potential misunderstandings arising from ambiguous lines. However, the reception of this canto's publication made it clear that his claim to privacy did not function as expected, leading Byron to realise his misposition and subsequently change course. With this failure, Canto III is still remarkable because, as Howe asserts, it provides the readers with 'a more promising "at the worst's"' when we 'might expect to end on "at the best is"', which is challenging, pluralistic, and splendorous with openness even despite some risks.[170]

4. An open end with the hope of an endless blasphemous fight

In Canto III, Byron's strong desire to manipulate his readers risked replicating a form of tyranny. To rebalance the power dynamic between himself and his audience, Byron returns in Canto IV to the narrative style of the first two cantos. The more complex and

[169] Howe, p. 34. Howe quotes Peacock's comment from Carl van Doren, *The Life of Thomas Love Peacock* (New York: Russell, 1966), pp. 112–13.
[170] Howe, p. 37.

expansive geographical and historical narrative endows the poet's sentimental discourse with an appealing quality that better reveals his emotions and enduring beliefs. After reconsidering his relationship with his readers, Byron, in Canto IV, aligns himself with them and, more importantly, endeavours to bring all that is superior down into the real world to stand as their equal.

To begin with, Canto IV marks a significant change: Byron no longer acts as a lordly giver. This shift can be explained in three parts. Firstly, he is now financially established as a professional poet. Secondly, his indicative self-identification emerges as a non-superior figure. Building on this second point, his changing relationship with nature, contrasted with the violent imagery of Canto III that enhances the persuasiveness of his blasphemy, is reshaped into a more acceptable form.

Byron never kept the copyright of his works. In his early *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*, he mocks Scott in these lines:

> Though MURRAY with his MILLER may combine
> To yield thy muse just half-a-crown per line?
> No! when the sons of song descend to trade,
> Their bays are sear, their former laurels fade.[171]

For the young lord, it was a disgrace to 'sell' his poetry. However, Mole notes that '[w]hereas Byron had previously refused payment for his poems, presenting them as lordly gifts to his readers, he drove a hard bargain for the copyright of *Childe Harold* Canto III'.[172] This marked a significant transition: For the first time, he viewed himself a poet in a commercial way. It did make some change when Byron then got his emolument directly for his publication. Tuite believes that Canto IV witnessed 'a break in his career between the pre-1816 poems and the post-1816 poetry of exile' and that 'the post-1816 moment of exile consolidates the commitment to writing as a career'.[173] I understand 1816 as a significant turning point. However, in Byron's poetical career, I prefer to situate that break between the publication of Canto III and the composition of

[171] *CPW*, vol. 1, p. 234 (173–6).
[172] Mole, *Byron's Romantic Celebrity*, p. 127.
[173] Tuite, p. 139.

Canto IV, taking into account both Byron's financial status and his evolving concerns regarding his readers. This perspective also helps consolidate his position within his celebrity, albeit at the cost of greater constraints imposed by both the audience and the industry. Both his writing and celebrity were subsequently valued by the market in a typically professional manner, signalling a more recognisable equality with his audience. Combined with the reception and his reactions following the publication of Canto III, Byron's self-realisation of this equality and normalisation becomes vividly apparent in his writing of Canto IV.

Byron took three steps to secure his readers' intimacy and trust. First, he ceased denying his overlap with Childe Harold. Next, he reverted to his well-honed tactic of delicacy to evoke sympathy. Finally, he positions himself alongside the masses, avoiding any intimidating imagery of superiority—such as the sword of lightning—when addressing blasphemous topics related to the church and government.

Since Byron sought to appear in person in Canto III, his overlap with both the narrator and Harold became undeniable. Consistent with his openness to criticism of Canto III, Byron further blurred the boundaries between himself and Harold in Canto IV, inviting the audience to fully recognise the ambiguous figure for themselves. For Byron's action, Thorslev comments that '[t]he identification between the literary Childe and Byron's own persona is of course quite close in [Canto III], and in the preface to Canto IV, Byron drops all pretense at keeping the two distinct'.[174] In fact, Byron's explanation is quite practical, admitting the reader's position:

> The fact is, that I had become weary of drawing a line which every one seemed determined not to perceive… it was in vain that I asserted, and imagined, that I had drawn a distinction between the author and the pilgrim; and the very anxiety to preserve this difference…so far crushes my efforts in the composition, that I determined to abandon it altogether—and have done so. (*CPW* 2: 122)

Byron asserts that 'the author, who has no resources in his own mind beyond the reputation, transient or permanent, which is to arise from his literary efforts, deserves

[174] Thorslev, *The Byronic Hero*, p. 131.

the fate of authors' (*CPW* 2: 122). Notably, Byron was not attempting to further distance the protagonist's image from Canto III in his own celebrity, but rather to accept the celebrated figure as something neither simply himself nor Harold, after recognising that it was 'in vain' to make such distinctions for his audience. With Byron's acceptance of this ambiguity, the evolving relationship between Byron, the narrator, and Harold ultimately reflected Byron's changing role as an actor engaged in the publicity of his work. Partly compelled, and partly pursuing his own interests, he compromised by situating himself in a position defined by both the industry and the audience, regarding his identity through *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*. Byron keenly realised that whether he completely removed Harold was less important than the fact that it was better not to do so. When he humorously asks, 'But where is he, the Pilgrim of my Song, | The being who upheld it through the past' (IV: 1468–9), the poet and his readers seem to reach a tacit agreement. Byron realises this seemingly secretive and intimate agreement like an appealing game to keep the celebrated figure loveable.

The central principle of Byron's writing in Canto IV is to create a sense of accessibility and participation for his audience, which relies on his depiction of Italian history and geographical scenes. Tuite insists that 'what Byron saw and discovered in Rome was the symbolic value of ruin and exile…the topos of ruin is vital for an understanding of the allegorical significance of the Byronic career'.[175] For Byron himself, the ruins become a symbolic analogy to his self-identification:

> 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, and must ever be
> The master-mould of Nature's heavenly hand;
> Wherein were cast the heroic and the free,
> The beautiful, the brave—the lords of earth and sea. (IV: 217–25)

Jerome McGann acknowledges that 'Byron's representation of Italian history—full of

[175] Tuite, p. 139.

ruins and rebirths—in many ways paralleled the poet's understanding of his own life at the time of the canto's composition' (*CPW* 2: 317). It is undeniable that the ruin here metaphorises a life of suffering and bitterness, where of course the poet arouses certain sympathy with the self-evident analogy. However, it is more than ruins—it is a ruin in Italy with its long and glorious history. Byron knew that a completely self-ruined figure is not what his audience expects. Like the heartbroken but strong father in Canto III, Byron here portrays a figure who is going to 'track [f]all'n states and buried greatness' of Italy. When the port presents 'the feeling of a former world', Byron relates also 'a future' (*BLJ* 8: 37). When asking 'even in thy desart, what is like to thee', by emphasising the past glory, Byron endows the ruins with a promising future where 'the heroic and the free' (IV: 230) would revive or at least cast their glow beyond time. It also suggests a spirit of change and even revolution. The ruins thus not only serve as an analogy to arouse sympathy for Byron's own life, but more importantly to bring the audience into this sense of vicarious grandeur of a fallen civilisation.

To further relate Byron's obscure intention behind these lines, Stanza 17 is worth analysing:

> Thus, Venice, if no stronger claim were thine,
> Were all thy proud historic deeds forgot,
> Thy choral memory of the Bard divine,
> Thy love of Tasso, should have cut the knot
> Which ties thee to thy tyrants; and thy lot
> Is shameful to the Nations,—most of all,
> Albion! to thee: the Ocean queen should not
> Abandon Ocean's children; in the fall
> Of Venice think of thine, despite thy watery wall. (IV: 145–53)

Daryl S. Ogden argues that '[h]ere are fertile seeds of an imperial anxiety, seeds that Byron, drawing on his own first-hand Italian experience, means to plant in the minds of his English readers'.[176] It is very true that these lines, beginning with Venice's decay, can hardly be interpreted as an attack on Britain. When Venice's current situation is

[176] Daryl S. Ogden, 'Byron, Italy, and the Poetics of Liberal Imperialism', *Keats-Shelley Journal*, 49 (2000), 114–137, 122.

'shameful to the Nations', Byron picks up Albion because he names her 'the Ocean queen'. It also cannot be denied that there is some indistinct pride behind this call. So, although Nigel Leask, according to Ogden, highlights this kind of political anxiety to suggest Byron acted as an implicit apologist for the British Empire, I prefer that Byron is trying to be involved into his English readers by warning them of a possibly similar future in Britain as in Italy.[177] Under such circumstances, Byron builds a connection with his readers through the ruins in a third way, which is more circuitous but very solid on his national identity. He groups himself with his readers with the same stand that they want a continuously flourishing country. This is not the first time Byron expresses his concerns about the country's destiny, which can obviously be out of innate patriotism. Compared with his impetuous attack on the figures in power in the first two cantos, finally in Canto IV Byron allies his readers with this common sensibility shared by most people and builds a more solid intimacy with his readers.

Byron's compromise in seeking to re-establish intimacy with his audience on an equal footing does not imply that he also compromised his use of blasphemy. This contrast reveals Byron's realisation of a fact that, as Goldsmith suggests, 'Romantic authors…[were] not merely writers but also…powerful cultural fields through which individuals and communities looked to contest and consolidate the dramatic cultural changes with which they were faced'.[178] Byron did not intend to be merely a field; he wanted this field of public learning and discourse to serve his own pursuits as well. This explains why he continuously adapted his writing strategies without altering his central concerns about society. In Canto IV, his new experiment is to blur the boundaries between God or Goddess and human beings in order to desacralise the sacred. In his search for the truth of human life, he persistently questions the tyrannical hierarchy of both religion and the secular kingdom. Compared with his mildness in addressing human issues, he subsequently acts more radically, seeking to bring down all those who have sat on high into the real world alongside him and his readers—a world where only

[177] Quoted from Ogden, 118. See Nigel Leask, *British Romantic Writers and the East: Anxieties of Empire*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).
[178] Jason Goldsmith, 'The Promiscuity of Print: John Clare's "Don Juan" and the Culture of Romantic Celebrity', *SEL*, 46 2006), 803–32, 825.

nature and natural beings endure. Through his imaginative exploration of Venus' life, the poet reflects on the relationship between Gods and mortals:

> Glowing, and circumfused in speechless love
> Their full divinity inadequate
> That feeling to express, or to improve,
> The Gods become as mortals, and man's fate
> Has moments like their brightest; but the weight
> Of earth recoils upon us;—let it go!
> We can recall such visions, and create,
> From what has been, or might be, things which grow
> Into thy statue's form, and look like gods below. (IV: 460–8)

If in Cantos I & II, Byron denies the mythological Gods' divinity from their origin by claiming they are born in human imagination and activities, in this stanza, Byron makes God's form an excuse to make Gods and mortals interchangeable. The premise is that the Gods' behaviour can only present in human epistemology with themselves in human form; the example is that Venus' love cannot come across without the description of her 'laps', 'face', 'sweet cheek', and 'lips' (IV: 455–7). When Gods can 'become as mortals', humans have the possibility to be the same as God at their 'brightest' moments. Here, Byron deliberately blurs the boundaries between God and man to reveal a sceptical perception: if Gods can be cognised in human form, then man—who is also in human form—is open to creation and imagination in a God-like manner. It is suggested that not only statues but also humans themselves can 'look like Gods below' within the realm of human knowledge.

Still, like his open attitudes towards God, Byron here creates a sense of approachability between Gods and mortals to undermine the legitimacy of the self-canonised social authorities compared with Canto III. Byron reveals this straightforwardly in stanza 95:

> I speak not of Men's creeds—they rest between
> Man and his Maker—but of things allowed,
> Averr'd, and known,—and daily, hourly seen—
> The yoke that is upon us doubly bowed,
> And the intent of tyranny avowed,

> The edict of Earth's rulers, who are grown
> The apes of him who humbled once the proud,
> And shook them from their slumbers on the throne;
> Too glorious, were this all his mighty arm had done. (IV: 847–55)

Whether God does exist or not is not important to Byron now. Even if God does exist, God and the mortals are connected and possibly interchangeable in form. So then, Byron questions why 'The edict of Earth's rulers' could impose 'The yoke that is upon us doubly bowed', since 'we' have the potential at our brightest moments to be the same as God. At worst, Byron compares, even upon the blood of God's anger there is 'an ark for wretched man's abode', but in the universal deluge of 'the tears | [a]nd blood of Earth' (IV: 827) caused by the conquering tyrants, there is no hope. Byron remembers the lesson he learned from Canto III—that he was not to be a mentor of his readers or a leader of revolution, but when he just presented the calamity, the audience would be probably led to question and become astonished at the fake legitimacy and lying rationality of the oppressions and tyrannies around them. The poet introduces neither heroic nor superior figure here but rather a vivid presentation of the common people's life to arouse great empathy and appeal for some revolutionary minds. It seems a contrast to Scott's comment on this canto:

> [I]t was not merely to the novelty of an author speaking in his own person, and in a tone which arrogated a contempt of all the ordinary pursuits of life, that 'Childe Harold' owed its extensive popularity: these formed but the point or sharp edge of the wedge by which the work was enabled to insinuate its way into that venerable block, the British public.[179]

When 'an author speaking in his own person' suggests the author–reader intimacy in a direct communication, Scott places much emphasis on Byron's attempt to insinuate the 'contempt of all the ordinary pursuits of life' into the British public's mind. Notably, Scott was not interpreting Byron's intention to despise the public but to influence the public to rebel against 'the ordinary pursuits of life'. By linking popularity to this 'contempt', Scott also highlights a universal reflection and even a questioning of 'the

[179] Scott, '*Childe Harold's Pilgrimage. Canto IV*', pp. 219–20.

ordinary pursuits of life'. Thus, when 'ordinary' signifies remaining within conventional and imposed circumstances, Byron seeks to arouse even greater revolutionary passion against such tyrannies over human minds and daily lives. If shaking these ordinary pursuits constitutes blasphemy, Byron executes it thoroughly by presenting a new performance that further blurs the boundaries between man and God, and between the real and the spiritual worlds:

> But in his delicate form—a dream of Love,
> Shaped by some solitary nymph, whose breast
> Long'd for a deathless lover from above,
> And madden'd in that vision—are exprest
> All that ideal beauty ever bless'd
> The mind with in its most unearthly mood,
> When each conception was a heavenly guest —
> A ray of immortality—and stood,
> Starlike, around, until they gathered to a god! (IV: 1450–8)

'Amidst the tensions of running iambic phrases and striving trochaic inversions, Byron dramatizes rather than stabilizes the theological context of his scene';[180] in this way, there lies a dynamic balance in the intimacy between Gods and man, again with an identical form being a bond. In this scene, near the end of the poem, Byron makes Harold perform his last presentation as 'Nothing'. Byron writes:

> …if he was
> Aught but a phantasy, and could be class'd
> With forms which live and suffer—let that pass—
> His Shadow fades away into Destruction's mass. (IV: 1473–6)

Following the broad representation of Gods and all human beings in a similar form, Harold emerges as the figure Byron selects to embody this concept. This choice symbolises the process of audience intervention in shaping Byron's celebrated figure. Aware that this figure is heavily influenced and even manipulated equally by himself, the audience, and the industry, Byron recognises it as the safest vessel for his appeal. This 'phantasised' figure, possessing human form and widely loved and worshipped, is

[180] Howe, p. 113.

not God but god-like. The quasi-Byron can never escape the celebrity apparatus constrained by external judgment, yet it serves as a perfect warning to readers against the folly of wholehearted obedience to a similar being—God.

With an expectation of the creative future of uncertain human actions, I want to further examine the last stanzas on the sea. For me, it is a great open end for the four-canto struggle between Byron, his audience, the tyrannical establishment, and all other things cognised by human beings based on human civilisation:

> And I have loved thee, Ocean! and my joy
> Of youthful sports was on thy breast to be
> Borne, like thy bubbles, onward: from a boy
> I wantoned with thy breakers—they to me
> Were a delight; and if the freshening sea
> Made them a terror—'twas a pleasing fear,
> For I was as it were a Child of thee,
> And trusted to thy billows far and near,
> And laid my hand upon thy mane—as I do here. (IV: 1648–56)

Elaine Wood, when approaching the Ocean, believes that 'Harold considers the ocean as a ''friend of youth'' that promises adventure, but [that] he is frightened by its potential power to drown him without public acknowledgement or commemoration', and further argue that '[t]hese lines express Harold's despair over the aging process and his youthful concern for fame'.[181] However, that the splendorous pilgrimage ends in the ocean itself could be a great symbol even without Harold, because everything comes to an end except for nature. The ocean suggests a wilderness compared with human civilisation on the earth, and nature a realistic recorder of history. After all, when all civilisations end in the expansion of the ocean, people of all classes, liberated or oppressed, are treated equally, 'just as if both had passed through the grave, and we stood at God's feet, equal,—as we are'![182] All hierarchical oppression would then be abolished. This constitutes Byron's final call for liberty, unrestrained by taboo, and expresses his ultimate blasphemous conviction: to keep fighting is to never lose the war against

[181] Elaine Wood, 'Parodic Romance: Joyce, Byron, and Sir Tristan in *Finnegans Wake* II.4', *Joyce Studies Annual*, (2012), 263–72, 268.
[182] Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre* (New York: Penguin, 1996), p. 284.

tyranny.

From Canto I to Canto IV, Byron shows us how he managed to develop both in poetry writing and bring his celebrity back under control. Gavin Hopps suggests that 'all manner of things [of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*] show a remarkable inability to keep themselves to themselves', and the four cantos depicts a world corresponding to the theological 'ekstasis'.[183] The exact feature firmly comes from two aspects: The first is Byron's struggle with the reader–author relationship concerning his celebrity, which is reflected in the developmental and dynamic structure of the celebrated figure consisting of Byron, the narrator, and Harold. Secondly, with the changing status of the main characters, the narrative of the four cantos always secures an unstable but at least safe representation based on human experience and human imagination, which actually undermines the theological basis which asks for involvement not into real life but into the pious devotion to God. The celebrated figure finally fits into Byron's celebrity and makes it more intimate and closer to the readers' spiritual world in order to appeal for the liberation from all different tyrannies and oppression.

[183] Gavin Hopps, '"Eden's Door": The Porous Worlds of *Don Juan* and *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*', *The Byron Journal*, vol. 37 (2, 2009), 109–20, 110.

Chapter 2. 'It leaves no possibility of doubt': Byron's Desacralisation in the 'Oriental Tales'

In rhyme, I can keep more away from
facts; but the thought always runs through.
(*BLJ* 3: 209)

This chapter will cover most of Byron's 'Oriental Tales', including *The Giaour*, *The Bride of Abydos*, *The Corsair*, *The Siege of Corinth*, and *Parisina*.[184] Through examining Byron's writing and publication of these works, this chapter aims to represent how Byron deals with his over-night celebrity after the publication of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* and before his self-exile. Though the Tales were created and published within a short period, most were uniquely crafted in form, narrative, or description, reflecting Byron's specific responses to issues related to his celebrity and his evolving thoughts about it at the time. Considering Lara was originally produced to be 'a sequel to' *The Corsair*, and that it mainly represents, in a 'more explicit' way, some political concerns mentioned in the earlier poems, this chapter does not include a detailed analysis of this piece (*CPW* 3: 452).[185]

The Oriental background along with Byron's love for Greece is little examined in this chapter. In *Orientalism*, Edward Said criticises Orientalist representations as 'a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient', exploiting the Orient as an object.[186] To object to Said's 'positiveness and totalities in the Romantic discourse of the Orient', Leask introduces 'anxieties and instabilities' to explain how 'the internal and external pressures determining and undermining' some 'more various' representations in the Romantic contexts. But even the 'internal' pressure is with regard to broader issues, for example, Byron's reflection of imperialism or European morality.[187] Considering 'Byron's open-mindedness and his tolerance

[184] This thesis takes the saying of six 'Oriental Tales' including the listed five and *Lara*.
[185] See also Footnote 83.
[186] Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin, 1978), p. 3.
[187] Leask, p. 2.

toward alien cultures and religions', George Rishmawi denies Byron's superiority over the exotic culture.[188] Marilyn Butler also thinks it might be an overreaction, as it was 'the Christian church' that was 'never…in a more favourable light'.[189] Caroline Franklin concludes that '[b]oth Islam and Christianity are portrayed with equal distaste, as instruments of personal, political, and imperialist control over individuals'.[190] This thesis views Byron's Oriental world primarily as a religion-based society organised by hierarchical order, employed to emphasise its similarity to the society in which the writer lived. In other words, I interpret Orientalism as a means Byron used to evade censorship over blasphemy in his Tales, rather than as a vehicle for deliberately biased judgements of the Orient.

Byron's cultural dislocations already added certain ambiguity to the Tales. Beaton comments that '[v]ariously described as "Turkish", "Eastern", or "Oriental", what these tales are not is conspicuously Greek'.[191] Among the Tales, even *The Bride of Abydos* which seems the most Oriental one because the three main characters are all Islamic, 'ironically enough', according to Lee Johnson, Delacroix 'thought the Moslem hero was a Greek' when he made illustrations of Selim and Zuleika.[192] Johnson suggests this might be because '[Selim] is once insultingly called a "Greek in soul, if not in creed"'.[193] I suppose there are several additional reasons. Firstly, Giaffir mentions that Selim's mother is a Greek slave. Secondly, for the less attentive mid-nineteenth-century reader, Byron's image would have been closely associated with Greece due to his famous death at Missolonghi. Last but not least, *The Bride of Abydos* is replete with classical allusions. Robert B. Ogle confidently claims that 'there are five allusive

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[188] George Rishmawi, 'Byron and the Near East in: "The Bride of Abydos"', *Bethlehem University Journal*, 3 (1984), 48–62, 50.
[189] Marilyn Butler, 'The Orientalism of Byron's Giaour', in *Byron and the Limits of Fiction*, edited by Bernard Beatty and Vincent Newey, (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1988), pp. 78–96, p. 91.
[190] Caroline Franklin, *Byron's Heroines*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), p. 72.
[191] Beaton, p. 32.
[192] Lee Johnson, 'Delacroix and The Bride of Abydos', *The Burlington Magazine*, 834(1972), 579–85, 579.
[193] Johnson, p. 579. *CPW*, vol 3, p. 110 (87).

adaptations from Ovid—three explicit and two, I think, implicit'.[194] As well as allusions to Achilles, Niobe, and Echo, Peter Manning even interprets in this story an oedipal plot and makes Zuleika the mother of Selim based on Niobe's line that 'the mother hardened into stone'.[195] While it has been common knowledge that Byron's philhellenism was to be, as Robert Gleckner concludes, 'throughout his life the closest man has come to recovering Eden', all these allusions and interpretations confirm Byron's acquaintance with classicism and ancient Greece and the reader's reception of this idea.[196] Public reception indeed intervenes extensively in the narrative and even alters Byron's proud authenticity. The portrayal of Greece in the Tales is not specific; worse still, it alienates the original plots. The risks associated with Greece-related interpretations further suggest that, created during his years of fame, Byron had to pay greater attention to balancing free writing with public criticism.

Recalling Byron's techniques for arousing empathy, this chapter demonstrates that by emphasising the connection between love and liberty in the Tales, Byron advocates for blasphemous freedom in love. This suggests that the approach to this vital aspect of human life should be independent of religious morality and thus free from despotic establishments that derive their authority from divinity. This framework then provides a clearer lens through which to consider Byron's criticisms of control over human love and emotion. Beaton also asserts that 'throughout the "Turkish tales", the political is very firmly subordinated to the personal'.[197] In the Tales, Byron questions the seemingly indisputable legitimacy of religion and the despots in intervening into normal human life and demonstrates how this kind of intervention alienates life and makes it a tragedy for everyone. The Tales inherit Byron's dramatisation of his grand tour in the very successful *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, Canto I & II* and develop to bring about more exoticism in his presentation. Readers can still view this background

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[194] Robert B. Ogle, 'The Metamorphosis of Selim: Ovidian Myth in "The Bride of Abydos" II', *Studies in Romanticism*, 1(1981), 21–31, 21.
[195] Peter Manning, *Byron and his Fictions*, (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1976), pp. 49-55. *CPW*, vol 3, p. 139 (494).
[196] Robert Gleckner, *Byron and the Ruins of Paradise* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1967), p. xx.
[197] Beaton, p. 34.

in *Don Juan* and other later poems. The consistent content helped Byron consolidate his readership. It is true that the combination of a radical core and a fanciful appearance made the Tales a significant contribution to Byron's already flourishing celebrity. Meanwhile, Byron adapted his writing and marketing strategies for the Tales in response to his readers, including contemporary critics and the market, providing us with a vivid example of celebrity at its peak.

It is worth distinguishing that, although Byron had enjoyed certain fame before *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, Byron's saying of his awaking to find himself famous overnight at least suggests that, from then on, Byron more clearly and probably proudly realised that he had become very famous and influential as a poetical figure.[198] And objectively, the first two cantos of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* brought Byron's fame to a much larger readership across classes involving not only Ladies and the Prince but also readers like 'Anna'. Under such circumstances, as is mentioned in the previous chapter, Byron claimed 'It is good short & true' after introducing that '[h]ere lies the spoilt child of *the/a* world which he spoiled' (*BLJ* 3: 118). This world, for Byron at that time, is the world of rhymes. These years of his creation of the Tales can thus be called the 'Years of Fame'.[199] Byron's self-awakening as a poet, who had established a considerable connection with readers from diverse social strata, enabled the ambitious young Lord to advance his political pursuits through his poetry. To explain Byron's increasingly radical representations, the Tales demonstrate his confident manipulation of poetic form, his blasphemous appeal, and his celebrity. Offering further insight, the Tales reveal how Byron blurred the boundaries between the spiritual and the real world in his writing, thereby preparing the blasphemous progression of his celebrity in the spiritual realm to advocate for an unrestrained and liberated real world. Bearing Byron's failure of privacy claim in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, *Canto III* in mind, the Tales also illustrate Byron's struggling to become comfortable with his celebrity.

This chapter consists of three sections. The first focuses on Byron's experiments

[198] Moore, p. 347.
[199] Peter Quennell in 'Author's Note' (p. 5) of *Byron: The Years of Fame* (London, 1950) identifies this specific period to be between July 1811 and April 1816, which was biographically in accordance with Byron's last stay in England. The Tales were published during these years.

in creative writing. He freely tests the public, reacts to public reception, and insists on appealing to the public for liberation against the tyrannies with changing forms and narratives. This section also reflects on Byron's superiority and confidence in manipulating his celebrity in this period. The second section starts with *The Giaour* to show how Byron relates love to liberty. Via Byron's representations of the group of figures, namely priests and figures of mission, I argue that Byron adopts human feelings as a weapon to unveil the inhumane nature of the established social order of belief, desacralise the figures in both secular and divine power, and attack the legitimacy of the rigid tyrannical systems. In the last section, I will continue to examine the representation of human feelings and human rebellions, particularly in *The Bride of Abydos* and *The Corsair*. Byron introduces the alienation of human love and other feelings to accuse the establishment of tyranny and appeal for freedom from the imposed belief. This section also shows, in the case of Gulnare's liberation, how Byron blurs the boundaries of the imaginative world and reality to oppose to the imposed belief in a fiercer way.

5. 'In rhyme, I can keep more away from facts'

Ogle acknowledges that 'the experimental nature of these early Turkish Tales has generally been recognized', while his emphasis is laid much upon Byron's 'new means of presentation and a new form for the re-expression of the themes of *Childe Harold*' in the Tales.[200] Some critics tend to view the Tales as sequels which Byron used to exhaust his overnight celebrity from the first two cantos of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*. It is true that, as is mentioned above, this consistency has its use in fostering readership. However, I think this is not as meaningful as expected because most of his following poems are written and published with his name and fame attached to *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* and his concerns already clearly revealed in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*. It would even be risky to view Byron's insistence on the humanistic, philhellenic, or

[200] Ogle, 21.

blasphemous concerns as a speculation 'fitted to appeal to a public corrupted by commodity-fetishism and imperialist war', which retrospectively undermines Byron's subjectivity upon writing and denies his struggling position in the individual-audience-industry apparatus, especially in this early period of the lordly giver's celebrity.[201] Meanwhile, considering his failure in the House and the augmenting influence of his poems, it is of course that he was then trying to expand his readership to better advance his political and social influence.

After his overnight celebrity, as mentioned in the last chapter, Byron adopted a series of methods to augment his poetical influence both in the following editions of the first two cantos of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* and the newly published Tales. To conclude, Byron tried to secure his authority in the interpretation of his works while involving more audiences into his appealing representations. This section mainly examines how Byron manipulated his celebrity in developing his poetry writing in the Tales. I argue that, in the newly composed Tales during his 'Years of Fame', Byron became more aware of his power in the realm of rhymes and further took advantage of this power of celebrity to reach a primary balance between individual discourse and public taste. However, he was also convinced of his inability to manipulate his audience and the market freely when he tried to do so. After all, Byron confirmed poetry's function in 'form[ing] a conspiracy to overthrow…all religion and government' (*BLJ* 4: 93).

5.1. Creative narratives

For the narrative styles of the Tales, typically that of *The Giaour*, Daniel Watkins notices that

> Byron turned reader attention almost entirely to the poem's fictive and personal ingredients. These emphases tend to reduce the poem's flexibility, so that deep-seated psychological confusion or, at the other extreme, personal reflections on the eternal "human condition" seem to constitute its entire aesthetic

[201] Leask, p. 33.

dimension.[202]

Leask, meanwhile, suggests that '[t]he complex narrative form of the Tales permitted Byron a freedom to contemplate ideological limits which he could not face in more directly transitive rhetorical contexts (such as the Lords speeches)'.[203] The reduction in 'the poem's flexibility' does not contradict Byron's 'freedom', because the former is to describe the reader's lack of freedom in interpreting while the latter Byron's freedom in representing his blasphemous freedom for his readers. What Byron wanted at this stage was complete command of the interpretations of his writings, as well as his audience's empathy.

The British Review uncovered Byron's trick in *The Giaour* that '[the Giaour's] name, character, and office occasioned us considerable perplexity, and our impatience to advance to the interior was checked by a sort of sphynx which embarrassed us at the entrance'.[204] From *The Giaour*, Byron's narratives went in two ways: In one way, he made the narrator the readers' guide in the maze of the story; in the other, he made the narrator the readers' eyes to view the striking scenes. *The Giaour* is an extreme example of the former situation, while *Parisina* of the latter. This section also tries to clarify that Byron's adoption of these creative narratives not only marked his effort in manipulating his celebrity to better appeal to his readers, but also indicated his exploration of blasphemous representations against the absolute tyranny imposed by the common belief in a broader sense.

For *The Giaour*'s fragmental style, Stephen Minta comments, '[t]he various elements that make up the tale place a tremendous burden upon the reader: it is difficult enough to figure out the plot, let alone who speaks, whom to trust, and whom, in the end, to believe'.[205] This is mainly because multiple narratives sprang up along with the

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[202] Daniel Watkins, 'Social Relations in Byron's The Giaour', *ELH*, 4 (1985), 873-92, 874.
[203] Leask, p. 40.
[204] '*The Giaour, a Fragment of a Turkish Tale*. By Lord Byron', *The British Review* (1813), 132–145, 132.
[205] Stephen Minta, 'At the Margins of Europe: Byron's East Revisited and The Giaour', *Byron and Marginality*, edited by Norbert Lennartz (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018), pp. 98–115, p. 104.

different editions of *The Giaour*. There are several narrators. Among them, the monk's narrative function is realised in the protagonist's speech, and the Tartar casts a view that is seemingly outside the storyline. The time sequence in this poem is also unreliable. One reads 'For Courtesy and Pity died | With Hassan on the mountain side' (346–7), but decades of lines later, Hassan appears again as 'Black Hassan from the Harem flies, | Nor bends on woman's form his eyes' (439–40). The former death is the end of the fisher's narrative, while the latter appearance is when the first narrator, the mouthpiece of the poet, starts to introduce the whole story from Hassan's perspective. The poet guides his readers abruptly and repeatedly through different scenes. Byron himself admitted that this tale was of 'disjointed fragments' (*CPW* 3: 39). Mole believes this poem is an invitation to the readers and makes them a 'close observer' engaging with the story.[206] It is true that, through the perspectives of different narrators—and increasingly so in the new editions—readers can continually discover new information that satisfies their curiosity. This information, presented from various angles, enriches the story's complexity, making it more vivid for readers and inspiring more imaginative interpretations. A recent study by Yuan Yin interprets this kind of disorder as a gothic style, because only 'ghost[s]' can slip across the scenes when the different narrators 'call each other into question and destabilize any textual attempts to fix, explain, or define'.[207] This view juxtaposes the different narrators and assumes they serve to tell a single issue. However, I contend that the narrators are not primarily employed to tell the story but, more importantly, to represent the readers. Nonetheless, I agree that the narrative in *The Giaour* introduces a novel idea: that a definitive voice for a completed story is unnecessary. While acknowledging that both the plot and the characters' actions are unreliable, Minta still suggests that '[t]he plot by now has become reasonably clear', and believes that 'Leila is seduced by a young Venetian, who is the Giaour of the title'.[208] The seduction is, in fact, questionable from the perspectives of the monk and

[206] Mole, *Byron's Romantic Celebrity*, p. 69. *CPW*, vol 3, p. 67 (868).
[207] Yuan Yin, 'Invasion and Retreat: Gothic Representations of the Oriental Other in Byron's "The Giaour"', *Studies in Romanticism*, Spring (2015), 3–31, 24.
[208] Minta, 'At the Margins of Europe', p. 103.

the real narrator, but it can be supported as a complete plot by others. This argument concerns not the poem itself but the reading of the poem. An interesting development occurred when Byron was criticised for wanting to 'plan imperfection, and to pre-arrange confusion' for his readers. Despite this, the various editions of *The Giaour* consistently captured readers' attention by presenting new and contradictory information open to discussion.[209] Orthodox writing principles continue to guide its criticisms, yet the readers have already embraced it.

Rare at its time, the fragmentary style was defended by Francis Jeffrey. He suggested that 'the taste for fragments, we suspect, has become very general; and the greater part of polite readers would now no more think of sitting down to a whole Epic than to a whole ox'.[210] This may sound more reasonable for Byron if *The Giaour* were not the only poem of this style among the Tales. From the writer's side, Gleckner argues in the other way for Byron, that a 'sense of the whole' is possible in this fragmented tale, because, although the individual narrators hold different positions and tell different stories, Byron can 'manoeuvre us into the position of seeing all the points of view represented at once' to form the 'sense of the whole'.[211] In this way, Gleckner indicates, Byron kept his command of mastery over the story. By adding new information, Byron actually conducted his resistance to the readers' confirmation or even free exploration of the story. In his letter to Murray on 26 August 1813, Byron complained, 'I have but with some difficulty not added any more to this snake of a poem' (*BLJ* 3: 100). At this time, Byron should be working on the fifth edition, which was nearly the same length as the final version. Minta is right to suggest that 'given that he chose so obviously to let the form reflect the uncertainty of what is being described or evoked, no number of further additions would necessarily have brought us closer to wholeness, or even coherence'.[212] Byron's intention was understood by his readers, though not necessarily as an act of resistance. In what I term 'non-existent communication,' Byron's celebrity

[209] *The British Review*, 133.
[210] Francis Jeffery, '*The Giaour, a Fragment of a Turkish Tale*. By Lord Byron', *Edinburgh Review*, 7(1813), 299–309, 299.
[211] Gleckner, p. 116.
[212] Minta, 'At the Margins of Europe', p. 107.

reveals something unusual from its earliest stage: both Byron and his audience were recipients of the outcomes of their dislocated interactions. This observation supports my argument for the necessity of the quasi-Byron as a mediating figure to embody this dislocation and to explain why Byron actively responded to his 'restrained celebrity' through his poetry. I will return to this point in the following chapters.

Concerning the coherence and its unreliability, an unpleasant fact, however, is that the sequentially published different editions with newly added non-sequential plots brought further uncertain effects on the readers' understanding as well as the consistency of their perception of the protagonist's character. In other words, while *The Giaour* itself is fragmentary enough, it might be neglected that the separate publications of the different editions also played an important role, especially for the contemporary readers. Lines 689 to 722 depict Hassan's mother. These lines are simply above the Giaour's speech of his story. It could be a tactic to sublimate the character in the finished version. The readers were guided firstly to sympathise with a mother, but then this sympathy would be surpassed by the Giaour's sentimental discourse about powerful love. In this comparative approach, the Giaour's pain and love are highlighted and emphasised. The emotional change is also reasonable. However, because of the editorial arrangements, the readers of an earlier version had already felt moved by the Giaour's loving words. Then, in the fourth edition, they learnt about this fresh sorrow of a heart-broken mother who waited only to see her son's body due to an adulterer's murder. This sentimental displacement could become a problem that undermines the legitimacy of the Giaour's love and even of love itself. Even if it was normal to question each part of the fragmentary story, this contrast with the wrong sequence would still pose a challenge against the readers' established social morality. Fortunately, only a tyrannical establishment, whether a religion or a government, 'leaves no possibility of doubt' (*BLJ* 9: 123). Byron after all would be happy to see this challenge to the values. The readers would be further guided into the debate of love, liberty, and social order as Byron wished. As Leask argues,

Byron's reduction of epic (or its vernacular form, ballad) to the fragmentary text

> of the Giaour's "broken tale" is the formal equivalent of cultural degradation which is the poem's theme. Islamic and Christian religions are debased to superstition and the violence of the "curse" levelled by both the fisherman and the monk usurps the place of a moral agency proper to religion.[213]

This opinion suggests a victory of humanistic concerns over the imposed established religious values, especially when the fragmentary narrative is still good at arousing questions and thus attracts the readers' attention to the storyline and the characters.

The multiple narratives produce various results. It must be clarified that the essence of *The Giaour*'s disjointedness results from deliberate information asymmetry. We can confirm this, because Byron continued to exploit the confusion of his readers about the incest in the following tale, *The Bride of Abydos*, though 'the complexity of the multi-narrator fragment form was abandoned for a more straightforward ballad narrative'.[214] This manipulation revealed Byron's aristocratic superiority over his readers, which ironically composed another kind of arbitrariness and indicated the immaturity of Byron in dealing with his celebrity. Similarly, by critiquing this form of superiority, the use of multiple creative narratives affirms Byron's pursuit of uncertain, open-ended, and free representations unbound by orthodox beliefs. The paradox of the free mind would compose Byron's long-term struggle in the celebrity culture context.

Although *The Giaour* creates noise in the audience's mind while *Parisina* silence, both can arouse the readers' empathy with the characters. In *Parisina*, Byron composes a tale only with several symbolic scenes instead of developing a series of movements. I think *Parisina* marks the sprout of Byron's later writing of drama. In not so much a tale as a series of descriptions of several images, Byron avoids describing strong movements, such as Selim and Zuleika's eloping or the Giaour's fight. The scenes of *Parisina* are quiet and thus imaginable. The visualisations in the 'production of mental images in the process of reading' are plausible.[215]

Silence is repeatedly emphasised in *Parisina*, representing certain equality

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[213] Leask, p. 30.
[214] Leask, p. 38.
[215] Ellen Esrock, 'Visualisation', *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory*, edited by David Herman, Manfred Jahn, and Marie-Laure Ryan (New York: Routledge, 2005), pp. 633–634, p. 633.

among everyone. Typically, in the scene of judgement, Parisina appears 'still, and pale, and silently' (147). By naming 'her speaking eye' (149), there is even more silence. The warriors are 'all silent' (162). Even the powerful Azo acts to be 'the silent sire' (232) when Hugo speaks. Byron so carefully protected this sense of silence that with their emotional organs, the eyes, the characters cannot 'gaze' or can only gaze 'with a glance' (113). Byron even adopts the saying of 'glance so heavily' (181). Otherwise, the eyes are 'downcast' or 'hid[den]' (163, 223). This scene is depicted as if being painted, with colours including 'white', 'violet', and 'livid' (177, 175, 179), and the most important—a sense of silence. This silence is deliberate, serving as a dramatic prelude to Hugo's discourse. It also diminishes the sense of immorality. Even without the allusive Shakespearean lines, it impresses upon readers an unreal, stage-like atmosphere. Consequently, it invites a distancing judgment of Hugo's love for Parisina, fostering empathy for all three main characters and posing a challenge to the established social order. The judgment scene, involving the triangle of Azo, Hugo, and Parisina, also recalls Byron's composition of the scenes featuring the Giaour's speech to the Monk and Giaffir's scathing rebuke of the effeminate Selim before Zuleika. The difference lies in *Parisina*, where Byron further undermines the reflective sense of conflict but highlights sentimental discourse to experiment with its emotional appeal. I suggest that, considering the following combinational but still striking descriptions of both the protagonist's speech and action—for example, Cain jumps to hit Abel with a powerful shout '[t]hy God loves blood' in *Cain: A Mystery*—Byron accelerates certain experience in *Parisina* to make the most of dramatic representations in his poems.[216]

In the second important scene depicting Hugo's death, Byron further strikes his audience with its gothic atmosphere, revealing aggressive blasphemy. Byron's depiction of this scene is meant to shake the foundation of the vainglorious and mendacious religions in after-death redemption. On Hugo's Death, Byron writes:

> He died, as erring man should die,
> Without display, without parade;
> Meekly had he bowed and prayed,

[216] *CPW*, vol 6, p. 286 (310).

> As not disdaining priestly aid,
> Nor desperate of all hope on high. (462–6)

Byron arouses the readers' attention to the only practical action at Hugo's death that 'he bowed'. The poet emphasises this action by affiliating another silent action to it that '[he] prayed'. Free from display and parade, Byron sublimises this scene in silence to be a painting of repentance. However, readers would complain that

> it is to Byron one must turn to find death *in its physical circumstances* displayed and dwelt upon over and over again. After the horrors and description, he has nothing to say to us but this—always the same reflection—See! a moment ago this was a human being, full of pain, pleasure, passion, agitation; now it is a piece of clay, food for worms.[217]

The complaint is especially true to point out that the human being was 'full of pain, pleasure, passion, agitation'. Yes, Hugo is full of passion after the judgement in an elaborated discourse. How unnatural the silence is to suggest some peaceful repentance! This is mainly because 'the horrors and description' have not come to an end. Following the pious death, Byron continues his description of the death scene:

> Still as the lips that closed in death,
> Each gazer's bosom held his breath:
> But yet, afar, from man to man,
> A cold electric shiver ran,
> As down the deadly blow descended
> On him whose life and love thus ended. (477–82)

This gothic representation of Hugo's last breath can arouse the 'cold electric shiver' on the reader's body, just like it 'ran' on each gazer's. And when this shiver ends, one can confirm that though 'not disdaining priestly aid', Hugo now 'is a piece of clay, food for worms'. No more life, and no more love. The result of Hugo's acceptance of the priest's consolation ironically does not lead to any peace, which suggests the uselessness of the imposed tameness and religious redemption in front of realistic life and death. And Byron actually makes Hugo direct this play of his death, which may further explain that

[217] 'Disraeli's Monument to Byron', in *Varieties in Prose* (London: Longmans, Green and co., 1893), pp. 279–312, p. 299.

the consolation of Hugo is at essence a blasphemy against consolation instead of a real one. Before his death, Hugo instructs the executioner to

> let me die
> At least with an unshackled eye —
> Strike':—and as the word he said,
> Upon the block he bowed his head;
> These the last accents Hugo spoke:
> 'Strike'—(450–5)

Byron recalls the 'unshackled eye' after his death that 'he claimed to die with eyes unbound, | His sole adieu to those around' (475–6). Byron in this way makes Hugo a director of the play of his own death and a designer of the last scene. The depiction welcomes the audience into 'The Byron Theatre' and thus composes an impressive irony against the posthumous redemption and peace, guiding the readers to question the imposed religious repentance.[218]

5.2. Reforms and returns

In Byron's negotiation with his protagonists, audience, market, and official censorship, reform is always a central concern whenever he produces a new poem. Byron's reform does not necessarily imply the creation of a new form; rather, it serves as the poet's method of expanding the boundaries of his readership. Philip Martin suggests it is 'with considerable self-amusement that he serves up exoticism as a commodity for his reader, an amusement that can be detected in his deliberate indulgence in the art of sinking after the Popean manner'.[219] However, even if Byron at that time did not care about the income of poesy so much, the readership concerning the influence of his poems was gradually occupying his attention. This is why Leask attributes Byron's 'grave departure for the Horatian and Popean satire' to the fact that this is 'more proper to his

[218] 'Disraeli's Monument to Byron', p. 300.
[219] Philip Martin, *Byron: A Poet Before his Public*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), p. 51.

class and writerly interests'.[220] Unlike the last section, this section examines Byron's realistic methods to actively fit himself into a larger readership, meanwhile realising his notion of liberty in writing and publishing. So, this section is not to examine the effects of Byron's couplets in *The Corsair*, which Susan Wolfson has carefully done, but to view the poem with this specific form in the context of the contemporary literary orthodox and Byron's celebrity.[221]

Wolfson renders Byron's return to the couplets in *The Corsair* as a gesture to question whether 'there [are] values worth exploring in the vexation, hindrance, and constraint to liberty the couplet seems to impose'.[222] This question is based on John Milton's 'politically charged resistance to the bondage of rhyme', especially when it is believed that Milton's creation of *Paradise Lost* as an 'English heroic verse without rhyme' reveals some revolutionary passion.[223] Wolfson asserts that with couplets, Byron represents 'a hero whose liberty alternately resists and reinscribes the forms of power with which he contends'.[224] When Wolfson identifies the tension between the form and the core in the 'enriching texture of complication' of Byron's representations, she actually gives a comparison between Milton and Byron's works which shows Byron's exploration of the boundary of poetical forms.[225] The experiment makes the form no longer a black-and-white issue, but suggests that both poems of ordered rhymes and blank verses have the possibility of representations of freedom. I shall stop myself from going further into the details of Byron's representations but return to the receptions of this form at Byron's time. *The Monthly Review* made this comment on the form of *The Corsair* in February 1814:

> We congratulate Lord Byron on his return to the standard heroic measure, if we may use that expression, of our language; convinced as we have always been that (in spite of the charges of monotony so often made, and so often refuted), it is better calculated for all the various purposes of a poem of

[220] Leask, pp. 15, 16.
[221] Susan Wolfson, 'Couplets, Self, and "The Corsair"', *Studies in Romanticism*, Winter (1988), 491–513.
[222] Wolfson, 'Couplets, Self, and "The Corsair"', 493.
[223] Wolfson, 'Couplets, Self, and "The Corsair"', 493.
[224] Wolfson, 'Couplets, Self, and "The Corsair"', 494.
[225] Wolfson, 'Couplets, Self, and "The Corsair"', 494.

> narration than any other metre; and conceiving that a melometric poem has no more warrant in taste than authority in criticism. We wish that he had also abstained from the modern practice of numbering the paragraphs; which, while it answers no good end that might not equally be obtained by the old fashioned and ordinary mode of dividing them, tends to break and embarrass the sense, on a first perusal.[226]

The reviewer regards couplets as 'the standard heroic measure…of our language' and links the poem's warrant in taste to the authority of criticism, revealing an interesting yet imposing established system within literary criticism. At the heart of this system lies form. The reviewer further demands that Byron eliminate his non-standard practice of numbering stanzas. When form is elevated to the standard of taste and criticism, the system becomes more harmful than one merely restricting content, as it arrogantly abuses the power of judgment over creative expression. *The Corsair*, with its couplets, worked in such a way that it caters to this standard and then deconstructs it in an ironic way.

In discussions or explorations centred on couplets, Alexander Pope should be mentioned alongside Byron. Although Byron specifically referenced Milton in his letter to Moore, I argue that a general comparison between Byron and Pope provides a clearer understanding of Byron's return to the couplet form. This section is not to elaborate Byron's long-term admiration and inheritance of 'the Popean manner'.[227] Pope's dynamic satirical style revealed in couplets suggests that Byron's couplet return can hardly be viewed as a return to the poetry of standard and closed restraints. Pope's fame also helps to explain why Byron's couplet return can naturally be engaged with his celebrity. As Leask says, Byron's 'abiding fascination' with Pope can be understood in two ways: one is about 'an aristocratic nostalgia for the values of an inert, Augustan Classicism'; the other is from 'Pope's "use of contradiction" in accommodating the values of the new capitalist order to the quite antagonistic moral paradigms of classical civic humanism'.[228] These two aspects make Byron's couplet return in *The Corsair*

[226] '*The Corsair*, a Tale', 190.
[227] Martin, p. 51.
[228] Leask, p. 19. For more about Pope's 'use of contradiction', see John Barrell and Harriet Guest, 'The Uses of Contradiction in Pope's Epistle to Bathurst', in John Barrell, *Poetry, Language and Politics* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), pp. 79–99.

reveal two important features of his celebrity in this period: his aristocratic self-consciousness and his ambition in manipulating the celebrity apparatus for his political appeals. Byron's aristocratic superiority is always criticised. Hazlitt lamented after his death that 'Lord Byron, who in his politics is a liberal, in his genius is haughty and aristocratic'.[229] When we acknowledge Byron's irony in his couplets, the form itself with its 'persistent order' represents an 'association with the noble class'.[230] Although its function in 'articulations of public communication…[creates] some kind of a public voice and, beyond this, of a significant public milieu', the public's role is passive and dominated.[231] This indicates Byron's expectation of his readers' compliant reception of his discourses and notions, thereby suggesting a tyrannical manner in his deconstruction of the very system that restrains him. More explicitly, this aristocratic taste originates from his class and represents a class-based superiority. This paradox exemplifies Byron's ambivalence in both literature and politics. While his rebellious stance remains fundamentally irrevocable, his vivid and authentic personal character prevents him from becoming a flawless rebellious saint. This reality renders him an embodiment of the genuine human condition portrayed in his fictional tales, thereby provoking further reflection on the celebrated 'self' within his celebrity. Wolfson believes that by representing the subject 'Self' in 'this interweaving of public voice with closed-couplet tradition' in *The Corsair*, 'Byron exploits both senses of the word subject: it is a synonym for "self" and a conscious acknowledgment of himself as a "subject" of public comment'.[232] This is true, but more importantly, Byon's self is objecting to the public comment: He copes with his readers in the form or in the content while imposing contradictions to deny both.

Apart from being another creative exploration and expansion of the boundaries of his poetic writing, Byron's return to the couplet represents his response to the dilemma between individual expression and industry–audience criticism. He was

[229] Hazlitt, p. 163.
[230] Wolfson, 'Couplets, Self, and "The Corsair"', 499.
[231] William Bowman Piper, *The Heroic Couplet* (Cleveland: Case Western Reserve University Press, 1969), p. 24.
[232] Wolfson, 'Couplets, Self, and "The Corsair"', 499–500.

reluctant to be subjected to pressure from either party. While still seeking political self-realisation through his poetry, he employed a clever strategy to lead his readers into the labyrinth of his genius, making himself welcome without being judged. This 'haughty and aristocratic' superiority will soon contribute to his failure in the *Hebrew Melodies*; however, it is undeniable that with his efforts to keep his distance from the systematic restraint from the other two parties of the celebrity apparatus, Byron himself also represents a real individual who avoids being adapted to perfection. This feature would be developed in his later poems and makes his celebrity not a sacred sermon of some saint but a real person's life with an endless call for freedom.

This Byronic return is after the failure of the *Hebrew Melodies*. In Mole's careful examination of this failure, he points out that 'the tensions between the celebrity poet and the enterprising publisher who made celebrity his business show their strained interdependence', which urges the writer to return to a safer style for marketing and publication.[233] This section seeks to situate Byron's Byronic return following this failure within the broader context of the Tales to explain his evolving style. Although the change is superficially presented as a return to the familiar Byronic representations of oriental affairs, I argue that Byron actually developed a more radical style of blasphemous representation in the last two poems.

It was only after November 1813 that Byron was no longer directly involved in the parliamentary issues. After the publication of *The Corsair*, Byron told Murray that:

> It doubtless gratifies me much that our finale has pleased—& that the curtain drops gracefully…We shall now part I hope, satisfied with each other—I *was* & *am* quite in earnest in my prefatory promise not to intrude any more—& this not from any affectation—but a thorough conviction that it is ye. best policy—& is at least respectful to my readers—as it shows that I would not willingly run ye. risk of forfeiting their favour in future.—Besides I have other views & objects—& think that I shall keep *this* resolution—for since I left London—though shut up—*snow*bound—*thaw*bound—& tempted with all kinds of paper—the dirtiest of ink—and the bluntest of pens—I have not even been haunted by a wish to put them to their combined uses—except in letters of business—my rhyming propensity is quite gone… (*BLJ* 4: 44–5)

[233] Mole, *Byron's Romantic Celebrity*, p. 113.

The Corsair, as we now know, is not Byron's 'finale', though he asserted that he 'shall keep *this* resolution'. Byron's tendency of self-dramatisation and his frequent self-contradiction can always be a problem, but it is true that most human beings can be even more self-contradictory in real life. It is of course risky to read Byron's biographical materials while subconsciously supposing him to be a coherent designed character. However, this does not mean that interpreting the contradictory words is pointless. The key point of this piece of writing is that he had 'other views and objects' at this period. As is mentioned, Byron started using poetry to advance his politics after realising his poetical influence. After he was 'sick of parliamentary mummeries' (*BLJ* 3: 206), it was reasonable that his interests in poetry writing also reduced. Based on his creation of the piracy tales, Talissa Ford suggests that after the parliamentary issues, through 'celebrating the ocean as escape and infinite opportunity', Byron's political concerns went to a post-nationalist stage, where the revolutionary sensibility trespassed freely.[234] This is hopeful but somehow escapist. Interestingly, two weeks after the letter, Byron wrote in his journal that 'the greater the equality, the more impartially evil is distributed, and becomes lighter by the division among so many—therefore, a Republic!' (*BLJ* 11: 384). It seems that Byron here gives an unusual interpretation of the meaning of equality, which is not to represent a certain value or virtue, but a tool to deal with the indestructible evil. However, the indication is that evil lies in the superior minority, and thus is too heavy to be removed. In *The Siege of Corinth* and *Parisina*, he vividly shows how evil undermines humanity in the explosion fired by Minotti, and he questions the sacred redemptions in the image of Hugo's death. These following publications had already signified Byron's continuous poetical and political passions. Concerning Byron's thinking of a solution to this 'republic' conversion, it is particularly interesting to mention Franklin's symbolic interpretation of Alp's apostasy. She says '[h]is attack on the city combines the military and the sexual in an act of conquest, a veiled violence on the virgin herself: My very love to thee is hate to them'.[235] This is in

[234] Talissa Ford, 'A Pirate or Anything', *Radical Romantics: Prophets, Pirates, and the Space Beyond Nation* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), pp. 41–66, p. 46.
[235] Franklin, pp. 68–9.

accordance with Byron's representation of the conversion. When Alp seeks love with liberty and equality, to him 'evil' is distributed, which makes his 'veiled violence' happen. Comparing this 'violence on the virgin' with Selim's chronic appeasement to the tyrant Giaffir, Byron poses a question not about love and hatred, but against the rigid standard of 'evil'. When Alp's death somehow smooths the 'evil' debate, the origin of violence is directly connected with the pursuit of liberty. Byron later again represents this connection in *Cain: A Mystery*. It is also worth mentioning that, although *Parisina* is eliminated from the Tales by some critics because it is not 'Oriental' enough, this tale completes the religious blasphemy of the Tales with a radically straightforward inclusion of Christianity. Unlike the Giaour's veiled identity and distancing monologue, this is more clearly an ironical gesture despising all religious values.

The Byronic return is significant because the last two Tales particularly reflect Byron's radicalised style in criticising both political and religious establishments, as well as in questioning the legitimacy of their authority and even their existence. This will be further elaborated in the second part of this chapter.

5.3. Readership and criticism

These returns reveal Byron's renewed ambition to maintain a continuous influence in the market. This is unsurprising, as poetry remained his most powerful means of advancing his political pursuits. The first step in appealing to a broader audience was to attract more readers. Although his lordship still sought to maintain some distance and even superiority, Byron was content to convey his concerns through carefully crafted interactions with his readers. Unlike forms susceptible to dubious interpretations, Byron's intention to communicate with, or instruct, his readers helps explain his subjectivity in integrating himself into the celebrity context and better realising his control over his celebrity. However, despite this subjectivity, some of Byron's effective modes of interaction through his writing still provoked conflicts—though he welcomed some attacks as a positive response to his blasphemous challenge against established tyrannical systems.

Notably, when I emphasise the importance of the market, I do not mean its financial significance during this period. It is true that 'Byron was profiting from that representation on the literary market', but it was too early to consider 'the intimate alliance between colonialist ambitions and the expansion of trade' in *The Giaour*, especially just after the great success of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*.[236] As explained in the first chapter, it was during the writing of Canto VI of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* when Byron started writing with a self-consciousness as a professional poet. Gerard Cohen-Vrignaud also notices that the tales were written before he started to 'care more about his writing income':

> When [Byron] published *The Corsair* in 1814, he was still giving away his copyrights to others and was deeply offended when press accounts claimed that he was writing prolifically for pecuniary reasons. In some sense, then, *The Corsair*'s nonchalance towards piratical robbery can be viewed as a manifestation of Byron's lordly privilege and disdain for material motivations.[237]

This is worth mentioning because many of Byron's concerns can be less understandable without acknowledging his identity as a lordly giver who cares not very much about financial benefits.

> Stick to the East;—the oracle, Staël, told me it was the only poetical policy. The North, South, and West, have all been exhausted; but from the East, we have nothing but S * *'s unsaleables,—and these he has contrived to spoil, by adopting only their most outrageous fictions. His personages don't interest us… (*BLJ* 3: 101)

Byron in this letter to Moore in 1813, Leask says, is 'like a Levantine or East India merchant who has tapped a lucrative source of raw materials in a newly opened up Orient, which he feels will make a splash on the home market'.[238] Leask tells the truth about Byron's significant attention over the Orient as 'the only poetical policy'. This

[236] Yin, 17.
[237] Gerard Cohen-Vrignaud, 'Becoming Corsairs: Byron, British Property Rights and Orientalist Economics', *Studies in Romanticism*, 4(2011) 685–714, 697.
[238] Leask, p. 13.

explains the beginning of Byron's creation of the Tales. In the meantime, when critics are used to reading about Byron's mockery of Southey, Byron did acutely find the reason for the 'unsaleables': fictions. This explains Byron's insistence on claiming authenticity in the Tales. Apart from the ambiguous oriental flavour, Byron's claim relied much on his notes.

As Naji B. Oueijan observes, 'Byron's ability to become a participant [in the culture of the Orient] is unique among his contemporaries, and this characteristic makes his observations of and experiences in the East highly authentic'.[239] However, although Byron's grand tour endorsed his poetical representations of the Orient, the experience itself does not function throughout the Tales. Mole believes that 'Byron splits himself between text and footnote' to consistently bridge his readers to the Tales' larger background.[240] By regarding Byron as an origin of the representations, 'a number of approaches [are provided] to an imagined pre-textual Byron'. [241] Under such circumstances, 'the slow revelation of more and more of the supposed "original" arouses and sustains desire for the whole'; Byron keeps his readers' interest in his narrative.[242] The side effect is that the authentic origin is attached to Byron as an individual. Because of its lack of substantial core, this celebrated figure is purely open to decorations and interpretations. This also explains why Byron's reluctance concerning his own distance from his readers does not work well from an objective viewpoint.

Noticeably, with the advantage in conveying the authenticity, the notes are always criticised for distraction. Alice Levine specifically observes of the notes to *The Giaour* that 'by their very existence, they pull the reader away from the story and the poetry, and, in both their content and style, work overtime to dispel the atmosphere and emotion built up in the poem'.[243] William Cobbett asserts that 'notes ought seldom to

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[239] Naji Oueijan, *A Compendium of Eastern Elements in Byron's Oriental Tales* (New York: Peter Lang, 1999), p. 18.
[240] Tom Mole, 'Narrative Desire and the Body in *The Giaour*', *Byron: A Poet for All Seasons. Proceedings of the 25th International Byron Conference*, edited by Marios Byron Raizis (Athens: Messolonghi Byron Society, 2000), pp. 90–97, p. 90.
[241] Mole, 'Narrative Desire and the Body in *The Giaour*', p. 90.
[242] Mole, 'Narrative Desire and the Body in *The Giaour*', p. 93.
[243] Alice Levine, 'Byronic Annotations', *Byron Journal*, 35.2 (2007), 125–36, 131.

be resorted to' because they are 'interrupters' and suggest the writer's inability to put the matter together 'to work it all up into one lucid whole'.[244] The distraction from the notes is undeniable. However, when Byron viewed the Orient as a 'poetical policy', considering his analysis on Southey's failure in the 'outrageous fictions', Byron must endeavour to make the Tales real and authentic rather than coherently fictionalised. As for Cobbett's critique, the problem is that Byron's authentic notes can hardly be viewed as the same matter, and Byron is good at playing tricks with this self-contradiction, typically in the case of the butterfly of Kashmeer:

> As rising on its purple wing
> The insect-queen of eastern spring,
> O'er emerald meadows of Kashmeer
> Invites the young pursuer near (388–91)
>
> The blue-winged butterfly of Kashmeer, the most rare and beautiful of the species. (*CPW* 3: 418)

As Qurania Chatsiou notices, '[t]he footnote forcibly replaces fictional imagination by the realm of scientific experiment…in an almost Swiftian way'.[245] Even though the text and the note are both about the butterfly, the text indicates a dramatic development from 'its purple wing', 'insect-queen', and 'the young pursuer', while 'blue-winged' and the more scientific use of the word 'species' in the note 'turns [the drama] into a burlesque, a sarcastic mockery and parody of the poem: a comic interlude appended to it'.[246] This immediate metafictional reverse invites the readers to a real and authentic world. Byron's interaction with his readers has already worked, and the note plays an important role. When Cobbet asserts that '[n]otes are seldom read', Madame de Staël was overwhelmingly flattered for Byron's praise of her *De L'Allemagne* in a note to *The Bride of Abydos*:

> I do not know how to express to you, my lord, how honoured I feel to be in a

[244] William Cobbett, *Grammar of the English Language* (London: John M. Cobbett, 1823), p. 143.
[245] Qurania Chatsiou, 'Lord Byron: Paratext and Poetics', *The Modern Language Review*, 3(2014) 640–62, 648.
[246] Chatsiou, 648.

> note to your poem, and in what a poem! For the first time it seems I am certain to be remembered by posterity, and you have placed at my disposal that realm of esteem which will be yours more and more every day.[247]

Given that readers clearly engaged with Byron's notes, which may have been more effective than anticipated in fostering interaction and attracting attention, this also suggests how literary figures linked contemporary fame to posthumous remembrance. Moreover, it reveals how Byron situated his celebrity within the literati by interweaving references to predecessors and contemporaries to affirm his position and corresponding poetic influence.

Despite the positive side, when Byron established such an interaction with his readers and the broader industry, he unavoidably showed his desire of control and manipulation, which again aroused some risks. An example is the note in which Byron mentions *De L'Allemagne*:

> I will not refer to 'Him who hath not Music in his soul', but merely request the reader to recollect, for ten seconds, the features of the woman whom he believes to be the most beautiful… For an eloquent passage in the latest work of the first female writer of this, perhaps, of any age, on the analogy…between 'painting and music', see vol. iii. cap. 10, DE L'ALLEMAGNE [1813]. And is not this connexion still stronger with the original than the copy? With the colouring of Nature than of Art? After all, this is rather to be felt than described…for this passage is not drawn from imagination but memory… (*CPW* 3: 436–7)

This note is affiliated with line 179: 'The mind, the Music breathing from her face'. Chatsiou noticed that, in Byron's draft, the pause was originally '"one minute"…[then] "one minute" is diminished to "30 seconds"; the latter is then crossed out and replaced by the final "ten seconds"'.[248] Chatsiou thus suggests that Byron 'was very consciously interrupting his main poetic narrative' to 'capture and control the reader's attention' to fulfil the description of Zuleika's beauty with 'the reader's own life experience'.[249] This

[247] Madame de Staël: *Selected Correspondence*, edited by George Solovieff, trans. Kathleen Jameson Cemper (New York: Springer, 2000), p. 329.
[248] Chatsiou, 646, more details from: Edinburgh, National Library of Scotland (NLS), Acc.12604/04026, 'MS, 1813, of "The Bride of Abydos" by Lord Byron, with dedication and addenda'.
[249] Chatsiou, 646.

is more delicately designed than the closed contradiction centring around Kashmeer. Moreover, the note suggests something more by emphasising 'this is rather to be felt than described' and 'this passage is not drawn from imagination but memory'. The words 'felt' and 'memory' welcome the readers' memory of 'the most beautiful woman' in their mind. The denial of 'imagination' in fact denies the fiction in this fictional tale. Byron deconstructs his writing not with the form but the note. By replacing the fictional confirmed description with real uncertain memory, Byron blurs the boundary between the imaginative world and real life. When the hero fights for the beauty, he is then fighting for the readers' memory. Through this way, he believes, that the liberty call and the revolutionary passion can be better 'felt' by the readers.

Back to the ten-second pause. Cobbett rightly criticises the notes for 'stars [*] and the other marks which are used for the purpose of leading the eye of the reader to Notes…are perfectly arbitrary'.[250] Just as *Eclectic Review* complains, '[i]n poems so perfectly in costume, the imagination has frequently to stop for the understanding; and woe to the passage which requires a note for its explication…of two or three outlandish terms'.[251] Through his notes in the Tales, Byron attracted more readers with the 'costume' and efficiently established interactions that facilitated the dissemination of his concerns. While his haughty pride remained an issue, a more significant outcome was that, due to his tendency to blur the boundaries between fiction and reality, his individual identity became increasingly entangled with the celebrated public figure, despite his desire for distance.

Through examining his successful or failed experiments out of reluctance or out of his subjectivity in the celebrity culture context, I think Byron's over-all flourishing celebrity at this period gave him adequate confidence. As he boasted that he was a 'spoilt child of the world which he spoiled' (*BLJ* 3: 118), his developing radical concerns which were restrained by his ambivalent political position could still be handled, so did his superiority. Before things got worse to urge him to make some significant change, he surprisingly started to confirm his poetical career in order to

[250] Cobbett, p. 143.
[251] '*The Bride of Abydos*. By Lord Byron', *Eclectic Review*, 11 (February 1814), 187–93, 188.

advance his blasphemous political concerns as a response to either positive or negative public receptions. Wolfson believes Byron's 'oppositional politics…have the quality of an "experiment" in "character," styled to call attention to worthy liberal causes, but patently informed by the energies of public performance'.[252] This perspective broadens the scope of Byron's experiments, particularly regarding his political performances presented to the public. It may be surprising that negative public receptions sometimes encouraged Byron, given the rebellious nature of the liberal causes he championed. Before Byron wrote *The Siege of Corinth*, a long poem, 'Anti-Byron', was written to criticise his blasphemy against the establishments. Byron mentioned this when he wrote to Annabella:

> — the author's object is to prove…that I have formed a promising plan for the overthrow of these realms their laws & religion by dint of certain rhymes…of such marvellous effect that he says they have already had the "most pernicious influence on civil society". (*BLJ* 4: 82)

Byron actually felt somehow flattered. He talked about this with Moore again, saying: 'I never felt myself important, till I saw and heard of my being such a little Voltaire as to induce such a production' (*BLJ* 4: 93). The former half of this sentence may be a lie, but the latter reveals Byron's realisation of his readers' recognition of his influence 'on civil society'. More precisely, Byron agrees with the blasphemous reading of his poems, because they were blasphemous. The interpretation confirmed the feasibility and efficiency of his blasphemous call and can consolidate his wish to use poetry to advance his political pursuits and appeal for his humanistic concerns.

On the contrary, when being told that he was viewed as 'the actual Conrad, the veritable Corsair', for the scandal about part of his travels '[which] are supposed to have passed in privacy', Byron defended himself with Macbeth's words that 'I doubt the equivocation of the fiend that lies like truth' (*BLJ* 3: 250). This is also naturally a response to *Anti-Jacobin Review*'s criticism that:

> It ill becomes a man, who so frequently addresses himself to the public, to

[252] Wolfson, 'Couplets, Self, and "The Corsair"', 499.

> affect a contempt of public opinion—for that opinion, in short, to which he must be indebted for the circulation of his works.[253]

By satirising that 'people sometimes hit near the truth; but never the whole truth' (*BLJ* 3: 250), Byron questions the public opinion as a whole. He doubts the public as an imposing party no less than the religion or the government when this party tries to involve him into a power system in which he was restrained and manipulated. This contradiction between his liberal call and his own superiority will remain a problem to keep the possibility of doubt against any specific tyrannical imposing power. This doubt in fact composes the essence of Byron's liberalism, that he is reluctant to a common voice or social belief which refuses things unusual or not so 'good'. The same logic also works when the public expect him to be consistently Byronic. However, the tricky paradox is that if Byron wanted more supporters for their common pursuit of liberty, he needed to be part of this common group. This resulted in Byron's ambivalent position in his celebrity. Worse still, his lordly superiority ironically added the risk of himself being a tyrant in creation, typically in the later published Canto III of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, as mentioned.

In the first chapter, I argued that Byron ultimately compromised and abandoned his distancing from readers. By engaging with public projections through certain sentimental discourses, his celebrated poetic persona further appealed to his audience's desire for humanistic freedom from tyrannical control and imposed conformity. Whether willingly or not, I contend that he glimpsed possible change in Anti-Byron and the growing public interest in the Tales, thereby confirming poetry as his ultimate weapon to challenge the rigid spiritual and real worlds.

6. '…the thought always runs through'

To better understand the limits of his freedom in writing and to capitalise on his celebrity, Byron tested the public with the experimental features of his Tales. However, the Tales

[253] '*The Bride of Abydos, a Turkish Tale*. By Lord Byron & *The Corsair, a Tale*. By Lord Byron', *Anti-Jacobin Review, and true Churchman's Magazine*, vol. 21, March (1814), 221.

remain fundamentally fictional. Although the inserted notes may have added some sense of realism to the stories, their popularity does not primarily stem from sounding realistic. As Cohen-Vrignaud asserts, Byron 'is willing to create a fictional world that strays from the limits of realism'.[254] Cohen-Vrignaud interestingly describes this feature to be 'infidelity'.[255] The word choice indicates some natural authority of realism. The Tales, with their authenticity, are indeed against this realistic authority. The lordly writer, with his superiority, was writing to doubt the religion that made him superior in the King's government. Moreover, in the fictional world, there are too many authorities, based on two opposing religions, and they struggle with each other. All these contradictions work together to make all the authorities no longer unquestionably condescending. This section examines human feelings as Byron's most important weapon in these Tales to command the different approaches to desacralise and undermine the legitimacy of these tyrannical parties.

6.1. Love as an endorsement of blasphemy in *The Giaour*

The Giaour does not have a name. This word has a Christian origin, but Byron's Christian readers can only take the Islamic side when calling him, like the Islams calling them in the real world.[256] When this natural alliance is established, Hassan must be doubted. The authenticity nonetheless reminds us that Hassan is right because this is in his religion and his culture. The struggling incompliance critiques a systematic common sense that the established conventions of belief naturally own an authority to dominate human feelings and judgements. Meanwhile, with the development of the story, it becomes clearer that each character is too complicated to be judged by binary morality. The Giaour thus despises convention-based judgments and leaves only love with liberty

[254] Cohen-Vrignaud, 710.
[255] Cohen-Vrignaud, 710.
[256] According to *Entangled Histories of the Balkans, Volume I: National Ideologies and Language Policies* edited by Roumen Dontchev Daskalov and Tchavdar Marinov, 'In the Ottoman defters, Orthodox Christians are as a rule recorded as kâfir or gâvur (infidels) or (u)rum' (p. 44). 'Gâvur' is transcribed as 'giaour'. More directly, in *The Turkish State and History: Clio Meets the Grey Wolf* written by Speros Vryonis, 'The Turkish term "giaour", a term of contempt, was applied to these Balkan Christians' (p. 50).

unstained in his last discourse. In this process, Byron challenges the established values with human feelings, which marks the beginning of his repetitive explorations of the relationship between love and freedom in the Tales.

In the first two cantos of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, Byron's talent to set obstacles for his readers is already clear, with which he clothes himself from being affected by the publication of his own experience. In *The Giaour*, though the target has changed, Byron adopts similar methods with slight adaptation: He clothes love with multiple representations, and in the disjointed and contradicted chaos, he raises love to be powerful and unstained regardless of the attachments.

To clarify first, Greece is a consistent symbol of Byron's revolutionary passion, and Byron also mentioned Greece in the eulogy, but it does not mean Greece is predominantly important in the Tales, especially in *The Giaour*. In the same way, when Leask believes that Watkins 'over-seriously reads [the Tales] as didactic fables of an alternative system of social relations, and more problematically, underplays their sexual politics and orientalism', the reading of sexual politics and orientalism itself can remain questionable.[257] The biggest problem is that Western critics naturally view Leila as the embodiment of lost Greece. When Colin Jager suggests that 'Hassan kills Leila because she is his property', which seems arguing for the cultural differences, he further asserts love 'is linked to a freedom that orthodox tyrants like Hassan cannot understand'.[258] Hassan is totally undermined for a cultural superiority not in writing but from the reviewer's stand. Minta acknowledges, 'we know almost nothing about Hassan, whether he was an "orthodox tyrant" or not. Nothing in the poem suggests that he was not in love with Leila; he might have killed her for that reason'.[259] Franklin says Leila is 'used as [one of the] mute objects of male reverence'.[260] The arguments above can suggest that Hassan is also used as a mute object of reverence. The Giaour says, that 'Faithless to him—he gave the blow, | But true to me—I laid him low' (1064–5). When

[257] Leask, p. 15.
[258] Colin Jager, 'Byron and Romantic Occidentalism', Romantic Circles: Praxis Series, <https://romantic-circles.org/praxis/secularism/jager/jager.html> [accessed on 21 May 2022].
[259] Minta, 'At the Margins of Europe', p. 107.
[260] Franklin, p. 41.

the Giaour places the two relationships in an equal context, the critics' denial makes Hassan even more severely mute than Leila. If Leila can be viewed as Greece, Hassan can too, and is more reasonable for its irony. He was in power in his own culture, then doomed for his glory (Leila's love) was stolen, and his effort to re-establish his orthodoxy was stopped by outside force. Moreover, in the Western intruder the Giaour's words, 'there read of Cain the curse and crime' (1058), Hassan is viewed as his pious and loyal brother, which, if not perfectly represents, at least suggests an understandable kinship between ancient Greece and the contemporary West. In line with the classical scepticism Byron later adopted, as noted in the first chapter, if both positions are reasonable, then both are open to doubt. Emphasising the particular character's symbolic meaning only leads the interpretation into meaningless debate. Along with what I have stated at the beginning of this chapter, I thus believe that centring on Greece or Orientalism seems enriching the background of most Tales, but with all the ambivalence it in fact strays from their consistent and abstract core: love.

I do not see any problem in treating *The Giaour* as an extended fable of love, but it is not didactic nor concerns concrete social relations. As mentioned in the first section, the storyline is dubious, and the characters' positions are interchangeable. The opening eulogy is still important, not because it mentions Greece, but for the very symbolic and confusing fable of 'The Nightingale and the Rose' (22–67). This fable cannot be directly related to the characters in the story. If the nightingale represents the protagonist while the rose Leila, Hassan cannot be 'the pirate' who aims to destroy the moral convention of Paradise in a Moslem background, because the Giaour does this. In another way, Hassan cannot be the nightingale. Although Leila is very beautiful in Byron's depiction, as a slave she is probably a concubine instead of a wife. Because it is uncertain whether Hassan truly loves Leila or not, since Hassan will marry someone after her death, it is also possible that he does not love Leila as an equal individual. When Byron further indicates that it is 'the tyrants that destroy', he suggests generalising the different parts of a love story but emphasising the existence of lovers and their true love only despite the background or the morality in the real world. In this case, Byron later adopts a narrator with unchanged bias (fisher) and a narrator who can

finally be objective (monk). They accommodate differing opinions and employ ambiguous representations to construct a provisional framework through which people can engage with and reflect upon controversial characters and paradoxical relationships. In this way, love itself is free from judgment and widely exists in the topics of Greece, the sexual triangle, Hassan's family, and all others. This powerful conception bridges readers from different perspectives and leads them to empathise. Leila is viewed as "a form of life and light" (1127), as a '… light from heaven—A spark…' (1131–4). Clearly, it 'tells more about the Giaour than about Leila'.[261] And it is true that '[even] love…as a last, private refuge against a hopelessly cruel world is entirely abstracted and idealized, transformed into an ideal stripped of all its human features'.[262] It just extends beyond Watkins' expectations. Leila is not necessarily one endpoint of the relationship; when the Giaour also acknowledges Hassan's legitimacy in their relationship, Leila becomes a more abstract and symbolised figure representing the concept of love. Her existence signals the presence of such a love relationship, but she is not necessarily a participant in it.

Leila's death thus marks the beginning of pain out of love. Love itself is free, but the loving people suffer from the system of established imposed belief. Watkins views Hassan and Selim's separate claim for Leila's body and spirit as a critique of 'how social injustice often is sanctioned by systems of belief that define self-interested acts and rites as "natural"'.[263] The point is that, when critics like Jager try to explain why Hassan kills Leila from a cultural perspective, they are also sanctioned by the system of belief to rationalise the established tyrannical authority. The Giaour himself tries to abandon the possible interpretation of tyranny in his amour with Leila. He is proud (he claims) that 'To me she gave her heart, that all | Which tyranny can ne'er enthrall' (1068–9), which suggests an opposition between true love and tyranny and in turn connects love to liberty. According to Crawford Brough Macpherson's 'political theory of possessive individualism', '[t]he human essence is freedom from dependence

[261] Watkins, 'Social Relations', 881.
[262] Watkins, 'Social Relations', 881.
[263] Watkins, 'Social Relations', 881.

on the wills of others, and freedom is a function of possession'.[264] Therefore, the Giaour's regret that '[y]et sometimes with remorse in vain | I wish she had not loved again' (1054–5) further develops this chain. The Giaour's remorse comes from Leila's death, which is the expense of love without freedom in the tyrannical system. Meanwhile, when the Giaour views himself as Cain, another layer of his remorse comes from Hassan's death, which is the expense of his obedience to the tyrannical social order endorsed by the imposed belief. For himself, the Giaour's remorse comes from his loss of love and freedom, which is the expense of human untamedness against the system and the order. Shahidha Bari suggests that 'the Giaour's apostatic Christianity posits a Western religious scepticism in the face of the strict sexual morality of Hassan's Islamic theocracy'.[265] This is a safer pronouncement about the Giaour's position in Hassan and Leila's world, and it is true that the challenge is not an enlightenment. The Giaour is named from the oriental view. The monks in the monastery and their reactions to the Giaour reflect the Western attitudes towards those who do not obey the rules: 'Saint Francis, keep him from the shrine' (909)! These vastly different systems share an astonishingly similar tyranny: imposing physical death and disregarding solitude. 'I wish she had not loved again' (1055), for love without freedom leads only to pain within the established world of tyrannical beliefs.

The tragedy in *The Giaour*, or maybe some following Tales, has its origin in such a struggle with uncertain results: 'In vain might Liberty invoke | The spirit to its bondage broke | Or raise the neck that courts the yoke' (161–3). Liberty may in vain invoke the rebellious spirit, but it cannot save the life. The certainty of doom and gloom is independent from the uncertainty in the results, especially when reality cannot witness the existence of spiritual rebellion and the physical embodiment cannot survive. Byron reconciles life with liberty through human feelings in his fiction. This is to say that the imposing order that deprives liberty of love can only result in pain, and that love with liberty is at least effective in arousing humane reactions. When the

[264] C. B. Macpherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962), p. 3.
[265] Minta, 'At the Margins of Europe', p. 108.

transferable humane reactions are at essence opposing to the order, they realise completions of human nature and human life. This is why Byron makes the fiction spread to the unnecessarily existing confidante through the last narrator—the monk's—narrative with a hopeful ending of the embodiment of 'Woe without name—or hope—or end' (276). When the monk is originally the spokesman of the imposing order, Byron elaborates how his human feelings are called out to be against the established belief. Before going further into the elaborations, this section will start with Byron's equal representations of the pain of restrained love in any tyrannically hierarchical society. First of all, Byron introduces the symbolic butterfly of Kashmeer along with a maid to obfuscate the background of the story. It functions similarly to the Rose, but more deliberately:

> A chase of idle hopes and fears,
> Begun in folly, closed in tears.
> If won, to equal ills betrayed,
> Woe waits the insect and the maid,
> A life of pain, the loss of peace,
> From infant's play, and man's caprice:
> The lovely toy so fiercely sought
> Hath lost its charm by being caught,
> For every touch that wooed its stay
> Hath brush'd its brightest hues away. (398–407)

When the flowers from 'rose to tulip' represent an unapproachable past, they also indicate a hopeless future, because 'There man, enamour'd of distress, | Should mar it into wilderness, | And trample, brute-like, o'er each flower' (50–2). Greece has been lost, not as a realistic country, but as a utopia where people are free from '[t]he freed inheritors of Hell' who are now in power dwelling in the 'heavenly thrones' (65, 64). Byron again strays from the exact storyline to abstract the features of this tyrannically ruled world in the fact that the powerful exploit the weak and delicate, like the 'infant' to the butterfly, and the 'man' to the maid. The established hierarchical system is confirmed by social order and endorsed by social belief. The Giaour, as the sole survivor of the love story, bears the mission of completing the war—not between the Islamic and Christian orders, but between love, freedom, and equality on one side, and imposed

belief on the other.

Minta asserts that '[t]here is no moral, no sense of binary satisfaction, available in *The Giaour*', since the cultural representations do not struggle with each other in essence.[266] Minta further asserts that '[i]t suggests that life is not very different at the margins from anywhere else; indeed, that the whole idea of margin and centrality is a convenient illusion that blurs the quality of sameness'.[267] To judge how *The Giaour* clarifies the 'quality of sameness', it is helpful to put the two scenes from their very own cultures together:

> Lady, a fearful bride thy Son hath wed —
> Me, not from mercy, did they spare,
> But this empurpled pledge to bear.
> Peace to the brave! whose blood is spilt —
> Woe to the Giaour! for his the guilt. (718–22)
>
> From him the half-affrighted Friar,
> When met alone, would fain retire—(845–46)
>
> The sablest of the serpent-braid
> That o'er her fearful forehead strayed —
> For he declines the convent oath,
> And leaves those locks unhallowed growth—(897–900)
>
> To love the softest hearts are prone,
> But such can ne'er be all his own (916–17)

When the Giaour's revenge cannot be justified in accordance with 'the strict sexual morality of Hassan's Islamic theocracy', and his ability to love is doubted for his blasphemous serpent-braid, the core conflict is not what he has done but that he 'declines the convent oath' (899). In the previous scene, Hassan is dead as a custodian of public morals with a denial of the legitimacy of the Giaour's love, and the monastery reaches the same conclusion for the Giaour because he lacks obedience. Following the Tartar's complaint to his master's mother, a curse is elaborated to give the Giaour a family and then break it:

[266] Minta, 'At the Margins of Europe', p. 110.
[267] Minta, 'At the Margins of Europe', p. 110.

Shall bless thee with a *father's* name —
That word shall wrap thy heart in flame! (769–70)

Then with unhallowed hand shalt tear
The tresses of her yellow hair,
Of which in life a lock when shorn
Affection's fondest pledge was worn,
But now is borne away by thee,
Memorial of thine agony! (775–80)

Then stalking to thy sullen grave —
Go—and with Gouls and Afrits rave (783–4)

The Giaour's blasphemy in the monastery is manifested through his distance from and disobedience to their order. In response, the monks isolate him, transforming solitude into a cage to prevent his access to 'the shrine'. As the Giaour disrupts the Islamic family, an imagined family is constructed and subsequently destroyed. Social identity becomes a tool of control used to discipline the heterodox. When the Giaour delivers his final discourse before the representative monk, he appears to recognise the gravity of the problem; his remorse extends not only to Leila and himself but also to Hassan and all victims of a hierarchical society dominated by religious theocracy. Particularly through the curse describing the imaginative collapse of the Giaour's family, Byron deliberately positions Hassan and the protagonist as cross-references to one another. As mentioned, the Giaour extends his understanding of Hassan that 'Faithless to him—he gave the blow; | But true to me—I laid him low' (1064–5). The understanding seems in contradiction with his later claim that 'I grieve, but not, my holy Guide! | For him who dies, but her who died —' (1121–2). The truth is that the emphasis remains unchanged regarding his subjective belief in love's justification of his behaviour, even as he reminds the monk that love is a universal experience and that all become victims when it is judged by imposed belief. His acknowledgement of Hassan's justification is to free love from the real authority. Without taking the risk to judge whether Hassan loves Leila really or not, the Giaour avoids falling into the cultural debate around possessiveness in love. He is in defence of love's existence and purity. Then the tragedy lies solely in

love's being devastated. This powerful suggestion brings about his justification which is finally realised in the monk's 'generous tear' (1322). The monk represents religious authority in this Tale and is part of the imposing system that seeks to erase the Giaour's existence within the monastery. Exploring his transition toward empathy is worthwhile, as it sheds light on how love can liberate individuals from restraint and transformation—responding to the similarly harrowing and isolating concept of redemption across different religions.

6.2. Monks and alienated human nature in the Tales

The figures of monks and monastic institutions are broadly represented across the Tales, from *The Giaour* to *Parisina*. Byron uses them as effective reflections of religion's cruelty and inhumanity. Particularly in the indirect portrayal of the monk in *The Giaour*, Byron contrasts the ineffectual redemption offered by religion with the redemptive power of human feeling and empathy, which serves to liberate the chained soul into a state of vitality and humanity. This form of blasphemous redemption desacralises the rigid and tyrannical religious order. Through his depictions of various priestly figures, Byron reasserts and critiques the inhumane tendencies of oppressive religious institutions and appeals to his readers for liberty—even revolutionary passion.

The monk in *The Giaour* suggests that the recovery of a genuine individual's human feelings constitutes both a blasphemy against systematic hatred and a redemption for humanity. As mentioned above and also indicated in the lines below, the representative monk indeed functions to guarantee a hopeful ending of the Giaour's posthumous story connected with his friend:

> He pass'd—nor of his name and race
> Hath left a token or a trace,
> Save what the father must not say
> Who shrived him on his dying day;
> This broken tale was all we knew
> Of her he lov'd, or him he slew (1329–34)

The monk is both a character in the story and probably the narrator of the last part of the story. However, as a character, his performances are mainly indicated in the Giaour's speech; as a narrator, his narrative is also indirect—this leaked 'broken tale' may be second-hand from the Giaour's friend, who has heard about it probably from the monk. The latter way of narrative works along with the deliberately designed 'friend' to augment the originality and authenticity of this story. The indicated performances of the monk as a character of the story help to evoke Byron's Christian readers' sympathy to the protagonist's experience. When the Giaour gives his speech, the readers are in fact placed in the confessor's role to listen to him.

The description suggests he is probably part of those who, '[w]hen met alone, would fain retire' (847). This is also in accordance with the monk's first indicated action in the Giaour's speech, which is to 'start', then 'bend [his] knee' (1036) when listening to our protagonist's bloody words. This reaction recalls the previous argument about the sameness instead of difference from the other religion. The Giaour notices this and is dissatisfied; he complains with mockery 'Thou wilt absolve me from the deed, | For he was hostile to thy creed' (1038–9). It is ironic that the Giaour, in his Christian title stigmatised by the Muslim, reminds us that he should be absolved for killing an enemy. But this is not the emphasis here, since the Giaour's pain does not stem from the murder itself. The opening depiction once again uncovers the dogmatic essence of imposing judgements upon untamedness in both religions. Byron depicts the Giaour's sneering at this through his continuous disagreements:

> Still, ere thou dost condemn me—pause —
> Not mine the act, though I the cause (1060–1)
>
> To thee, old man, my deeds appear —
> I read abhorrence on thy brow,
> And this too was I born to bear! (1160–2)
>
> Think me not the thankless—but this grief
> Looks not to priesthood for relief
> My soul's estate in secret guess —
> But would'st thou pity more—say less —
> When thou can'st bid my Leila live,

Then will I sue thee to forgive. (1206–11)

The monk's behaviour is quite clearly but indirectly elaborated. He was to 'condemn' but was denied; he was to exhort with 'abhorrence on [his] brow' but was stopped; he did preach a sermon, but Byron omitted it, because that 'seems to have had so little effect upon the patient, that it could have no hopes from the reader' (note to 1207, *CPW* 3: 422). Chatsiou believes that

> Byron stresses the Giaour's indifference towards the monk's urges for penitence…and actually omits the monk's sermon, portraying thus Christian religion as hollow and unable to offer what it claims, namely, forgiveness, salvation, and eternal peace of the soul.[268]

This is true. Byron expresses his own blasphemous idea here against the religious redemptive power, and he probably also satirises the Resurrection by the Giaour's request to 'bid my Leila live'. In the meanwhile, I think it is more important to identify that this is a process through which Byron desacralises for his readers the monk along with the religion. Byron demonstrates the development of the monk from a religious symbol to a sympathetic human being whom the Giaour 'thank[s] for the generous tear' because his own 'glazing eye would never shed' again out of overwhelmed despair (1322–3). With the Giaour's contrastive reactions, Byron makes it clear that it is the theocratic, imposing judgements that are being rejected, rather than the monk's interaction. For those readers who take the monk's place, when they develop their emotional reactions from 'abhorrence on [the] brow' to 'tear' in their eyes, like the monk, their religious identity fades and their humanity regains a hold. The Giaour's expression of gratitude further encourages readers' empathy towards this blasphemous protagonist and prompts them to question religious morals through the humanistic concerns evoked by this loving figure. When the monk fails to maintain his divine-endorsed authority, it is human feeling that grants him a sentimental redemption, allowing him to become humane.

In contrast to the monastery's initial arrogant assumption that the Giaour is

[268] Chatsiou, 649.

incapable of love, the monk's reactions ironically reveal the doctrine's failure to suppress human empathy and the experience of love—and of the pain that comes when love is deprived of freedom. This depiction affirms the power of love to awaken human nature in resistance to the controlling force of tyrannical belief.

As indicated in the arguments above, the sentimental empathy is not designed for the monk, but the readers who takes the observatory position to the story. In *Parisina*, Byron's depiction of Hugo's death can be quite effective in moving the readers. Not by coincidence, a priest is introduced as part of the background of the scene. Though 'not disdaining priestly aid' (465), Hugo's death composes an irony of blasphemy even in a stronger sense than the Giaour's refusal. Calling back on the strange scene of repentance, apart from the 'unbound' eyes, Hugo's last commanding word—'strike'—represents some disquietude. Mole suggests that 'Hugo's instruction to his executioners makes him once again an agent, not simply a victim'.[269] Mole adds, 'He symbolically usurps Azo's right to command by appropriating the death sentence'.[270] In other words, to the end of his life, like the Giaour, Hugo realises his freedom from outside domination. When Hugo takes the power and leads to all the after-life horrors under 'physical circumstances', Byron poses a gesture against the fake consolable reality of death which is modified by the authority of belief.[271] In this way, the Gothic depiction of death, with the realistic horror it evokes, helps to unveil the truth of human life and mortality. It further serves to rationalise unpleasant human feelings and emotions, preventing them from being manipulated to legitimise false authority. Mole's argument also reminds that Byron in fact introduces the invisible agent, Azo, in this scene. There is a battle between Azo and Hugo concerning their power over an individual's life. By Hugo's own instruction of his execution, Byron not only desacralises the religions and disenchants his readers from illusory religious offerings, but also conducts an irony against the secular despotism over man's body and life endorsed by the imposing system of belief. Both the priest of the religion and the executioner, who can be viewed as the priest of

[269] Tom Mole, 'Byron and the Good Death', *Byron and Marginality*, edited by Norbert Lennartz (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018), pp. 233–53, p. 239.
[270] Mole, 'Byron and the Good Death', p. 239.
[271] 'Disraeli's Monument to Byron', p. 299.

the government, are undermined to reflect Byron's contemporary representations of a radicalised and overwhelming blasphemy which celebrates spiritual freedom and human autonomy in both life and death.

In *The Giaour*, the monk initially embodies two predominant features typical of characters in the Tales who have entrenched themselves within the tyrannical system governed by rigid belief: first, the alienation of their feelings and values as ordinary human beings; and second, their being overlooked—either by the arbitrary system they serve or by the rebels opposing it. When the monk is moved to tears by the Giaour's vivid expressions of pain and love, his human nature temporarily overcomes the rigid doctrine to which he has long been accustomed. However, in most cases, alienated human feeling remains concealed beneath submission to the tyrannical system. As Franklin notices, in Byron's age, 'romantic love was minimized or manipulated by the plot to accord with social duty to the heroine's father, [who is usually believed to be] the venerable patriarch of beleaguered traditional values'.[272] Byron's opposition to the authority of realism sometimes lies in his sympathetic depiction of the manipulated characters. Especially in his Byronic return to *The Siege of Corinth*, a full-scale assassination against a city of traditional Christian belief is underway to 'overthrow' the religion and the government along with the finally conquered city.

There are no specific priests in this poem. Francesca's soul, or the imaginative Francesca in Alp's dream, takes the role of the monk in *The Giaour* to do some taming and regulating work to the real Francesca's lover. In the cold depiction that ''and her motionless lips lay still as death, | And her words came forth without her breath' (567–8), the dead Francesca is used, unsuccessfully, as a mouthpiece representing the Christian values to evoke Alp's 'good' thoughts. If this is a soul, this plot is a case of how Byron undisguisedly puts his criticism of Christianity into his verse tales. As Franklin asserts, 'she is a cipher and the speech urging him to do his duty as a Christian is merely projected through her image'.[273] In this depiction, Byron ironises 'the constricting ideology of Christianity', whose endorsement to the rigid hierarchical

[272] Franklin, p. 38.
[273] Franklin, p. 70.

system of the city results her death once, and now 'killed her doppelgänger' again.[274] The brutal exploitation of the people reflects the inhumane essence of the system. If the soul is not a separate entity but rather an imaginative projection of Alp himself—which is possible—it is subjected to the gaze and control of the system, representing a habitual surrender to tyranny. Its failure, then, marks a moment of rupture, a breakthrough against the rigidity of such restraint.[275] Moreover, by emphasising the transparency in '[i]t was so wan and transparent of hue, | You might have seen the moon shine through' (516–17), Byron unveils the weakness of the tyranny without a realistically established body. Compared with Leila, Francesca is not excessively idealised as a symbol of pure and unstained love—perhaps because Alp himself was raised in the city of Corinth. This possible interpretation of projection suggests that, even as a rebel, he struggles to overcome the deeply implanted doctrines of his upbringing. That he ultimately leads the siege but is doomed to fail reflects the rigidity of established orders and belief systems. This may offer a pessimistic reflection on Byron's own failed attempt at reform, as seen in *Hebrew Melodies*.

Francesca is not the only spokeswoman of Christianity in *The Siege of Corinth*, but the others are unable to speak. If it is doubtable of Francesca's position, the others are invisible. In the final explosion, when the church is fired, Byron depicts no priests apart from naming 'the Christian band' (972). The priests in this poem are omitted like the monk's sermon in *The Giaour*. However, it is better to describe them as being desacralised to be common warriors in the explosion. All of them become ash, like the Christian and Islamic bodies in the black water in the first two cantos of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* but in a more pointed way, which reveals Byron's distaste over different tyrannical systems. Byron warns his readers that wars driven by religious and political conflicts cause needless human suffering and death, and that priests are merely another group of ordinary individuals. Those who perish in such wars do not elevate the rulers' status; rather, their deaths only underscore the tyrants' vanity.

Watkins comments on the gunpowder beneath the church as an irony that 'the

[274] Franklin, p. 70.
[275] Alp's struggle can be viewed together with Selim's appeasement.

Christian church is resting upon foundations stored with the weapons of destruction'.[276] This can be viewed together with another fact that the Giaour gets in the monastery, because 'Great largess to these walls he brought, | And thus our Abbot's favour bought' (816–17). Yin comments that '[t]he acquiescence to money as an alternative to religious devotion only emphasizes the dependence of Christian hospitality on some kind of payment, be it worldly cash or otherworldly faith'.[277] I prefer to conclude with Byron's complete representation of the essence of the tyrannical system: the exploitation with the help of imposed belief and brutal violence. Byron's blasphemy thus extends further in his representations of the final group of characters: men in power. Hassan's death, Giaffir's sorrow at Zuleika's demise, and Azo's silence in response to Hugo's discourse all suggest Byron's critical stance towards tyranny. In presenting these figures—even the tyrants themselves—as victims of the systems they uphold, Byron underscores the destructiveness of hierarchical authority. Furthermore, he uses Minotti as a vehicle through which to interrogate the foundational bond between ecclesiastical and secular power. The explosion Minotti initiates by firing upon the church satirises the unholy alliance between religion and secular despotism. These two forces, Byron implies, collude to exploit the lower classes and ultimately bury everyone—literally and symbolically—beneath the ruins of their joint oppression. This moment decisively undermines the legitimacy of the hierarchical structures of tyranny and exploitation. In the final two Tales, Byron's blasphemy grows more expansive and radical. Recalling the failure of his Byronic return, his paradoxical position becomes even more apparent: he longs to free himself from the entrenched systems that constrain him—including the machinery of his own celebrity—but remains necessarily entangled within them. Though he despises the superiority and coercive power of institutional authority, his aristocratic self-identification risks replicating the same forms of tyranny within the poetic realm. These can also lead to Byron's representation of the battle in Canto III of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, where he takes on the power of nature, trying to usurp the

[276] Daniel Watkins, *Social Relations in Byron's Eastern Tales* (New Jersey: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1987), p. 115.
[277] Yin, 15.

legitimacy of the church and the government and identify them as blasphemous against human life and liberty, as argued in the first chapter.

7. ‘I have a love for freedom too’

Following the argument about love in *The Giaour* that love itself can be unstained against the tyrannical system in extreme idealisation, in *The Bride of Abydos* and *The Corsair*, love’s representations are more complicated. A main reason is that no character relies on the extreme idealisation of love to confirm its purified existence. In this way, love’s existence becomes questionable for all the characters, as it is influenced and even dominated by different recognitions and desires. I argue that Byron represents the relationship between love and liberty in various ways to affirm the capacity of human feelings to reflect on—and even rectify—the constraints imposed by hierarchical tyrannies rooted in the alliance between secular despotism and religious authority. This can be viewed as an early preparation for his representation of real human life as a whole in *Don Juan*. In the successful or failed rebellions against such restraints stimulated by uncertain love, Byron both questions the systematic alienation of human nature and suggests some hope in human liberty.

The Bride of Abydos is the second Tale Byron published on 2 December 1813. The time was unusual for Byron in every aspect. Regarding politics, after his failure in the parliamentary speeches, on 14 November he wrote, ‘I have declined presenting the Debtor’s Petition, being sick of parliamentary mummeries’ (*BLJ* 3: 206), though he still attended the House until he left Britain. Regarding poetry, with his increasing celebrity since the publication of *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage*, on 24 November he complained, ‘Who would write, who had anything better to do?…“Actions—actions”, I say, and not writing,—least of all, rhyme…what a worthless, idle brood it is’ (*BLJ* 3: 220–1); nevertheless, six days later, he told Moore: ‘All convulsions end with me in rhyme, and to solace my midnights, I have scribbled another Turkish story’ (*BLJ* 3: 184). Finally regarding his personal life, it is a much longer story, but the most important issue was that he had begun an incestuous relationship with his half-sister Augusta Leigh, which

lasted for several months. Although he told Lady Melbourne in August that he wanted to elope with Augusta, he was at the same time embroiled in other affairs. In such a curious period, *The Bride of Abydos* 'was written in four nights to distract my dreams from * *' (*BLJ* 3: 208). Byron further described his feeling of this Tale:

> *The Bride of Abydos* was published on Thursday the second of December, but how it is liked or disliked, I know not. Whether it succeeds or not is no fault of the public, against whom I can have no complaint. But I am much more indebted to the tale than I can ever be to the most partial reader; as it wrung my thought from reality to imagination—from selfish regrets to vivid recollections—and recalled me to a country replete with the *brightest* and *darkest*, but always most *lively* colours of my memory. (*BLJ* 3: 230–1)

Rishmawi suggests that '[t]he East, just like poetry itself, offers a safety valve, an emotional by-pass which prevents Byron from going mad'.[278] For fear of the reading of certain 'imperialism of imagination' in Byron's very personal fantasy, Rishmawi unwillingly includes Byron's 'feelings of guilt about his incestuous relationship with his half-sister Augusta' which might drive Byron 'mad' in brackets.[279] However, if Byron's 'dreams' were concerning the 'country replete with the *brightest* and *darkest*', the 'most *lively* colours of my memory' should come from at least two parts: the East and his half-sister. And the latter should be even clearer and stronger because it was closer and contrasted with Byron's affair with Lady Frances. It is striking that critics often downplay the significance of love in the Tales, especially in *The Bride of Abydos*. Yet this ambiguity is both reflected in Byron's own personal perplexities and emerges, in this section, as a definitive feature of the triangular relationship between Selim, Zuleika, and Giaffir. The ambiguity operates through unexpected dimensions and, at the same time, encourages the reader to observe dispassionately what Byron has never concealed. I contend that *The Bride of Abydos* marks Byron's first comparatively sustained poetic exploration of the entanglement between love and liberty within a tyrannical system. I further argue that the tale's ambiguous portrayal of love ultimately gestures not towards a genuine romantic relationship, but towards a collective

[278] Rishmawi, 49.
[279] Rishmawi, 49.

experience of victimhood under tyranny—developing the critique initiated in *The Giaour* into a more radicalised blasphemous representation of devastating political and religious establishments.

When Byron strengthened the ability of love in pursuing liberty, he laid more emphasis on love's ability to test and challenge the system. With the tragic and less tragic endings of *The Bride of Abydos* and *The Corsair*, he further appeals for self-awakening revolutionary passion against all tyrannical systems. In this section, I compare the main characters' storylines, with particular emphasis on the representations of feeling and love, to reveal how Byron disrupts the imposed hierarchies of gender, tyranny, victimhood, fiction, and reality, ultimately appealing for liberation from all forms of tyrannical systems founded on rigid belief.

7.1. Individual metamorphosis as a reflection of tyranny

Before introducing the varied representations of love and liberty, along with the three noteworthy rebellions, it is important to begin with the characters' uncertain identifications. Change plays a central role in Byron's representations—not merely because it reflects or drives the development of the narrative, but more significantly because it reveals the human capacity to be affected. Change does not imply perfection or progress; rather, it embodies human nature and the freedom to feel and to act. When Byron renders change as tragic, he thereby questions the origins of the alienation of human nature within tyrannical establishments. Beaton writes that '[t]he heroes of these tales have the power to invent or transform themselves. …Identity is not stable in these poems, but willed by the protagonists—or the controlling hand of their creator'.[280] Tyranny, typically, can render the male effeminate (as in Selim), just as it can render the female masculine (as in Gulnare)—yet neither represents a final or fixed state. Moreover, in keeping with Byron's habitual abstraction and tendency to blur his characters' outlines, the leading role itself becomes mutable as the narrative develops.

[280] Beaton, p. 33.

The shifting power structures within the Tales produce corresponding metamorphoses in the characters, further underscoring the instability of identity under oppressive systems.

It is interesting that Byron presents his main characters in unstable forms in *The Bride of Abydos* and *The Corsair*. The active and the passive, or the masculine and the feminine, sides of the characters objectively reflect Byron's adoption of the characters as a tool to visualise the different human conditions caused by the outside force. A particularly clear conversion of androgyny appears in the figures of Selim, Conrad, and Gulnare. In this way, Leask believes, 'Byron displaced the political dimensions of a "radicalised hero" into the terms of gender, thereby finding a way of surreptitiously overcoming the limits imposed upon him by the norms of representation and his own political ideology'.[281] In other words, the androgynous representations are Byron's externalisation of the transformation in the characters' minds which are under the control of a tyrannical system. It reflects Byron's critique of the systematic alienation of human nature and his appeal to be against this control.

Critics widely acknowledge Selim's 'metamorphosis from effeminate Turkish prince to heroic Greek Galiongee or pirate' as a key point of *The Bride of Abydos*.[282] Regarding the effeminacy, Rishmawi agrees with Gleckner that the reason why Selim's 'love and human feelings' are regarded as such is that Giaffir's 'world which is strictly run by the power of his mind' rejects this romantic inclination as 'unmanly'.[283] From another perspective of power struggle, Mole emphasises, "Giaffir [the usurping uncle] keeps [Selim] under surveillance…and tries to coerce the rebellion out of him [by] marking him down as effeminate, weak and worthless'.[284] These two opinions both emphasise the tyrant's arbitrariness, though out of different considerations, and view the effeminacy as an imposing label. Thorslev, however, suggests that a platonic

[281] Leask, pp. 44–5.
[282] Leask, p. 41.
[283] Rishmawi, p. 51.
[284] Tom Mole, 'The Bride of Abydos: The Regime of Visibility and the Possibility of Resistance', *Liberty and Poetical Licence: New Essays on Byron*, edited by Bernard Beatty, Charles Robinson, Tony Howe (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2008), pp. 20–36, p. 25.

tradition influenced the Romantics to seek representations of androgyny. This tradition lies in *The Symposium*, where the 'pristine and hermaphroditic soul of original man...was split by Apollo into two "monosexual" parts, each of which is destined to spend a lifetime searching for his or her other half'.[285] And because the 'brother-sister affection is both strongest and most pure', the representation of androgyny further develops into incestuous love.[286] Put the incest in *The Bride* aside, this interpretation emphasises androgyny as an inherent feature, and effeminacy is part of the character by nature. This interpretation, compared with the former two, can only suggest the presence of the effeminacy, but can hardly explain the metamorphosis. The former two opinions can help to explain the metamorphosis but are less effective in identifying the masculinity outside Giaffir's realm. To explain the metamorphosis and better understand its suggestion, the key is the contradiction between Selim's human feelings and the imposing order. From the beginning of the second canto, Byron recounts that Selim has been a pirate leader for some time. The reason he exposes himself is because Zuleika will marry some other person who is 'kinsman of the Bey Oglou' and that Giaffir differentiates him from 'a boy' (I: 206, 208). This set a target in the competition of love. Selim feels it necessary to show that he is also powerful and no longer 'a boy' to match Zuleika. Noticeably, as Franklin points out, because of his effeminacy, 'he is allowed into the harem (I, 67) [which] shows that...he is...regarded as sexually immature or impotent'.[287] So, the direct reason for Selim's metamorphosis is to tell Zuleika about his masculinity:

> I said I was not what I seemed —
> And now thou seest my words were true;
> I have a tale thou hast not dreamed,
> If sooth—its truth must others rue.
> My story now 'twere vain to hide,
> I must not see thee Osman's bride:
> But had not thine own lips declared
> How much of that young heart I shared,

[285] Peter Thorslev, 'Incest as Romantic Symbol', *Comparative Literature Studies*, 2 (1965), 41–58, 54.
[286] Thorslev, 'Incest as Romantic Symbol', 54.
[287] Franklin, p. 55.

I could not, must not, yet have shown
The darker secret of my own. —
In this I speak not now of love —
That—let time, truth, and peril prove. (II: 151–62)

Selim explains his metamorphosis in two parts: Firstly, he now knows '[h]ow much of that young heart I shared', or he believes so; secondly, he must be competitive with 'Osman'. This is tragic for two reasons. Firstly, he agrees on the connection between love and power. Secondly, he does not know Zuleika's love is ambiguous, though she asserts that:

Without thy free consent, command —
The Sultan should not have my hand!
Think'st though that I could bear to part
With thee—and learn to halve my heart? (I: 315–18)

The indicated kinship of reliance cannot fully represent love—which I will further elaborate on later—but Selim mistakes it for love because power has taught him possessiveness rather than love. He gains confidence by exposing himself. It is worth asking whether, in the presence of true love, he would still take such a risk. He ought to be a pirate leader accustomed to concealment, not a radical on the verge of instigating a revolt. Alienated from love, he remains unconsciously insecure. He internalises the dominant belief, long imposed by the tyrant and long appeased by himself, that he must perform masculinity in order to be worthy of love. This alienated conception of love drives him to enact a performance of manliness. Thus, he appears to complete his first metamorphosis. However, one must not overlook Gleckner and Mole's arguments that the source of his effeminacy lies in a repression of human feeling and romantic inclination. There is another metamorphosis from the seeming masculine pirate leader back to effeminacy, I believe, which is very short, just before his death:

There as his last step left the land,
And the last death-blow dealt his hand —
Ah! wherefore did he turn to look
For her his eye but sought in vain?
That pause—that fatal gaze he took —

Hath doomed his death—or fixed his chain—(II: 561–5)

The never loosened chain regains its tyranny upon the manipulated life. The death look of love ends in vain, suggesting the end of Selim's two metamorphoses. Love definitely works in both situations, but it failed in its battle with established authority. Selim's death thus represents the severe impact of the imposed belief upon the human beings. When the readers empathise with the doomed Selim for his love, Byron suggests an accusation against the manipulation by the tyrants and authority of belief and poses a veiled call for liberty and insistent revolution.

According to Gleckner's opinion, Conrad's embracing romantic love with Medora seems to reveal some effeminacy. Mary Shelley would also relate 'the dear Corsair expression half savage half soft' when remarking Robert Finch.[288] It might be safer to explore the love representation from Medora's perspective later, but it is clear that Conrad also reveals his androgyny in a metamorphosis into a more feminine figure compared with his primary manly and knightly figure as head of the corsairs after he is captured, hopelessly waiting for the doom:

> His steel and impious prayer attract alike —
> The storm rolled onward, and disdained to strike;
> Its peal waxed fainter—ceased—he felt alone,
> As if some faithless friend had spurned his groan! (III: 266–9)

When feeling 'alone' and his 'groan' reveals his weakness, '[p]assively indifferent to a fate he feels powerless to direct, Conrad is, in the poem's politics of gender, feminized', according to Wolfson.[289] Conrad's first metamorphosis is completed with the help of Gulnare. Wolfson adds: 'His attack on Seyd not only results in his own capture and subjection, but is bettered by Gulnare's attack on Seyd'.[290] The imposed tyrannical restraints make a man effeminate, but this is not the ending of Conrad. There is another short-last metamorphosis back to masculinity:

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[288] Mary Shelley, '26 April 1819', *The Letters of Mary W. Shelley*, vol. 1, edited by Frederick L. Jones (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1946), p. 68.
[289] Wolfson, 'Couplets, Self, and "The Corsair"', 511.
[290] Wolfson, 'Couplets, Self, and "The Corsair"', 511.

He, half forgetting danger and defeat,
Returns their greeting as a chief may greet,
Wrings with a cordial grasp Anselmo's hand,
And feels he yet can conquer and command! (III: 502–5)

And now he turned him to that dark-eyed slave,
Whose brow was bowed beneath the glance he gave,
Who now seemed changed and humbled:—faint and meek (III: 531–3)

He clasped that hand—it trembled—and his own
Had lost its firmness, and his voice its tone.
'Gulnare!'—but she replied not—'dear Gulnare!'
She raised her eye—her only answer there —
At once she sought and sunk in his embrace (III: 539–43)

With Gulnare's first metamorphosis in killing Seyd, her second metamorphosis back to be 'humbled:—faint and meek' delighted some contemporary readers. *The Monthly Review* happily welcomed 'the return of that natural softness which must ever form a prevailing feature in the female character'.[291] Compared with this 'natural softness', Conrad, regaining his leadership, regains his manhood. Franklin reminds of the irony that 'in order to escape Gulnare must become masculinized, but Conrad must passively submit to being rescued by feminine means'.[292] She also mentions that Byron celebrated a 'subversive "feminine" capacity for passion, as a defiant avowal of individualism at a time when there seemed to be a consensus on the need for moral rigour and social conformity'.[293] If we view this also as a response to *The Monthly Review*'s comment, it is clear that Byron's metamorphosis works flexibly to avoid public criticism but still evoke unignorable revolutionary passion. I further argue in the following sections that Gulnare's revolt composes the only self-realised revolt in the name of love, while Conrad has no possibility of success as the representative of authority of social order.

As Mole asserts, in Giaffir's realm beneath his gaze, his power is imposed.[294] And Selim's crew, as Ford asserts, is 'united only by their being situated outside the

[291] *The Monthly Review*, 189.
[292] Franklin, p. 78.
[293] Franklin, p. 76.
[294] Mole, 'Byron and the Good Death', p. 239.

constraints of society and law'.[295] Selim boasts of their '[o]bedience to [his] command', and views them only as 'instruments' (II: 368–73). Gleckner also questions against Selim's desire for freedom achieved within '[his] sabre's length' which seems 'only another form of slavery'.[296] In the realm of Giaffir, he is exploited; in the realm of piracy, he exploits others. When the former reveals his effeminacy, he wants also to gain manliness in tyranny. This is also reflected in the performed metamorphosis; after he unveils his piracy, he takes advantage of the social authority of belief to tame Zuleika. Franklin thinks that '[with] masculinity and martial identity, Selim assumes authority by right of gender in his relationship with Zuleika'.[297] The female is more vulnerable, thus revealing more obvious reflections of the authority's restraints in the depiction of their life.

Still, I think the origin of Selim's performance does not stop at gender, but can trace back through the hierarchical system. In his commanding words to Zuleika, it is clear that his cognition is also decided and alienated by the tyrannical system:

> And woman, more than man, when death or woe,
> Or even Disgrace, would lay her lover low —
> Sunk in the lap of Luxury will shame —
> Away suspicion!—*not* Zuleika's name!
> But life is hazard at the best—and here
> No more remains to win, and much to fear—(II: 440–5)

Concerning only Selim and Zuleika, Selim gives this hysterical speech. However, his 'fear' of the relationship is never out of the unequal 'right of gender' indicated between himself and Zuleika, but due to 'Osman's power, and Giaffir's stern decree' (II: 447) and their predictable exploitation of Zuleika, which he now views as within his realm. Selim assures his love to Zuleika, through '[f]or thee in those bright isles is built a bower' (II: 408). This new harem is to claim that he can now possess and dominate Zuleika. And the legitimacy is from the ambiguous kinship and more importantly his own powerful manliness among his crew, which is used by Giaffir to rule over him. For

[295] Ford, p. 47.
[296] Gleckner, p. 130.
[297] Franklin, p. 60.

Selim's final doom, and Giaffir's 'idle grief' (II: 655) on Zuleika's subsequent death, Gleckner also believes that Giaffir is now victim to his own tyranny, but he simply concludes that 'neither Selim nor Giaffir is right or wrong. All men suffer from the tyranny of their minds and the futility of their passions'.[298] Rishmawi interprets this statement as 'Gleckner's attempt to find a universal theme in Byron's poetry, e.g., "the conflict between the mind and the heart"', but he also acknowledges that this 'goes against the simple rules of common sense'.[299] First and foremost, the statement is inaccurate in its characterisation of Giaffir's and Selim's situations. Original human nature is neither inherently right nor wrong; rather, it is their conduct that reveals tyrannical tendencies. The fact that they are also victims does not exempt them from moral scrutiny. Only through an assessment of the consequences of their actions can the underlying causes of human tragedy be brought to light.

When Selim says, 'I have a love for freedom too', he does not really. Rishmawi thinks 'Zuleika's love for Selim is undermined by the latter's obsession with the pursuit of freedom, which takes priority over Zuleika's love'.[300] This is not true. The very important evidence of Selim's action for freedom is represented through his metamorphosis. Selim's metamorphosis, as argued, is determined by his love—or rather, his possessiveness—towards Zuleika. This love is ultimately undermined by his internalised desire for the tyrannical power of command. After all, love can only be realised through liberty, which remains distant from Zuleika and is not prioritised by the tyrants in comparison with their pursuit of exploitative power. As mentioned, Selim's fear of the tyrants transforms him into another tyrant; through his behaviour, he ends up justifying the very authority he ought to oppose. Conrad has the same problem. He says:

> Lady! I look to none—my lips proclaim
> What last proclaimed they—Conrad still the same:
> Why should'st thou seek an outlaw's life to spare,
> And change the sentence I deserve to bear?

[298] Gleckner, p. 131.
[299] Rishmawi, 52.
[300] Rishmawi, 56.

Well have I earned—nor here alone—the meed
Of Seyd's revenge, by many a lawless deed.' (III: 282–7)

These lines indicate that Conrad does not view himself as free from social authority. He legitimises Seyd's sentence to him to reveal a self-identification of part of the hierarchical system on the land. Leask's explanation of this denial is that 'Byron downgraded the poem's potential radicalism only to deconstruct the "heroic" alternative in representing the failure of this modern Achilles'.[301] In fact, for Conrad—whose identity is a corsair, free in the sea but still willing to be dominated by the tyrannical system on the land—whether it is to represent the spread of human social order across the sea or not, his obedience to this order, like Selim's fear, suggests that the natural human desire for life and liberty is dominated and alienated in tyrannical order. The order is neither good nor bad, but since both sides are not some benevolent figures, Conrad is using his life to justify the tyranny. When the mind is assimilated to recognise the legitimacy of the tyrannical exploiting system, there is no conflict between the mind and heart, just undaunted revolutionary passion. The universal conflict is thus between the manipulated mind and the possibly liberated soul.

7.2. The alienated human feelings and doomed destiny without freedom

In the comparison between Byron's Tales of 'the eternal triangle' and Blake's *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*, Franklin asserts that both writers 'used the concept of romantic love to stress sexual autonomy as the primordial freedom of the individual and the source (not result) of political freedom'.[302] Recalling my arguments about love with or without liberty, the latter becomes questionable—likely alienated to reflect a dominating mindset and belief system imposed by the restrained, tyrannical social order. Not only in the Tales are women more vulnerable to being manipulated, but also in the real world considering *Anti-Jacobin Review* critiques that Zuleika, Medora, and Gulnare 'make strong love to the man, which is not very decorous, nor yet very

[301] Leask, p. 44.
[302] Franklin, p. 75.

natural'.[303] This makes Byron's inclusion of their alienated feelings—especially Gulnare's struggle for a half-gained freedom from tyranny—more effective in arousing empathy among his principal readership, spreading awareness of the inhumane alienation of love and other human feelings, and ultimately appealing for a more absolute revolution in the name of blasphemy against the rigid social order and tyrannical belief.

This section may also help to explain Selim's doom, since I will argue that Zuleika indeed has no idea of romantic love because of the dominated alienation of her natural feelings. Under such circumstances, Selim's manliness, even before the final look resulting in his death, cannot get rid of weakness and effeminacy for fear of the more powerful tyrannies; while Zuleika's ambiguous love also cannot be confirmed, because, interestingly, Zuleika's role also changes along with the development of the story, and the second half reflects that Selim's recognition of that love is indeed very self-centred. I thus argue that, by portraying Zuleika as a confessor and a victim but never a true beloved in both Giaffir and Selim's despotisms, Byron makes her life and death a powerful irony and denunciation against the manipulation of human life and human feeling by the tyrannical establishment.

Before Francesca's soul becoming a Christian persuader, Zuleika already acts to comfort the potential riot. Zuleika also changes in accordance with Selim's metamorphosis, but it is not another transformation. Her comforting performance cannot work after Selim's metamorphosis, because the manly Selim now rejects her opinion. Watkins comments on the female characters in the Tales that 'Byron here as in other poems perhaps takes unfair advantage of his female character…treating her as entirely passive and as a reward for or object of devotion for men'.[304] This is true for Zuleika, because, although she is not 'entirely passive', she performs because she is passively dominated. It might be surprising to recognise that Zuleika is reluctant to Selim's change. After Selim for the first time claims that '[t]hink not I am what I appear, | I've arms, and friends, and vengeance near' (I: 381–2), she says:

[303] *Anti-Jacobin Review*, 230.
[304] Watkins, *Social Relations*, p. 40.

Think not thou art what thou appearest!
My Selim, thou art sadly changed;
This morn I saw thee gentlest, dearest,
But now thou'rt from thyself estranged. (I: 383–6)

Do all but close thy dying eye,
For that I could not live to try; (I: 404–5)

Zuleika is sharp enough to recognise Selim's change and eager to console him. She feels Selim 'sadly changed' and his rebellious words makes him 'estranged'. She wants to smooth Selim's rebellious thoughts by closing his eyes, and this is because for her father she 'tremble[s] now to meet his eye' (I: 451). In Selim's assertion of his manliness, she recalls the tyranny in her father's eye. For Giaffir's eye, Mole suggests, 'a politics of the gaze is systemic in Giaffir's regime, and deeply inscribed in Islamic society as the poem represents it'.[305] The restrained and dominated Zuleika, though with her innocence, realises its danger but dares not to rebel against such an arbitrary system ruled by her father. Mole also argues that 'the gaze can also become a weapon of resistance', and in this case, Zuleika wants Selim to close his dying eye, because she cannot bear that sorrow while Giaffir can '[see] rebellion there begun' (I: 118); also, she realises the possibility of tyranny in Selim's eyes. When finally they elope to the grotto, Zuleika's appeasement to her father fails. A tricky point is that before Selim's confession, Zuleika shouts out:

— for now I know
Why Giaffir always seemed thy foe;
And I, alas! am Giaffir's child,
For whom thou wert contemned—reviled —
If not thy sister—wouldst thou save
My life—Oh! bid me be thy slave! (II: 178–83)

It seems that she has had some clues of the grudge between Selim and her father, so she realises her relationship with her father is now unreliable, and she proposes a changing relationship. With this cleverness, she makes almost her last sentimental call, 'Oh! bid

[305] Mole, '*The Bride of Abydos*', p. 23.

me be thy slave'. The situation is still that she will be dominated and restrained, even by the so-called lover. I think before she finally dies from grief, she has realised what the future will be. This is because of Byron's comparative depiction of her chamber and the grotto. This comparison is very unique: The chamber is described like a delicate lone cage, while the grotto finally a natural tomb 'enlarged by art' (II: 101). Before, the cave was:

> Where oft her lute she wont to tune,
> And oft her Koran conned apart;
> And oft in youthful reverie
> She dream'd what Paradise might be—
> Where woman's parted soul shall go
> Her Prophet had disdain'd to show; (II: 102–7)

Mole believes this cave 'enables [Selim and Zuleika] to obtain a brief respite from Giaffir's society'.[306] Here, however, for Zuleika, considering her dream about 'what Paradise might be', which is described in Koran, has indicated that this cave is the extension of Giaffir's society for the sake of their religion. Nonetheless, although she never escapes to have a free mind, she enjoys—or at least expects—something other than her cage-like chamber. While now, '[t]here arms were piled, not such as wield… | And one was red—perchance with guilt— | Ah! how without can blood be split' (II: 122, 125–6), the crucial depiction brings about a new tyranny for Zuleika, even more vividly in the cave, and splits her dream into pieces. Her pretending peace which she tries very hard to maintain is broken. Also, as mentioned before, we see Giaffir's 'grief' after Zuleika's death, but because she is both her father's 'pride of heart' and his 'bride for Osman's bed' (II: 656), Zuleika's humanity till now is totally deconstructed and alienated. Franklin comments, '[t]o her father or husband she is seen as an object of value in the exchange of women by men in a patriarchal social system based on dynastic alliance and male primogeniture'.[307] Thus, Zuleika's final death represents her failure in reconciling Selim the new tyrant with Giaffir the elder, as well as her failure in

[306] Mole, '*The Bride of Abydos*', p. 29.
[307] Franklin, p. 38.

recognising the ambiguous love with freedom from that with confinement in the harem. Zuleika's harem is important to visualise the imposing authority upon herself. Zuleika in fact comes from Byron's first attempt at fully characterising the heroine of a narrative poem. He writes of his aims in the new poem:

> I also wished to try my hand on a female character in Zuleika—and have endeavoured as far as ye. grossness of our masculine ideas will allow—to preserve her purity without impairing the ardour of her attachment. (*BLJ* 3: 199)

For Zuleika in the poem, her purity is at the expense of freedom. Ogle comments that Zuleika is restricted by her 'social role', and the 'haram' externalises the restraints upon her world.[308] Because of her natural beauty, a common idea about the heroine Zuleika is that she, 'a woman as both sexually passionate and yet innocent', helps to 'retain the traditional authority of the male sex'.[309] This is not true. The fact should be that the tyrants, both Giaffir and Selim, exploit her innocence for the tyranny. The saying of innocence indicates her harem as another Eden, where there is no knowledge, freedom, or humanity. Zuleika's alienated life and feelings are taken for granted in the love romance, just as Adam and Eve's marriage is taken for granted because there are no other options. Franklin believes that 'the gorgeousness of its concentrated essence cannot dissipate its "air of gloom", for it is also an artificial prison from which she yearns to escape to the cypress grove and the natural equality of the sibling relationship'.[310] The inequality inherent in Zuleika's relationship with the outside world places her awakening love—or what resembles love—at risk. Consequently, another problem underlying Zuleika's tragedy lies deeper still: the alienation of her natural human feelings even before her failed attempt to reconcile the two tyrants. In *The Bride of Abydos*, Zuleika actually at least shows three layers of her feelings actively to Selim:

> Come, lay thy head upon my breast,
> And I will kiss thee into rest (I: 301–2)

[308] Ogle, 26.
[309] Franklin, pp. 48, 47.
[310] Franklin, p. 50.

Thy cheek, thine eyes, thy lips to kiss,
Like this—and this—no more than this;
For, Allah! sure thy lips are flame,
What fever in thy veins is flushing?
My own have nearly caught the same,
At least I felt my cheek too blushing (I: 394–9)

Oh! not my brother!—yet unsay —
God! am I left alone on earth? —
To mourn—I dare not curse—the day
That saw my solitary birth!
Oh! thou wilt love me now no more! (II: 165–9)

I view the first two lines as Zuleika's mother-like love for Selim, because she does treat Selim as a baby. This makes herself a typical image of Our Lady by expecting a sleeping baby's head 'upon her breast'. The second extract changes to romantic love, because she certainly kisses Selim from 'cheek' and 'eyes' to 'lips'. Only the kisses are still motherly, but she feels the 'flame', the 'fever' and '[her] cheek, too blushing'. However, the last extract is again different. Rishmawi believes the third piece is an evidence of Byron's autobiographical representation in this poem which indicates Selim and Zuleika originally are brother and sister. In this case, for fear of 'the consequences of [his own] incestuous relationship, [Byron] deliberately changes the relationship...[but] forgets to change Zuleika's feeling to fit her new status'.[311] As mentioned above, Zuleika does have some idea of their real relationship. However, the third piece here, compared with the wish for Byron's having a bad memory, in fact suggests that, as a young lady living in the harem and reading the Koran, maybe has a slight memory of her own mother. She probably has equated romantic love to kinship. Under such circumstances, when Selim claims no more to be her brother, her complaints that 'God! am I left alone on earth' and 'Oh! thou wilt love me now no more' indicate she actually knows nothing of romantic love. Recalling the confinement in her 'Eden', the representations of her love are more like a supposed devotion input in her mind with restrained and dominated recognition of life without pursuing certain knowledge, let alone true love with freedom. The ambiguous love of Zuleika is after all not love for

[311] Rishmawi, 55.

Selim. Franklin also radically accuses that 'idleness and cultivation of literature are...cherished in his daughter' because the tyrant's power is boasted of in the 'women he maintains in idleness'.[312] The dubious representations of Zuleika's ambiguous love ultimately suggest that social authority, through its imposing belief system, denies the legitimacy of recognisable human feelings—especially love, which cannot be sustained without freedom. In this way, true love inherently resists tyranny, while alienated love exposes the inhumane nature of tyrannical oppression.

In addition, critics really add more rebellious passion in the discussion of the potential incest between Zuleika and Selim. Franklin thinks Byron 'rendered Zuleika's forbidden love more shocking still, by invading the incest taboo—thus giving the poem a decidedly antinomian edge'.[313] The only problem is that the combination of Zuleika's alienated feeling and Selim's dominated nature cannot give birth to true love, but only a command for the appeasement to the tyrants. If love itself is dominated, exploited, and alienated, the incest is also absent, not to mention that both characters have a certain idea of their real relationship. However, it is unfair to say that 'Byron himself finally saw the theme of incest to be really irrelevant to the dramatic development he had in mind'.[314] The possible misinterpretation of the incest before the readers learn that Selim and Zuleika are cousins increases the readability of suspense. More importantly, this anti-orthodox reading in the context of social realism evidences the alienation imposed by orthodox tyranny in the poems. Byron involves his readers more closely to feel the irrationality of the imposed belief and its possible unnatural influence.

Compared with Zuleika, Medora enjoys a more successful priesthood; compared with Selim, Conrad adheres to a more rigid belief. Medora's tower functions as another kind of harem: she lives as an attachment to Conrad, and the tower represents a realm of social order within the otherwise lawless domain of the pirates. Two orthodox beliefs govern this realm—marriage and Medora's queenship, the latter legitimised through the former. In Wolfson's comment on Conrad's feminisation, she mentions that

[312] Franklin, p. 50.
[313] Franklin, p. 53.
[314] Gleckner, p. 129.

‘he in effect refigures Medora’s patient arrest in the tower where she awaits his return, and which becomes her actual tomb’.[315] It is also true that before Medora’s actual tomb, Conrad disappears at the end of this tale. The tomb is now for two. But I want to argue that, before the tomb, Conrad finally confirms his love to Medora as a human being. However, Medora’s love is still not justified until her death. Worse still, just as Franklin notices, because his kiss with Gulnare makes him no longer ‘satisfy the virtuous heroine’s desire for a lifelong monogamous romantic love’, even the romantic love is not justified.[316]

For the relationship between Conrad and Medora, Franklin concludes that:

> For the idealization of a monogamous love, consisting of a partnership between complementary but highly differentiated gendered roles, even if not a legal marriage, represents a constriction which coexists uneasily with the Byronic vision of masculinized individual freedom from social values.[317]

This may remind us of Wolfson’s opinion of the contradiction between the closed couplet form and Byron’s irony. It may be unfair to judge, but the reason why this poem is conflicting from the form to the content is possibly Byron’s mockery of the fact that ‘I have been sometimes criticised, and considered no less responsible for their deeds and qualities than if all had been personal’ (*CPW* 3: 149). The response is a perfect couple, who, in the name of piracy, live entirely like an orthodox pair from realist fiction—though with an absurd undertone, as their authenticity ultimately gestures towards a kind of nothingness:

> Earth’s coarsest bread, the garden’s homeliest roots,
> And scarce the summer luxury of fruits,
> His short repast in humbleness supply
> With all a hermit’s board would scarce deny (I: 71–4)
>
> Light toil! to cull and dress thy frugal fare!
> See, I have plucked the fruit that promised best,
> And where not sure, perplexed, but pleased, I guessed
> At such as seemed the fairest; thrice the hill

[315] Wolfson, ‘Couplets, Self, and “The Corsair”’, 511.
[316] Franklin, p. 66.
[317] Franklin, p. 88.

My steps have wound to try the coolest rill;
Yes! thy Sherbet to-night will sweetly flow,
See how it sparkles in its vase of snow! (I: 422–8)

Byron dramatises the different lifestyle with intended contradicting details of the couple. By emphasising Medora's resistant catering, Byron presents her dominated and subsidiary position to the readers in the name of love. In the broader realm full of other pirates, Medora in most cases will be absent. After Conrad's failure, she cannot remain the ordered life in the tower. When she leaves the tower and weakly falls down at the bad news, the pirates' reaction to their 'Lady' is described as '[b]ut that with hands though rude, yet weeping eyes, | They yield such aid as Pity's haste supplies' (III: 107, 115–116). Her Queenship is endorsed with the marriage but only acknowledged as 'Lady'. For these lawless men out of society and free from the imposed authoritative belief, 'had they known | A woman's hand secured that deed her own, | She were their queen' (III: 508–10).

Medora indeed understands this and is afraid of this unorthodox recognition (which can never 'form a prevailing feature in the female character'). She, like Zuleika, and then later Francesca, tries to comfort Conrad:

Would that those days were over! wilt thou ne'er,
My Conrad! learn the joys of peace to share?
Sure thou hast more than wealth, and many a home
As bright as this invites us not to roam. (I: 388–91)

She does not understand that peace is unstable, since her tower seems quite stable. Her love for Conrad seems to be about his protection, and his protection is for, as McGann says, Medora as Conrad's 'lost dream of a perfect political order'.[318] However, Wolfson, in his criticism on the role reversal between Conrad and Gulnare concerning their opinion on assassination, believes that 'Conrad, [Byron] shows us, can think only in terms of the old order'.[319] In Byron's representation of the other corsairs' possible acknowledgement of Gulnare, his ideal of the corsairs is, however, boldly 'scorning all

[318] Jerome McGann, *Don Juan in Context*, (London: John Murray, 1976), p. 126.
[319] Wolfson, 'Couplets, Self, and "The Corsair"', 507.

laws that God or man can frame'.[320] Here lies a trick representing how Byron involves his readers in this seemingly orthodox discussion and then tells them the order itself means nothing, that only human feelings matter:

> My fondest, faintest, latest accents hear —
> Grief for the dead not virtue can reprove;
> Then give me all I ever asked—a tear,
> The first—last—sole reward of so much love!" (I: 359–62)

> None saw his trickling tears—perchance if seen,
> That useless flood of grief had never been;
> Nor long they flowed—he dried them to depart,
> In helpless—hopeless—brokenness of heart. (III: 652–5)

The second piece forms a response to the first. At the very beginning, Medora has related the very emotional and sentimental performance as a 'sole reward of so much love', while Conrad's cry finally regains him his humanity and justifies his love, just before his disappearance, which indicates a forever freedom from any systems, even the smallest in a tower. Franklin believes that '[t]he exaggerated excess which characterizes the sexual stereotyping of the relationship of Medora and Conrad almost slips into self-parody'.[321] However, I think the weird tower, which represents Medora's life, love, and legitimacy in the station of corsairs, objectively visualises Byron's irony towards the judgement of authority in social reality. From this perspective, since Medora's love remains uncertain, it is in fact dominated and judged by public criticism. Through blurring the boundaries of fiction and reality, Byron further ironises the social order based on conventional belief.

7.3. Gulnare's revolt for liberty in the name of love

From *The Giaour* to *The Siege of Corinth*, Byron tells that victors cannot be viewed as glorious, but that does not mean the losers are worth pitying. This is in accordance with

[320] Unus Multorum, 'To Lord Byron', *The Morning Post* (Feb. 16, 1814), reprinted in *The Spirit of the Public Journals for 1814* (London: Ridgway, 1815), p. 75.
[321] Franklin, p. 65.

Byron's depiction of the 'Waterloo Eve' in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*. Through the two cases of alienation, these representations suggest that Byron had started to think about that question in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* from the Tales: 'can tyrants but by tyrants conquered be' (4: 856)? The half-answer lies in Gulnare's story, and the other half is promising. This section denies Gulnare's devotional love towards Conrad, which confirms the cleverness and bare success in her approach to freedom.

The best description of Gulnare's original situation is that she is '[t]he Haram queen—but still the slave of Seyd' (II: 224). The Queenship suggests that she is nominally equal to the King; being 'the slave to Seyd' indicates her suffering within the nominally orthodox relationship, which suggests the nothingness and uselessness of orthodoxy with its essence in exploitation and domination. This recognition will help to understand the origin of Gulnare's impression to Conrad:

> The Pacha wooed as if he deemed the slave
> Must seem delighted with the heart he gave;
> The Corsair vowed protection, soothed affright,
> As if his homage were a woman's right.
> "The wish is wrong—nay worse for female—vain:
> Yet much I long to view that chief again;
> If but to thank for, what my fear forgot,
> The life—my loving lord remembered not!" (II: 265–72)

She recognises that the manner of Conrad's saving her is suited to a woman who needs protection but not a disposable slave. While Seyd still believes in the legitimacy of his tyranny and abuse, his power endorsed by the social authority, Conrad's behaviour shakes that legitimacy and makes it no longer an acceptable universal belief, as least not for Gulnare. Noticeably, she still called Seyd her 'loving lord', which is of course out of irony, but it confirms that she was dominated to acknowledge the unequal and unfree love. The reason for this irony, she claims later, is that 'I felt—I feel—love dwells with—with the free' (II: 502), which suggests she is not totally ignorant of love and freedom. Franklin says that '[Conrad] gives her insight into her condition'.[322] It is somehow exaggerated but still not wrong that this 'ideal of chivalry to women can thus

[322] Franklin, p. 79.

be portrayed as enlightening', although the process might remind the readers of the French revolution since Gulnare will later kill her 'loving lord'.[323] The point is that, within a similar confinement to Zuleika, Conrad brings about a possibility of realising Gulnare's feeling of love and freedom, especially after a crisis concerning life and death. This will also be complemented by Gulnare's assassination, and it will form an absolute equality between their offerings. By absolute equality, I mean 'save to enlighten' and 'sacrifice to save'—Conrad thinks assassination, especially by a woman, is about 'guilt' and at the expense of '[h]er all on Earth, and more than all in Heaven' which he believes is what Gulnare has sacrifice 'for him' (III: 527, 530, 529). Conrad is really a spokesman of social reality; his opinion is no different from *The Monthly Review* mentioned above. However, even with the premise of Conrad's enlightenment, Gulnare has her own reason for the assassination in Seyd's threatening words:

> I do mistrust thee, woman! and each word
> Of thine stamps truth on all Suspicion heard. (III: 178–9)
>
> Then, lovely dame, bethink thee! and beware;
> 'Tis not his life alone may claim such care! (III: 184–5)
>
> Now 'tis thy lord that warns—deceitful thing!
> Know'st thou that I can clip thy wanton wing?
> In words alone I am not wont to chafe:
> Look to thyself—nor deem thy falsehood safe! (III: 190–3)

It seems Gulnare only faces an uncertain threat on her life. I think the more severe problem is that Seyd 'do[es] mistrust' her, believes she betrayed him, and views her as a 'deceitful thing'. The long-term dominated horror still casts a shadow upon Gulnare. She is not only dangerous to death but also already doomed to be disposed. In her real communication with Conrad, she does three things.

Firstly, she makes Conrad believe that she loves him. Gulnare's loving words, though viewed as 'strong', are in fact an ambiguous compound: 'It feared thee—thanked thee—pitied—maddened—loved' (III: 295). Compared with her words of

[323] Franklin, p. 79.

denial that '[m]y love stern Seyd's! Oh—No—No—not my love' (II: 499), the loving words can be a bit too hesitant and dubious. For her belief, which has been established for a long time as indicated in the tenses of 'I felt—I feel', there is also no womb for the birth of love where she is still a slave and Conrad a prisoner. More importantly, her declaration of love is always accompanied and sometimes surpassed by her hatred of Seyd:

> I see thee shudder—but my soul is changed —
> Wronged—spurned—reviled—and it shall be avenged —
> Accused of what till now my heart disdained —
> Too faithful, though to bitter bondage chained. (III: 32–23)
>
> I still had saved thee, but the Pacha spared. (348)
>
> Alas! this love—that hatred are the first—(351)
>
> My life, my love, my hatred—all below… (374)

In her persuasive words, Gulnare urges her natural ally to stand with her—love, intimacy, and hatred arousing sympathy. Under such circumstances, Gulnare establishes a connection which would guide her out of the confinement.

Secondly, she emphasises herself no longer to be a disposable attachment but an equal partner. She compares herself to Medora:

> Thou lov'st another—and I love in vain;
> Though fond as mine her bosom, form more fair,
> I rush through peril which she would not dare.
> If that thy heart to hers were truly dear,
> Were I thine own—thou wert not lonely here:
> An outlaw's spouse—and leave her lord to roam!
> What hath such gentle dame to do with home? (III: 297–303)

Wolfson reads that this comparison is realised by 'summoning the rhyme word Conrad wants to suppress and explicitly opposing it to the one he favors' of 'fair' and 'dare'.[324] More importantly, these lines reveal Gulnare's ambition outside home. When 'home'

[324] Wolfson, 'Couplets, Self, and "The Corsair"', 508.

represents the smallest unit of the established ordered social system of authority, it unveils Gulnare's plan to join the corsairs, and of course not in the tower. In a series of operations, Gulnare shows her thoughtfulness and bravery in arranging the escape:

> Are on this cast—Corsair! 'tis but a blow!
> Without it flight were idle—how evade
> His sure pursuit? my wrongs too unrepaid,
> My youth disgraced—the long, long wasted years,
> One blow shall cancel with our future fears. (III: 375–9)

> But since the dagger suits thee less than brand,
> I'll try the firmness of a female hand.
> The guards are gained—one moment all were o'er—
> Corsair! we meet in safety or no more. (III: 380–3)

Franklin praises that, 'Gulnare demonstrates the possibility of a heroine...who chooses the role of companion in the "masculine" sphere of action'.[325] More precisely, Wolfson describes, 'Gulnare is now in command'.[326] Through this process, Gulnare's masculinity works to oppose two imposing powers: one from the effeminacy imposed by her living condition, the other from the knightly spirit held by Conrad. The former collapses together with Seyd's death, the latter is temporarily invisible when Conrad escapes together with her.

Thirdly, Gulnare performs feminine harmlessness when necessary. Conrad's representation of the realistic criticism is spiteful, but the corsairs would view her a real 'Queen' if they knew her heroic feat. So, the last step is to be introduced into the crew by Conrad. This woman, who has just declared that '[t]he few gained over, now are wholly mine' (III: 434) and looks like a General reviewing that 'through the gallery pour...her vassals—Greek and Moor' (438–9), when 'clapp[ing] her hands' (438), 'now seem[s] changed and humbled:—faint and meek' (533) to remind the manly Conrad of her devoted love and gets his kiss as an endorsement to enter the lawless realm. This feminine return again represents certain absurdity across the boundary between the fiction and the reality.

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[325] Franklin, p. 68.
[326] Wolfson, 'Couplets, Self, and "The Corsair"', 511.

Franklin notices the influence from Byron's readers in Gulnare's story:

> dramatized for Byron's readership their widespread fear of the subjective passions of rebellious subjects gaining the upper hand...Gulnare's degradation as an oppressed subject had been sympathetically portrayed...as willing to accept the authority of Conrad...So...she is finally accepted as a worthy companion of the Byronic hero.[327]

However, I think, through Conrad's final disappearance, Byron suggests that, in the current situation, Gulnare will not be dominated again into Medora's character. Wolfson views the ending of *The Corsair* as a reflection of Byron's way of balancing his publicised personage and his real self, by which she means that the real self disappears while the personage remains, just as with Conrad and the Corsair.[328] Nevertheless, I think the ending possibly promises that Gulnare becomes the true Queen of the pirates, liberated from the domination of the imposing realistic authority represented by Conrad. In this way, Byron cross-references his personal rebellion against the restraints of the celebrity apparatus with his protagonists' blasphemy against tyrannical systems founded upon social belief and institutional authority. Love is deployed as a weapon of human nature to desacralise the legitimacy of theocracy and to justify and realise freedom. Ultimately, the extremely idealised love arouses empathy and draws the audience into its defence against manipulative impositions; while alienated love, deprived of liberty, constitutes a critique that incites revolutionary passion for a liberated future.

[327] Franklin, pp. 85–6.
[328] Wolfson, 'Couplets, Self, and "The Corsair"', 500.

Chapter 3. 'Thy God loves blood': Blasphemy, Celebrity and Popular Radicalism in *Manfred*, *Cain: A Mystery*, and *The Vision of Judgment*

Gottfried August Bürger's *Lenore*, which was repeatedly translated into English after 1796, depicts a Gothic love story in which the protagonist is brought to a cemetery by her lost lover's skeleton and then killed by the spectres because she had shown blasphemy against God for the loss of her lover.[329] The tale exposes certain tensions between human nature and religious doctrines, yet it ultimately upholds the authority of the latter. In a sermon given in Shrewsbury before the North Staffordshire Yeomanry in 1798, the Vicar of St. Alkmond's argued that the 'highest climax in blasphemy' is 'deny[ing] the being of God'.[330] These two representations help to delineate the centrality of God in the conceptualisation of blasphemy and to suggest how this centrality informed the major terms of contemporary blasphemy debates. This chapter examines how Byron engaged with these terms when adopting blasphemy to oppose imposing authorities in both political and religious contexts.

In eighteenth-century Britain, blasphemy was in reality adopted by social authorities as a tool for regulating the public sphere, which prepared its later use by radicals to challenge the very authorities through the same crime. Before that happened, social authorities, including the church and the government, had already classified opposition to the state or to the official interpretation of divine will as blasphemy through a series of laws concerning seditious or blasphemous libels. Things got worse in 1819 when the Blasphemous and Seditious Libels Act was passed, permitting transportation as a punishment for a second such offence. The King's church and government's increasing concerns about their power and right of intervention and interpretation concerning the public mind were reflected in the expansion of the holy crime, as Nash suggests:

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[329] See Gottfried August Bürger, *Lenore*, translated by Dante Gabriel Rossetti (London: Ellis and Elvey, 1900).
[330] Richard de Courcy, *Self-Defence not Inconsistent with the Precepts of Religion* (Shrewsbury, 1798), p. 19.

> At its very inception, in the biblical world, the state was the major stakeholder in blasphemy's evolution as an offence punishable by law.…Initially these supplemented ecclesiastical and theocratic authorities but eventually came to substitute for it, as matters of public order replaced a concern for sin and its consequences.[331]

The crucial point is that the composition of a blasphemy crime remained ambiguous. As Michael Tugendhat noticed, 'the lack of public confidence in the impartiality of judges in treason, sedition, and other political cases was never assuaged'.[332] This is understandable. In this crime, God's position is not observable to every person but announced to every person, and at the same time can only be confirmed by a certain group of persons. After the Parliament enacted Fox's Libel Act in 1791, the power to decide seditious or blasphemous crime was transferred from the judge to the jury. Tugendhat adds, 'there was a marked decline in convictions for such criminal libels thereafter'.[333] The result suggests some further chaos concerning this crime, as the reduction shows that the standard was never confirmed with consistency and remained arguable, which naturally made this prosecution an area of public attention and suggests a potential in arousing fame or notoriety. Moreover, in 1795, *British Critic* already brought some complaints against the 'political pamphlets' in the guise of 'sermons'.[334] It is easy to understand this as a new way of sedition and thus a crime of political blasphemy. However, as Peter Denney points out, 'achieving wit at the expense of piety', this would definitely be considered a blasphemy against God's realm, especially as it indirectly denies the endorsement by God.[335] This brings up a very important and controversial part of blasphemy. God does not talk and cannot talk, but the extent to which His realm be determined by others and His words decided by others is also up for debate. This notion provides a ground for Byron and his radical circle to argue against Southey's blasphemy in *A Vision of Judgment*.

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[331] Nash, 14.
[332] Michael Tugendhat, *Liberty Intact: Human Rights in English Law*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), p. 70.
[333] Tugendhat, p. 70.
[334] *British Critic*, 8 (1796), 313.
[335] Peter Denney, 'Popular Radicalism, Religious Parody and the Mock Sermon in the 1790s', *History Workshop Journal*, 74 (2012), 51-78, 53.

Byron's contemporary society was prepared for such blasphemy debates. The church and government paid plenty of attention to educating or taming their people. This was realised in a straightforward if not blunt way, but it still worked well. When the development of the printing industry raised certain risks of blasphemous publications, the rigid restriction upon thinking, speaking, and writing also spread as a common belief and social authority. It needs no extra; as Sarah Trimmer in her *Guardian of Education* critiques William Godwin's *Bible Stories, Memorable Acts of the Ancient Patriarchs, Judges, and Kings, Extracted from Their Original Histories for the Use of Children* on his imaginative treatment of the Bible: 'That such a book as this can be published in a CHRISTIAN COUNTRY is to us surprizing'![336] Michelle Levy views this as an 'implied threat of prosecution for blasphemous libel', while I view it as a sign that there already was a common social belief extracted from the more religious version to create a public area of debate against all evolution from the established authorities.[337] Although the radicals were better at listening to the 'shrewd remarks' of the 'common people' after the beginning of the nineteenth century, the mainstream belief was still predominant.[338] This is not to say blasphemy became less powerful. The point is that the authorities' rights of intervention and judgement expanded, and the oppositional stands thus also increased. In such a Christian country, then, it was easier to be blasphemous. Tom Scriven suggests that 'throughout the 1820s London Radicalism was dominated by an "underworld" culture of blasphemous infidel chapels, obscene satire, and pornography'.[339] This use of blasphemy reflects a retrospective coverage as a result of the integration of dissidents in radical conflicts, especially when blasphemy was originally separate from heresy.[340] Considering Byron's religious belief, I would not consider him an infidel or non-believer, but it is still crucial to relate that Byron's response to the prosecution of blasphemy is influenced

[336] Sarah Trimmer, *Guardian of Education*, vol. 1, (London: Hatchard, 1802), pp. 263–4.
[337] Michelle Levy, *Family Authorship and Romantic Print Culture*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), p. 82.
[338] See Denney, 74.
[339] Tom Scriven, *Popular Virtue: Continuity and Change in Radical Moral Politics, 1820–70,* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017), p. 21.
[340] See Nash, 7.

by this changeable background and is reflected in his writings. Peter Vassallo observes Byron's intention to avoid being prosecuted in Byron's translation of the *Morgante* as 'an indirect form of self-justification', which was 'primarily intended to demonstrate that a poet could be facetious about religious matters and still not incur the charge of blasphemy'.[341]

This chapter is divided into three sections. In the first section, I discuss Byron continuing his representations of the systematic alienation of the mortal self. From an immortal's angle, Byron in *Manfred* argues for the lost human nature and free self in the hierarchical system and desacralises what is claimed to be sacred by the powerful. The second section further deconstructs the hierarchical political system through the judgment of blasphemy. The creation and publication of *The Vision of Judgment* blurs the boundary between the spiritual and real world to reflect on the systematic tragedy revealed in human life. This section also presents a secular and desacralized version of heaven. Lastly, in *Cain*, Byron creates a complete stage for human performances, echoing the previous separations of humanity from the alienated selves to blasphemously liberate people from the 'good' and 'evil' social and religious doctrines. This section can be viewed as a religious complement to Chapter Four in explaining the origin of human action and human life. Through this chapter, I further establish the conflicts and connections among blasphemy, celebrity, and social and religious authorities. When God's position is downgraded in the chaotic judgments, the aim is not to downgrade God, but to deconstruct blasphemy as a crime.

8. Manfred's struggle between immortal and mortal 'self'

Criticisms about *Manfred* have been predominated by biographical. Richard Lansdown optimistically claimed that 'the nineteenth-century identification of the poet as a psychological individual with his various heroes' was disrupted and critics of the second half of the twentieth century were 'hav[ing] it understood that "The Giaour, the Corsair,

[341] Peter Vassallo, *Byron: The Italian Literary Influence*, (New York: St Martin's Press, 1984), pp. 152–3.

Childe Harold" were the dramatic creations of an authentically self-conscious artist and not mere emanations of personality'.[342] The surprising rediscovery of the association between Byron's protagonists and 'the political developments of his time, rather than with the poet's self' has aroused certain criticisms against the overplayed autobiographical readings.[343] The feeblest ones are for *Manfred*. McGann asserts that '*Manfred* is a nakedly autobiographical piece in which Byron tries to represent what sort of life can remain for a man once he knows not only that his soul is a sepulchre, but that he himself has made it so'.[344] This can easily be seen as a sequel to E. H. Coleridge's affirmation that 'the motif of *Manfred* is remorse—eternal suffering for inexpiable crime'.[345] He adds, '*Manfred* is no echo of another's questioning, no expression of a general world-weariness on the part of the time-spirit, but a personal outcry: "De profundis clamavi!"'[346] Following this 'nineteenth-century identification', critics did not bother to doubt the existence of Byron's personal experience in *Manfred*. As for Byron's declaration of the inspiration for this poem—'it was the Staubach [sic] and the Jungfrau, and something else, much more than Faustus that made me write Manfred'[347]—Samuel C. Chew announced that '[t]he mention of the mountain and the waterfall refers to the influence of nature upon the poet's inspiration…[and that] the "something else" is that autobiographical background about which speculation has long been rife'.[348] The self-evidencing of these claims imposes some natural restraints upon the readings of *Manfred*.

William D. Melaney attempts to move beyond Byron's personal experience in order to draw attention to 'a nihilistic attitude toward the universe as a whole'.[349] He argues that '*Manfred* includes a sharply realistic assessment of nature and an awareness

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[342] Richard Lansdown, 'Suicide, Melancholia, and Manic Defense in Byron's *Manfred*', *Nineteenth-Century Literature,* vol. 76*,* 1 (2021), 1–32, 2.
[343] Lansdown, 'Suicide, Melancholia, and Manic Defense in Byron's *Manfred*', 2.
[344] McGann, *Don Juan in Context*, p. 36.
[345] E. H. Coleridge, 'Introduction to Manfred', in *The Works of Lord Byron: Poetry* (London, John Murray, 1922), p. 82.
[346] E. H. Coleridge, p. 82.
[347] E. H. Coleridge, p. 81.
[348] Samuel C. Chew, *The Dramas of Lord Byron: A Critical Study* (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1915), p. 60.
[349] William D. Melaney, 'Ambiguous Difference: Ethical Concern in Byron's "Manfred"', *New Literary History*, Summer (2005) 461-475, 463.

of the inherent futility of human affairs'.[350] He admits that this dilemma may be related to 'the experience of exile and estrangement that permeates the period when the poem was actually composed' but believes this autobiographical angle helps to reveal 'how traumatic experience has been transmuted into poetry at the precise point where the author separates himself from his poem'.[351] His reading of Manfred as an 'allegory' but not 'the ideal vehicle of verbal completeness' makes *Manfred* a transgressive act but unable to encounter others.[352] This specific isolated transcendence is after all unattained. Madeleine Callaghan reaches a similar conclusion, where 'Manfred adopts a pose of splendid isolation from the opinions of society'.[353] She suggests this independent isolation comes from 'Manfred's verbal dexterity and poetic style [that] almost overshadow the substanceless core of the nature of his quest'.[354] Although she does not agree with McGann's overplaying, Callaghan says 'it is the artistic element of the self that forms the basis of Manfred's resemblance to his author'.[355]

Critics generally agree that Manfred represents 'the journey of a doomed self', either from the Promethean or Miltonic angle of readings.[356] But because of the autobiographical reading, they try to prove that Byron himself feels responsible for this failure and struggled for 'symbolic meanings that hold out the hope of ultimate reconciliation'.[357] However, Byron knows very well, as argued in the first chapter, that his protagonist, as well as himself, was famous for disagreeability. Even if he was uncertain about that, he should have been convinced after the Byronic return, as argued in the Tales. Especially compared with the following more political and pointed *Cain* and *The Vision*, Manfred plays an important role, not simply in representing 'a doomed self' but in rationalising it and making it a weapon of tragic mortality against restrained human liberty. It is not concerned with Byron's self, but more broadly with an

[350] Melaney, 465.
[351] Melaney, 468.
[352] Melaney, 471.
[353] Madeleine Callaghan, '"A Tyrant-Spell": The Byronic (Poet-)Hero in *Manfred*, *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* and *Beppo*', *The Poet-Hero in the Work of Byron and Shelley* (London: Anthem Press, 2019), pp. 19–38, p. 30.
[354] Callaghan, p. 29.
[355] Callaghan, p. 26.
[356] See Melaney, 473.
[357] Melaney, 472.

examination of the human position within the spiritual world.

8.1. Astarte as Manfred's lost self

Autobiographical readers fail to reach a consensus on Astarte's prototype. Chew's comparison between *The Dreams* and *Manfred* suggests that:

> The autobiographical references in *The Dream* are indisputable in their cogency. The poem is a record of Byron's love for Mary Ghaworth […:] "Things equal to the same thing are equal to each other". Since Mary Ghaworth is the Lady of *The Dream* and since Astarte's history is identical with that of the Lady, it follows that Astarte and the Lady and Mary Ghaworth are one and the same.[358]

And there are more examples of Augusta. Peter Cochran disagrees with both. He attempts some comprehensive interpretations:

> Looked at in a broader perspective, Manfred's despair is Byron's own despair at his own failure as a man: Astarte is neither Annabella nor Augusta, but an embodiment of his anima, the Significant Female Other whom his inner demons had caused him to reject…for good.[359]

> [I]n her remoteness and verbal economy Astarte is closer to Annabella. Annabella could be a very effective rhetorician (on paper, in private), but in public she said as little as possible.[360]

For the specified figures, including Augusta, Annabella, and Mary Ghaworth, following that Byron 'self-consciously employed Academic or Pyrrhonist skepticism to distance himself from the creeds that competed for his allegiance' in Canto III of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, I think they are not worth distinguishing as lovers of some specific time.[361] Indeed, Cochran's other interpretation of 'an embodiment of his anima' can find quite some echoes. Melaney does not address a concrete conclusion; he questions that

[358] Chew, *The Dramas of Lord Byron*, p. 72.
[359] Peter Cochran, *Manfred: An Edition of Byron's Manuscripts and a Collection of Essays* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, 2015), p. 12.
[360] Cochran, *Manfred*, p. 15.
[361] Reiman, p. 309.

‘Manfred refers to Astarte as a kind of double, or kindred spirit, whose resemblance to him raises the interesting question of whether his love for her is anything more than a version of self-love’.[362] Young-ok An approaches it from the angle of patriarchy and comments, ‘Manfred’s depiction of Astarte reflects a narcissistic identification with a female other who functions as his idealized self-image’.[363] The main support for the ‘self-love’ lies in the following lines:

> MAN. She was like me in lineaments—her eyes,
> Her hair, her features, all, to the very tone
> Even for her voice, they said were like to mine;
> …
> She had the same lone thoughts and wanderings,
> The quest of hidden knowledge, and mind
> To comprehend the universe: nor these
> …
> I loved her, and destroy’d her! (II: 105–17)

The sameness between Astarte and Manfred has aroused attention before, for which Thorslev emphasised Manfred’s ‘narcissistic sensibility’.[364] Based on Freud’s theory of narcissism that ‘the object serves as a substitute for some unattained ego ideal of our own’, D. L. MacDonald expands the scale of Byron’s projection.[365] Recalling Chew’s words about nature and also ‘something else’, MacDonald believes that ‘Manfred’s relations with inhuman nature are also narcissistic, or Imaginary: he sees himself as “Grey-hair’d with anguish, like these blasted pines,” which is to say that he sees them as images of himself’.[366] For Manfred’s self-love, MacDonald’s effort ends in a recurrence that ‘he feels as alienated from nature as he does from humanity’ through ‘this roundabout way’ of incest.[367] However, in the Freudian model of melancholia which consists of ‘ego, object and love-investment’, according to Otto Rank’s

[362] Melaney, 469.
[363] Young-ok An, ‘Manfred’s New Promethean Agon’, in *Byron and the Politics of Freedom and Terror, edited by M. Green* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 102-117, 109.
[364] Thorslev, ‘Incest as Romantic Symbol’, 50.
[365] D. L. MacDonald, ‘Incest, Narcissism and Demonality in Byron’s “Manfred”’, *Mosaic: An Interdisciplinary Critical Journal*, Spring (1992), 25-38, 30.
[366] MacDonald, 34.
[367] MacDonald, 34.

observation, the object choice seems to occur on "a narcissistic foundation', so that 'the object-investment, if it encounters difficulties, is able to regress to narcissism'.[368] Usually, if the love-investment continues to be lost, the broken ego suffers from terrible self-reproach and has a tendency towards self-destruction, which means that narcissism brings not necessarily isolated self-destruction but more like self-protection against unstopped loss. The result depends on its effect in absorbing the love-investment back to the ego to complete the regression of the lost cathexis. Manfred's death after his unpleasant encounter with the spirit of Astarte suggests a failure in the regression. This loss of ego can be related through contextualisation.

I think the incest Byron depicts in *Manfred* can lead to a different result from that in the Tales. Compared with the reversed incestuous plot in *The Bride of Abydos* and the doomed incestuous Hugo in *Parisina*, the relationship between Manfred and Astarte, from my perspective, is more like that between Alps and Francesca in *The Siege of Corinth*. In *The Bride* and *Parisina*, incest is indicated or introduced to be against the authority of reality to create an unrestrained space in imagination. This is not necessary in *Manfred*, even considering An's interpretation from the patriarchal angle, because he is supernatural from the first appearance. This is unlike *Don Juan* or Goethe's *Faust*. Byron claims that:

> I forgot to mention to you that a kind of Poem in [blank verse] or Drama...of a very wild, metaphysical, and inexplicable kind. Almost all the persons—but two or three—are Spirits of the earth and air, or the waters; the scene is in the Alps; the hero a kind of magician, who is tormented by a species of remorse, the cause of which is left half unexplained. He wanders about invoking these Spirits, which appear to him, and are of no use; he at last goes to the very abode of the Evil Principle, in propriâ personâ, to evocate a ghost, which appears, and gives him an ambiguous and disagreeable answer; and in the third act he is found by his attendants dying in a tower where he had studied his art. *(BLJ* 5: 76)

Manfred appears as an immortal. His life goal is to find a ghost with the same appearance as him. Here, 'ghost' has double indications: It is not, or not yet, a saved

[368] Sigmund Freud, 'Mourning and Melancholia', *On Murder, Mourning and Melancholia*, translated by Shaun Whiteside (New York: Penguin, 2005), pp. 201–18, p. 209.

spirit; it is a dead mortal self. This would remind us of Francesca's appearance when the Alps feel unquiet before the siege of Corinth, the symbolic city of established political and religious authority.

What the lost 'goodness' represents is projected in his lover's figure, 'urging him to do his duty as a Christian'.[369] Astarte is of course not the lost Christian ego of Manfred; she is the lost androgynous human ego of Manfred. After 'The Phantom of ASTARTE rises and stands in the midst' (*CPW* 4: 84):

> MAN. I cannot speak to her—but bid her speak —
> Forgive me or condemn me. (II. IV: 104–5)
>
> MAN. She is silent,
> And in that silence I am more than answered.
> NEM. My power extends no further. Prince of air!
> It rests with thee alone—command her voice.
> ARI. Spirit—obey this sceptre!
> NEM. Silent still! (II. IV: 110–15)

It is very interesting that when Manfred decides not to speak, the real silent figure is the phantom of Astarte. It becomes more interesting when Manfred cannot help asking Astarte to speak: "Astarte! My beloved! Speak to me… | but let me hear thee once—| This once—once more!' (II. IV: 118, 149–50) and Astarte replies only once, 'Manfred!' (II. IV: 151). Manfred continues to say, "Say on, say on—I live but in the sound—it is thy voice!' (II. IV: 152). The Phantom says, 'Manfred! To-morrow ends thine earthly ills. Farewell!' (II. IV: 153). The reason for the exact date of death is presumably that she is leaving—this is in accordance with Manfred's words. Manfred further asks, 'Yet one word more—am I forgiven?' (II. IV: 154). The Phantom replies with only one word: 'Farewell!' (II. IV: 154). The word is not 'yes' or 'no', because Manfred himself does not have an answer.

Considering also that the phantom of Astarte is powerful enough to defy even Arimanes' sceptre, it is reasonable to interpret her as the lost mortal ego of the powerful magician, Manfred. This contradiction between the mortal and immortal self allows

[369] Franklin, p. 70.

Byron's depiction of Manfred's two suicide attempts to articulate his vision of mortal life, which seeks to reclaim humanity from the dominion of the Almighty.

8.2. Manfred's self-destruction

Manfred's first attempt is stopped by the chamois hunter. 'As MANFRED is in act to spring from the cliffy the CHAMOIS HUNTER seizes and retains him with a sudden grasp' (*CPW* 4: 66). Manfred's reason for this suicide is not directly expressed. He says:

> There is a power upon me which withholds
> And makes it my fatality to live;
> If it be life to wear within myself
> This barrenness of spirit, and to be
> My own soul's sepulchre, for I have ceased
> To justify my deeds unto myself —
> The last infirmity of evil. (I. II: 23–9)

> — Oh, that I were
> The viewless spirit of a lovely sound,
> A living voice, a breathing harmony,
> bodiless enjoyment—born and dying
> With the blest tone which made me! (I. II: 52–6)

> I live but in the sound—it is thy voice. (II. IV: 152)

The narcissistic Manfred loves himself indeed and wishes to live and die following the law of nature. Then what is unnatural is 'a power upon me'. Manfred scolds that

> But we, who name ourselves its sovereigns, we,
> Half dust, half deity, alike unfit
> To sink or soar, with our mix'd essence make
> A conflict of its elements, and breathe
> The breath of degradation and of pride,
> Contending with low wants and lofty will
> Till our mortality predominates (I. II: 39–45)

It may be surprising to conclude that human life itself becomes a paradoxical cage for Manfred, according to Byron's occasional straightforward words. The burden comes

from the mortal's ambition to be immortal, while becoming immortal not only means evil against the natural law, but also brings a loss of the human self as mortal. Manfred's dilemma lies in his inability to solve the disagreement between immortal life and human mortality. This is a continuous concern following Conrad and Medora's sweet realm in the tower. John W. Ehrstine suggests that 'Byron often conceives of a similar re-unification achieved by establishing a geographical haven-paradise of one sort or another'.[370] But for me, it represents some spatial authority in the lawless sea, and makes Conrad and Medora's freedom fake and meaningless. A similar spatial representation occurs 'in Manfred's confrontation with the Chamois Hunter', Melaney suggests, and 'the spatial metaphor of an endless desert breaks up the expanse of time and reminds us of our human limitations'.[371] Byron is to acknowledge these limitations, and this is his resolution to Manfred's dilemma: Manfred should end his life because it is now 'The last infirmity of evil' (I. II: 29). It is important first to recognise Manfred's love of life, and his loss of the human part of his living ego, before acknowledging his desire to commit suicide. This establishes another paradox: that Manfred's failure to achieve reconciliation in his internal dilemma reflects Byron's assertion of free will in preserving human dignity and independence. This paradox is reinforced by two external forces, both of which support my argument regarding Manfred's enduring commitment to his independent human nature.

The first is still about suicide. Lansdown again reminds us that '[t]he history of attitudes to suicide in the West is…[that] a practice venerated in the Classical world became prohibited in the Christian one'.[372] When it is evil to live abnormally for Manfred, it is evil to die in the chamois hunter's opinion. This so-called conflict explains why the caring hunter announcing 'Friend! have a care, | Your next step may be fatal!—for the love | Of him who made you, stand not on that brink' accuses Manfred of his possibly '[staining] our pure vales with thy guilty blood' (I. II: 101–3, 111). The hunter says it bluntly that it is more unacceptable to be 'aweary of thy life' than being

[370] John W. Ehrstine, *The Metaphysics of Byron: A Reading of the Plays*, 2013 edition, (Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton, 1976), p. 3.
[371] Melaney, 464.
[372] Lansdown, 'Suicide, Melancholia, and Manic Defense in Byron's *Manfred*', 3.

untamed to God's imposing 'love'; the latter is the direct reason for his claim over Manfred's 'guilty blood' (I. II: 110). Byron conducts a more blasphemous comparison in *Cain* in 'thy God loves blood' (III. I: 310). But the following dialogue is no less powerful:

> C. HUN. Well, sir, pardon me the question,
> And be of better cheer. Come, taste my wine; (II. I: 16–17)
>
> MAN. Away, away! There's blood upon the brim!
> …
> I say 'tis blood—my blood! the pure warm stream
> Which ran in the veins of my fathers, and in ours
> When we were in our youth, and had one heart,
> And loved each other as we should not love,
> And this was shed: but still it rises up,
> Colouring the clouds, that shut me out from heaven,
> Where thou art not—and I shall never be. (II. I: 21, 24–30)
>
> Preach it to mortals of a dust like thine, —
> I am not of thine order, (II. I: 36–7)
>
> Do I not bear it?—Look on me—I live. (II. I: 42)

Manfred's claim about the blood and heaven makes *Cain* later possibly a prequel for Cain's crime and his last words in the play. Cochran claims that '[t]he hysterical rejection of the wine is not fully explained, and is…probably as much a reaction against its eucharistic symbolism'.[373] The blasphemous untamedness is vivid in accordance with Manfred's proud self. It is also worth mentioning that Manfred's first declaration about normal human beings is '[h]alf dust, half deity, alike unfit' (I. II: 40). For those to whom Christianity can preach, Manfred calls them 'mortals of a dust like thine' (II. I: 36). Talking with the hunter, Manfred declares a division that 'man! I have lived many years' (II. I: 44). This further confirms Byron's design of Manfred's lost human ego and his challenge against Christian authority, which makes a transcendent freedom blessed by the natural deity no longer available.

The second force supporting my argument about Manfred's love for his

[373] Cochran, *Manfred*, p. 146.

independent human nature relates to Christianity, as also indicated in his second attempt at suicide. Like Hugo directs his own death scene, Manfred does not listen to the abbot's exhortation and dies. As for Byron's representation of Christianity here, Cochran notices that:

> When the Abbot pleads "... reconcile thee | To the true church—and through the church to heaven" we have to protest that so much of the play has made real to us a series of demonologies which have nothing to do with "the true church", that the church itself now stands exposed merely as one system among many, all equally worthy—or unworthy—of belief.[374]

This is in accordance with, again, Byron's management of the Christian and Islamic creeds in Canto I of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* and the consistent juxtaposition of Christianity and Islam in the Tales. What makes *Manfred* different is that Byron no longer presents this individual at the same level as other authorities and systems. He emphasises the value of human identity and the conflicting nature between human liberty and any other authoritative spirits or Gods. Byron indeed makes Manfred a tragically lost representative of all human beings, ideally all of his readers. Manfred says:

> Nor will I hence, while I have earthly breath
> To breathe my scorn upon ye—earthly strength
> To wrestle, though with spirits… (III. IV: 101–3)
>
> I do not combat against death, but thee
> And thy surrounding angels
> …when the earth
> Saw men and spirits walking side by side,
> And gave ye no supremacy: I stand
> Upon my strength—I do defy—deny —
> Spurn back, and scorn ye!—(III. IV: 112–21)
>
> The mind which is immortal makes itself
> Requital for its good or evil thoughts —
> Is its own origin of ill and end—(III. IV: 129–31)
>
> I have not been thy dupe, nor am thy prey —

[374] Cochran, *Manfred*, p. 147.

But was my own destroyer, and will be
My own hereafter… (III. IV: 138–40)

When Manfred the immortal's self-destruction is a result of the loss of his mortal ego, he is proud to be a representative of men. Now he is equal to the spirits, not because he is Byron's protagonist, but because he also believes and views himself as an independent man no lower than any other being. This equality, based on Byron's pantheistic view of Nature, reflects his attempt to reconcile with his readers of lower classes. Michael Cooke suggests that Manfred 'typifies the perfectionist and iconoclast in collision with reality…It is crucial to see that Manfred rises above the things he rejects'.[375] Under such circumstances, Manfred's failure to achieve self-completeness and his will toward self-destruction are significant for three reasons. First, it reflects Byron's shifting position in communicating with his readers through writing, as a response to the criticisms of his lordly superiority. Second, as David V. Erdman asserts, 'even while he looks upon the conflict of "polish" versus "force" in art as a counterpart of traditional class distinctions…Byron's ultimate sympathies and deeds are on the side of "force" and the demos'.[376] From the angle of class, Byron seeks some unity beyond restraints. The symbolic individual struggling with a paradoxical situation would especially arouse more sympathy and intimacy for his political propaganda. Third, the underlying message is that Byron, through Manfred as a representative of the free and independent spirit, warns his readers not to forfeit human freedom, and appeals for an undaunted spirit of rebellion against religious—and other equally tyrannical—forms of authority.

9. The blasphemous uncertainty revealed in *The Vision of Judgment*

Unlike *Manfred*'s focus on the liberated powerful self, *The Vision of Judgment* from

[375] Michael Cooke, 'The Fatal Bounds of the Will', in *The Blind Man Traces the Circle: On the Patterns and Philosophy of Byron's Poetry* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), pp. 61–90. Reprinted in *Poetry Criticism*, vol. 16, 67–121, 69–70.
[376] David V. Erdman, 'Byron and "The New Force of the People"', *Keats-Shelley Journal*, Winter (1962), 47–64, 54.

another angle deconstructs the hierarchical systems and their authorities. Furthermore, *The Vision* continues *Manfred*'s representation of individual inability to maintain a status of perfection between life and death, but instead to prepare for subjective ability to do so through a link between the judgements in the real world and in heaven. Along with *Manfred* and *Cain*, it also establishes a ground to detach the legitimacy of existing systems. However, considering the complicated background of its creation, Southey dominates the criticisms in an unwanted way.

In 1860, *Debow's Review* from America put forward a confident claim that it 'is impossible properly to appreciate the last-named poem in one caption, unless it be taken in connection with the two first named'.[377] This 'last-named poem' is *The Vision of Judgment*, and the other two are *A Vision of Judgement* and *Paradise Lost*. The reviewer believed that 'Byron's primary object in writing was to lash and ridicule Southey' to fight back against Southey's attack in his preface of *A Vision*.[378] As for *The Vision*'s comparison with *Paradise Lost*, the reviewer in fact preset that Byron was religious and '*good'*. *The Vision* was believed 'to brush away these profane superstitions which were deforming Christianity', which 'would have immortalized Byron had the manner and spirit of the performance equalled its ability'.[379] This would remind its readers of Milton's 'improper' manner when depicting the over-glamorous Satan in the later confirmed Christian tale *Paradise Lost*. It seems counterintuitive to talk about Byron's piety. 'To claim that Lord Byron was much occupied with problems of religious assent may surprise many people,' as William Ruddick admits, that 'his popular reputation as a tireless amorist hardly accords with that of a searcher after sacred truth'.[380] One can find it similar in James Kennedy's words that

> [Byron] said that he was not an infidel who denied the Scriptures and wished to remain in unbelief—on the contrary, he was very desirous to believe, as he experienced no happiness in having his religious opinions so unsteady and

[377] 'Art. III.—Milton, Byron, and Southy', *DeBow's Review and Industrial Resources, Statistics, Etc: Devoted to Commerce, Agriculture, Manufactures*, vol. 1 (October 1860), 430–41, 430.
[378] *DeBow's Review*, 430.
[379] *DeBow's Review*, 430.
[380] William Ruddick, 'Lord Byron: Visions of Judgement and the Uses of Scepticism', *Newsletter (National Conference on Literature and Religion)*, 2 (May 1983), 7–13, 7.

unfixed.[381]

These words, however, cannot be evidence of Byron's religious piety, because 'was very desirous to' means 'but do not or cannot'. Pain or 'no happiness' is usually viewed as a punishment on infidels, while it can also be interpreted as the idea that belief is made more painful so they still do not believe. As for 'a searcher after sacred truth', Coleridge expressed a similar opinion but from another perspective. He said, '[had] Lord Byron possessed perseverance enough to undergo the drudgery of research, and had his theological studies been at all like mine, he would have been able to unsettle all the evidences of Christianity, upheld as it is at present by simple confutation'.[382] It seems that Coleridge denied the possibility that Byron might still uphold Christianity after he got 'the sacred truth'. These arguable and somehow dramatic sayings and opinions on Byron's religious belief are usually viewed as conflicting with each other and not listed together equally in criticisms. However, in Byron's case, the phenomenon that one can find these very different opinions should find its root in the broader radical context for Byron's blasphemous writings.

Before situating this unusual work within the broader context of long eighteenth-century radicalism, it is worth noting that *Debow's* was not the only publication to identify Byron's 'primary object' in the poem as being Southey-centred. In fact, Byron's personal relationship with Southey dominated the criticisms about *The Vision* for a long time. This angle of reading pushes critics to deepen the study into both the political and poetical debate between the loyalist laureate and the rebellious celebrated noble poet. In his declaration of war to Byron, Southey wrote:

> One word of advice to Lord Byron before I conclude. When he attacks me again, let it be in rhyme. For one who has so little command of himself it will be a great advantage that his temper should be obliged to keep tune. And while he may still indulge in the same rankness and violence of insult, the meter will, in some degree, seem to lessen its vulgarity.[383]

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[381] James Kennedy, *Conversations on Religion, with Lord Byron and Others* (London: John Murray, 1830), p. 46.
[382] Samuel Coleridge, *Letters, Conversations and Recollections* (London, 1864), p. 103.
[383] Robert Southey, 'To the Editor of the Courier', *The Life and Correspondence of Robert Southey* (London, 1832), p. 353.

It is interesting to read this together with:

> Thou shalt believe in Milton, Dryden, Pope;
> Thou shalt not set up Wordsworth, Coleridge, Southey;
> Because the first is crazed beyond all hope,
> The second drunk, the third so quaint and mouthy. (II:1633–1636)

When Southey ridicules that 'let it be in rhyme' and Byron lists the six poets' names, it seems fair to say the debate between these two is poetical. Jake Philips goes a step further in Byron's poetical style, and his helpful conclusion is that 'the Italian verse form used by Byron was an aristocratically appropriate vehicle for his social critiques and poetical self'.[384] Here, Philips explains Byron's 'appropriate' poetical style compared with the folk poet Robert Burns, though one may find the class issue strange when couplets, rhyme, and Roman tradition can all naturally be viewed as standard. This indicates a fundamental problem with criticism based on relationships—namely, the dislocation that arises when Byron's dynamic poetical criticisms are viewed as not only consistent but also fixed in alignment with a confirmed public belief, a belief self-servingly represented and presented by the reviewer. To clarify this dislocation, another example is that the *Debow's* reviewer believed in Byron's Miltonic belief not following Byron's own. 'Milton' was always a flexible shelter for Byron but not always in one consistent way.

One may find three obvious dislocations in criticisms about Byron and Milton and also Byron's criticism about Milton. Firstly, modern critics' reception of the Romantic blasphemous reading of Milton cannot retrospectively influence the eighteenth-century situation that Milton's reputation as a biblical poet had been confirmed, and this confirmation makes it possible that Byron sheltered behind Milton. Secondly, to the public, Byron's ironical adoption of this confirmation is that 'if *Cain* be blasphemous, *Paradise Lost* is blasphemous' (*BLJ* 9: 574). The public opinion on *Paradise Lost* is represented and defined by the authorities, but it does not mean they are the same. This representation results in the second dislocation, which makes Byron's

[384] Philips, 223.

blasphemous appeal survive. Thirdly, Byron's belief in Milton's blasphemy also indicates two directions: one for Byron's blasphemy as indicated in *Cain*'s preface, and the other for Byron's possible piety. William Walling reminds us of 'two essential criticisms: that Milton was guilty of flagrant arrogance in presuming to portray God, and that his so-called "Christianity" was little more than another name for his harsh vindictiveness'.[385] He further adds that as for Byron, 'Milton is as absurd (and, in fact, blasphemous) in putting material lightning into the hands of the God head, as in giving him hands at all'.[386] This is the same as what Byron does in *The Vision*: he tries to take over the legitimacy to define what is blasphemy because Southey actually does the same. Walling also notices this as revealed in 'Preface' to *The Vision*:

> The reader is…requested to observe that no doctrinal tenets are insisted upon or discussed; that the person of the Deity is carefully withheld from sight, which is more than can be said for the Laureate, who hath thought proper to make him talk, not "like a school-divine", but like the unscholarlike Mr. Southey. (*CPW* 6: 311)

I quote this not to view this 'preface' as another confirmed 'appropriate' source to argue for Byron's religious identity as a guard of fundamentalism, especially when it did not work as expected until the chaotic events centring *The Vision*'s publication finally ended. I want to deduce reversely based on Walling's comparison: When Byron's criticism of Milton can be transferred to Southey, reversely it is also possible that Byron actually reads Southey as blasphemous, rebellious, and revolutionary in his exaggerated 'mockery' of the imaginative God, Heaven, and King. Due to the flexible representations of irony and satire, this becomes an endless circle when running after the personal relationships with all these cognitive dislocations. However, as mentioned before, this angle of reading objectively deepens the critical exploration of these poets' works and their considerations when composing both poetry and criticism.

The risk lies in such a situation where the personal relationship surpasses the meaning of the poetry in a contemporary social context. In fact, the former would even

[385] William Walling, 'Tradition and Revolution: Byron's Vision of Judgment', *The Wordsworth Circle*, vol. 3 (1972), 223–31, 228.
[386] Walling, 228.

weaken one's understanding of the latter. When Gary Dyer suggests that 'Byron deflates the laureate's mythmaking by replacing his unnaturally vigorous and articulate George III with the blind, deluded old man the king had become, and by making celestial deliberations resemble something as worldly as a parliamentary debate'.[387] We see Kelsall's efforts to relate this poem's situation to Byron's own experience in the parliament and make Byron's figure never absent in his own representations. However, it cannot be in this way because this is very much unlike a parliamentary debate where even *The Vision of a Judgement* cannot be found. In his recent study, Andrew McKendry makes it better to let *The Vision* 'mirror the English legal system'.[388] More precisely, he focuses on 'the poem's jurisprudential subtexts'.[389] Regarding the view that this poem is primarily Byron's response to Southey, McKendry remarks, 'while this approach helped explain the origins of the poem, it necessarily left the intellectual and historical contexts of *The Vision* comparatively neglected'.[390] From my perspective, McKendry's focus on Byron's criticism about 'the deficiency of the legal process his poem imitates' is reasonable;[391] he pays great attention to explaining how deficient the system is but stops at the point of exploring Byron's reception, understanding, and suggestion about this situation, which again leaves 'the intellectual and historical contexts of *The Vision* comparatively neglected'. If we want all these issues clarified, it is time to return to the radical context mentioned at the very beginning.

9.1. The prosecution of blasphemy in the real world

When the three dislocations make the biographical reading in Byron's poetry lack consistency, they actually also work in the same way as a reason for the deficiency of the legal system, especially in the seditious or blasphemous libel action. The main

[387] Gary Dyer, *British Satire and the Politics of Style, 1789–1832*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 90.
[388] Andrew McKendry, 'Will the Public Please Step Forward? Libel Law and Public Opinion in Byron's "The Vision of Judgment"', *Studies in Romanticism*, vol. 54, No. 4 (2015), 525–49, 526.
[389] McKendry, 526.
[390] McKendry, 527.
[391] McKendry, 535.

feature of all these representations is 'ambiguous', but the reason for this ambiguity can be clarified. As we already know, the series of government actions composed the 'suppression of intellectual dissent…in a succession of interventions to curb political and religious heterodoxy, which continued into the early decades of the 1800s'.[392] However, from the 1790s, 'William Pitt's "reign of terror" against the radicals…did little to dissuade radical followers'.[393] In these long-standing conflicts, radicals developed various strategies to resist or survive libel actions. At the core of the issue lay the definition of blasphemy—or, more precisely, the authority to determine what should be deemed blasphemous.

Dyer describes the environment during this period:

> While the legal repression of sedition in the decades after the French Revolution encouraged the Radical mode of Satire by forcing writers who wished to attack the government or the royal family to do so only indirectly, at the same time theirs are the literary techniques that generally make satire most distinctive, most stimulating.[394]

When Dyer also mentions that 'satires in this class take a radical stance on immediate political issues', it is worth clarifying that the environment considers satirical writings to develop rebellious opinions, but these two features are not necessarily bound together.[395] This constituted a primary reason for the ambiguity surrounding many subsequent blasphemy libel prosecutions. This point is crucial, as this section does not seek to trace the subterranean development of radicalism, but rather to foreground the radicals' efforts to bring blasphemy and unorthodox thought into the public sphere. The indirect, satirical and indicative representations provide some fields for such performances, and I will later relate them to the dislocations with some examples.

Robert Elliott comments on satire's advantage in promoting public reception, with special attention to the wit tradition of the eighteenth century:

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[392] Christina Parolin, '"Honourable House of Blasphemers": the radical public of Newgate in the early nineteenth century', *Radical Spaces: Venues of Popular Politics in London 1790– c. 1845* (Canberra: ANU Press, 2010), pp. 17–48, p. 19.
[393] Parolin, p. 30.
[394] Dyer, *British Satire and the Politics of Style*, p. 72.
[395] Dyer, *British Satire and the Politics of Style*, p. 67.

> Once wit has been brought into the service of the satiric spirit, then all the rhetorical maneuvers by which the literary satirist achieved his end become available: irony, innuendo, burlesque, parody, allegory—all the devices of indirection which help make palatable an originally unacceptable impulse. It is a nice complication, however, that the devices which make satire acceptable to polite society at the same time help sharpen its point.[396]

Considering the general reception, this comment from the satirists' angle seems too idealistic. As Kevin Gilmartin has observed, the 'ability to work through repression, and especially imprisonment, became a litmus test for the viability of radical protest in print'.[397] Again, the dislocation appears. Public acceptance is expected from the radicals' side; repression or imprisonment is also in the name of the represented public and realised by the uncompromised authoritative system. Dyer mentions this difficult situation that 'satire flourishes when it must censor itself, as it tries to challenge orthodoxy while deflecting prosecution for seditious or blasphemous libel'.[398] This suggests an increasing reliance on prediction and imagination. Unlike the apparatus surrounding celebrity culture, the position of the public or audience within the apparatus of blasphemy is largely imagined and lacks concrete performances.

This deficiency continues to work even after the crime is confirmed. It is also worth pointing out that radicals get their name not because they hold the same position, but because they all hold dissents. Concerning blasphemy, radicals can be roughly divided into two groups: one believes they are enlightened to be blasphemous, and the other thinks the authorities are blasphemous. The latter indicates another ambiguous issue: God's will, or more practically the right to interpret God's will. I will discuss this ambiguity later. The former group recontextualizes blasphemy as a secular concern within the discourse. Their inquiry focuses narrowly on whether blasphemy constitutes an illegal act, rather than interrogating the legitimacy of blasphemy as a reified concept. Despite the term's inherent fluidity, their approach perpetuates a predetermined binary

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[396] Robert G. Elliott, *The Power of Satire: Magic, Ritual, Art* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1960), p. 264.
[397] Kevin Gilmartin, *Print Politics: The Press and Radical Opposition in Early Nineteenth-Century England* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 90.
[398] Dyer, *British Satire and the Politics of Style*, p. 4.

framework—effectively reinforcing the very carceral logic they ostensibly oppose. When there are criminals, there is a prison. Taking Newgate as an example, Christina Parolin views the prison as a symbolic place where the confrontation starting in the court gets prolonged.[399] The other criminals, as special representatives of the public, becomes the audience of their confrontation. Noticeably, the radicals also become part of the public, because 'the central tenets of prison reform…claimed that even the most wanton and fallen criminal could be redeemed through religious instruction'.[400] While these radicals do not view themselves as criminals, the judgement forcefully places them at the bottom of this legal system. They are then forced to answer yes or no to the religious instruction, which actually is equal to the authorities here. Some did agree to this system; some others even guided some special representatives out of it:

> [T]he radicals' brief contact with a fellow prisoner, Edward Cockerill, however, both challenged the general disdain of radicals for their prison counterparts and affirmed the authorities' fears of the potential for contagion from state prisoners to the wider prison community…To the disgust and despair of the prison chaplain, Cockerill refused religious consolation and shunned God during the entire proceedings at the gallows…The incident made news across Britain with the mainstream press reporting Cockerill's long and painful death on the gallows as a consequence of his impiety…[401]

This result, since it happened at a time close to Byron's, can be analysed to reflect some basic truth of the judgement of blasphemy. First, the judgement of blasphemy does not end in court. Second, blasphemy's function as a crime is expected to approach the imagined public through the 'mainstream press', just as blasphemy is a radical voice in text. Third, the confrontation works even in a fiercer way compared with believers' domestic debates. Through this process, prison and public opinion compose the second and the third courts to continue the unfinished judgement of blasphemy. I thus reaffirm that some blasphemous voices spoke through the refusal and death, while more were only unnamed, imagined, and silently represented.

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[399] See Parolin, p. 17.
[400] Parolin, p. 40.
[401] Parolin, p. 39.

9.2. Byron's symbolic court for the judgement of blasphemy

In the first court—the actual court of law—The Vision should be judged within this context, as it was initially published without its preface, which would otherwise have directly shifted the debate toward the question of what constitutes blasphemy. In the lost preface, Byron attributes his creation of this poem completely to Southey: 'If Mr Southey had not rushed in where he had no business, and where he never was before, and never will be again, the following poem would not have been written' (*CPW* 6: 309). Dyer thinks this shows that Byron predicted that a preface like this 'was needed in order to fend off prosecution'.[402] Philips believes that this 'reveals how little his poem is really concerned with the King's death, as it is entirely geared up as an attack on Southey'.[403] I would prefer not to analyse Byron's purpose revealed in the preface, not because it is unreliable as a tactic to survive censorship, but simply because of its absence from the beginning, and in result the jury and the judge never cared about Southey.

The central problem of the original text is whether it is blasphemous according to the court. The authorities work in a direct way to ask for a 'yes' to this question. Lord Chief Justice Sir Charles Abbott cared only about the poem's 'tendency…to taint, disgrace, and vilify the fame' of the late George III, and if 'it was calculated to disturb and disquiet the mind of the present King, and to bring him into public scandal and disgrace'.[404] Dyer comments, '[t]he anonymous author was accused of libeling not Southey, whom he announces in the preface is his primary target, but a ruler whose sins he indicates were passive and a reigning king he scarcely mentions, George IV'.[405] The Lord Chief Justice's instruction should be read together with Jeremy Bentham's criticism about the jury system to support Sir Burdett's complaint. Bentham says:

> We have seen what expedients the nature of the case affords, for moulding

[402] Dyer, *British Satire and the Politics of Style*, p. 93.
[403] Philips, 229.
[404] Dyer, *British Satire and the Politics of Style*, p. 72; quoted in William H. Marshall, *Byron, Shelley, Hunt and The Liberal* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1960), p. 206.
[405] Dyer, *British Satire and the Politics of Style*, p. 92.

> juries into obsequiousness, principally by means of corruption; and thus divesting, as much as may be, of all reality, the appearance which they exhibit of a check to the arbitrary power of the judge…A special jury is so termed to distinguish it from a common jury: this last name being reserved for the designation of the only sort of jury, which, till the invention of this special instrument of corruption, was in existence.[406]

A similar issue is illustrated later at the end of the nineteenth century by A. V. Dicey on a more specific issue. In *Introduction to the Study of the Law of the Constitution*, he questions the arguable nature of the right to freedom of discussion, which is 'little else than the right to write or say anything which a jury, consisting of twelve shopkeepers, think it expedient should be said or written'.[407] He questions the legitimacy of the jury's judgement, even though this has already become more reasonable after the Fox's Libel Act 1791. If a crime's subject cannot be confirmed, it is doubtful that it can be legally justified. Nonetheless, the result of this judgement in the court is that 'John Hunt, who had published the poem in the first issue of The Liberal, was tried for libel, found guilty by jury, and sentenced to pay one hundred pounds as well as to enter into securities for five years'.[408] When more indirect representations were developed as a response to the suppression, the ambiguous standard of the crime proved to leave more flexibility for the authorities. Sir Francis Burdett complained early in 1813 that 'the only criterion [of libel] was whether any matter was or was not pleasing to his Majesty's Attorney General'.[409] The situation got worse in the age of the publication of *The Vision*. Byron told Murray he would assure any publisher 'that if he gets into a scrape I will give up my name or person' (*BLJ* 8: 232–3). His caution was of course a predictive preparation for the judgement of blasphemy, and composes part of the judgement during as well as after the trial.

The reason Byron cannot be directly placed in one of the two mentioned groups

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[406] Jeremy Bentham, *The Elements of the Art of Packing, as Applied to Special Juries, Particularly in Cases of Libel Law*, (London: Effingham Wilson, 1821), p. 26.
[407] A. V. Dicey, *Introduction to the Study of the Law of the Constitution* (London: Macmillan, 1915), p. 238.
[408] 'The King against John Hunt, 1824', in *Reports of State Trials: New Series*, 2 (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1889), p. 104.
[409] 'Sir Francis Burdett', 1821.

of blasphemers lies in *The Vision*'s creation as well as his reaction to Hunt's trial. With the preface, we can at least claim that Byron wanted this debate to be Southey-centred—or pretended to. The coincidence that the preface did not reach Hunt brought about a new stage, and Byron himself became one of the audience. This is similar to the symbolic Newgate now. The opinions centring *The Vision* in and outside the court asked for a new judgement of sedition and blasphemy among the public. The argument centring its blasphemy (or not) reveals, as McKendry points out, 'the disjunction between courtroom invocations of "the people" and the heterogeneous character of public opinion'.[410] This also forms the main point of McKendry's argument about *The Vision*'s revealing 'the limitations of judgment, the inadequacy of representation, and the prohibitive heterogeneity of public opinion'.[411]

This is why I describe public opinion as 'imagined'. The imagined public operates in the minds of both the authorities and the blasphemers during the judgment of blasphemy. While the blasphemers appeal to this imagined public in anticipation of their reception, the authorities require only its silent representation to legitimise their arbitrary power. Byron's judgement did not end even in 1831, long after his death:

> The scandalous insults which Lord Byron offered to the late king were of course, mainly designed, and excellently well calculated, to please certain liberal circles in those days, condemned as such circles then were to the blackest rancour of hopelessness…Lord Byron had, in their view, degraded himself as a man, by lending his poetical talents to the purposes of a small exclusive knot of magnates, who, occasionally professing levelling principles on a wider scale—and perhaps well enough disposed to please the mob, if they could do so safely, at the expense of the people…[412]

The judgements were finally brought to the real public vision in a dramatic way. The public situation is imagined and represented again. The 'preface' actually works now, because the saying is that 'Byron…lend[s] his poetical talents to the purposes of a small exclusive knot of magnates'. Byron is described as an audience instead of a self-motivated individual with opinions. But preface aside, I view this case as a prolonged

[410] McKendry, 528.
[411] McKendry, 538
[412] *Quarterly*, XLIV (Jan 1831), 197

judgement from the writings. The main reason is that the God-like (though they do not know themselves as such) public is introduced into the arguments about judgements of blasphemy, not through the jury but through the press. The confirmed blasphemous action is repeated as a result to realise further 'the central tenets of prison reform' in this preaching tone. This is the same as 'Cockerill's long and painful death on the gallows as a consequence of his impiety' described in the mainstream press.[413] I thus call the series of performances centring *The Vision*'s judgement as Byron's symbolic Newgate, though the confrontation can be a bit more complicated.

This should firstly be distinguished from Southey's call of a 'Satanic school':

> The school which they have set up may properly be called the Satanic school; for though their productions breathe the spirit of Belial in their lascivious parts, and the spirit of Moloch in those loathsome images of atrocities and horrors which they delight to represent, they are more especially characterized by a Satanic spirit of pride and audacious impiety, which still betrays the wretched feeling of hopelessness wherewith it is allied.[414]

This Satanic school can be viewed as the same as what I have called the radicals, but from the authorities' perspective the figures in this school are not the same; they are just all opposed to the established system. The more important issue is that the 'Satanic school' does not indicate influence or confrontation inside. It is fixed to be a negative judgement from the outside. When Byron is placed in a similar position to the radicals in the Newgate, it is also helpful to understand the connection between Byron's blasphemy and celebrity.

The connection may be surprising, but blasphemy as an arguable crime in itself can arouse great popularity. As Gilmartin observes, 'trials for seditious and blasphemous libel became a key forum for radical assembly and verbal expression during the repressive campaigns that peaked in 1817 and 1819…and more controversial trials attracted large crowd'.[415] In the broader public context of blasphemy concerning irreverence towards established social belief, Samuel Foote's success in *The Minor*, as

[413] Parolin, p. 39.
[414] Southey, pp. xx–xxi.
[415] Gilmartin, p. 115.

Jane Moody asserts, 'enhanced [his] notoriety, filled his pockets and convinced him of spectators' appetite for the defamation of public figures'.[416] In these cases, it can be concluded that the audience and the industry as well as celebrity culture have a nature to welcome blasphemy.

Wolfson also notices the possibility of viewing the judgement of *The Vision* as a symbolic stage. On Byron's two following statements on the court issues —

> I am also willing to be both ostensible and responsible for the poem—and to come home and face the consequences on the Author.
>
> …
>
> I did not wish the publication of the V. and indeed particularly warned [John Hunt] to pause—or erase passages likely to be obnoxious. (*BLJ* 10: 72)

— Wolfson comments that

> [h]is syntax not only differentiates "the Author" of *The Vision* from an "I" of wishes and willingness, but also offers a publisher's will and the letter of the law (prosecutor, jury, and sentence) as co-authors of *The Vision* and its effects.[417]

This situation closely resembles that of Newgate, where the radical—oppressed by the authorities within a systematic carceral space—is not only an active agent but also a passive figure within the imagined public. The unforeseen omission of the preface accelerated the process and rendered the judgement of The Vision both a radical forum aimed at reaching a more silent public and a symbolic prison in which Byron's confrontations were staged without the buffer of rhetorical indirection.

In fact, from an etymological angle, Minta identifies some connections between blasphemy and fame:

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[416] Jane Moody, 'Stolen Identities: Character, Mimicry and the Invention of Samuel Foote', in *Theatre and Celebrity in Britain, 1660–2000*, edited by Mary Luckhurst and Jane Moody, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. 80.
[417] Susan J. Wolfson, 'The Vision of Judgment and the Visions of "Author"', in *The Cambridge Companion to Byron*, edited by Drummond Bone, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 171-85, p. 183.

> Greek pheme also has a contested history. It can be divine, an "utterance prompted by the gods", "a voice from heaven", but in the following fascinating passage from Homer's contemporary Hesiod, the ambiguities surrounding the idea of talk are fully in play: "Avoid the wretched talk (pheme) of mortals. For talk is evil: it is light to raise up quite easily, but it is difficult to bear, and hard to put down. No talk is ever entirely gotten rid of, once many people talk it up: it too is some god"…Talk may be light and trivial, but through that promiscuity of articulation at the heart of fame, through endless repetition and circulation, it acquires a power that is somehow god-like: the power and the price of fame.[418]

The more important point is that this argument echoes not only celebrity culture's blasphemous nature of offending God, but also the arguable legitimacy represented in different stands of blasphemy concerning God's word. When Minta considers fame's core as 'that promiscuity of articulation', it is in accordance with what Pope does to represent his Cibber. Julia Fawcett believes that 'Pope employ[ing] a form at once "barren" and "superfluous" to describe the indescribable aspects of his arch nemesis suggests Cibber's simultaneous omnipresence and indescribability'.[419] From another angle, the power to talk freely is sacralised to be overwhelmingly powerful. From a historical view, if we compress the spread of the Bible into the ages with a more developed printing industry, what is the difference between these talks? Nash concludes that 'the spread of advanced literature was frequently confronted by conservative organisations who genuinely believed that ruin would follow heterodox religious and social opinion', which may be reasonable for fear of a new being walking in his country.[420]

Back to blasphemy as a crime—blasphemy works in a strange way to increase blasphemers' (like Byron) fame. In 1817, Lord Chancellor Eldon held in Southey v. Sherwood that the poet was not entitled to an injunction against Sherwood for printing *Wat Tyler* because 'a person cannot recover in damages for a work which is, in its nature,

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[418] Minta, 'Byron, Death, and the Afterlife', p. 121.
[419] Julia H. Fawcett, *The Celebrity Emerges as the Deformed King: Richard III, the King of the Dunces, and the Overexpression of Englishness, Spectacular Disappearances*, (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2016), p. 56.
[420] Nash, 12.

calculated to do injury to the public'.[421] With respect to Southey's *Wat Tyler* in 1817, Shelley's *Queen Mab* and Byron's *Don Juan* similarly were believed to be without property and so made available at very low prices, which is good for the same groups of radicals and artisans from the eighteenth century to get one copy. Similarly, because *Cain* was determined to be blasphemous and therefore outside the protection of copyright, the decision to sell at low price

> had robbed him of his property, and had cast it away in the public market, to be scrambled for and divided among the breakers and defyers of the law...[I]t had lowered the price of the work, and thereby increased its sale ten-fold.[422]

Foote is right to some extent; the blasphemy prosecution did not stop the audience from reading Byron, just like the Newgate did not stop the radicals' fame or even political capital.[423]

When the imagined public comes to realise themselves, there emerges conflict, 'competing manifestations' of different opinions.[424] On the one hand, this substantiates 'the allegations of critics that the "public" invoked in the courtroom was at odds with the sentiments of the English public';[425] on the other hand, the radical group expands as it welcomes all opinions that are different from the authorities. It is highly reasonable that Byron considers these, because, as mentioned in the previous chapter, Byron confirmed his poetical influence through public reception, especially in the long poem 'Anti-Byron'. In the meanwhile, from the fourth canto of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, as argued in the first chapter, Byron financially became a professional poet. In *Beppo*, he boasts that:

> How quickly would I print (the world delighting)
> A Grecian, Syrian, or Assyrian tale;
> And sell you, mix'd with western sentimentalism,
> Some samples of the finest Orientalism (*Beppo*, II: 5-8)

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[421] See Levy, p. 193.
[422] Tuite, p. 219.
[423] See Parolin, pp. 31–33 on John Cam Hobhouse in Newgate.
[424] McKendry, 534.
[425] McKendry, 534.

Dyer concludes three main concerns of the common radicals: 'to protect [Byron] from prosecution for seditious libel…to keep his readership broad and his income steady'.[426] Under such circumstances, 'because shifts in the interpretation and prosecution of libel law had fundamentally compromised its application in the courtroom', it seems that Byron had no reason not to expect certain problems when composing *The Vision*.[427] It may be hard to evaluate how much Byron was dissatisfied with 'the Peterloo Massacre and the ensuing suppression of political writing', but it should be safe to say that *The Vision* reflects Byron's certain impulse to respond to this context.[428]

Moreover, although public opinion is largely imagined in presentation, it is deliberately emphasised in the original composition of certain representations. This forms the foundation of religious debate: the majority's belief is confirmed yet remains ambiguous, allowing both the authorities and officially labelled blasphemers to continue arguing over what constitutes blasphemy, while simultaneously seeking to represent and persuade the public. Dyer tells that '[f]or Byron, the laureate's presumption lies less in the widely criticized gaffe of pretending to know how George III's soul was judged than in his eagerness to condemn people to hell on God's behalf'.[429] McGann mentions that Southey's *Vision* is 'a celebration of England's most conservative traditions'.[430] This conservativeness is religion-based, but presented to be mainly political and royalist. Timothy Ruppert believes that 'Southey benefited from his alignment with the Tory royalist establishment, making him a natural target for the ambitious and outspoken young lord'.[431] The words 'ambitious' and 'outspoken' somehow indicate that Byron was looking for some celebrated and well-known powerful position someplace. But Ruppert mainly presents this oppositional tie. When arguing for secular power, Southey and Byron turn to the divine. God's will becomes important when people care. God is then manipulated and neglected like public opinion

[426] Dyer, *British Satire and the Politics of Style*, p. 3.
[427] McKendry, 526.
[428] McKendry, 534.
[429] Dyer, *British Satire and the Politics of Style*, p. 90.
[430] Quoted in Philips, 227.
[431] Timothy Ruppert, 'Byron's Idea of Tolerance in The Vision of Judgment', *The Keats-Shelley Review*, vol. 25 (September, 2011), 137–46, 139.

in the judgements. Byron therefore can satirise Southey more, because God is absent in Byron's heaven and thus gets, if at all, more dignity and respect.

9.3. The represented public, interpreted God, and arbitrary authorities: Byron's deconstruction of the existing system through 'tolerance'

All the subsequent dramas in the real world may have exceeded Byron's expectations, but they still echo some of Byron's fundamental concerns. And, in the broader contexts of religious and political debates, *The Vision* had prepared some powerful appeals for his readers to engage with alongside these unfolding events.

McKendry puts forward such a possible intention of Byron's court-like design in front of the gate of heaven: 'In fact, the absence of a jury emphasizes the role played by readers of the poem, who are repeatedly encouraged to judge for themselves—to act as the jury'; what he really wants is in fact to confirm 'the voice of "the people"' in this heavenly courtroom.[432] Nonetheless, I think these two are different in Byron's representations. Byron enlarges the jury to its idealistic range, but even in this imaginative situation, only the representatives come out:

> "Then we'll call
> One or two persons of the myriads placed
> Around our congress, and dispense with all
> The rest", quoth Michael: "Who may be so graced
> As to speak first? There's choice enough—who shall
> It be?" Then Sathan answered, "There are many;
> But you may choose Jack Wilkes as well as any". (514–20)

This is not the first time Byron tries to place his readers as observers in his depiction. In *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, he emphasises the intimate connection between human beings throughout the different cultures and also the history in front of the Greek ruins. Byron makes it different here: 'one or two persons' against 'the myriads'. Here, the majority's opinion is still imagined, as in Sathan's words, 'any' of the myriads shall not

[432] McKendry, 537.

be different from the named Jack Wilkes. In this way, this 'jury' may work as McKendry suggests, but it is better to view it as part of the mockery of the reality. The introduction of the audience's observation is not to make this courtroom a perfect place for the judgement but a perfect stage for the following performances. In this way, what 'was highlighted by the slew of liberal trials that led up to the publication of *The Vision*…[was] the disconnect between public opinion and courtroom invocations of "the people"'—and *The Vision* is not to solve this point, but to make this problem more noticeable.[433] This also reveals the similar uncertainty and ambiguity of both public view in the secular court and God's will in heaven. Byron thus denies the confirmation and the following judgement based on either of these two.

This design challenges or echoes the popular reading of Byron's tolerance in *The Vision* from several different perspectives. I want to introduce Dyer's tolerance reading first because it identifies Byron's smart and 'blasphemously tolerant' opposition to the religious truth. He notices Byron's unusual adoption in the following lines:

> I know this is unpopular; I know
> 'Tis blasphemous; I know one may be damn'd
> For hoping no one else may e'er be so;
> I know my catechism; I know we are cramm'd
> With the best doctrines till we quite o'erflow;
> I know that all save England's church have shamm'd, no
> And that the other twice two hundred churches
> And synagogues have made a damn'd bad purchase. (105–12)

Dyer comments that 'Byron's *Vision*…uses theology only rhetorically', and then adds, 'the poet is treating the "supernatural machinery" of Anglican doctrine as correct solely for the sake of his satirical attack'.[434] The tone here is exaggerated and the expression too absolute, which shows Byron's eagerness to uncover his satire. In the meantime, the comparison here between 'England's church' and 'the other twice two hundred churches' suggests Byron's sceptical understanding of the religious doctrines. This reveals two notions I always return to: On the one hand, this sceptical understanding is

[433] McKendry, 525.
[434] Dyer, *British Satire and the Politics of Style*, pp. 90–1.

in accordance with Byron's adoption of classical scepticism in Canto III of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* to challenge the authority of the king and Church as that of God; on the other hand, that the other four hundred churches 'have made a damn'd bad purchase' means England's church has made 'a damn'd [good] purchase', but a purchase is a purchase instead of truth or even faith. Byron satirically denies and desacralises these religious doctrines here, an idea which can prepare us to approach some other tolerance readings hereafter.

The core text for all other readings of tolerance is the last stanza of *The Vision* as the ending of this vision of the judgement in front of the heaven's gate:

> As for the rest, to come to the conclusion
> Of this true dream, the telescope is gone
> Which kept my optics free from all delusion,
> And show'd me what I in my turn have shown:
> All I saw farther in the last confusion,
> Was, that King George slipp'd into heaven for one;
> And when the tumult dwindled to a calm,
> I left him practising the hundredth psalm. (841–8)

Before stepping into the arguable critical contexts, it is worth distinguishing Byron's usage of 'King George' from that of 'George the Third' in *The Vision*. If he wants, Byron can rhyme in other words. Instead, among the five stanzas directly naming George before the ending, four of them name 'George the Third' and only one 'King George', and the context tells of Byron's different indications. When naming 'George the Third', Byron means the King of England. The king died 'mad' and 'blind', and 'left his subjects' still sharing these (63–4). In the angels' words, they care only whether this king has a head (141). Byron here made fun of the beheaded French king; the relevance is that they are both 'opponent[s]' of 'Liberty' (355–6). Byron makes John Wilkes call 'George the Third' for the last time in stanza 68. In spite of Wilkes's changing position to the king's government, he appears still 'to judge of kings' (539). All these four stanzas in context suggest this is a judgement of the king, but the only 'King George' in stanza 37 points out a unique means to decide the ending. Michael makes it quite clear that the criteria is based on '[h]is duties as a king and mortal'. In *The Vision*, the

king clearly fails in fulfilling his duty as a king. From the very beginning, Byron tells us indirectly about the king's reign, as the recording angel

> found, indeed, the facts to multiply
> With such rapidity of vice and woe,
> That he had stripp'd off both his wings in quills,
> And yet was in arrear of human ills. (20–4)

About King George's mortal part, however, it is only known that he gets 'older', maybe 'mad', possibly 'blind' (544, 64). But if, as a king, George the Third should go to hell, only the mortal part can probably explain why this blind old man finally 'slipp'd into heaven' in *The Vision*'s mechanism, especially as Byron adopts 'King George' again only at the end. Most critics notice the unusual ending of George in heaven but neglect this mechanism.

Ruddick makes a careless claim that '*The Vision of Judgment* ends with George the Third's private virtues weighing a shade heavier in the balance than his political vices: he creeps into heaven…'[435] Ruddick then is eager to add that '[l]aughter, tolerance and the Lord's graciousness and mercy dominate the conclusion of *The Vision of Judgment*'.[436] But if the weighing of virtues over vices were truly the basis for the king's ascent, why would the dominant themes be 'tolerance and the Lord's graciousness and mercy'? Critics who read the ending as an instance of tolerance must concede that such "tolerance" implies the king is not, in fact, deserving of heaven.

There are generally four kinds of angles to answer the question about this tolerance. Firstly, critics like Peter Cochran deny the confirmation of this tolerance. Cochran finds this ending uncertain because 'all [King George] can do there is "practise" the Hundredth Psalm—it is not clear that when Michael and the angels return, he is going to be allowed to stay and sing it'. To explain why King George can stay is feasible, though not necessary. If singing well can secure his position, it is easy to meet the requirement because even '[t]he angels all were singing out of tune' (9); and Byron's description of the bureaucratic 'handsome board' in heaven indicates they would not

[435] Ruddick, 13.
[436] Ruddick, 13.

bother to drive the old George to leave, because they are toiling hard and want a strike:

> This was a handsome board —a t least for heaven;
> And yet they had even then enough to do (33–4)
>
> They threw their pens down in divine disgust —
> The page was so besmear'd with blood and dust. (39–40)

This secularised arrangement works well to mirror the real world of blasphemous uselessness, which I shall elaborate later. Not to mention that Byron sarcastically writes that 'we learn the angels all are Tories' (208). Cochran's uncertain reading thus cannot echo the context or explain the ending. Furthermore, critics like Jake Philips deny this tolerance from another perspective. In fact, Philips views the ending as 'a sympathetic, albeit casual dismissal of the matter at hand'.[437] Philips enlarges the meaning of 'slip' to emphasise that the King's salvation is 'unnoticed and unimportant'.[438] He adds, 'readers know that Byron is more concerned with writing good poetry, and showing that Southey wrote bad poetry, than with any moral, or political subject'.[439] As readers may find it hard to ignore the king before he finally appears for the first time after two hundred lines, Philips draws our attention to the preface again:

> If Mr Southey had not rushed in where he had no business, and where he never was before, and never will be again, the following poem would not have been written. It is not impossible that it may be as good as his own, seeing that it cannot, by any species of stupidity, natural or acquired, be worse. The gross flattery, the dull impudence, the renegade intolerance and impious cant of the poem by the author of 'Wat Tyler', are something so stupendous as to form the sublime of himself—containing the quintessence of his own attributes. (*CPW* 6: 309)

Philips thus concludes: 'Byron's own Preface reveals how little his poem is really concerned with the King's death, as it is entirely geared up as an attack on Southey'.[440] It is easy to know the preface was written separately. As argued, to view it as a necessary

[437] Philips, 230.
[438] Philips, 230.
[439] Philips, 230.
[440] Philips, 229.

method to survive the libel prosecution is reasonable. Byron specially names Southey as 'the author of "Wat Tyler"' to satirise his changing position. Philips himself also admits the poem can thus be viewed as 'a judgement on the act of [Southey's] judgement'.[441] It is inadequate to attack the judgement without learning for what the judgement is legitimised; it also does not conflict with the fact that in *The Vision*, 'Byron not only vilifies Southey for his weathervane performances and graceless productions, but he also mocks the late King George for his uninspired life and authoritarian reign'.[442] Byron attacks the king as 'the first opponent' of 'Liberty', which was also a primary concern of Byron at the time. He writes to Kinnaird:

> [Y]our present Public…shall not interrupt the march of my mind—nor prevent me from telling the tyrants who are attempting to trample upon all thought—that their thrones will yet be rocked to their foundation. (*BLJ* 4: 152)

Philips may wrongly estimate then that it is inadequate to explain Byron's attack on Southey's 'cant' in poetry without considering what the Laureate's identity symbolised within the hierarchical, tyrannical system led by the king. Then the question goes back to the original one asking what decides the tolerance revealed in the result. The third angle is provided still by Ruddick. Although there exist some conflicting arguments about the king's ending, Ruddick views Byron's tolerance for King George as a religious tolerance. This may be odd to explain, but Ruddick thinks 'a movement from somewhat embittered rejection towards a liberating freedom to believe in a humane and humanitarian Christianity can be traced through his writings'.[443] Ruddick holds an evolving Christian belief and this is revealed in his creation of 'humane and humanitarian Christianity'. I do not go further on this concept, but the syntax shows that Ruddick views belief as a redemption of liberty for Byron. He takes this wishfully by saying that '[t]he psalms were Byron's favourite Biblical reading from childhood, and the hundredth carries the final message of his poem'.[444] This is to replace the

[441] Philips, 228.
[442] Ruppert, 139.
[443] Ruddick, 7.
[444] Ruddick, 13.

subject with an exhibition of Christian arbitrariness. I still include this reading because it witnesses the prolonged debate over systematic restraint represented at Byron's time, earlier in *Debow's Review* and now in a new disguised way. Ruddick suggests a seemingly optimistic reading of *The Vision*: '[Byron's] reinterpretative, sceptical wit works even more directly towards establishing true moral perspectives while demolishing traditional doctrines which (like political obscurantism) stand in the way to an enlightened assent'.[445] And the result is 'a liberating and humane religious position'. Here, the question is not even whether there can be such a position, but whether 'establishing true moral perspectives' is duplicating another system of 'traditional doctrines'. Byron in *The Vision* shows no intention to depict George with luck after amnesty. Wolfson reminds us of George's 'gate-crashing', and in the draft, Byron even adopts 'squeeze' instead of 'slip' to describe this ending.[446] Ruddick brings an arrogant religious reading of *The Vision*, but it is true that Byron is 'demolishing traditional doctrines' through such designs.[447]

The fourth angle to read the tolerance suggests also a new 'ethical position'; per Ruppert, '[Byron] sees Southey as a false prophet, a ravening wolf in sheep's clothing, Byron rebukes him through satire; but because he also sees Southey and George as human beings, Byron saves both through vision'.[448] Ruppert notices Byron's 'small hope of bettering future ill | By circumscribing, with some slight restriction, | The eternity of hell's hot jurisdiction' (102–4). Based on this position, Ruppert views the last stanza of dramatisation as Byron's 'magnanimity'. In this way, Ruppert concludes, Byron's 'remarkable lenity toward the Poet Laureate and the late monarch alike' in *The Vision* represents 'a deliberated ethical position…of a courageous humanity born of superior vision'.[449] This explains both Southey and George's results, and indicates a different value from heaven, so that George slipped into heaven to complete this humanitarian salvation, but Byron does not let him enter in a normal way in order to

[445] Ruddick, 12.
[446] Wolfson, 'The Vision of Judgment and the Visions of "Author"', 180.
[447] Ruddick, 12.
[448] Ruppert, 144.
[449] Ruppert, 146.

emphasise this difference. What I thus add to Ruppert's conclusion is that George's slipping into heaven not only suggests Byron's denial of the non-humane system, but his wish for keeping the uncertain humanity or human subjectivity. This is not about George the king's uncertain future in heaven as Cochran suggests, but to represent a non-binary and unconfirmed status of human beings with subjective free nature. Claude M. Feuss critiques Byron's satirical attack on Southey in *The Vision* to be centring a sense of 'unanswerability', as the satire is largely 'dramatic'.[450] From this, Walling reads Southey as 'a figure of sublime absurdity, farcically interacting with other characters as comically dramatized as he'.[451] This absurdity of course recalls Byron's ironic description of Southey's writing as 'something so stupendous as to form the sublime of himself' (*CPW* 6: 309). I mention these on Southey because Southey appears for the sake of King George but in fact Byron does not make him say anything about the king:

> He said—(I only give the heads)—he said,
> He meant no harm in scribbling; 'twas his way
> Upon all topics; 'twas, besides, his bread,
> Of which he butter'd both sides; 'twould delay
> Too long the assembly (he was pleased to dread)
> And take up rather more time than a day,
> To name his works—he would but cite a few —
> Wat Tyler—Rhymes on Blenheim—Waterloo. (761–8)

In Byron's depiction, Southey so expertly '[h]ad turn'd his coat—and would have turn'd his skin' (776). 'He meant no harm', but '[u]pon all topics' he continues 'his way'. For this dramatised Southeyan figure, which is designed to '[butter] both sides' all the time, the readers can be curious about why all these binary conflicts combine to create such an awkward and clownish atmosphere. And finally, this Southeyan figure

> fell like Phaeton, but more at ease,
> Into his lake, for there he did not drown,
> A different web being by the Destinies

[450] Claude M. Feuss, *Lord Byron as a Satirist in Verse*, (New York: Russell & Russell, 1912), p. 194.
[451] Walling, 225.

> Woven for the Laureate's final wreath, whene'er
> Reform shall happen either here or there. (828–32)

Falling like Milton's former Archangel, the laureate survives also like a spirit or God in all binary conflicts because '[r]eform' shall happen either here or there', but they all want God's endorsement just like the poet's flattery. Recalling Wilkes from 'the myriads', the Southeyan figure can always turn his coat to represent the most silent public, just as the authorised and used God. Before stepping out of the public, he remains silent; after that, the angels cannot stand not only for the poet's 'scribbling' works but also because, in the bureaucratic board,

> A general bustle spread throughout the throng,
> Which seem'd to hold all verse in detestation;
> The angels had of course enough of song
> When upon service… (729–32)

I therefore think the real 'unanswerability' lies in the ironic inability to talk outside the system with binary morality which in fact only caters to the authorities' tyrannical command. The figure thus ends up embodying a clownish absurdity and a tragic sublime when he is depicted exaggeratedly to boast his right to make the judgment uselessly:

> But talking about trumpets, here's my Vision!
> Now you shall judge, all people; yes, you shall
> Judge with my judgment! and by my decision
> Be guided who shall enter heaven or fall!
> I settle all these things by intuition,
> Times present, past, to come, heaven, hell, and all,
> Like King Alfonso! When I thus see double,
> I save the Deity some worlds of trouble. (801–8)

The chaos resulting from the unreliability of the judging system based on unreliable endorsement and representatives, in a dramatic way allows the human action of George's slipping into heaven. This arrangement of Byron's composes a rebellion against this outside judgement but truly realises a mortal's value as a response to the criteria, which is free human subjectivity. In doing so, Byron unsettles the fixed and

hierarchical good/evil binary that mirrors social reality. His blasphemy is thus enacted not merely by challenging divine authority, but by transcending the endless domestic debates centred on God's will. This is not to suggest that Byron is either for or against God—such a position would require accepting God's existence—but rather that Byron does not care about God, or at least interrogates the idea of a deity who remains silent and whose authority is always manipulated and reinterpreted by others—much like Byron's own celebrated figure in the audience's imagination, or the imagined and represented public in the courtroom. This presents blasphemy as a means of dismissing the solemnity of God-centred debates and, in doing so, naturally challenges the imposed authority that claims divine endorsement. Byron makes this boast with deliberate absurdity: the 'I' of any 'Individual' would 'save the Deity some worlds of trouble' simply because they can speak—unlike God, who always requires a 'trumpet'. But indeed, there is no need to heed the trumpets.

Along with the abandonment revealed through the dramatisation in *The Vision*, Byron's very early claim in 1811 can be better understood:

> I will neither read *pro* nor *con*. God would have made His will known without books, considering how very few could read them when Jesus of Nazareth lived, had it been His pleasure to ratify any peculiar mode of worship. As to your immortality, if people are to live, why die? And our carcases, which are to rise again, are they worth raising? I hope, if mine is, that I shall have a better pair of legs than I have moved on these two-and-twenty years, or I shall be sadly behind in the squeeze into Paradise. (*BLJ* 2: 98)

It is impossible to know whether this last sentence appeared in Byron's mind when he first took down 'squeeze' at the end of *The Vision* to describe the other George's entrance into heaven. The topic of life and death repetitively appears in Byron's works—from the Tales to *Manfred* to *Cain.* It is especially noticeable here, however, compared with the not-so-famous young Lord Byron; writing *The Vision* further developed his self-proclaimed indifference to the religious, the political, his readership issues. With this indifference, an enriched celebrity identity representing a vision from minor radical groups, oppositionists, or simply liberals endow his celebrity a supreme value of human ideological freedom from the religious and political authorities. This is

also further illustrated in *Cain.*

10. Exodus from the Christian system through Cain's murder

It is worth mentioning again that Byron produced *Cain* when 'a wave of blasphemy prosecutions [had] swept through England' and actually at the same time as *The Vision*.[452] Many connections can be found between *Cain*, *The Vision*, and *Manfred*, but they are quite different. *Manfred* sings for the human free self even at the expense of immortality; *The Vision* desacralises heaven and immortality while deconstructing the systems serving only the authorities; *Cain*, however, finds more meaning in human life and breaks the system to surpass even the non-binary morality in *The Vision* to create a liberated vacuum centring human life and human actions. Here, by 'vacuum' I mean that it is neither a status of utopia nor republic to emphasise its liberation from the existing system under God. I thus think Byron's post-Paradise-Lost drama is a regained paradise for humanity without any attempt to return the former one of ignorance, tameness, and spiritlessness.

In *Cain*, Byron dramatically revises the biblical myth, recasting the first human murderer as a rebellious hero who, driven by revolutionary passion, pursues knowledge and the truth of life in defiance of rigid religious doctrines that restrict free thought. After *Cain* had been published, Scott thought Byron 'certainly matched Milton on his own ground'.[453] For the Romanticists, Byron's Cain was like Milton's Satan because they both evoke revolutionary passion and share similar features. In *Paradise Lost*, the villain figure of Satan is viewed to be heroic in the first two books of the epic because of Milton's seemingly glamorous description. Also, because *Paradise Lost* was written after the English Civil War, and considering that Milton was a radical Puritan, it was believed that he threw his unfulfilled revolutionary passion into the

[452] Peter A. Schock, *Romantic Satanism: Myth and the Historical Moment in Blake, Shelley, and Byron* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p. 86.
[453] Walter Scott, 'Extract from a Letter of December 17, 1821, to John Murray', *George Gordon, Lord Byron (Bloom's Classic Critical Views)*, edited by Harold Bloom (New York: Infobase, 2009), p. 256.

rebellious Satanic figure. Under this circumstance, when being accused of blasphemy and profanity and severely suppressed, Byron used to shelter himself behind his devout predecessor Milton. Here is the famous sentence, again: '[I]f *Cain* be blasphemous, *Paradise Lost* is blasphemous' (*BLJ* 9: 574). Since Milton's reputation as a biblical poet had been confirmed, this excuse was more like a satire indicating the authority's self-deception in suppressing political readings of anti-Christian works, considering the wide acknowledgement of Milton's 'revolutionary thinking' among the radicals of the time. This can compose another example of the interpreted dislocation as mentioned. However, *Paradise Lost* actually cannot be blasphemous. For those who would like to insist on Satan's God-like glamorous figure, Milton relentlessly accuses Satan even in the first two books of his rebellion:

> …with ambitious aim
> Against the throne and monarchy of God
> Raised impious war in heaven and battle proud
> With vain attempt.[454]

The words 'ambitious aim' and 'vain attempt' indicate Satan's doomed failure '[w]ith hatefulest disrelish writhed their jaws | With soot and cinders filled' (Milton, X: 569–70). The failing result emphasises that the rebellion is a mistake with vanity, and that Christian values are glorious and undefeated. Thus, in *Paradise Lost*, the 'right' path for humans is to be tamed for redemption. The essence of Milton's Satan is to strengthen Christian values and restraints. Counsellor Lancelot Shadwell claims that 'the seemingly "blasphemous and impious" passages in Byron's drama are no more so that "what Milton has done also both in his Paradise Lost and Regained"'.[455] This is not true. It is not because Byron is more blasphemous or impious, which is true, but because Milton's occasional revolutionary passion cannot be an effective comparison to make Byron any less impious. Thus, this can only be Byron's strategy to avoid the prosecution of blasphemy. Nonetheless, the overreading of Milton's Satan objectively indicates

[454] John Milton, *Paradise Lost* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), section I, lines 41–4.
[455] Quoted in Truman Guy Steffan, *Lord Byron's Cain: Twelve essays and a text with variants and annotations*, (Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 1968), pp. 13–14.

people's appeal for a change of the rigid conventions in portraying this kind of antichrist. The arguments he arouses provide, maybe not intentionally, a perfect womb for the breakthrough of the humanistic figure in *Cain.*

10.1. Lucifer as the origin of Cain's 'evil', or not

The prototype for Cain lies in *Genesis*. Here, Cain and his brother Abel both bring offerings to God. However, God does not accept Cain and his offering because he 'doest not well, sin lieth at the door' (Genesis 4: 7), which imposes that Cain is close to 'evil'. So finally, Cain does lose his control over his sinful mind. Driven by jealousy, he murders his brother.[456]

Compared with the plain plot in its origin, Byron adds many more details to this story. *Cain* starts when Cain refuses to pray with his family led by parents Adam and Eve to show gratitude to God. Cain does so because he feels that he is destined to die and therefore does not owe anything to God. The only way of avoiding death seems to be the fruit on the tree of life in the Garden of Eden. However, his parents plucked the fruit from the Tree of Knowledge and were expelled from Eden by God for their violation of God's order. Cain cannot agree to be judged as sinful for his parents' eating the Forbidden Fruit, because life and knowledge are both good. To him, it is a pity that his parents have this knowledge but are destined to die, and a shame that they feel so guilty to have the knowledge that they indulge themselves in being controlled and tamed for so-called redemption. Cain's untamed behaviour arouses his parents', especially Eve's, anxiety and anger, and their irritation is amplified by his self-awakening towards a pursuit of knowledge and liberated life. At this time, the spirit Lucifer comes up and claims himself as immortal. He leads Cain to appreciate the Abyss of Space, from which Cain gets a voyage revealing both the clear and vague truth of the universe. After he witnesses the grandeur of the world, Cain breaks with the restricted and manipulated life. The action he finally takes is to kill the symbol of blind

[456] See Genesis, King James Bible at <https://www.kingjamesbibleonline.org/Genesis/>

religious belief, Abel, who is also his younger brother. The play ends with Cain's self-redemption by endeavouring to defeat the destiny written in blood through positive and intentional human actions.

In Genesis, Cain is more an illustration of 'evil' than a man. However, his identity as a human being is still noticeable because he is 'the first human being…raised in…human circumstances…[with] consciousness of man's mortality'.[457] In many adaptations, this has been emphasised in a more complicated and systematic way. For example, Salomon Gessner's *The Death of Abel* (*Der Tod Abels*) 'strongly weaves together the worldly and the religious in a common sentiment of unity and of affectionate understanding', where Cain is imposed to examine and reflect his family's respectable piousness, representing the efficient Christian management of the human world.[458] This perspective views family as a micro system mirroring broader Christian society. Byron takes this development, but not in a 'good' way. As illustrated, Byron fuelled the disharmony among the family members to emphasise the terrible surrounding factors affecting Cain's pursuit of his human right, which shows that Byron had no intention of letting this individual rest in domestic tameness. He endows Cain with a more valuable pursuit for humans: knowledge. Cain's original blasphemous conduct germinates in his suspicion of God's justice, where Cain encounters the contradiction between his own thinking and God's judgement in his family's sin and their being expelled from Eden. He writes:

> CAIN. Why not?
> The snake spoke truth; it was the Tree of Knowledge;
> It was the Tree of Life; knowledge is good,
> And Life is good; and how can both be evil? (I. I: 35–8)

Here, Cain questions why pursuing Knowledge and Life according to the truth, even though told by the serpent, is evil. It leads to the question of whether it is evil for human

[457] Paul A. Cantor, 'Byron's "Cain": A Romantic Version of the Fall', *The Kenyon Review*, vol. 2, 3 (1980), 50–71, 52.
[458] See Ricardo J. Quinones, 'Byron's Cain and His Antecedents', *The Changes of Cain: Violence and the Lost Brother in Cain and Abel Literature,* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), pp. 87–108, p. 90.

beings to be wise and have a longer life without God's permission. Before this suspicion is entirely developed, Byron, acutely and ironically, explains what God expects for every man through Eve's mouth: 'Content thee with what is. Had we been so, | Thou now hadst been contented' (I. I: 45–6). However, Cain refuses to do so. He starts his awakening to be a rebel against the unreasonable forces in the realm of spirituality over his own rights as a human being. Byron underlines Cain's unwillingness to be tamed, because a man should not feel satisfied when his own rights are unreasonable restricted.

Then, Lucifer appears, as 'an ironized mouthpiece for free thought'.[459] To cultivate Cain's independent thinking against religious control, Byron introduces Lucifer as an attachment, or maybe 'a phantasm or drive within Cain himself' which plays a vital role in Cain's development.[460] His mindset turning Lucifer's way, Cain further confirms his pursuit of knowledge and liberated life. Reviewers usually 'took Lucifer to be the author's iconoclastic mouthpiece'.[461] Since Edward Bostetter has pointed out that 'Lucifer's demonstration…[is] to show that the power of God is both limited and transitory', it also suggests that it is possible to escape God's control and that Cain can be more confident in his own insistence.[462] Furthermore, I suppose that Lucifer's figure is actually Cain's own imagination and projection. Lucifer is more like the personification of Cain's anti-Christian thinking, imagination, and contradicting thoughts when hesitating in confirming his doubtful self. Like Francesca is the 'good' thought of Alps, Lucifer is the 'evil' projection of Cain. In this way is revealed a dramatic and complex connotation of the first murderer. It also indicates that human beings are the unity of 'good' and 'evil', tameness and rebellion, belief and query. Thus, Cain's awakening is ultimately the process he uncovers through his own pursuit by himself.

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[459] Schock, p. 8.
[460] Tilottama Rajan, '"Something Not Yet Made Good": Byron's Cain, Godwin, and Mary Shelly's Falkner', *Byron and the Politics of Freedom and Terror*, edited by Matthew J. A. Green and Piya Pal-Lapinski (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 92.
[461] See Schock, p. 78.
[462] Edward E. Bostetter, 'Byron and the Politics of Paradise', *PMLA*, vol. 75, 5 (1960), 571–6, 574.

In fact, following his famous juxtaposition of *Cain* and *Paradise Lost*, Byron continues:

> *Cain* is nothing more than a drama—not a piece of argument—if Lucifer and Cain speak as the first Murderer and the first Rebel may be supposed to speak—surely all the rest of the personages talk also according to their characters—and the stronger passions have ever been permitted to the drama. (*BLJ* 9: 103)

The phrase 'Lucifer and Cain speak as the first Murderer and the first Rebel' reveals that these two figures in Byron's mind are mixed—even if not one and the same, together they form the complete blasphemy. Byron's description of Lucifer's appearance in the poem also indicate that Lucifer is part of Cain. The appearance of Lucifer is given in Cain's soliloquy:

> He seems mightier far than them, nor less
> Beauteous, and yet not all as beautiful
> As he hath been, and might be: Sorrow seems
> Half of his immortality. (I. I: 93–6)

Considering Cain here is perplexed in questioning the legitimacy of blind belief in God, the melancholy which Lucifer reveals could come from Cain's own mind. This projection, leading to a self-debate, marks that Cain commences thinking about his own life in a more dialectical way. We can expect that Lucifer's vanishing at the end represents Cain's combination of his 'good' and 'evil' thoughts and that he confirms himself in some decision. At present, because Cain is a man who awaits becoming mature, the 'immortal' spirit Lucifer shows certain immaturity. He shows his pride through seemingly grand but hollow lines. 'LUCIFER. Mortal! | CAIN. Spirit, who art thou? | LUCIFER. Master of spirits' (I. I: 98–100). However, when Cain challenges his strength that '[b]ut I will bend to neither', Lucifer only compromises: 'Ne'er the less, | Thou art my worshipper; not worshipping | Him makes thee mine the same' (I. I: 316–20). The weakness blurs Lucifer's powerful image but reflects Cain's floating mind. At the same time, the demonstration of a debate with a powerful immortal just conveys Cain's undefeated self-esteem: He believes he is equal even to

the immortal and the almighty. Cain in this way completes Byron's equal representations of Manfred and the spirits before. Apart from the debate on life, belief, or truth, Lucifer brilliantly represents Cain's imagination of his voyage in the unknown universe:

> CAIN. Oh thou beautiful
> And unimaginable ether! and
> Ye multiplying masses of increased
> And still-increasing lights! what are ye? what
> Is this blue wilderness of interminable
> Air, where ye roll along, as I have seen
> The leaves along the limpid streams of Eden?
> Is your course measured for ye? Or do ye
> Sweep on in your unbounded revelry
> Through an aërial universe of endless
> Expansion—at which my soul aches to think—
> Intoxicated with eternity? (II. I: 98–109)

The ether is far away, but imagination brings Cain into outer space. Cain realises that a man is infinitely small within the sheer scale of the cosmos. Touched by the splendour of the world, he reflects on the current situation. He feels more dissatisfied with being restricted. He asks the 'increasing lights' to express his ambition to learn more about the truth—since the world can be that magnificent, he would never be content to accept that a man's destiny is manipulated and arranged by God, nor to bend one's head to respect and obey rigid social conventions like a blind sheep.

Before Cain confirms himself, Byron borrows from Milton's description of Satan, but relentlessly sneers at it through Lucifer's mouth:

> When thousand ages
> Have rolled o'er your dead ashes, and your seed's,
> The seed of the then world may thus array
> Their earliest fault in fable, and attribute
> To me a shape I scorn, as I scorn all
> That bows to him. (I. I: 233–8)

This taunt comes down in a continuous line with Cain's original question on good and evil and can be a support in the falseness of blind belief. Also, it uncovers the non-

tameness of the 'evil'; for those who are not willing to bow, the 'evil' is actually 'good'. With 'scorn', Byron castigates not only the autocratic 'He', but also those who blindly 'bow'. Again, through Lucifer's mouth, Byron says the deviated words: 'But we, who see the truth, must speak it' (I. I: 240), claiming that all humans should be able to acquire truth freely, and they also can and should freely tell it.

Stephen Bauer acknowledges that 'Lucifer's method of subverting Cain makes his speeches often appear as externalizations of Cain's own thoughts', but he doubts the notion that 'Lucifer is but a projection of Cain' mainly because Lucifer seems to know what Cain does not know.[463] Cain indeed says to Lucifer that 'I knew not that, yet thought it' (II. I: 268). However, when Cain says he *did not* have any idea, apparently he *is then gaining* certain considerations, which represent the progress Cain has made to learn and pursue what he wants. More importantly, in the voyage, Cain can only get a vague image of death. The reason can only be that Lucifer is but a projection and cannot present what Cain cannot even imagine. And when Cain must wish he can get the truth, he still has to admit Lucifer's words that 'matter cannot | Comprehend spirit wholly' (II. II: 169–70), which signifies Cain's empirical belief that knowledge maybe only lies in imagination. The 'cannot' again reveals that Cain subconsciously avoids resorting to God. However, at present he is actually still hesitant in his way to accept truth because of his fear of and perplexity concerning death. He even comes up with another self-doubt that maybe 'my father's God did well | When he prohibited the fatal tree' (II. II: 232–3), because he is afraid that the expense of the truth is overwhelmingly frightening. But he wants the knowledge after all. He cannot help imploring 'let me perish, so I see them' (II. II: 408). But Lucifer replies:

> LUCIFER. There
> The son of her who snatched the apple spake.
> But thou wouldst only perish and not see them;
> That sight is for the other state. (II. II. 408–11)

[463] Stephen Bauer, 'Byron's Doubting Cain', *South Atlantic Bulletin*, vol. 39, 2 (1974), 80–8, 81.

This is not to suggest that Lucifer becomes the orthodoxy speaker. It is Cain's last self-critique on his wishful weakness and compromise. Through Lucifer's mouth, he reminds himself of his mother's fate. He thus realises that God and his offering are never reliable. He should rebel for himself. All these developing and even floating thoughts finally firm him up as a strong individual—a completely independent and humanistic individual. He turns all his dissatisfaction and even residuary panic into a fighting spirit to pursue truth and knowledge. Also, with Lucifer being the projection, in the long process of self-debate, Byron clarifies that a human being should and can think independently with his own ability to judge and make decisions. Stimulated by a series of thinking, Cain finally makes the decision to take action to get the freedom that he thinks a man should have. Thus, he will and must split from the imposed life and tackle all the obstacles in his way with his liberated mind. The religious 'good' and 'evil' gives way to an independent self.

10.2. Murder and Cain's other human reactions to the tyrannical system revealed in 'Thy God loves blood'

Now there seems to be an unavoidable conflict, yet Cain still prepares to offer a sacrifice to God. Through this arrangement, Byron asserts that those who continue to believe in tameness as a form of redemption must come to realise that only rupture and rebellion can lead Cain to a future of liberty and truth as a human being. The represented cruelty of God, revealed in this moment of sacrifice, serves as the final evidence in the play for the legitimacy of rebellion against systematic Christian tyranny. After God accepts Abel's inhumanely bleeding sacrifice, Byron highlights Cain's indignation by stressing that the alter is destroyed, and Cain shouts to Abel:

> To cast down yon vile flatterer of the clouds,
> The smoky harbinger of thy dull prayers—
> Thine altar, with its blood of lambs and kids,
> Which fed on milk, to be destroyed in blood. (III. I: 290–3)

Undoubtedly, Byron indicates the destruction of man, as sheep symbolise God's believers in biblical expression. Cain is angry because the sacrifice confirms the cruel control of life. The direct cause of the final murder is that Abel, with his devoutness, still tries to pull Cain back in the tameness. Abel here is not Abel himself now, but a typical 'vile flatterer' and a representative of 'dull prayers'. He becomes an obstacle which embodies the human tameness and depersonalisation to religious control. Cain shouts 'Thy God loves blood!' (III. I.309) and kills Abel, which is the ultimate break from rigid restraint and manipulation.

Cain's rebellion is not of violent destruction without 'rights of reason', but a performance of revolutionary sacrifice. Cain does show remorse for the murder:

> CAIN. And he who lieth there was childless! I
> Have dried the fountain of a gentle race,
> Which might have graced his recent marriage couch,
> And might have tempered this stern blood of mine,
> Uniting with our children Abel's Offspring!
> O Abel! (III. I: 555–61)

Cain does not regret rebelling here, but he regrets the hurt his rebellion brought to a man and a family. Here, through the line 'unit[e] with our children Abel's offspring', human beings continue to move forward through multiplication, seeking ethical redemption through their own efforts rather than through tameness and manipulation by the Almighty. Cain's greatness lies both in his rebellion and in his belief that humanity can overcome destiny through human action. He believes that the harm done to Abel can be compensated through human agency. Cain's response to divine punishment demonstrates his complete rejection of the conventional binary moral framework of good and evil, liberating himself from its tyrannical influence. This reflects Byron's ultimate aim in instrumentalising blasphemy: to render it no longer a problem in itself, but instead to shift attention to real human life. This is also the central theme of *Don Juan* in the next chapter.

It must be clarified that, just as in its prototype Cain is only a symbol of 'evil', in Byron's depiction, Abel represents the doctrine of 'good'. From the Tales, Byron has

emphasised the systematic alienation of human feelings and freedom. Especially from the monk in *The Giaour*, Byron depicts both the free and the restrained parts of the representatives in the hierarchical system. Two closer examples come from *Manfred* and *The Vision*; the abbot of Maurice in *Manfred* plays an important role in representing a half-restrained self.

Byron deliberately designs the very ironic scene to critique the church system in the dialogue between the abbot of St. Maurice and Manfred. The abbot plays almost the same role as the monk in *The Giaour*—both a failed confessor and an unobvious narrator. Cochran realises that '[Manfred] allows the Abbot dignity, and a pious, even heroic concern for his doomed parishioner'.[464] He reminds us that:

> But this is the wise and charitable Abbot of the revised Act III…Established Christianity, in the first version of the Act, is depicted as materialist and hypocritical. All the ur-Abbot is interested in is the wealth which will accrue from Manfred's "gift of all [his] lands to the monastery".[465]

As Cochran says, in the first edition, Abbot in fact represents the monastery in *The Giaour* since '[g]reat largess to these walls he brought, | And thus our Abbot's favour bought' (816–17). Nonetheless, the Abbot of a revised version is still ironic and makes the representation even more blasphemous:

> ABBOT. …
> The accents rattle—Give thy prayers to heaven —
> Pray—albeit but in thought,—but die not thus.
> MAN. 'Tis over—my dull eyes can fix thee not;
> …Fare thee well —
> Give me thy hand.
> ABBOT. Cold—cold—even to the heart —
> But yet one prayer—alas! how fares it with thee? —
> MAN. Old man! 'tis not so difficult to die.
> [MANFRED expires.]
> ABBOT. He's gone—his soul hath ta'en its earthless flight —
> Whither? I dread to think—but he is gone. (III. IV: 144–53)

[464] Cochran, *Manfred*, p. 146.
[465] Cochran, *Manfred*, p. 144.

The Abbot's insistence on urging Manfred to pray can hardly mislead readers to a sense of piety if we do not do the same comparison as Ehrstine does, which suggests 'the Abbot represents unalloyed good in the form of the church's orthodox salvation, and the Demon-Spirits body forth in counterpoint Arimanes' absolute evil'.[466] The design of this last scene is a combination of the Giaour's confession in *The Giaour* and Hugo's death in *Parisina*: With the former it shares a sentimental monk who is well prepared to be desacralised, with the latter it shares a devil who designs his own death to satirise authority; all three share Byron's attack on the useless redemption of religion. An notices that '[i]n addressing the abbot informally, Manfred nullifies social and religious codes and points to the realm beyond the symbolic hierarchy structured by the Name of the Father'.[467] Byron further makes the Abbot an individual man instead of an unconscious tool of the hierarchical system. Cochran emphasises that '[h]e's independent to the last'.[468] Callaghan also says: 'Manfred's overarching fixation appears to be on retaining his independence'.[469] What is unique in this last scene is that the Abbot in fact endorses Manfred to make his own choice, which is not to pray and repent 'albeit but in thought'. It reveals that Byron portrays the Abbot in a different way than the Hunter, which means the Abbot cares about Manfred for Manfred instead of for God. This does not only complete the desacralisation of the Abbot, but also contrasts to finish the design of a man of dust and a man of half dust and half deity: The half deity of the Abbot returns to its natural status with Manfred the magician's last breath. This composes a stronger blasphemy than in *The Giaour* and *Parisina*. Compared with George in *The Vision* and Cain in the mystery, the Abbot's shaking self looks less active and subjective with certain superpositions of his religious role.

The reason I especially explain him here is to suggest that Abel's tamed self indicates his complete loss of human nature. He is placed in the group to symbolise an alienated self only to be broken, just like Francesca the ghost-like figure in Alps' dream. Thus, Byron assails the rigid social conventions that oppress and deceive humanity

[466] Ehrstine, p. 20.
[467] An, p. 116.
[468] Cochran, *Manfred*, p. 165.
[469] Callaghan, p. 29.

through the character of Cain and his attachment to Lucifer. Cain remains a killer, but not the guilty one shaped by imposed associations with evil. Through Cain's rebellion in blood, Byron asserts that human beings' access to knowledge and liberty can never be obstructed and that blind belief in idols cannot block man's pursuit of truth. With undaunted courage and unprecedented success in humanistic liberation, Cain's presence therefore encourages emancipation from the suppression of the human mind. Through Cain's determined break with the rigid and arbitrary system, Byron further appeals to those who are keen on the liberation of individuality and humanity from any tyranny.

Looking back on Cain's angry shouting—'thy God loves blood'—the odd 'thy' can again remind us of what happens in judgements of blasphemy, judgement before heaven, the represented public, and the imagined God. The very solid part of blasphemy is only being against God. Harold Ray Stevens believes that 'Byron questions neither the existence of God nor an afterlife in *The Vision of Judgment*, because he affirms that he has intentionally kept God out of the confrontation before the gates of Heaven'.[470] As we have already known, this becomes grounds to fight back against Southey's attack. Dennis Weißenfels notices a seemingly similar design in *Manfred*: 'In spite of the grand Prometheanism that Manfred displays, Byron is careful not to turn his protagonist into a direct representation of that traditionally divine character…Byron is too careful to be blasphemous in this respect'.[471] This might be a reason for Byron's such design, but I view it as a struggling position to keep hold of human nature. However, it is interesting that Weißenfels makes Byron flatter God as the Maker when 'Manfred explicitly refers to a deity outside of anything represented in the text as he tempts Arimanes back'.[472] This hierarchical design desacralises all the immortals, which makes God, even if He is there, no more glorious, and the whole system becomes farcical compared with Manfred's pride as a self-recognised human being.

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[470] Harold Ray Stevens, '"I am more fit to die than people think": Byron on Immortality', *Christianity and Literature*, vol. 55, 3 (2006), 333–67, 360.
[471] Dennis Weißenfels, '"Thou shalt not tempt the Lord': Byron's Miltonic Manfred and Wordsworthian Temptations', *The Byron Journal*, vol. 47, 1 (2019), 55–66, 61.
[472] Weißenfels, 61.

Chapter 4. 'And live and die, make love and pay our taxes': Byron's Humanistic Appeal in Don Juan's 'Real' Life

The creation and publication of *Don Juan* aroused considerable concern regarding its social influence. In his discussion of the debate over whether *Don Juan* should be included in the Newcastle Literary and Philosophical Society's library, David Stewart situates the poem within the context of the Romantic-period culture of conversation, more specifically, the culture of free and open dialogue. He suggests that *Don Juan* has 'the peculiar capacity...to address and to disturb a literary culture undergoing a transition'.[473] I think whether such notions as 'free conversation' and 'literary sociability' ever truly materialised remains questionable, especially since the suppression of such freedoms had never abated prior to the publication of *Don Juan*. Rather than signalling a transition, *Don Juan* intensified the already fierce cultural conflicts. William Turner, thinking about establishing this society performing conversation, aimed to unite men's labours to inspire knowledge, 'which would not, probably, have occurred to their authors, in the retirements of private meditation', through the process of 'collision', which he specified to be 'in the free conversation of associated friends'.[474] This privacy claim reminds me of Byron's self-deceived failure in Canto III of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*; it ultimately signified no more than a reluctance to face public censorship, since even then 'Religion, [...] British Politics, and indeed all Politics of the day, shall be deemed prohibited subjects of discussion'.[475] Stewart comments that 'regulated semi-public institutions like the Lit & Phil...encouraged but also controlled free exchange'.[476] Nonetheless, this discussion remains useful in representing the blurred ecology of politics and society, even under such restrictions.

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[473] Stewart, 323.
[474] William Turner, 'Speculations on the Propriety of attempting the Establishment of a Literary Society in Newcastle', *Transactions, Papers and Memoirs of the Literary and Philosophical Society of Newcastle upon Tyne*, vol. 1 (1831), p. 1.
[475] Turner, 'Further Observations and HiMacnts on the leading Objects of the Society', *Transactions*, vol. 1, p. 18.
[476] Stewart, 326.

In this ecology, it is striking that Byron was excluded from the conventional divisions of British social groups, yet remained omnipresent. John Hookham Frere predicted that 'there was preparing a convulsion between religionists and free-thinkers. The first would triumph and the latter be extirpated with their works', so he, along with John Murray's other advisors, did not suggest the publication of *Don Juan*.[477] Stewart goes further from the contemporary ecology: He thinks '*Don Juan* disturbed even those most keen to defend the principle of free discussion and liberal reform. The poem rendered even its advocates uneasy', which suggests the divisions then to be religionists, free-thinkers, and Byron.[478] I think this is from a middle-class angle, which also composed the major force in those 'semi-public institutions'. In the meanwhile, as argued in Chapter Three on the coverage of radicalism and blasphemy, Goldsmith concludes it similarly that 'anyone dissatisfied with the status quo' can be categorised as 'radical'.[479] For example, in defence of their freedom to accept *Don Juan* in the library, Henry Atkinson insisted that he would 'Let *fair judgment* and *sound reasoning*, the invincible champions of *truth*, be employed...*True religion*, *unadulterated* and *pure Christianity*, can defend itself'.[480] However, unlike the non-binary truth and morality Byron explores in most of his later works, Stewart observes the details of the debate among the society members and tells us that, even though Atkinson accepts not *Don Juan* but his countrymen's ability to 'think for themselves' and the power of Christianity to regulate, he was 'denied a post as a mathematics teacher at the Grammar School in 1823' as a result of this event.[481] The self-regulation of such free-thinkers can be seen as a form of appeasement, as they unconsciously adhere to the very doctrines invoked by social authorities—only to remain categorised as unreliable nonetheless. Atkinson was not denied because of *Don Juan*, but because he, as a typical middle-class

[477] See John Cam Hobhouse, *Recollections of a Long Life*, edited by Lady Dorchester, vol. 2 (London: 1909), p. 109. John Cam Hobhouse took down Hookham Frere's words from their conversation about *Don Juan.*
[478] Stewart, 334.
[479] Goldsmith, 'Byron, Radicals and Reformers', p. 265.
[480] Henry Atkinson, *The Tyne Mercury*, 924 (8 February 1820), p. 3.
[481] Stephen Harbottle, *The Reverend William Turner: Dissent and Reform in Georgian Newcastle upon Tyne* (Leeds: Northern Universities Press, 1997), p. 100.

person, wanted to 'regulate the morals of the whole community'.[482] In this system, however, they have no endorsement in name and nothing to offer in material, so they compose a moat of the real power and get used by both upper and lower classes to secure or attack the power system.

Don Juan, in fact, lacks a focus on middle-class concerns. This, I think, is because the core pursuits of the two sides are fundamentally contradictory. The middle class seeks social power in name, especially after acquiring a respectable level of material capital—yet the former is constrained by the latter, while the actual power remains in the hands of others. *Don Juan*, nonetheless, explores the social order through material conditions as its primary medium. It is through materiality that Byron deconstructs the established world and interrogates the legitimising discourse of the hierarchical system, just as revealed when Juan '[g]ot to the spirit-room, and stood before | It with a pair of pistols' (II: 275–6). The challenge posed by reality to the established order, especially when that order is invoked in the name of society, becomes particularly stark in the scene of cannibalism. This moment is far more complex than it first appears, and it will be further examined in this chapter. I argue that, through successive cycles of establishing and dismantling order, Byron articulates a vision of equality by exposing the underlying logic that connects material conditions and symbolic authority, real life and social systems. His critique deconstructs these systems without dismissing the broader discourse surrounding social morality and the legitimising structures that sustain them. Byron's representation halts just short of asserting a specific position, instead allowing Juan's passive and mutable character to become a vehicle through which contemporary debates on freedom may be staged and explored.

Meanwhile, the reception of *Don Juan* uncovers the essence of exploitation and suppression of the established hierarchical system. An upper-class reviewer claimed it 'would have been confined by its price to a class of readers with whom its faults might have been somewhat compensated by its merits', otherwise that it could only be brought

[482] Stewart, 334.

'within the reach of purchasers on whom its poison would operate without mitigation'.[483] Sellers from this angle, Collette Cooligan notices, 'shrewdly inverted… [the] anxiety about *Don Juan*'s immorality reaching the masses by suggesting that these cantos would corrupt middle-class readers'.[484] In this way, they disclaim *Don Juan*'s legal rights. Going further on this corrupting risk, working class or radical readers insist on the blasphemy and illegitimacy of *Don Juan* to break its copyright and spread the parodies and piracies to fight against 'the bourgeois press of thieving material, repackaging it as respectable, and effectively excluding the working-class reader'.[485] It is noticeable that the blasphemy debate helped to increase *Don Juan*'s readership in an unusual way. This chapter further elaborates on this deconstruction of Byron's literary property.

Considering both the literary and social contexts, this chapter also demonstrates how Byron's celebrity functions as a method to present, explain, and justify his representations of real human life in resistance to imposed authority and belief. Above all, to explore the development of Byron's original political concerns until his creation of *Don Juan*, taking his criticism about Leigh Hunt's *The Story of Rimini* as an example, in the year of his beginning of writing *Don Juan*, Byron says: 'When a man talks of system, his case is hopeless' (*BLJ* 6: 46). This is a development of his earlier thinking about the distinctions between his contemporary poets, including himself, and the classics, by which he meant mainly Alexander Pope:

> I am convinced the more I think of it—that he and *all* of us—Scott —Southey—Wordsworth—Moore—Campbell—I—are all in the wrong—one as much as another—that we are upon a wrong revolutionary poetical system—or systems—not worth a damn in itself—& from which none but Rogers and Crabbe are free—and that the present & next generations will finally be of this opinion.—I am the more confirmed in this—by having lately gone over some of our Classics—particularly *Pope*—whom I tried in this way—I took Moore's poems & my own & some others—& went over them side by side with Pope's—and I was really astonished (I ought not to have been

[483] [Southey?], 127.
[484] Colette Cooligan, 'The Unruly Copies of *Don Juan*', *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, Vol. 59, 4 (March 2005), 433-462, 453-4.
[485] Cooligan, 441.

> so) and mortified—at the ineffable distance in point of sense—harmony—effect—and even *Imagination* Passion—& *Invention*—between the little Queen Anne's Man—& us of the lower Empire—depend upon it is all Horace then, and Claudian now among us—and if I had to begin again—I would model myself accordingly. (*BLJ* 5: 265)

Friederike Wolfrum thinks the first half of this passage reveals that 'Byron carefully acknowledges the need for system'.[486] Considering it as a whole, I would however suggest that Byron turns to a more practical way of writing, which begins with 'sense—harmony—effect—and even *Imagination* Passion—& *Invention*', instead of a pointed system. It is a challenging question to determine whether this represents a new system or simply a need for systemic structure. Howe comments on Byron's poetics that 'it is precisely in breaking free from the assumptions of philosophy that poetic writing finds its epistemological value'.[487] Howe also points out that Byron's question about systems cannot offer 'energies' as systems do.[488] Back to Byron's original concerns about writing, the ultimate truth is not systematic but may fall into certain systems. This struggling mode helps to explain why Byron, Shelley, and Hunt later compose 'a common literary project'.[489] This fact is also revealed in *Don Juan*'s lastingly unstable and reversible representations of different systems: 'One system eats another up, and this | Much as old Saturn ate his progeny (XIV, 5–6)'. However the system is, the only confirmed truth is that any system can have and must have its end.

At the same time, in Mary Shelley's disagreement with Hunt's response that '[Hunt] sees this somewhat differently & talks about your being a Lord, he is quite in the wrong' from another angle, we see how Byron's aristocratic identity continues to dominate outside criticisms about him and his words.[490] Richard Cronin believes that Byron recognised 'his own political identity, as aristocratic champion of the people, as

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[486] Friederike Wolfrum, '"When a Man Talks of System, His Case Is Hopeless": Byron at the Margins of Romantic Counterculture', *Byron and Marginality*, edited by Norbert Lennartz, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018), pp. 77–97, p. 87.
[487] Howe, p. 33.
[488] Howe, p. 32.
[489] See Wolfrum, p. 89.
[490] Mary Shelley, 'Letter to Byron, 16 November, 1822', in 'Byron's Correspondence and Journals 15', edited by Peter Cochran, accessed from < https://petercochran.wordpress.com/byron-2/byron/>, p. 29.

gentlemanly radical, as the classically educated spokesman for an inarticulate populace, ha[d] been erased' in the complex social matrix at the end of 1810s.[491] In Jane Stabler's view, Byron's later work present 'classical allusions and digressive couplets' in a way 'detached' from the 'aristocratic milieu'.[492] I am not objecting to this view, but I wish to maintain a distance from a binary system of judgment. Still, taking *Don Juan* as an example, readers at the time received it as 'CLASSICAL effort of a Noble Lord'.[493] In other words, Byron's interpreted attempts to be radical may just have just been that he did not try very hard not to be radical. This interpretation is not to assume that Byron is not radical but to follow Mary Shelley's thinking and deem that aristocracy is not necessarily dominating. I think, just like the free conversation in name between the middle-class society members along with their invisibility and inability, Byron makes *Don Juan* an ambitious representation of all social reality to guide his readers into observing the truth of real life, which already denies absolute truth in all binary systems. Based on this observation, Byron's poetics returns to the famous Platonic argument about poetry in *The Republic*. Byron makes a substitution for the premise out of his sceptical nature: Truth becomes an uncertain explosion, while poetry is the only possible fuse. This fuse poses a question by observation instead of opinion. It inspires the audience to think through the conflicts and unity in name and reality of social power, social order, and social life.

As to some extent, human life and the observation of human life can never start or end, in Canto XII Byron tells his readers: 'But now I will begin my poem' (XII, 425). To Mole, ' this makes clear, *Don Juan* is, in a sense, all beginning'.[494] In the meantime, Anna Camilleri notices that earlier in Canto I, '[a]ll these things will be specified in time' which 'enabl[es] endless deferrals of any indication of the poem's anticipated size'.[495] In this case, *Don Juan* always begins but never begins; there can be an end, but

[491] Richard Cronin, *The Politics of Romantic Poetry: In Search of the Pure Commonwealth*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), p. 172.
[492] Stabler, *Byron, Poetics and History*, p. 179.
[493] See Stewart, 335.
[494] Tom Mole, 'Byron and the Difficulty of Beginning', *The Review of English Studies*, New Series, vol. 69, 290 (2017), 532–45, 543.
[495] Anna Camilleri, 'Byron's Cunning Poetics', *Essays in Criticism*, vol. 66, 2 (April 2016), 221–41, 233.

it is endless. This is like human cognition of real life and ultimate truth: Everything is temporary as it is lastingly changing. The protagonist Juan passively floats along with the stream of his life. However, *Don Juan* does not stop in this pessimistic passivity. There is an active, digressive, energetic, and gossiping narrator, who is the real observer, the readers' sharing eyes, and Byron's real mouthpiece. '"Actions—actions," I say' (*BLJ* 3: 220), Byron insists. The narrator also represents Byron's ultimate unified cognition of eloquence and print, sentimental discourse and posthumous fame. I shall elaborate on this later to argue that the narrator is situated, along with his creator, in a central position independent from social changes. Because of this distance, it could be embodied as the broader representation of an observation of human beings and their real life or at least the British society. When Camilleri views that '*Childe Harold* takes the self not only as the primary centre of cognition, but also as the static point around which the narrative rotates, and to which the poem inexorably returns', I think Byron's active establishment of the unity, connection, and distinction between himself and the narrator ultimately completes my thinking of quasi-Byron as Byron's celebrated figure.[496] In this case, when blasphemy represents a challenge to the contemporary social order and its authorities, its reception two centuries later also enacts a challenge to the ultimate realistic order: life and death. When life, extended by name—that is, fame or renown—prolongs reality, it mocks the impotence of death. Here, death is not merely a biological endpoint but a symbolic counterpart to life within a binary structure of existence, a figure that upholds the system Byron seeks to dismantle. People's memories, feelings, and narratives of human life escape from the absolute authority of this rigid dichotomy—thus performing the greatest blasphemy. Blasphemy, as Byron repeatedly deploys it, is not merely a transgression for its own sake, nor does it aim at an endless dispersal of its effects. Rather, it should be understood as a crime constructed and imposed by authorities, and intentionally used as a tool to resist that imposition. It signals a spirit of rebellion against dominant structures of life and social order as sanctioned by power. At its core, Byron's blasphemy functions to reject the fixed,

[496] Camilleri, 228.

imposed binaries, especially the binary moral frameworks of good and evil legitimised by authority, and thereby to liberate human existence from such tyrannical constraints.

This chapter is thus divided into three sections. The first section brings attention to Byron's celebrity identity. Centring on the writing, publication, and reception of *Don Juan*, I use the figure of quasi-Byron as support for my exploration of the transmutation of Byron's celebrity identity and certain related issues. I will specifically discuss how the group that further imposed its influence on Byron's poetry, celebrity identity, and celebrity image after the further rise of radicalism and the development of the print industry after the 1810s operated, and how *Don Juan*'s creation, publication, and even piracy and imitation composed the creative, publishing, and critical dilemmas directly or indirectly related to Byron. The second section considers Byron's new and experimental epic writing in *Don Juan*. It primarily explores how *Don Juan*'s writing and creation in Byron's poetics and self-cognition reflect Byron's perception of contemporary society and his corresponding response; in particular, *Don Juan*'s invitation to humanity constitutes a new discursive context for Byron's question to the current order. The third section turns into a closer reading of *Don Juan*. I extract the principal contradiction of Juan's life to be the contradiction between name and reality. I further argue that, through conflicting descriptions, Byron dismantles the imposed discourses of social authorities and their legitimacy and, ultimately, deconstructs the established authoritarian system and the blasphemy controversies it espouses.

11. Celebrity identity as a weapon for blasphemy

The vitality and rich content of Byron's works still makes sense in various modern contexts. Meanwhile, the retrospective angle brings new risks in blurring the necessary issues with changes over time. Throughout this thesis, I insist on situating the readings and analyses within the poet's own time in order to provide an anchor for the entire complex of issues. This chapter provides further explanations for why this is necessary.

Christopher Laxer reminds us that the 'readers of *Don Juan* in 1819 knew Byron, not as we do after two centuries of biographical research, scholarly inquiry, and literary

criticism, but as a literary label with relatively few associations'.[497] This is true, while it still suggests a habitual conclusive acquaintance between readers and Byron nowadays. After long-term biographical explorations, modern critics can feel great retrospective familiarity with Byron and his poetry. The core issue is never whether this familiarity is good. When the fact simply reflects the development of author–reader associations, cognition of this fact influences the angle of criticism. To clarify, the early nineteenth-century readers of Byron received and felt 'Byron' differently in two aspects. Firstly, a significant group of readers did not know Byron in life. This is especially understandable for *Don Juan*, as Hugh Luke suggests, '[t]he fact that there were at least eighteen pirated editions of all or a part of *Don Juan* before 1832 indicates a wide sale to the newly emerging English common reader'.[498] Also for *Don Juan*, it is very likely that some of the readers did not really read Byron. They might have read William Hone's *Don Juan: Canto the Third*, or other parodies at the time. Secondly, most readers would still be influenced by many realistic issues. On the one hand, *Don Juan* aroused great concerns about social morality. For example, *Edinburgh Magazine* claimed that *Don Juan* 'poison[s] the current of fine poetry, by the intermixture of ribaldry and blasphemy such as no man of pure taste can read a second time, and such as no woman of correct principles can read a first'.[499] On the other hand, contemporary literary critics also hoped to dominate the interpretations of popular and controversial poems. This began much earlier than *Don Juan*'s publication. Upon *The Giaour*'s reading, Anna Laetitia Barbauld shared with her friend that:

> And pray do you say Lord Bȳron or Bў̆ron?...And do you pronounce Giaour hard *g* or soft *g*? And do you understand the poem at first reading?—because Lord Byron and the Edinburgh Reviewers say you are very stupid if you don't, and yet the same Reviewers have thought proper to prefix the story to help your apprehension.[500]

[497] Christopher Laxer (2013), *Literary Branding in the Romantic Period*, [Doctoral thesis, University of Toronto], p. ii.
[498] Hugh Luke, 'The Publishing of Byron's *Don Juan*', *PMLA*, 80 (1965), 199–209, 209.
[499] *Edinburgh Magazine*, 2nd series, 9 (August 1821), 105–6.
[500] Anna Laetitia Barbauld, *The Works of Anna Laetitia Barbauld with a Memoir*, vol. 2, edited by Lucy Aikin, (London: Longman,1825), pp. 96–7.

As for *Don Juan*, things were more complicated in more than the pronunciations; I shall argue about all these judgements and regulations later. Despite their unfamiliarity with Byron's personal life and the influence of external factors, early nineteenth-century readers nonetheless enjoyed a particular advantage over modern critics: they were the original audience Byron addressed, and their ignorance of the poet himself did not lessen—but perhaps even intensified—their significance as his primary target readers. This can result in both positive and negative reactions. In Murray's usually effective way of persuading Byron to edit, 'your Fame my Lord demands it'.[501] Byron's worries about public reception were obvious. As argued, even with the long gap between Cantos I & II and Canto III, Byron still showed great concerns about the readers' response and made careful though not so successful design for the beginning of Canto III. Jerome also notices that instead of 'set[ting] apart' the audience, Byron's poetry 'assumes the presence of an audience that talks and listens—an audience that may hear as well as overhear, and that may have something to say in its turn'.[502] For the former, Byron had an indirect response when he talked about the Murray's circle:

> I have lately been leading a most poetical life with Messrs. Rogers Moore & Campbell…R[ogers] & Moore are very pleasing, & not priggish as poetical personages are apt to be. (*BLJ* 2: 128)

Byron's judgment of other people's priggishness sounds hilarious but is more than complicated. I think it brings about some interesting facts when being considered together with a long-term criticism of Byron's judgement on plebian reformers. For example, Goldsmith comments that '[Byron] regarded plebian radicals such as William Cobbett and Henry Hunt with contempt'.[503] The evidence is that he declared 'I am and have been for *reform* always—but not for the *reformers*' (*BLJ* 6: 166). Nonetheless, Byron's following short complaint is that 'I saw enough of them at the Hampden Club

[501] 'John Murray to Lord Byron 4 September 1811', in *A Publisher and his Friends: Memoir and Correspondence of John Murray, with an Account of the Origin and Progress of the House, 1768-1843*, edited by Samuel Smiles, (London, 1891), p. 208.
[502] Jerome McGann, *Byron and Romanticism*, edited by J. Soderholm (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 117, 120.
[503] Goldsmith, 'Byron, Radicals and Reformers', p. 265.

(*BLJ* 6: 166)'. Major John Cartwright 'dominated the club's activities after 1813'.[504] Leslie Marchand specifically writes down the following known fact when footnoting this letter: 'Byron's last speech in the House of Lords in 1813 had been in support of Cartwright's petition for the right to petition Parliament for the redress of grievance of the people' (*BLJ* 6: 165). And back to the letter itself, the reason why Byron mentioned all these issues in this letter to John Cam Hobhouse in June 1819, just before the publication of the first two cantos of *Don Juan*, is that:

> To my great surprise we hear that you have been challenged by Antient Pistol Major Cartwright—this seems to me mere Midsummer madness—what had you to do with those blackguard Reformers? who made you defy & leave the Whigs and make you lose your Election—and then call you out as a reward for your trouble?—This is the damnedest piece of impudence I ever heard of.—Sunburn me if it is not!—I am and have been for reform always—but not for the reformers—I saw enough of them at the Hampden Club—Burdett is the only one of them in whose company a Gentleman would be seen unless at a Public meeting—or in a Public house.—"I shall have to bail my old friend out of the Round-house" "what a Coalition!" as "Davy" said of Johnson and Beauclerck.—You were the founder of the Whig-Club at Cambridge—if my memory serve me rightly. (*BLJ* 6: 165–6)

Although Hobhouse had already smoothly resolved Cartwright's challenge, Byron's championing of him would still make sense to their friendship. In other words, Byron's superiority here is in defence of Hobhouse and prioritising him. However, I provide this explanation not to deny superiority. Its risk in evoking public dissatisfaction is somehow indicated in Byron's other friend Moore's edition of *Letters and Journals of Lord Byron with Notices of His Life*, where this letter was not included.[505] I mention this complicated issue covering events from 1813 to 1819 and Byron's public and private performances mainly to reaffirm the retrospective risk in modern critics' replacing and imagining the contemporary major readers' real reception of Byron's image and his works. Moreover, even for modern critics, it is worth questioning whether Byron's private remarks—when judged under the banner of plebeian reformism—can

[504] Naomi C. Miller, 'Major John Cartwright and the Founding of the Hampden Club', *The Historical Journal*, 17, 3 (1974), 615–19, 615.
[505] See Moore, *Letters and Journals*.

truly outweigh his consistent revolutionary commitments in practice. This perfectionist tendency in criticism warrants further examination in later sections. After all, while it is true that modern readers possess more biographical knowledge about Byron, Byron himself wrote with the awareness that his contemporary audience lacked such familiarity, or at least not to the same extent. This expectation, I suggest, is crucial to understanding certain deliberate strategies in his poetic composition.

Back to Byron's consideration of the public reception of his work, especially *Don Juan*, in which the influence of the readers and the market, including the piracies, was clearly reflected. Partly as a response to the flourishing underground piracy of *Don Juan* with obscene prints, Byron returned with, as Cooligan calls, 'canto six and an orgy of detail about the Turkish harem'.[506] This kind of influence shows people's ability to change accordingly and Byron's own insistence on action. Biographical readings invite a logical explanation based on Byron's life experience. However, just like *Don Juan*, there is no end to complete the story. We all know Byron's life as it is just because he died. For Byron and his contemporary readers, life was not simply labelled as 'uncertain' but was genuinely experienced through real and often strange actions that implied an uncertain, yet hopeful, future. '[T]he House of Lords Proxy Book for 1816', as Stabler notices, 'states that from 3 April 1816 "George Earl of Essex hath the proxy of George Lord Byron"'.[507] Stabler comments that 'while flaunting his intention to shake the dust of England from his shoes, Byron was also preparing to reengage with English politics via a different route'.[508] This different route keeps a certain possibility of Byron's returning to Britain during his life. This possibility cannot be ignored even though it would never happen again. This is why I insist *Don Juan* cannot be read with an out-of-range distance between Byron and Britain. Byron himself says that 'Truth is always strange, | Stranger than fiction' (XIV: 801–2); he also writes, 'fact is truth' (VII: 642). Then Stabler's firm argument 'Byron's writing resists the totalising discourse of any one theoretical model' suggests also that we cannot expect to calculate and conclude a

[506] Cooligan, 442.
[507] Stabler, *Byron, Poetics and History*, p. 1.
[508] Stabler, *Byron, Poetics and History*, p. 1.

mode of Byron's life and creation but only find and uncover the revealing truths of different times.[509] The battle for the authority to interpret Byron and *Don Juan* is one that never truly ends.

11.1. Law problems with *Don Juan*

An always valuable step in situating Don Juan within its historical context is to question its copyright. This should be divided into two questions: who wrote the poem, and who owned the poem. To answer the first question seems easy: Even though the first two cantos were published anonymously as Murray wanted, Byron was widely regarded as the writer. But we still remember that *The Vampyre* was misattributed to Byron. Publishers were passionate about using Byron's name. Apart from the indication of Byron's writing style and the commercial value of his celebrity, what is especially different in *Don Juan*'s publication is the anonymity. This appeared as an invitation to link Byron to the baldly grey areas of the publishing industry. By 'invitation', I mean a mechanism of conversation or quarrel centring the landscape of literary representations across different groups of readers, which would help to understand the second question at the same time and prepare to explain Byron's response in this matrix. To explain Byron's response, I am not prioritising Byron's opinion or Byron himself; rather, I view the response as a means of approaching contemporary social reality.

The direct result of the anonymity in *Don Juan*'s publication is piracy and parody. To clarify it first, Byron himself cursed the persons involved: '[T]he impostors have published—*two* new *third* Cantos of *Don Juan*—the devil take the impudence of some blackguard bookseller or other therefore' (*BLJ* 6: 237). He later also sued one of them. So, in name and reality, privately and publicly, Byron denied the booksellers' disrespectful and cheating behaviours. Byron can condemn the 'impudence' because he is the person owning the right over *Don Juan* in reality. Considering the second question at the same time, the tricky part is that Byron did not own the right in name because of

[509] Stabler, *Byron, Poetics and History*, p. 10.

the anonymity concerning the first two cantos. When he sued William Dugdale, he already had his name on *Don Juan*, but Dugdale challenged his rights then in the name of law. As *Times* recorded:

> [Dugdale] now appeared to contend strenuously (and he hoped satisfactorily to the court) that this work was wholly unworthy of the protection of the Court, that its tendency was immoral in the highest sense of the word, most calculated to taint the minds of the public, licentious, in every way dangerous, and most destructive of the morals of the community at large.[510]

Dugdale the defendant mainly argued from three aspects. First and foremost, he mentioned anonymity, saying that 'so convinced was the publisher of its immoral tendency, that he shrunk from avowing himself to be the author of the book'.[511] Secondly, he mentioned Murray's cheaper editions to 'counteract piracy';[512] he cleverly interpreted this self-protection as Murray's anxiety that 'the work did not deserve protection in a court of law or equity'.[513] Lastly, Dugdale started his quotations of the work itself: On the one hand, *Don Juan* represents obscene scenes in the clothes of 'one of the warmest poems in the English language';[514] on the other hand, the work 'inculcated the most dangerous revolutionary principles', which include 'liberalism and licentiousness', that of the French revolution, and objection to the British government and the King.[515]

Dugdale's first purpose is to get rid of Byron's copyright in *Don Juan*'s publication. For Cooligan, 'Dugdale's rhetorical finesse transforms the desire to own and read the poem into a desire to disown it'.[516] Because Cooligan mainly focuses on Dugdale's obscene reading, he further suggests Dugdale 'also helps introduce shame into the act of reading morally dubious books, a phenomenological effect that will shape the covert operations of London's obscene print culture and characterize its

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[510] 'Law Report, *Don Juan*.—Lord Byron v. Dugdale', *Times*, (Friday 9 August 1823), *Times Digital Archive*, 2–3, 2.
[511] 'Law Report', 2.
[512] 'Law Report', 2.
[513] 'Law Report', 2.
[514] 'Law Report', 2.
[515] 'Law Report', 2, 3.
[516] Cooligan, 456.

consumption'.[517] If I may conclude, however, Dugdale's defence—along with the public's occasional laughter—shows that the legal system rejects being labelled 'morally dubious'. The case reveals a binary logic: if a printed work is not wholly moral, it is treated as immoral and prosecutable. As argued in the previous chapter on *The Vision of Judgment*, authority claims sole legitimacy, silencing other interpretations as radical or blasphemous. In such a system, this binary can be manipulated or reversed, as Dugdale attempted, but it cannot be formally denied.

Dugdale the pirating publishers' legal defence is to make Byron illegal in his claim of *Don Juan*'s copyright. Objectively, it also serves to lower the publication's price and prepare the literary property for a broader readership, especially considering that Murray's cheapest edition still cost one shilling for three cantos. This is the same as what I discussed about the social conversations. As Stewart observes, '[i]t cost a guinea to join the Lit & Phil, the same price as the first edition of *Don Juan*, beyond the reach of even relatively well-paid members of the working class like the Newcastle keelmen'.[518] This again confirms the limitation of the only nominal free mechanism. For the literary publication, however, there emerged arguments from two sides. The loyalists accused it of 'uncontrolled reproduction by dubious publishers who pilfer literary property and putatively pander to the dangerous desires of working-class readers',[519] while, as mentioned above, the contemporary radicals 'accuse[d] the bourgeois press of…excluding the working-class reader'.[520] As a result of the established tyrannical law system, things developed further out of control. After Byron's death, Jack Mitford put forward that 'everything connected with the life and character of so illustrious a bard as the late Lord Byron is public property', including poems other than *Don Juan*, as a response to the lasting law problem of Byron and his blasphemous works.[521] This confirms that when Byron himself struggled with his celebrity identity, the public—especially the radical public, which also composed his

[517] Cooligan, 456.
[518] Stewart, 334.
[519] Cooligan, 440.
[520] Cooligan, 441.
[521] Jack Mitford, *The Private Life of Lord Byron; Comprising His Voluptuous Amours, Secret Intrigues…* (London, 1828), p. 3.

main readership—never hesitated to view him as a public cultural symbol. On the contrary, undermining the authority of the central figure within this singular cultural system served as a reference point for various social groups contesting the authority of established systems in reality. The fact that the celebrated quasi-Byron is not Byron himself may thus constitute a blasphemous denial within this system.

11.2. Blasphemy arguments about *Don Juan*

When Dugdale argued against *Don Juan*'s copyright, he was arguing for *Don Juan*'s danger in reading. This danger lies in *Don Juan*'s immorality and radicalism. As argued, in the social and religious context of the time, binary morality was regarded as a tool to suppress blasphemous and radical literary representations. For its challenge against morality, *Don Juan* aroused arguments about its blasphemy since its first publication. This issue became more typical in representing how binary morality functioned in the hierarchical social system, especially with *Don Juan*'s copyright, as suggested in *Quarterly Review*:

> [I]f it had been the subject of copyright, [*Don Juan*] would have been confined by its price to a class of readers with whom its faults might have been somewhat compensated by its merits; with whom the ridicule, which it endeavours to throw upon virtue, might have been partially balanced by that with which it covers vice, particularly the vice to which the class of readers to whom we are alluding are most subject—that which pleads romantic sensibility, or ungovernable passion; to readers, in short, who would have turned with disgust from its indecencies, and remembered only its poetry and wit. But no sooner was it whispered that there was no property in 'Don Juan', than ten presses were at work, some publishing it with obscene engravings, others in weekly numbers, and all in a shape that brought it within the reach of purchasers on whom its poison would operate without mitigation—who would search its pages for images to pamper a depraved imagination, and for a sanction for the insensibility to the sufferings of others, which is often one of the most unhappy results of their own, and would treasure up all its evil, without the power of comprehending what it contains of good. 'Don Juan' in quarto and on hot-pressed paper would have been almost innocent—in a whity-

> brown duodecimo it was one of the worst of the mischievous publications that have made the press a snare.[522]

This review reaffirms the flexible standard by which blasphemy is judged—whether something is deemed blasphemous depends entirely on interpretation. The authorities hold the right to decide the interpretation, while the classes who believe themselves entitled to this right remain subject to the system's control and consequently defend it in exchange for their nominal privileges. This circular logic also recalls, as previously argued, the class-based nature of Watkins' faith in his countrymen's capacity for rational thought, while Watkins' ending reaffirms this system still works in an arbitrary manner without guaranteeing even the nominal free rights of the named classes.

In my introduction to this chapter, I roughly sketched the middle-class image in the blasphemy argument about *Don Juan*. It is noticeable that another group is particularly used but still unnoticeable in both the middle-class and the working-class arguments. Byron mentions this along with his copyright issue:

> There has been an eleventh commandment to the women not to read it, and what is still more extraordinary they seem not to have broken it.—But that can be of little import to them, poor things—for the reading or non-reading a book—will never keep down a single petticoat. (*BLJ* 6: 237)

Byron's mentioning 'an eleventh commandment' in particular suggests that he has noticed the contemporary reviewers' inability to find enough confirmed blasphemous examples in the first two cantos despite his parody of the commandments in 'Thou shall believe in Milton, Dryden, Pope; | Thou shalt not set up Wordsworth, Coleridge, Southey' (II: 1633–4). However, this inability did not change the continuous attack on *Don Juan*. In the Newcastle Lit & Phil debate, Christopher Benson urged that *Don Juan* would 'stain their catalogue, and perhaps pollute the purity of many young and female minds. Into such hands it will fall, if placed in the library of the Society. There are females who are reading members'.[523] In fact, for a long time since the establishment of the society, there were only seven female reading members against more than five

[522] [Southey?], 127.
[523] Christopher Benson, *Newcastle Courant*, 7475 (15 January 1820), p. 2.

hundred society members, and they did not have the right to attend the meetings. I do not pursue gender issues further here but regard women as a representative group who ought to have been granted equal rights—yet were not, particularly given that, as noted, even access to such membership demanded a high price. Like the middle and working classes, women readers were instrumentalised: a group without power or authority, used rather than recognised. Also indicating groups including women readers, when Dugdale in his defence tried to sympathise with the powerful group of judgment, he said, 'scenes of the most disgusting nature were introduced into this work—such scenes as no father of a family would permit to be read, or for an instant to be listened to'.[524] In this carefully constructed model, a father who holds the authority sets the rules to restrict his family's rights of reading and listening, thus indicating the father's right to decide the interpretation. This example also indicates a connection between family morality and social morality, which is worth elaborating on later.

Recalling *Edinburgh Magazine*'s comment that *Don Juan* was 'poisoning the current of fine poetry, by the intermixture of ribaldry and blasphemy such as no man of pure taste can read a *second* time, and such as no woman of correct principles can read a *first*', it is then clear that tameness and obedience were the only way to guarantee 'pure taste' and 'correct principles'.[525] This manipulation of the social standard of religious morality exposes the brutal and unequal nature of common blasphemy prosecutions, which conflate power with the possession of rights.

11.3. Byron's pains and gains in *Don Juan*'s market

It is hard to know how much Byron disliked piracy itself, but it should be safe to say he cares about it not very much—as it is mostly about money; in another letter to Murray, Byron comforted him that 'if you have lost money by the publication—I will refund—any—or all of the copyright' (*BLJ* 9:103). Byron's main concerns were revealed in the letter where he scolded the 'impostors':

[524] 'Law Report', 2.
[525] *Edinburgh Magazine*, 105–6.

> Perhaps I did not make myself understood—he told me the sale had been great—1200 out of 1500 quarto, I believe, (which is nothing after selling 13,000 of the Corsair in one day); but that the "best judges &c." had said it was very fine, and clever, and particularly good English & poetry, and all those consolatory things, which are not, however, worth a single copy to a bookseller—and as to the author—of course I am in a damned passion at the bad taste of the times—and swear there is nothing like posterity—who, of course, must know more of the matter than their grandfathers. …[I]t is of import to Murray—who will be in scandal for his aiding as publisher.—He is bold howsomedever—wanting two more cantos against the winter—I think that he had better noy—for by the larkins!—it will only make a new row for him. (*BLJ* 6: 237)

Murray's attitude as a publisher has been indicated here: He would like to take the risk if they could further capture markets and increase sales. Byron also cares about the market, and he is still proud of the great success of *Corsair*. However, as mentioned, his concerns were not reflected in money. He was always concerned about his readership, which was reflected in his familiarity with the sold copies and the criticisms. In fact, it was not the first time Byron very clearly showed this tendency. Before the publication of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, Byron used to worry about its sales. He somehow complains that '[Murray] wants to have it in quarto, which is a cursed unsaleable size; but it is pestilent long, and one must obey one's bookseller' (*BLJ* 2: 113). This obedience turned out to be wise. It shows again the different points of interest in publication between Byron and his publisher. The amount sold, together with the criticisms, shows Byron's satisfaction with *Don Juan*'s popularity. That he also mentioned the 'eleventh commandment' reveals his reception of his poem's political and religious influence among his readers. All of these were not in conflict with piracy. In fact, in Dugdale's case, we already know that piracy made *Don Juan* affordable not only through pirated versions but also from Murray's channel.

However, not having too much at stake does not make Byron completely invincible in the market. Recalling Chritopher's saying of literary labels, when anyone could take advantage of and even counterfeit the label, three parties were weakening or even undermining Byron's control over his work, name, and celebrity. The first is again

the ‘impostors’. This party created works including *Don Juan: Canto the Third*. They took Byron’s name to advance radicalism or simply obscenity. In some cases, they did similar things as Byron, but the problem was that they still enriched the non-Byron part of quasi-Byron. In fact, they probably also helped in Byron’s creation from another angle, but before clarifying that I must introduce the other two parties. The second is the reviewers or the interpreters. This group makes the reading of Byron’s poems fall into the same dilemma as the blasphemy debate. In fact, from *Corsair*’s couplets return to *Edinburgh Magazine*’s class superiority in reading *Don Juan*, and later the Christian reading of Byron’s tolerance in *The Vision of Judgment*, certain reviewers never stopped appropriating Byron’s writing and identity. And Barbauld’s letter reveals that when they got endorsed by social authorities, they could influence the public reception and understanding of the poems. The final component is tightly linked to the second and composes a solid ground for their debate, which is Byron’s aristocratic identity. Leigh Hunt was not the only person who questioned Byron on his aristocracy; people like Mary Shelley were, if not *are*, the minority. Even in the freedom debate staged in Newcastle, when free thinkers try to unite ‘all who have escaped the dogmata of the Nursery, and surrendered themselves to the freedom of ACTING as well as THINKING’, they use Byron’s name as ‘a Noble Lord’.[526] When critics and the broader readers are talking about Byron, Byron’s identity always brings about more than Byron’s self. I think this is also evidence that they were always dominated by the hierarchical system which represents deeply rooted ideological tyranny. And this again confirms the necessity to view quasi-Byron as the discussed and alienated figure which is always reshaped in this establishment. Looking back on the first group, their denial of Byron in reality, then, reveals something revolutionary, and Byron completes this circle by himself in Canto VI writing the obscene harem. This was also when Byron gave up his theory of hopelessness when talking about the ‘system’. He turned to John Hunt. As Cooligan observes,

[526] See Stewart, 335.

> the later harem cantos in *Don Juan* caused the greatest excitement and censure: [T]he condemnation of the poem's immorality in the bourgeois press escalated into charges of "indecency" and "obscenity" as the criticism began to focus almost exclusively on the harem.[527]

Byron's familiarity with the criticisms blessed him with broader public concerns when reading the poem, otherwise, it cannot explain why the Lord who already knew clearly about 'the bad taste of the times' (*BLJ* 6: 237) moved a step further in his illustration. Byron saw his readers. As argued in Chapter Three, Byron embraced his radical readers in order to expand his readership—an expansion that formed a central element of his later marketing strategy and underpinned his use of poetry as a vehicle for political advancement, especially following his final unsuccessful privacy claim in Canto III of *Childe Harold*. All these issues are also reflected in *Don Juan*'s creation.

Under such circumstances, Mitford's claim of 'public property' over the life and character of Byron reached a strange harmony with Byron. However, Mary Howitt at Byron's funeral said that

> [h]e was a lover of liberty…which the Radical Corporation here thought made him their brother; therefore all the rabble rout from every lane and alley, and garret and cellar, came forth to curse and swear, and shout and push, in his honour.[528]

The boundary between the unpleasant passivity and ambivalent subjectivity in Byron's life-long writing finally got blurred. With Goldsmith's claim that 'both during his life and after, Byron was venerated as the patron saint of radicalism', I want to reaffirm quasi-Byron as the celebrated figure uniting the conflicting identities of Byron's independent self, the public icon, and the perfectioned saint.[529] It thus constitutes an internal, realistic blasphemy that once again challenges the imposed cognition, even within this glamorous system centred on Byron.

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[527] Cooligan, 442.
[528] Mary Howitt, *An Autobiography*, vol. 1, edited by Margaret Howitt (Londo, 1889), p. 185.
[529] Goldsmith, 'Byron, Radicals and Reformers', p. 265.

12. Social authorities, moral regulations and *Don Juan*'s experimental epical writing

It is commonly held that scepticism exerted a profound influence on Byron's writing. Like in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, Byron's challenge in *Don Juan* against the religionists is generally based on Pyrrhonism, which develops a sense of variety and mobility turning poetic words into a powerful weapon to question the fixed binary doctrines in related social, religious, and political contexts. The very active narrator plays a rather important role. In the previous section, I presented a state of being coerced into conflicting social currents. Different groups knead celebrity culture and blasphemy concerns together in an overwhelming hegemonic gesture, which explains why I have repeatedly emphasised that the blasphemy debate in the established system of binary morality would not ultimately resolve this criminal prosecution itself for freedom, because blasphemy prosecutions are in essence the powerful group's domination over the less powerful or the altogether powerless, and the reverse nature of the power system makes it possible for even the judge to fall prey to a new system of violence leading to the collapse. This is seen most typically in the shipwrecking scene. The reason the current structure does not collapse from *Don Juan* is that Byron abandons the dichotomous debating mode, where he turns to and transforms the grand epic narrative, embracing real human life and their practical relationships in a truthful and sincere presentation to witness both the establishment and collapse of certain systems as a state of affiliation to human life itself. In the first chapter of this thesis about the development of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, I argue that Byron represents his confrontation with God with a basis of human power endorsed by nature even though he places his aristocratic self in the leading place in a tyrannical manner. In the following chapter, I viewed the Tales as evidence of Byron's integration of human feeling and human liberty. In Chapter Three, we see Byron can further strip human identity of its political attributes. Until now, *Don Juan* provided a rather complicated ground to perform an enriched version of this integration as well as disinterest. I call it real human life to emphasise its uncertainty, but this uncertainty is in fact realised by a

sense of variety, which I shall elaborate on in the last section. In this case, we may view Byron's saying that 'Truth is always strange, | Stranger than Fiction' (XIV, 801–2) as self-mockery. To smooth over the sense of deliberate arrangement, and also with some other purposes, it is a surprise to find that Byron gives up the narrative distance which he so cared about in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*.

The narrator in Don Juan bears a strong resemblance to Byron himself: 'I recollect Great Britain's coast looks white' (II: 93), he writes when depicting Juan's leaving Spain. 'I' also boast about having 'pass'd the Hellespont' (II: 838)' when talking about Juan's swimming talent. The most obvious part may be that 'I' mention 'my grand–dad's Narrative' (II: 1096) to indicate Juan's hardships after the shipwreck. All these lines and others suggest that Byron changed his way of communicating with his readers. He places a figure like himself in communication, which shows equality and more importantly, his willingness to represent equality in communication. Still, there is an ambiguity to distinguish this from Byron. For example, the narrator claims he is 'in a single station' and 'not having…domestic cares' (I: 174, 184); the tone somehow suggests that he never had these concerns since he only 'arrange[s] all [his] friends' affairs' (I: 183). However, compared with what he reveals later, it seems that Byron only dodges his marriage issue here. It is true that, as mentioned, quite a lot of readers were not familiar with Byron and could not fact check. However, this still composes an active response when the public coercing is already fierce. Also, as Byron goes further to emphasise this intimacy by introducing 'I', the narrator with most of Byron's features, he welcomes his audience to build virtual connections with him through Juan the protagonist as well as the narrator. He gives up the distance in a more active way than he did in Canto IV of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* and changes to get involved into the context, which reveals more vividly his recognition of his celebrity identity and his intention to deal with his celebrated figure with less or no superiority over his readers. The reason for this is also noticeably clear at the end of Canto II: 'Laying down my pen, I make my bow | Leaving Don Juan and Haidee to plead | For them and theirs with all who deign to read' (II: 1726-8). This response, as well as the

intention to build up intimacy, also explains why I use quasi-Byron instead of fake-Byron to conclude Byron's celebrity figure.

Young Byron did 'not think publishing at all creditable to either men or women' (*BLJ* 2: 175), and his dissatisfaction with poetry does not end after he turned to poetry. I always argue that Byron used poetry to advance his politics; he also transformed poetic representations according to his political concerns at the same time. I think it should be understood with his later 'thought that Poetry was an art, or an attribute, and not a profession' (*BLJ* 6: 47). Poetry is the tool—the stage and a place like a parliament—and it does not itself compose an absolute system of opinions from Byron's perspective. This may also explain why he quit blank verse, as 'Prose poets like blank-verse, I'm fond of rhyme, | Good workmen never quarrel with their tools' (I, 1605–6). Stewart reminds us that

> reading is open, but radically so, in a way that would undo the rational usefulness…just as much as the moral purpose...It is not immoral or improving because it is not, precisely, anything. The only intention it seems to have is something like pure play.[530]

In *Don Juan*, Byron's early oscillations between action and poetry were eventually resolved as a consequence of cultural unity in his celebrity. Only the act of seeing the reader and directing them to the reading forms the core of Byron's manipulation of his celebrity in *Don Juan*, and the linked relationship equally completes the construction of his work concerning interacting oratory. In a magic way, the circulation as well as the decay of the narrative has remained on the page along with the words.

Don Juan also reveals that Byron completed a re-establishment of his view of oratory, which bridges his political and poetic discourses from the very beginning and then helps him fit in the influencing mechanism of celebrity culture. Recalling more about Byron's early career transition—when Byron wanted to be a successful politician, if I may replace this word, Byron meant a successful orator. He was encouraged that he 'should turn out an Orator' (*BLJ* 9: 43) by his headmaster Joseph Drury at Harrow

[530] Stewart, 340.

School. From that time, the young lord developed a tight connection between these two ways of using language:

> I coincide with you in opinion that the *poet* yields to the *Orator*; but as nothing can be done in the latter Capacity till the expiration of my *minority*, the former occupies my present Attention; & both *ancients* & *moderns* have declared that the 2 pursuits are so nearly similar, as to require in a great measure the same Talents, & he who excels in the one, would on application succeed in the other. (*BLJ* 1: 113)

He particularly mentioned to Sheridan that '*these* are *great* names…I can never equal them' (*BLJ* 1: 113). But in 1814, he refused to dine with Sheridan because 'with him the saying of Mirabeau, that "words are things", is not to be taken literally'.[531] This dismission means that Byron found oratory language cannot do good as well as print, and Byron at the time had gotten used to his success in the latter. In Chapter One, I demonstrated Byron's career transition mostly with objective factors; here, I want to add some more abstract issues, mainly about language and poetics, to explain it. Behind the career transition was Byron's persistence in exploiting the value of language. When poetry brought him more than politics did, he turned to poetry, but he was not satisfied with the functions and features of contemporary verse. In the Tales, I argued, Byron attempted to construct images and even introduce an interactive sense of stage performance in his poems. He later also turned to drama-like creations. David Francis Taylor agrees that, for Byron, with a process or not, 'he is affirming what written words do that spoken ones do not'.[532] And I want to add that the mentioned experiments mainly prove that, at least for Byron, the advantages of speaking language can be compromised into written ones, typically the sentimental discourses; *Don Juan* goes further in free speech with colloquial characters. Taylor further notices that for Byron

[531] This is from an undated note in Moore's edition of *Letters and Journals*. Following Byron's letter to Mr. Rogers on 19 June 1814, the editor believes that '[t]he following undated notes to Mr. Rogers must have been written about the same time'. The letter to Mr. Rogers can also be found on 128–9 in *BLJ*, vol. 4. For the use of this quotation here, it does not matter even if the exact date could not be confirmed. Since the note and the letter have some connections in content, I take the editor's claim here.
[532] Taylor, 483.

'the centrifugal impetus of his rhyme—ink/think/link—is unmistakable'.[533] It reveals that in print, language 'goes on living long after the body and voice have decayed'.[534] With Byron's concerns about action and mobility, celebrity culture prolongs the longevity of his words in publication.

What I use to describe Byron's celebrated figure in this process of influence and communication, as mentioned, is quasi-Byron. I think Leonard W. Deen's view helps to understand quasi-Byron's necessity in Byron's poetical transformation:

> The fact that Byron's truths often have to be added to the narrative rather than being adequately represented in it is made to imply not a failure of imagination on Byron's part, but an inadequacy in "poetry" itself, which makes it difficult for "poetry" to communicate the kinds of truth Byron is interested in. Since these truths have awakened the poet's strong moral attitudes toward truth itself, and since they have taken a powerful impression from his mind and feelings, they belong to him as a kind of personal acquisition, and they require his intrusion into the fiction. For Byron, they are a legitimate part of the poem because they are part of the poet.[535]

In this case, I think an analogy can help to further understand the narrator's role and Byron's special poetic representation of the world. In this analogical interpretation, Don Juan—the protagonist, the epic hero, and the central stage performer—is giving his speech in the House of Human Beings, and the narrative angle of *Don Juan* is thus from one of the audience members. I thus regard the writing and publication of *Don Juan* as an invitation to a Parliament-like theatre within the poem, staging social reality through a focus on universal human concerns rather than a specific nation such as Britain. This strategy also helps to avoid Byron's system-related concerns.

Wolfrum views Byron's refusal of systems as guarding against 'ideological recruitment, irrespective of the underlying motives or goals', which Wolfrum connects to 'Hunt's utilitarian attitude towards language'.[536] I think it is worth distinguishing that Byron's refusal of systems can also be a utilitarian attitude towards poetic language but

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[533] Taylor, 483.
[534] Taylor, 483.
[535] Leonard W. Deen, 'Liberty and License in Byron's *Don Juan*', *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* vol. 8, 3 (1966), 345–57, 348.
[536] Wolfrum, p. 88.

different in 'ideological recruitment'. This is important because Byron's representation of the step between these two steps is 'explanation'. As Byron writes, for Coleridge's '[e]xplaining metaphysics to the nation—| I wish he would explain his Explanation' (Dedication: 15–16). With Pyrrhonism as a basis, Byron stops before explanation—either because he does not want to, or he could not—and thinks this is the best way of using poetic language. He used to make such comments to the speaker and the audience in Parliament:

> The impression of Parliament upon me was, that its members are not formidable as speakers, but very much so as an audience; because in so numerous a body there may be little eloquence, (after all, there were but two thorough orators in all antiquity, and I suspect still fewer in modern times,) but there must be a leaven of thought and good sense sufficient to make them know what is right, though they can't express it nobly. (*BLJ* 9: 16)

This reveals that, from his early experience, Byron recognised and was concerned with the distinct roles of speaker and audience. Crucially, he did not regard them as separate; for Byron, they are joined at either end of a string of expression and cognition. Those who cannot speak may still understand. Byron's language thus reflects his inclusion of both roles as equal Parliamentary agents. While they may exist independently of the formal institution of Parliament, the Parliament provides a stage upon which their connection may be enlarged and their fluid relationship performed. When I consider the narrator's fluid identity—both as an audience to Juan's life and as a speaker to the readers as a second audience—I suggest that they can thereby be liberated from both the narrative itself and the systems it represents. *Don Juan*, as an epic, stages Byron's understanding of human life and offers readers a glimpse of their own free nature.

Byron's confidence in *Don Juan* is obvious; he claims that [i]f you must have an epic, there's "Don Juan" for you...[I]t is an epic as much in the spirit of our day as the Iliad was in Homer's...and my spirits, good or bad, must serve for the machinery'.[537] The mechanism and the standard are both noticeable, but it is unusual to have his 'spirits,

[537] *Medwin's Conversations of Lord Byron*, edited by E. J. Lovell (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966), p. 165.

good or bad'. *Don Juan*'s freedom is partly, and importantly, realised in this sense of interaction, and mainly by the design of the narrator. However, this section shall first continue the first section to complete the image of the unhappy religionists to reflect what *Don Juan*'s freedom without heavy religious blasphemy meant at the time. Then, because the last section illustrates mainly the outside factors, I shall further present from Byron's angle his 'effort' in representations.

12.1. Crisis awareness among religionists

The first section presented the main external factors that directly influenced the creation and reading of *Don Juan*, and the second section turns to Byron's side to explain the design, response, and adjustments manifested within the poem. However, before doing so, I think it is necessary to know what Byron really had to contend with in *Don Juan*. In Chapter Two, I argue that the long poem 'Anti-Byron' helps Byron to confirm what his blasphemous poems can do in undermining social belief and social authorities—and he boasts that. The long poem provides Byron with some evidence of the unease his poems arouse among the loyalists. In the same way, *Don Juan* enjoys, if I may say, the religionists' attack for Byron to confirm his power against the established system in a more persuasive way.

As was introduced, prior to the publication of the first two cantos of *Don Juan*, Murray's circle predicted that there would be a battle between the free thinkers and the religionists and that the latter would win, and therefore *Don Juan* was not suitable for publication. It means that they believe *Don Juan*, as early as in Cantos I and II, is in conflict with the religionists. Especially in the context of a certain victory for the religionists, the publication of *Don Juan* could invite trouble for them. They were right, as is shown in a letter involved in the Newcastle debate telling the response of Nicholas Hurry of the Liverpool Athenaeum:

> These are times of rebuke and blasphemy; and all the friends of religion need to exert themselves with extraordinary vigour...This circumstance shows the importance of Bible Associations and Societies, and Tract and Mission

> Societies, all aided by the prayers and active exertions of the whole Christian community.[538]

As Stewart comments: 'Reading poetry represents a danger that must be contained and societies which foster free discussion are a risk that must be controlled carefully'.[539] For these issues, Byron frequently responded to the attack on the false morality of his poem, in the name of freedom 'being as much the subject of attack | As ever yet was any work sublime, | By those who love to say that white is black' (XI: 716–18). However, the most blasphemous piece for common religionists might be the following part ridiculing both the social and family moralities about the affairs between Juan and Alfonso's families, centring on the micro unit of the larger social system. As mentioned, this piece questions and challenges the social authorities through their connection with family authorities.

In Chapter Two, I frequently introduced the family issue into arguments, typically including the alienated family relationships in *The Bride of Abydos*, *The Siege of Corinth*, and *Pairisna*. Moreover, in *The Corsair*, Conrad and Medora's isolated home with mainland regulations and morality emphasises Byron's observations of the connection between family and society. However, the affairs between Juan's and Alfonso's families are still different. The main reason is that it strips off the broader power contexts but focuses on trivial representations of real-life scenes to approach its readers with the story's unconventional core. Unlike the Tales accusing tyrants of their imposing power, *Don Juan* already signifies the systematic constraints over human life and human freedom, aligning with Byron's reception of the contemporary comments and preparing for his later works (especially as is argued about *The Vision of Judgment* in Chapter Three). As mentioned, the contemporaries of *Don Juan* also particularly emphasised its corruption in the name of patriarchal domination of family issues. But the core character of this ironic drama, from my perspective, is Inez. She undertakes an

[538] *Letters Read by C. N. Wawn, O.M. in the Literary and Philosophical Society of Newcastle upon Tyne regarding Don Juan*, (Newcastle, 1823), p. 7.
[539] Stewart, 329.

important role in setting a standard in this system. Her image is vivid in the narrator's introduction:

> In short, she was a walking calculation,
> Miss Edgeworth's novels stepping from their covers,
> Or Mrs. Trimmer's books on education,
> Or "Coelebs' Wife" set out in search of lovers,
> Morality's prim personification,
> In which not Envy's self a flaw discovers,
> To others' share let "female errors fall",
> For she had not even one—the worst of all. (I: 121–8)

Byron's acquaintance with the female moral models and their works makes this stanza's ending line a special ridicule. When introducing Trimmer's attack on Godwin's *Bible Stories*, I argued that the religious 'good' and 'evil' doctrines have become a common belief and formed specific social authority. In stanza 16 of *Don Juan,* Byron makes Inez 'Morality's prim personification', which means she now represents 'good'. Byron's ridicule of this 'perfect' (I: 129) goodness is completed by Alfonso's. In stanzas 66 and 67, the narrator first indicates Inez's love with Alfonso. In stanza 176, although Julia does not mean this to attack Alfonso, 'Alfonso's loves with Inez were well known' (I: 1432). Noticeably, Alfonso appears with patriarchal authority to claim his power and control over his wife:

> Without a word of previous admonition,
> To hold a levee round his lady's bed,
> And summon lackeys, arm'd with fire and sword,
> To prove himself the thing he most abhorr'd. (I: 1109–12)

When he cannot find the adulterer, '[h]e would not justify what he had done, | To say the best, it was extreme ill–breeding' (I: 1387–8). This arbitrary power is unequal considering his own affairs but is naturally accepted without confirmation of evidence. Alfonso's actions are similar to the usual procedure of prosecuting blasphemy and sedition at the time, especially when he is the person in power. This procedure was also corroborated later in Hunt's case on *The Vision of Judgment*. Back to Alfonso's relationship with 'Morality's prim personification'—I view this relationship to mirror

not the endorsement between King and God but the cooperation between the church and the government in suppression. Byron's ridicule against both the 'perfect' goodness and also the relationship indicates his response to this suppression and also reflects the realistic basis of blasphemy debates: 'good' may not be good, let alone perfect; if the binary doctrines are unreliable, the system based on it shall be questioned. This ambiguous blasphemy makes Stewart think that '[t]he need to provide but the impossibility of being sure…was one reason that the poem prompted such a famously negative reaction. Readers often were not quite sure what Byron had done to them'.[540] *Don Juan* can indeed result in great moral panic probably because it is unclear, but the question is, however, apart from the law issues of anonymity, whether this part of the reaction that the accusation over his morality is negative from Byron's side. We in fact see that this ambiguity develops to be a sign in the later cantos of Byron's position, which is not only per the poem's satirical style but also a way of increasing the poem's appealing effect. Strangely, the unspoken word was safer when arousing more risky thoughts. An example is again that Moore's edition of Byron's letter on the eleventh commandment omits Byron's words 'keep down a single petticoat'.[541] It can be wrong if released, but it definitely arouses more possible ways of offensiveness while keeping the safety explained in a decent way. This uncertain area, lying outside the formal blasphemy debate, was what most concerned Byron and his circle.

Regarding the family issues, another important function of these pieces is to establish the only growth of Juan. Byron continues his representations of human feelings and human love from the Tales but differently develops a clearer thinking pattern centring on human nature. The earliest and best representation is in stanzas 91 and 92 in Canto I:

> He, Juan (and not Wordsworth), so pursued
> His self–communion with his own high soul,
> Until his mighty heart, in its great mood,
> Had mitigated part, though not the whole
> Of its disease… (I: 721–5)

[540] Stewart, 338.
[541] See Moore, *Letters and Journals*, 1830.

He thought about himself, and the whole earth,
Of man the wonderful, and of the stars,
And how the deuce they ever could have birth;
And then he thought of earthquakes, and of wars,
How many miles the moon might have in girth,
Of air-balloons, and of the many bars
To perfect knowledge of the boundless skies;
And then he thought of Donna Julia's eyes. (I: 729–36)

Byron calls Juan's self-awakening process in these two stanzas his approach to becoming a metaphysician. However, putting Byron's own metaphysical writing style aside, what he generously repeats here is all about Juan's self, including his 'high soul', 'mighty heart', 'great mood', his knowledge and curiosity, and his love for Julia. Byron may unconsciously use 'metaphysics' to represent a human unease about one's dilemma between taught morals and human nature, especially in this Christian country. In other words, Juan's sense of disorientation stems not from his intrinsic self but from his conflict with the external system of education. In this sense, Juan may be seen as the precursor to Byron's Cain.

Although Byron frequently alludes to Adam and Eve and their forbidden fruit, he only directly refers to it when Alfonso 'stood like Adam lingering near his garden' (I: 1437). As for the love 'like Adam's recollection of his fall' (I: 1011), it is shared by Julia and Juan. And for love in Juan's family, 'Don Jose, like a lineal son of Eve, | Went plucking various fruit without her leave' (I: 143–4). Later in Canto II, Haidee's love is described as '…all | Which Eve has left her daughters since her fall' (II: 1511–12). It is easy to find that Byron deliberately does not situate human love in the family. In fact, Byron describes love, instead of any other thing, as the primary fall in the Bible. The reason is that Byron views love as a key to knowledge, discovery, and a new stage of human life:

Like Adam's recollection of his fall;
The tree of knowledge has been pluck'd—all's known—
And life yields nothing further to recall
Worthy of this ambrosial sin, so shown,
No doubt in fable, as the unforgiven

Fire which Prometheus filch'd for us from heaven. (I: 1011–16)

In Juan's primary awakening to love, his nature calls him to think over the world and relate his love in this free space instead of the previous restrained space. In stanzas 41–43, Byron already indicates this relationship between classics (knowledge and thinking) and human nature (love and human feeling). They were both castrated and restricted in the binary moral system. *Don Juan* does not fall into normal structure and logic. This is normal for Byron because he had done so many experiments, but it is abnormal as a printed work because Juan and morality are just like Byron and parliamentary politics, by which I mean they are not namely related but have some de facto connections. The point is that Juan gets rid of the moral debate restrictions or the systematic pattern itself. It is not because they do not care, but they are unaffected by these powers, especially for Juan's Hispanic background. The more powerful but unsystematic pattern seizes human real life, which represents the materials and other realistic things for human beings in their life. Meanwhile, in Deen's opinion, '[b]y associating the liberty of his performance with outspoken freedom of speech…[t]he great intent of Byron's license is to turn the poem into a free field', and he adds that 'the poet can claim freedom from any law except that of truth. "Truth" and "freedom" are the keys to the rhetoric of *Don Juan*'.[542] This is not the first time Byron has done this. The difference is that in the Tales, typically in *The Corsair*, the professed freedom is still illusory in Conrad and Medora's home, whereas Juan transgresses the boundary to realise a truly free freedom, as if plucking the fruit of knowledge or igniting his spiritual world with fire from heaven.

In the meantime, Alfonso is 'like Adam' at the gate of his garden. His love, however, is not in his fall with Eve, but with the perfect moral personification, Inez. Alfonso loses his garden as well as his love, only standing '[w]ith useless penitence perplex'd and haunted' (I: 1438). The religionists' efforts in maintaining the restriction or the attraction of perfection are still in the context of God's being, which result in Heaven and Hell make less sense than the real world. Indirectly, Byron satirises their alienated nature. More importantly, he ridicules the realistic endorsement between

[542] Deen, 346.

social authorities, as Inez cannot pluck the fruit when maintaining her perfection, so the endorsement is either unreliable or unattainable.

12.2. ‘CLASSICAL effort of a Noble Lord’: Poetry and fame for Byron

Byron expects to establish an alliance with people through his unique language style. Readers from different classes and backgrounds have their own standards when they read, attack, or defend Byron’s poems, which means their opinions as a whole are uncertain and Byron’s response is expected to accommodate all of them. Meanwhile, for common readers, the unnamed majority who are not eager to utter wants and opinions, Byron does have some expectations. The deliberate ambiguity in this epic is designed for the mentioned situations. Byron takes advantage of the general expectations concerning his aristocracy, an epic and even revolutionary attack on his home’s religious and political environment. Readers find some familiarity when they enter the poem with weirdness and even suspect tergiversation. Byron blurs most opinions to keep the most important paradigm of his poetics of politics, and clothes them in an equal mechanism of conversation. The performer and the audience reach the stage to find a common sense of the blasphemous truth against the established ones, and Byron aims to make it acceptable at the expense even of expression itself.

In fact, the expression is unreliable. Byron sketches some important components in Canto III:

> His strain display’d some feeling—right or wrong;
> And feeling, in a poet, is the source
> Of others’ feeling; but they are such liars,
> And take all colours—like the hands of dyers. (III: 789–92)

> But words are things, and a small drop of ink,
> Falling like dew, upon a thought, produces
> That which makes thousands, perhaps millions, think;
> ’Tis strange, the shortest letter which man uses
> Instead of speech, may form a lasting link
> Of ages. (III: 793–8)

Some dull MS. oblivion long has sank,
Or graven stone found in a barrack's station
In digging the foundation of a closet,
May turn his name up, as a rare deposit. (III: 805–8)

This is about 'feeling', and 'words' in two forms 'letter' and 'speech', and then the recorded history. The first is where the poetry's influence comes from, while the latter two bring about how fame is consolidated. Byron develops his emphasis on feelings, and makes it more specific to be 'unquiet': he claims that 'the unquiet feelings, which first woke | Song in the world, will seek what then they sought' (IV: 843–4). He reaffirms that 'poetry,…is but passion' (IV: 847). This is from the poet's perspective. Poetry creation for Byron at this time means more. When fame is confirmed, Byron says '[i]ts fumes are frankincense to human thought' (IV: 842), and this 'human thought' bridges the readers and the poet. Byron indicates this sentimental connection in his mind in various ways to create a context for common sense of the world. He quotes Bacon's words in Canto XIV: 'Fling up a straw, 't will show the way the wind blows | …And such a straw, borne on by human breath, | Is Poesy, according as the mind glows' (XIV: 58–60). 'Feeling' here reaches the human spiritual world within poetry to form a united community of the poet and his readers. Byron's adoption of feeling in *Don Juan* is different from that in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* or the Tales; this difference is because Byron makes it more abstract and able to be detached from the poetical representations. In other words, in *Don Juan*, a certain space is spared for sentimental communications.

Before explaining why this could happen, I think it useful to explore Byron's decision between 'letters' and 'speech'. In the first section, I argue that Byron finds poetry the form through which unify his writing and speaking power. Meanwhile, its strength gets along with Byron's inborn scepticism. From Byron's comment on fame:

And glory long has made the sages smile;
'Tis something, nothing, words, illusion, wind —
Depending more upon the historian's style
Than on the name a person leaves behind. (III: 809–12)

Byron's distrust of the historian is evident. While this scepticism is not unfounded, it is

often misdirected. As mentioned, Howe thinks that for Byron, '[language] is precisely in breaking free from the assumptions of philosophy that poetic writing finds its epistemological value'.[543] I think even the notion of ideological recruitment can be too philosophical here. In Byron's specific representations, poetry, language (words in letters and speech), and history (recorded language) are different things, though he does not care about their difference, just like he does not care about the examples of Milton, Shakespeare, and others he has named. He thinks '[a]ll these are, *certes*, entertaining facts' (III: 826). This attitude changes but only when he becomes the historian using his own style to critique Southey, Wordsworth, and their circle. Byron's explanation for his criticism is that '[Wordsworth] there builds up a formidable dyke | Between his own and others' intellect' (III: 849–50). Byron also makes the comparison between Wordsworth and the maniac Joanna Southcote. Nonetheless, before listing the entertaining facts of Milton, Byron says that Milton is '[a]n independent being in his day— | Learn'd, pious, temperate in love and wine' (III: 819–20). One thus realises that Wordsworth's abstruse words are not wrong; the 'manner' Byron criticises and displays 'aversion' towards is not the words, but the feeling. This feeling, indicating the sentimental disconnection, what Byron calls 'a formidable dyke', is not between Byron and Wordsworth, but between the readers (including Byron) and Wordsworth. In these comparisons, it can be read that Byron keeps a tolerant attitude towards 'things' revealing feelings, names, and records, but he holds his rebellious passion strictly against the hierarchical suppressive system, which shows great aggressiveness. For Stewart, 'Byron's very failure to advocate clearly any position meant his poem evaded both the defenders of intellectual liberty and the condemners of immorality'. [544] Meanwhile, Irving Babbitt notices 'he is subject to no centre' but still finds 'an intrusion of the poet's ego'.[545] But this is not a problem, as is argued in Chapter Three; Byron refused to build another binary system of social morality, belief, and truth to avoid that 'the new births of both their stale virginities | Have proved but dropsies, taken for

[543] Howe, p. 33.
[544] Stewart, 341.
[545] Irving Babbitt, *Rousseau and Romanticism*, (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1919), pp. 265–6.

divinities' (III: 855–6). In *Don Juan*, with some new observations and a narrative of the changing social order, Byron also clearly declares war against the 'dyke'. In Canto IX:

> And I will war, at least in words (and—should
> My chance so happen—deeds) with all who war
> With Thought;—and of Thought's foes by far most rude,
> Tyrants and Sycophants have been and are.
> I know not who may conquer: if I could
> Have such a prescience, it should be no bar
> To this my plain, sworn, downright detestation
> Of every despotism in every nation. (IX, 185–92)

Recalling his own criticisms in Canto III (though not exclusively there), Byron portrays 'the formidable dyke' constructed by Tyrants and their Sycophants as akin to dropsy in the human body. 'I' declare the war now 'in words' and 'deeds' in the possible future. Goldsmith declares that 'Byron…reflected the hopes of his readers…[and] remained a ghostly presence on the English political stage…Such taunts amplified Byron's unprecedented celebrity, and reveal how far words might stand for flesh and blood'.[546] These 'words' are written down in letters, but in a speaking manner, and aim to evoke feelings. But more importantly, 'I' in this stanza, or the narrator, is fixed in a position like that of 'Moses, or Melancthon, who have ne'er | Done any thing exceedingly unkind' (IX: 162–3). In this way, Byron mirrors the social situation that never being exceedingly unkind is not enough to answer the religionists' blasphemy debate, and that incomplete loyalty is not loyalty at all, but radicalism. Byron stops before he goes further in the following stanzas of metaphors appealing to revolutionary passion. But the words already show Byron's intention to connect with the people:

> It is not that I adulate the people:
> Without *me*, there are Demagogues enough,
> And Infidels, to pull down every steeple
> And set up in their stead some proper stuff.
> Whether they may sow Scepticism to reap Hell,
> As is the Christian dogma rather rough,
> I do not know;—I wish men to be free
> As much from mobs as kings—from you as me. (IX: 193–200)

[546] Goldsmith, 'Byron, Radicals and Reformers', p. 266.

This passage reaffirms that Byron uses 'I' or '*me*' to indicate a position people can all take for themselves. Byron also specifies the target of the hellish powers endorsed by Christian dogma. Unlike the leading role Byron arranged for himself in Canto III of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, Byron in *Don Juan* tries to get rid of the possible individual hegemony (in his celebrity) and aristocratic superiority (in the social system) through establishing this rebellious community 'free…from you as me'.

The concerns about celebrity culture help in understanding poetry as an action in these contexts. Again, in Byron's writing of his poems, words are not the ultimate form of his creation. Deen comments that

> the poet's relations with his fiction and with his audience have become part of the poem's subject. "Truth" in *Don Juan* is largely in this three-way relationship, which is to say that the poem is highly rhetorical and that it has a dimension of extrapoetic awareness that would destroy most poems.[547]

Byron partly responds to this comment by himself, still in Canto III: 'feeling, in a poet, is the source | Of others' feeling' (III: 790-1). In Canto VIII, Byron makes the effect predominant in his poetic representation:

> He wrote this Polar melody, and set it,
> Duly accompanied by shrieks and groans,
> Which few will sing, I trust, but none forget it—
> For I will teach, if possible, the stones
> To rise against Earth's tyrants. Never let it
> Be said that we still truckle unto thrones;—
> But ye—our children's children! think how we
> Showed what things were before the world was free! (VIII: 1073–80)

Like that people can never forget this Polar melody, Byron believes his appeal can also survive as a spirit. The spirit that people shall rise against the tyrants for liberation should last for generations. I do not think the reason why Byron tells '[t]hat hour is not for us (VIII: 1081)' is pessimism; I think it is because the contemporary hour means this poem cannot fade like the Polar melody. Without this design, the historical decay

[547] Deen, 346.

of language makes no sense, thus the feeling is less powerful in comparison. With this predictive tone, the imagined situation in stanza 137 brings about a more striking effect, which is like a curse to make kingship become history like 'Mammoth's bones' (VIII: 1091). In this imagining process, Byron speeds up his narration to make this epic more epic, and the revealing sense of epic is realised by possibly 'perish[ed] memory' (of words). As for things that could happen if the perchance can remember, Byron first and foremost utters 'disdain' and 'scorn' (VIII: 1086–7). In his belief in these poetic connections of feeling, Byron in Canto X again satirises Wordsworth by saying that 'as I said, | I *won't* philosophize, and *will* be read' (X: 223–4), because through the survived poems, he believes one 'can stave off thought' (X: 219). People can think—freely think—with equality. Byron's belief in his people is not like Atkins'. His belief is for the future, even now '[p]inned like a flock, and fleeced too in their fold, | At least nine, and a ninth beside of ten' (XV: 203–4).

Since words are the means and not the end, what Byron's epic records is the feeling of prevailing in history. This does not mean the words are not important. As mentioned, language is not the thing, but Byron's way of adopting it is. Again, in Chapter One I argued that Byron transferred from the House of Lords to the realm of rhymes, emphasising celebrity culture as a motive. In fact, just as Byron does not abandon politics in poetry, neither does he relinquish speech or his parliamentary style in written letters. *Don Juan* the epic's recording function plays an important role in Byron's celebrity culture. Taylor particularly points out that '*Don Juan* creates a framework within which the instability of transmission that elsewhere forestalls the poet's efforts to remember or repeat the speech now become the principle of a dynamic rhetorical afterlife'.[548] Adding to what I have argued in the first section about fame and words, I want to introduce the idea that, when feeling in speech blurs in memory, as Byron mentions, 'the shortest letter… | … may form a lasting link | Of ages' (III: 796-8). And when Byron confirms the dominant position of feelings in poetry creation, the feeling and all connections built on the feeling beyond the paper consolidate a stronger

[548] Jane Stabler, 'Byron and "The Excursion"', *The Wordsworth Circle*, vol. 45, 2 (2014), 137-147.

Byron-centred community. In Canto XI, Byron boasts that:

> In twice five years the ‘greatest living poet’,
> Like to the champion in the fisty ring,
> Is called on to support his claim, or show it,
> Although ’tis an imaginary thing.
> Even I—albeit I’m sure I did not know it,
> Nor sought of foolscap subjects to be king, —
> Was reckoned, a considerable time,
> The grand Napoleon of the realms of rhyme. (XI: 433–40)

I do not want to compare Byron to Napoleon as is argued in Chapter One, but it would be useful to compare their connection with their realm. Before clarifying this connection between fame and feelings, I want to point out that, as is mentioned in the first section, readers of *Don Juan*’s piracy or even parodies, or those who never read Byron but only know his name and view him still as the radical patron, are all part of Byron’s celebrity ecology. But how could they connect with Byron and his poems? The answer now is that Byron himself recognises feelings more than words as the bond when he starts his conversation with his readers. This process is like Napoleon’s issuing a decree. The decree gathers people in spite of their reading, but for their recognition. Celebrity culture at this time already shows a tendency of undermining the thing itself; Byron notices this, but for him, this is a good point. His challenge against the existing system is partly realised through his celebrity identity as a decree in his wishful new world. The herald in this epic, as a recorder also, is the narrator.

12.3. Digression and blasphemy: The narrator’s liberty pursuit

Byron’s introduction and emphasis on feeling are mainly for his narrator involving his readers in the poem. This narrator—or ‘I’—resembles Byron: not explicitly acknowledged, yet recognised by both the writer and the readers, including the broader audience concerned with Byron-centred issues, even those who do not read. Ideally, the narrator serves as a perfect embodiment of what I call quasi-Byron, which also marks a shift in Byron’s pattern of celebrity following Canto III of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*.

Especially regarding Byron's privacy claim and manipulation out of superiority and his audience's refusal, the pattern before and typically in Canto III of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* can be illustrated as such:

≠ Byron

Byron → narrator and protagonist ↗ → ↙ readers

↖ =Byron

When Byron keeps his engagement with his celebrated figure, he declares his position above the readers with his wish to appeal to them. The readers then conduct a de facto objection to his manipulation by denying his claim and reversing the similitude. In *Don Juan*:

quasi-Byron (narrator, and protagonist?)

(Byron ↗ ←→ ↖ readers)

As illustrated before, Byron in *Don Juan* is not on the stage; he appears beside the audience. This is unimaginable in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*. In *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, the readers all think Byron is on the stage, and so does he; he wants everyone to pretend that he is not the performer when listening to his appeal, and the readers do not buy it. In *Don Juan*, Byron writes as if he were a solicitous playwright eager to have a conversation with his readers, and then sits among the audience, nagging all the time to disturb others. The readers sense his presence and grow confused: If this is Byron, who is on the stage? But this question soon becomes irrelevant, as the narrator continues his interruptions. *Don Juan* blurs the differentiation with craftiness. Its staging of the connection and unity between Byron and his readers marks the ultimate pattern of Byron's celebrity.

Before specifying what Byron told his readers via the narrator, I reaffirm that confirming the narrator's British identity is necessary to understand the relationship between Byron and his expected readers. As illustrated, Byron makes the narrator like himself: They have done the same things (except marriage), and they have the same

grandfather. In fact, Byron shares more of his social relationships with his narrator: In Canto X, 'my friend Jeffrey writes with such an air: | However, I forgive him, and I trust | He will forgive himself' (X: 86–8). And several stanzas later, he recalls his cherished memory in Aberdeen that '[t]he Dee, the Don, Balgounie's Brig's black wall, | All my boy feelings, all my gentler dreams | Of what I then dreamt, clothed in their own pall' (X: 139–41). All these tell Byon's readers that 'I' is Byron, but this is not the narrative of this epic. Fiona Stafford introduces how modern critics try to blur this conception to 'devolv[e] English literature' or introduce how Byon was 'most European'.[549] The question is whether Byron was really 'remaining in cultural exile' as the narrator in *Don Juan* or not.[550] It is true that in Canto X, when 'I' claim that 'I have no great cause to love that spot of earth' (X: 521) and 'I' admit there has been '[s]even years (the usual term of transportation) | Of absence' (X: 526-7). However, in Canto VII, 'I' also make a mockery of the Anglo-French feud that 'there were Frenchmen, gallant, young and gay: | But I'm too great a patriot to record | Their Gallic names upon a glorious day' (VII: 169–71). If 'I' am 'a patriot' speaking English, then who is 'I'? When recalling the Scotch view, 'I' proudly claim that 'I am half a Scot by birth, and bred | A whole one, and my heart flies to my head' (X: 135–6). This is smart, because in Canto XV, 'I' joyfully tell the readers that '[y]et I wish well to Trojan and to Tyrian, | For I was bred a moderate Presbyterian' (XV: 727–8). In some common but less recognisable cases, the identity of the narrator reveals a more important function. These cases involve the direct conversation between 'us'. From Canto V:

> This was a truth to us extremely trite,
> Not so to her, who ne'er had heard such things;
> She deem'd her least command must yield delight,
> Earth being only made for queens and kings.
> If hearts lay on the left side or the right
> She hardly knew, to such perfection brings
> Legitimacy its born votaries, when
> Aware of their due royal rights o'er men. (V: 1017–24)

[549] Fiona Stafford, 'England and Englishness', in *The Oxford Handbook of British Romanticism*, edited by David Duff (Oxford: Oxford University press, 2018), pp. 91–105, p. 93.
[550] Stafford, p. 94.

The 'truth' is 'our hearts are still our own' (V: 1016), which is uttered by Juan, effeminate in female clothes in front of the Sultana Gulbeyaz, a scene similar to Gulnare's killing the Pacha Seyd but in a gender-reversed way. 'I' translate this free heart against the tyrants to be 'truth' for 'us'. This is what I say about the pattern in *Don Juan* and why I say Byron sits just beside his readers. For *Don Juan*'s target readers, Deen argues, '*Don Juan* is a poem addressed particularly to the English by a poet in exile. Exile allows him the more effectively to set himself over against the society…and his address is for the most part direct'.[551] This becomes clearer in Canto X when 'I' want to start another piece of digression: 'Before they give their broadside. By and bye, | My gentle countrymen, we will renew |—Our old acquaintance' (X: 666–8). I want to add that for the narrator's confirmed nationality, Byron reveals his attitudes by modifying the way of calling his readers, just as the Scottish identity. By calling 'us', he provokes free minds. However, in Canto XII for example, 'I' complain that '[e]ven Plutarch's lives have but picked out a few, | And 'gainst those few your annalists have thundered' (XII: 149–50). This is to criticise 'your annalist' William Mitford, whose 'great pleasure consists in praising tyrants' (*CPW* 5: 753, Byron's notes to these lines). The narrator is humiliating his 'countrymen' now from the perspective of a man who has been absent for seven years. 'I' have done this before in Canto XI, saying '[y]ou are not a moral people, and you know it | Without the aid of too sincere a poet' (XI: 695–6). The final goal of this technique is of course not for humiliation. The narrator divides these expressions, because 'I was born for opposition. | But then 'tis mostly on the weaker side' (XV: 176–7). 'I' am for the weak, because 'I hate even democratic royalty' (XV: 184). Byron approaches his readers in the way of sharing his feelings with opinions in an equal way of communication. The narrator's British nationality provides a common ground to allow all the varieties of expressions to happen and influence his readers. In the context of this thesis, it is an important and confirmed point.

Making the narrator's voice unneglectable for his readers technically represents the predominant writing style of this unusual epic. It divides all related components of

[551] Deen, 354.

this poem into two parts: one is the main purpose and also the story itself, and the other includes the numerous digressions. The former is on the stage, but the latter is unneglectable. This deliberate design mocks the orthodoxy in form. 'I' give up the usual method that '[m]ost epic poets plunge in "medias res"' (I: 41) and declare that '[m]y way is to begin with the beginning; | The regularity of my design | Forbids all wandering as the worst of sinning' (I: 50–2). Just below, humorously in brackets, 'I' whisper in the ear of the readers the open line '(…cost me half an hour in spinning)' (I: 54). The intimacy established in the repeated communicative tongue, as is argued, is to pour the feelings and opinions in front of his readers. 'I' am slippery in most cases. In Canto XIII, after quoting 'modest Ruth' (XIII: 764), 'I' pretend to be aggrieved and afraid that '[f]urther I'd quote, but Scripture intervening, | Forbids' (765–6) because of a sarcastic reminder for the readers: 'A great impression in my youth | Was made by Mrs. Adams, where she cries | "That Scriptures out of church are blasphemies"' (766–7). This great cry out of some crisis awareness of the pious religionist is of course an extreme case, but it is to set such a target for the readers to attack the abuse of blasphemy prosecutions, which serves also as a call-back of all the responses in previous cantos to the blasphemy prosecution against *Don Juan*. But this does not end here; to provide the readers with emotional outlets, 'I' politely quote the scriptures, twice, until two stanzas after this one:

> That happiness for Man—the hungry sinner! —
> Since Eve ate apples, much depends on dinner. (XIII: 791–2)

> Witness the lands which "flowed with milk and honey",
> Held out unto the hungry Israelites:
> To this we have added since, the love of money,
> The only sort of pleasure which requites.
> Youth fades, and leaves our days no longer sunny;
> We tire of Mistresses and Parasites;
> But oh, Ambrosial Cash! Ah! who would lose thee?
> When we no more can use, or even abuse thee! (XIII: 793–800)

These two quotations continue Byron's usual way of confronting religious doctrines. It is a common criticism about how materialism changes society. Byron takes advantage of it in a more practical way, telling his readers that religion seems not so useful and

meaningful compared with food and money. When he for the first time responds to the blasphemy prosecution, he also makes a great comparison through indication:

> Some have accused me of a strange design
> Against the creed and morals of the land (IV: 33–4)
>
> But the fact is that I have nothing plann'd,
> Unless it were to be a moment merry,
> A novel word in my vocabulary. (IV: 38–40)
>
> Alas! man makes that great which makes him little:
> I grant you in a church 'tis very well:
> What speaks of Heaven should by no means be brittle,
> But strong and lasting, till no tongue can tell
> Their names who rear'd it. (V: 465–9)
>
> We know where things and men must end at best,
> A moral (like all morals) melancholy,
> And "Et sepulchri immemor struis domos"
> Shows that we build when we should but entomb us. (V: 501–4)

The first two excerpts question whether human happiness is at odds with social creed and morality; the third suggests that the Christian sublime lies beyond human imagination and creation, while human beings themselves are forgotten and destroyed; the final appears to contrast real human life with vain religious ostentation, but in fact implies that the end of life lies not in Heaven, but in the dust of the tomb. These are all blasphemous claims, yet the digressive, colloquial style deflects the emphasis elsewhere. The first is endorsed by Pulci, and the latter by Horace. The religionists attack Byron's blasphemy, but he replies, 'This way of writing will appear exotic; | Pulci was sire of the half-serious rhyme' (IV: 42–3). Camilleri comments that '[t]he digressions Byron performs within *Don Juan* are purposeful deviations from the purported central design of the epic plot...enabling him complete freedom in the transitions between episodes in relation to both character and event'.[552] This is true, but outside the plot, the digressive style disguises what he speaks with how he speaks. While this directly shows his intention to connect with his readers, he also hides himself

[552] Camilleri, 233.

beneath the naggings.

When escaping from the blasphemy prosecutions without stopping his denial of the represented imposed social morality and belief, Byron also defends his own morality. This is consistent with his plea. In Canto VIII, the narrator says, 'Yet, in the end, except in freedom's battles, | Are nothing but a child of Murder's rattles' (VIII: 31–2). This kinship does not end here. Byron quotes Wordsworth: '"Carnage" (so Wordsworth tells you) "is God's daughter:" | If *he* speak truth, she is Christ's sister, and | Just now behaved as in the Holy Land' (VIII: 70–2). The relationship goes further through 'where the hottest fire was seen and heard, | And the loud cannon pealed his hoarsest strains' (VIII: 261-2). Then:

> But never mind;—"God save the king!" and kings!
> For if he don't, I doubt if men will longer —
> I think I hear a little bird, who sings
> …
> …and the Mob
> At last fall sick of imitating Job. (VIII: 393–5, 399–400)

There would thus be 'the Revolution' (VIII: 407). I am not arguing about Carbonari or others, because the revealed line of the relationship is strong and powerful enough. Byron names two kinds of battles or wars: one is for freedom, the other is but carnage. The war in Canto VIII is the latter, as in Canto IX for Catherine the Empress's joy over the victory, when Byron sighs, 'Blood only serves to wash Ambition's hands' (IX: 472). The war is just a symbolic example of how the mechanism of tyranny works. Religions and tyrants support and use each other to ruin human life only for the social powers' own interests. But the religions are also disposable:

> Ismail's no more! The crescent's silver bow
> Sunk, and the crimson cross glared o'er the field,
> But red with no redeeming gore: the glow
> Of burning streets, like moonlight on the water,
> Was imaged back in blood, the sea of slaughter. (VIII: 972–6)

The crescent has a silver bow, while the crimson cross is polluted. Byron contrasts what a soldier can best get—'[h]e fell, immortal in a bulletin' (VII: 160)—with the tyrants'

joy and the general's heroism and provokes his people to revolt against this imposed system urging their lives, money, and tomb gate. Generally, Byron uncovers 'that odd impulse, which in wars or creeds | Makes men, like cattle, follow him who leads' (VIII: 303–4). To realise the ultimate goal of abolishing the symbol of this hierarchical system, the monarchy, Byron groups his readers together through realistic concerns in real life via the mouth of this communicative, lively, and free narrator. As Deen also notices,

> Having established the primacy of the poet over the poem, and his right to stand outside the fiction and to write beside it, he has freed himself for a direct relation with the reader, in his own voice, and not simply through the narrative.[553]

This technique works with the basis of the connection in common feelings and asks for consistent sentimental intimacy. This is why the narrator keeps making the audience notice his existence with them, all in front of the stage of the social reality. The latter celebrity pattern thus reflects the relationship that meets the blasphemous need of Byron at this stage. In other words, it shows how Byron rationalises and naturalises his political concerns in poetry for his readers. Celebrity culture operates through this connection to unite people in resisting imposed systems.

13. Passiveness, pessimism, and truth: Juan and real human life

Compared with the active narrator, the real protagonist's story can be concluded as a series of Byron's pessimistic social experiments. Throughout reading the poem, considering it is sketched in a sequential order of Juan's experience, the readers may tend to think that the different units present a linear relationship. This view leads to the risk of overlooking the fact that Juan's character arc does not change substantially after the end of the prologue, by which I mean his leaving Spain after being caught for adultery with Julia. I view this as a prologue because it is a relatively isolated plot. The love symbol was made into lots for cannibalism: 'Having no paper, for the want of

[553] Deen, 354.

better | They took by force from Juan Julia's letter' (II: 591–2). This is not the first time reality beats Juan's love for Julia; another closest example is revealed in Byron's funny description of his seasickness:

> A mind diseased no remedy can physic —'
> (Here the ship gave a lurch, and he grew sea-sick.)
> …
> No doubt he would have been much more pathetic,
> But the sea acted as a strong emetic. (II: 151–2, 167–8)

That the sea smooths Juan's love symbolises his passivity in the real world. This does not mean his love is not true, but he loves easily and too much. The other issue is that in Canto XV, when the sign of his love for Aurora appears, 'Juan [knows] nought of such a character—| High, yet resembling not his lost Haidée' (XV: 457–8). There was also an indication in Canto X, when Juan '[writes] to Spain:—and all his near relations' (X: 233), and now he knows he has 'a little brother | Born in a second wedlock' (X: 254–5) of his mother. I expect this son to be Alfonso's. All these cut a line between the first canto and the following Juan's love stories. I call them love stories, because the main growth of Juan in Canto I is learning love as a natural feeling of human beings. The synopsis of his childhood is: 'Although in infancy a little wild, | They tamed him down amongst them; to destroy | His natural spirit not in vain they toil'd' (I: 395–7). In stanzas 89–94, listening to the call of the wild, Juan's nature is unveiled. It is hard to say whether the former or the latter represents a process of paradise lost, but it is clear that another man's human nature—that is, love of and for human beings, stimulated by a woman and inspired by nature—has been revealed anew. This true self endorses him to excoriate the desperate in shipwreck: 'Let us die like men, not sink below | Like brutes' (I: 284–5); it also supports him to love Haidée, dismiss Gulbeyaz, save the orphan, hang around in Catherine's harem, and sink into Aurora's eyes again.

Byron depicts Juan's true self through complete passivity to emphasise his loveable innocence, which however reveals a sense of heartlessness. He is not completely inactive, for example, when he refuses Gulbeyaz, but his initiative is far less important than his passivity. Mole views it in accordance with the plot of the poetry, in

which '*Don Juan* is always and never beginning: always beginning over again in response to changing situations, but never managing to instantiate any sustained programme of action'.[554] He adds that Juan 'reflects the poem that…is also always beginning, always remaining open to contingency, and always ready to adapt to circumstances'.[555] It seems a good reason as the poem really could encounter any circumstances, because Byron does not have a plan, as he wrote to Murray: 'You ask me for the plan of Donny Johnny—I have no plan—I had no plan—but I had or have materials' (*BLJ* 6: 207). From another angle, Camilleri pays attention to the figure in tradition. For this 'heroic inaction', she announces that '[i]n a logical extension of the shift from brawn to brain, poet becomes hero, and hero merely protagonist'.[556] Byron is now sitting next to his readers doing some unheroic bargains. Also, Paul Cantor thinks about heroic 'relocation' that '[f]inding themselves unable to write traditional epics, the Romantics laboured to transform the genre into something more personal, and in the process they discovered that they could be their own best heroes'.[557] I want to recall Byron's opening declaration, 'I WANT a hero' (I: 1). 'I' want because I am not; 'I WANT' because there is not. As is argued, 'I' want all the people around the stage viewing the show to be stimulated to rise as a hero. The relocation is true, while the truth might be more ambitious. In fact, Deen has gone further in this relocation, or cancelling the location altogether. He thinks 'Juan is for the most part an instrument for exploring the world and is thus little more than pure possibility of experience, lacking judgment and a conscious past of his own'.[558] In the meanwhile, Wolfrum thinks 'the narrator subverts himself as creator of meaning, inciting his readers to perform their own never-ending acts of meaning construction'.[559] In other words, the passive Juan is a body through which everyone can observe the world and participate in its construction. As I tried to illustrate in the previous section, *Don Juan*'s invitation to communicate is

[554] Mole, 'Byron and the Difficulty of Beginning', 544.
[555] Mole, 'Byron and the Difficulty of Beginning', 545.
[556] Camilleri, 228.
[557] Paul A. Cantor, 'The Politics of the Epic: Wordsworth, Byron, and the Romantic Redefinition of Heroism', *The Review of Politics*, 69 (2007), 375–401, 377.
[558] Deen, 346.
[559] Wolfrum, p. 91.

more than vivid. Juan's figure in the context of celebrity culture provides a stage for this conversation and reflects their connection, as well as that with reality and the fictional text. Viewing this networking relationship as a new way of critiquing and creating context and then evaluating its meaning and value should be helpful. Juan's passivity gives way to observation and arouses a sense of involvement, I think it is the first and foremost important point.

For the social orders Juan experiences, though he usually cannot decide the development, the description in the texts provides an angle to critique and challenge the existing order. Byron indirectly concludes what Juan has experienced has been 'a harem, | A battle, wreck, or history of the heart' (XIV: 163–4). He also reluctantly admits that it is time for '[t]he *real* portrait of the highest tribe' (XIV: 159). Juan does not grow up and does not have a final goal. This is in accordance with Byron's juxtaposition of the events. In this way, Byron disenchants the epic hero by stripping him of his blessed and predestined goal. The hero is presented in a way like a celebrity or just a named individual; the story goes back to his being, nature, and uncertain experience. Among these experiments of social orders with Juan's unchanged central position, the very complete process of the establishment and collapse of the social order is during the wreck. The vivid essence of any hierarchical system is revealed and desacralised in the site of the higher tribe.

In Canto IV of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage,* I view the sea as a wilderness away from the hierarchical systems, indicating an open end and a free future. This is realised in a different way in Canto II of *Don Juan*—the shipwreck: 'The ship was evidently settling now | Fast by the head; and, all distinction gone' (II: 345–6). But Byron makes Juan establish a new basic order, too primitive to support a system:

> Perhaps more mischief had been done, but for
> Our Juan, who, with sense beyond his years,
> Got to the spirit-room, and stood before
> It with a pair of pistols
> …
> 'Give us more grog,' they cried, 'for it will be
> All one an hour hence.' Juan answer'd, 'No!

> ’Tis true that death awaits both you and me,
> But let us die like men, not sink below
> Like brutes:’—and thus his dangerous post kept he,
> And none liked to anticipate the blow. (II: 273–6, 281–6)

Here is in fact an establishment, and Juan can be the authority. He has his pistols to regulate his people effectively under his creed of ‘let us die like men, not sink below | Like brutes’. Then, Byron designs two rounds of reversals centring this creed. The poet is to consolidate it, but with destructions. The first round begins when the large ship is finally wrecked. Juan brings his dog and his tutor Pedrillo onto the boat. The order ends before the shipwreck because people are really dying. This round of reversal proves the creed’s weakness. The second round begins when they have no food. People on the boat decide to commit cannibalism. Juan loses his previous temporary power to regulate others, but he insists on his own principle to avoid eating his tutor’s body. In fact, cannibalism becomes symbolic with Byron’s design of the order in the scene:

> The lots were made, and mark’d, and mix’d, and handed,
> In silent horror, and their distribution
> Lull’d even the savage hunger which demanded,
> Like the Promethean vulture, this pollution;
> None in particular had sought or plann’d it,
> ’Twas nature gnaw’d them to this resolution,
> By which none were permitted to be neuter —
> And the lot fell on Juan’s luckless tutor. (II: 593–600)

> He but requested to be bled to death:
> The surgeon had his instruments, and bled
> Pedrillo, and so gently ebb’d his breath,
> …
> And first a little crucifix he kiss’d,
> And then held out his jugular and wrist. (II: 601–3, 607–8)

> The surgeon, as there was no other fee,
> Had his first choice of morsels for his pains; (II: 609–10)

This scene, as Alexander Regier notices,

> while bizarre in its context, is an extremely social procedure, almost a weird commentary on Rousseau’s political writings…The behaviour betrays, in other

> words, the idea that these actions are borne out of desperation and atavistic impulse…The "resolution" to eat Pedrillo is resolutely human.[560]

The re-establishment of the order is unexpected, if not ironic. If this order ends here, Regier's reading helps to understand the use of this order, especially when Byron 'does not, nor is he trying', as Regier admits, to 'promote a specific or even systematic solution' to answer this problem.[561] The problem is that humanity and nature are not all the conflicting parties here. The 'crucifix' brings God's view, which involves then another pair: the spiritual belief and the materialistic call. The behaviour relates this fragile order to the land of religion and emphasises its indifference to either humans or nature. This social order, in *Don Juan*'s context, proves the vanity of these widely accepted foundations of the society and witnesses its uselessness in involving.

Byron does not end here in his representation of social authority and morality as gradually devastated. He carefully describes the people and also their endings. In the beginning, there are 30 people on the boat (II: 431). When the other 9 people die on their cutter, these 30 people 'grieved for those who perish'd with the cutter, | And also for the biscuit casks and butter' (II: 487–8). Here food shortage is indicated, and the value of human life is obviously downgraded. The lot of being eaten fell on Pedrillo (II: 600). Only 'three or four' people did not take Pedrillo's body, including Juan (II: 617). However, only the people 'who were most ravenous in the act | …died despairing' (II: 627, 632). Although Byron writes '— Lord! how they did blaspheme' (II: 628), it looks much like a mockery of virtues and morality on land, because under the threat of death, finally '[a]ll except Juan' used Pedrillo (II: 653). In the end, '[t]heir living freight was now reduced to four, | And three dead' (II: 804–5). The second round finally ends with Juan's single survival. Byron emphasises Juan's swimming ability in several stanzas and that 'the other two' died because 'they could not swim' (II: 847). But in stanza 107, there is an unusual suggestion in the following lines: 'Nor yet had he arrived but for the oar, | Which, providentially for him, was wash'd | Just as his feeble arms could strike

[560] Alexander Regier, 'Byron's Dark Side: Human and Natural Catastrophe in *Don Juan* and "Darkness"', *Byron Journal*, 47, 1 (2019), 31–42, 36.
[561] Regier, 36.

no more' (II: 849–51). Recalling Byron's repetition, before these several stanzas of ending, in claiming that '[t]hey perish'd, until wither'd to these few, | But chiefly by a species of self–slaughter, | In washing down Pedrillo with salt water' (II: 814–6), the introduction of luck into Juan's final survival suggests a destined award for his insistence in being humane. But considering the poet's engagement with his readers, this saviour is in fact a combination of Juan the individual's effort and the observer's active response. The readers are encouraged to think in this way while it already matters. It reflects that, since Byron views writing poetry as an action, he likewise expects reading poetry to be an action—or at least to prompt action in his readers.

We already know from the religionists' reaction to *Don Juan* that religionists value the rights and way of speaking more than common people do because of the scripture basis of contemporary establishments. While it seems that the interpretation of the scripture decides the power, it composes the power itself. In my opinion, the blasphemy debate is an expanding version of blasphemy prosecution, because the premise of both is to confirm the central authority of God in social issues, especially the moral and spiritual sides. In this way, the blasphemy debate does not make blasphemy crime disappear or simply less powerful; on the contrary, it enlarges the scale and embraces more groups under God's words. In the meantime, this expansion unveils the core of social power manipulation. This de facto manipulation is realised by nominal domination or domination in the interpretation of the authorities' name. Byron's rebellion 'at least in words' marks the point that he views words for freedom as an action, too, while what helps in *Don Juan* is not to fight back against this prosecution but make his readers and the broader public realise it is unnecessary, useless, and meaningless to argue about blasphemy. His weapon is reality. Accordingly, a core methodology in *Don Juan* is to contrast between hypocritic doctrines and authenticity, reality, and sincerity. The conflicts between what is real and what is not also happen in the remarkable scene of the 'public days'. Byron lists persons in an experienced manner:

> There were some hunters bold, and coursers keen,
> Whose hounds ne'er erred, nor greyhounds deigned to lurch;
> Some deadly shots too, Septembrizers, seen

Earliest to rise, and last to quit the search
Of the poor partridge through his stubble screen.
There were some massy members of the church,
Takers of tithes, and makers of good matches,
And several who sung fewer psalms than catches (XVI: 681–88)

The poet tells his readers that 'members of the church' care about secular issues more than the sacred and that there is no need to be surprised because this is as common as it is for hunters and coursers to be bold and keen. Byron also worries that his readers ignore this juxtaposition, so he includes the Septembrizers, too. Here, these partridge hunters help to make the church member's behaviour sarcastically common, while Byron subtly rationalises the Parisians' attack on the jailed loyalists.

Byron picks Peter Pith up in the following several stanzas to show his talent for irony. For Pith's preferment, Byron dramatically gasps, 'Oh, Providence! how wondrous are thy ways, | Who would suppose thy gifts sometimes obdurate' (XVI: 701–2). Readers already know that Pith is not promoted for his piety but for his jokes. Byron continues to talk about his uselessness: 'For wit hath no great friend in aguish folks' (XVI: 707). It is noticeable that, with Byron's sarcastic tone, the readers can feel it more pessimistically true than angry. Through such an easily accepted figure, Byron does not judge on his piety but reveals his useless nature. Fourteen cantos after the last repast—if not supper—of poor Pedrillo's body, Juan has experienced enough to realise that this bureaucratic church system is no more sacred than any other secular institution, and just as corrupt as other forms of social authority.

From this typical corner of the public day, Byron again reveals his intention to draw divisions between name and reality. He does not privilege one over the other, but simply tells the truth: the name cannot represent reality. It is funny, ridiculous, and even pathological that the name is so often misused to harness reality—when, in the end, people care far more about the latter in actual life. One example is about 'Adeline playing her grand role' (XVI: 811) with mobility. Here, the mobility is not only to suggest Adeline's sophisticated performance during the feast but also to include her 'impartial indemnification | For all her past exertion and soft phrases' (XVI: 866–7). It is quite ironic that when the guests are 'Delighted with the dinner and their host, | But

with the Lady Adeline the most' (XVI: 855–6), Adeline cannot wait for the 'keen | Skirmish of wits o'er the departed' (XVI: 881–2). However, please do not be eager to right wrongs, because several stanzas before, the poet already tells us that '[e]ven in the country circle's narrow bound—| (For little things upon my Lord's estate | Were good small—talk for others still less great)' (XVI: 774–6). The good guests know everything, but only three of them may not vote for Adeline's husband, for Juan instead of the Lady:

> But others, who were left with scarce a third,
> Were angry—as they well might, to be sure.
> They wondered how a young man so absurd
> Lord Henry at his table should endure;
> And this, and his not knowing how much oats
> Had fallen last market, cost his host three votes (XVI: 755–60)

The turbot dish and oats price matter more than some words. What really matters in life is not some witty, or maybe unkind, jokes. Until now, a better contrast is made, by which I mean Pith gets promoted for his jokes when Lord Henry loses three votes for material interests. Byron repeatedly represents the essence this contrast reveals throughout the existing cantos of *Don Juan* to deconstruct the arbitrary power of the existing social authorities for their meaninglessness and uselessness in real human life. This is not the first time Byron mentions the oats' fall; in Canto IX, Byron adopts another Emperor's name to describe the economic crisis in his homeland: 'She fell with Buonoparte:—What strange thoughts | Arise, when we see Emperors fall with oats' (IX: 255–56). This should be read together with a stanza before from line 193 to 200 as quoted before. Enough Demagogues and infidels show the broad dissatisfaction with contemporary authorities. However, Byron's sceptical opposition is to all kinds of tyrants. This is why he juxtaposes the different parties. Meanwhile, the juxtaposition itself suggests an equal view of all the individuals to wipe off the established hierarchical superiorities. Back to oats. The imposed obedience to the governor's name cannot make him survive the collapse of reality metaphorised in the fall of oats; it reveals Byron's acute view of the connection between social order and material basis. In this sense, we may add the order as a result of the marriage between name and reality. There is no divorce but only well-

known betrayal:

> He saw however at the closing session,
> That noble sight, when really free the nation,
> A king in constitutional possession
> Of such a throne as is the proudest station,
> Though despots know it not—till the progression
> Of freedom shall complete their education.
> 'Tis not mere splendour makes the show august
> To eye or heart—it is the people's trust. (XII: 657–64)

The grand scene of irony, even before Byron's further elaboration of the corrupted establishment, reveals Byron's deep sarcasm against the real despot usurping the name of Constitutional kingship. People's trust or hope of a free nation should have collapsed as shown in Canto IX resulting from the arbitrariness against liberty through the Holy Alliance. Byron continues this critique in Canto XIV:

> Shut up the bald-coot bully Alexander
> Ship off the Holy Three to Senegal;
> Teach them that "sauce for goose is sauce for gander",
> And ask them how they like to be in thrall?
> Shut up each high heroic Salamander,
> Who eats fire gratis (since the pay's but small);
> Shut up—no, not the King, but the Pavilion,
> Or else 'twill cost us all another million. (XIV: 657–63)

And he intrinsically puts forward anti-royalism as a resolution when he says, 'I should turn the other way, | And wax an Ultra–royalist in loyalty, | Because I hate even democratic royalty' (XV: 182–4). I'm not going argue whether Byron is a Republican or something else, because Byron himself does not care about the name here. The reality is that Byron goes back to the oats-like topic when he mentions no more about the reactionary despots but cleverly mentions that the King's meretricious Pavilion costs too much. In Canto III, Byron makes a comparison of Lambro:

> Let not his mode of raising cash seem strange,
> Although he fleeced the flags of every nation,
> For into a prime minister but change
> His title, and 'tis nothing but taxation;

But he, more modest, took an humbler range
Of life, and in an honester vocation
Pursued o'er the high seas his watery journey,
And merely practised as a sea-attorney. (III: 105–12)

In the war cantos, glory is always mentioned together with salary. In Canto IX, when Byron writes on Wellington again, he says, 'You have obtained great pensions and much praise' (IX: 6). All forms of money touch the hearts of all classes of people. As argued, this is a clever way to wipe off class differences as well as superiorities. In the meantime, it also helps to deconstruct the rationality of the hierarchy. The core of Lambro's case is not taxation, but the right to tax. In other words, Byron suggests that the established social order endorses the authorities to tax. The reality is, however, that the constitution, ideally a guiding principle, is in fact violated, and the material basis crumbles along with the oats. In such a corrupted system, the rigid, imposed doctrines—like the splendid façade of the upper class—become meaningless and useless. Yet the name of orthodoxy continues to be wielded to suppress human beings in their real life.

In all the scenes, Juan, in his passivity, resembles an unscratched mirror, coldly reflecting the absurdities of social reality. Again, this does not mean he is incapable of action. As mentioned, his swimming talent nearly saves his life. 'Nearly' because Byron loves to use coincidence to change the storyline, and this is not always good. For example, Lambro's late return forces the protagonist to change its place. Mole thinks 'failing to continue in the way the beginning envisages reveals the tightly circumscribed nature of human agency, as well as the vanity of trying to overreach it'.[562] Byron himself argues that ''Tis strange—but true; for Truth is always strange, | Stranger than Fiction: if it could be told' (XIV: 810–12). I actually think that when Byron claims to present a different world, he is, in fact, presenting the same world—only without a future. Because of Juan's passivity and the inertia evident in the stagnation of his natural development, all the represented issues are likewise mirrored as such—that is, they are juxtaposed without progress or development. Recall Regier's comment: 'He does not,

[562] Mole, 'Byron and the Difficulty of Beginning', 544.

nor is he trying'.[563] The listing of different scenes uncovering similar imposing powers that do harm to human nature, human feelings, and human freedom, represents Byron's distrust of the future of human beings. He indeed expects people of the future to abolish the monarchy, but from a broader perspective, he is pessimistic about social systems and social orders. In other words, apart from the practical value in the celebrity culture mechanism, the passivity of Juan also reflects this pessimism. In Canto III, the tyrant of the island's 'country's wrongs and his despair to save her | Had stung him from a slave to an enslaver' (III: 423–4), which is like Napoleon. In Canto VIII, the endless pain of war leads to a curse that has nowhere to go:

> Now back to thy great joys, Civilization!
> And the sweet consequence of large society,
> War, Pestilence, the despot's desolation,
> The kingly scourge, the Lust of Notoriety,
> The millions slain by soldiers for their ration (VIII: 538–42)

There might be no more kings, but Byron is not optimistic about war and taxation. And if the material basis does not change,

> When this world shall be former, underground,
> Thrown topsy-turvy, twisted, crisped, and curled,
> Baked, fried, or burnt, turned inside-out, or drowned,
> Like all the worlds before, which have been hurled
> First out of and then back again to Chaos,
> The Superstratum which will overlay us. (IX: 291–6)

Wolfrum, through his comparison of Hunt and Byron, notices that,'[i]f we selectively posit countercultural agency as the centre of our definition of Romanticism, we can see…Byron prefers modes of strictly recursive negation that question both the current state and any particular alternative offered'.[564] Mole is more optimistic concerning *Don Juan*'s form: He believes that, viewing all different scenes as temporary with different beginnings, Byron

[563] Regier, 36.
[564] Wolfrum, p. 92.

> developed an existential vision of a world characterized by contingency, in which all projects were necessarily provisional. Beginning, in this view, was no longer an artistic problem to be solved; it was now a fundamental, endlessly repeated necessity, in life as in art. Beginning had become an end in itself.[565]

I think the best answer to this question is revealed in the last stanza of Canto XV:

> Between two worlds life hovers like a star,
> 'Twixt night and morn, upon the horizon's verge:
> How little do we know that which we are!
> How less what we may be! The eternal surge
> Of time and tide rolls on, and bears afar
> Our bubbles; as the old burst, new emerge,
> Lash'd from the foam of ages; while the graves
> Of Empires heave but like some passing waves. (XV: 785–92)

To be clear, no matter how hard it is to answer the question of future society, Byron does not hesitate to criticise contemporary establishments and social authorities. In the context of celebrity culture, Byron's effort in augmenting and maintaining his popularity, challenging the social authorities, and blasphemously desacralising the imposed religious and social belief in turn makes Juan's passivity an unchanged and undaunted insistence in uncovering the damned social reality. As he utters through the narrator's mouth, 'I *won't* philosophize, and *will* be read' (X: 224), the end of *Don Juan*'s writing lies in the eyes and minds of his readers. Recalling the restrained self in the apparatus of celebrity culture and Byron's compromises into this mechanism, the limitation of celebrity culture prevents the poet's pessimism from being over-developed. After all, if human civilisations are like bubbles, 'the old burst' but 'new emerge', and the old must have undermined the old Empires; in this way, as Mole says, the end of human beings are all beginnings, while 'the graves | Of Empires heave but like some passing waves'. If life and death are imposed necessities, the recurring bubbles shine blasphemously.

[565] Mole, 'Byron and the Difficulty of Beginning', 545.

Conclusion

This thesis begins with Byron's blasphemous poetic performances and drawing on the contemporary religious, political, and cultural contexts of the eighteenth century and the Romantic period. Celebrity culture helps in approaching Byron's poetical representations corresponding to his position in these contexts. In Chapter One, mainly in the political context, I argue about Byron's career transition from politics to poetry in the House of Lords and how his human-centred poetics worked in this process. This chapter prepares for the following chapters with Byron's self-identification as a

celebrated poet. In addition, through examining the creation and publication of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, it indicates two important time periods. The first period starts with his career transition and ends before the second transition in his career when Byron abandoned his aristocratic superiority. Chapter Two fills in this period to explore Byron's genuinely free manipulation of his poetry and celebrity as a lordly giver. I do not take Byron's 'Oriental Tales' as representations of Orientalism in this chapter, but they are still great examples to represent the social systems under a religious and political hierarchy to emphasise the consistent human-centred political concerns that Byron relies on to complete his career transition. The second period is after Byron's confirmation that it is feasible to use writing and celebrity in evoking revolutionary passion among the public. Chapter Three echoes this period to underline how Byron's blasphemous concerns work in both politics-based and religion-based frameworks to emphasise its particular influencing effect in the context of popular radicalism. I view *Don Juan*, which was created after the first period and in the second period, as a mature example of Byron poetical creation responding to the public as well as his self. I argue that Byron in Don Juan tried to get rid of the blasphemy debates still centring on God; Chapter Four, otherwise, confirms the sublime future of a society grounded in human life rather than divine doctrines, in order to smooth over the blasphemy debates imposed by social authorities.

From 'Anna' to 'Anti-Byron', the public reception provides examples and cross-references that support my argument concerning Byron's human-centred concerns and rebellious passion in resisting authority through his celebrity and blasphemous representations. This does not mean that I agree to view reception in celebrity culture as an end goal of Byron's creation. This may lead to an overestimation of the commodification of Byron's poetry and is not in accordance with Byron's revealing subjectivity in creation and rebellion through poetry. The celebrity theatre that stages quasi-Byron symbolises part of the essence of celebrity culture in Byron's case, which is a dislocated but mutual-influencing communication mode. As argued in Chapter Four, quasi-Byron represents the celebrated figure in Byron's celebrity, reflecting a struggling, dislocated but willingly initiated communication between the individual and the

audience. By dislocation I mean both parties have their own subjectivity and actions out of their own thoughts; the communication can be maintained however because they still share an active wish for a new order free from God-centred hierarchical systems as well as blasphemy debates. Under such circumstances, I take examples from Byron's poetry to explore how Byron the individual, with a developing sense of celebrity and an insistence on human subjective action, manipulated his celebrity to build a connection with the public and promote his vision of a human-centred society and belief system.

Nonetheless, the public reception and the existing model of celebrity culture are objective in reflecting the corresponding developments in Byron's experiments in form, style, and content, which goes with the premise of Byron's revolutionary concerns. From Chapter One, I aimed to place Byron's celebrity model in a broader context. When the poetic influence supports Byron's final decision to leave the House of Lords to the realm of rhymes, it must be clarified that his blasphemous resistance and his writing strategies revealed in the first two cantos of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* had already been prepared to permeate his life-long creation. When Byron was willing to adjust his aristocratic superiority to enhance the intimacy with his audience from *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* to *Don Juan*, it must be clear that the premise is that he confirmed in writing the notion that his major audience shared the blasphemous concerns with him. I adopt the concept of dislocation when arguing about popular radicalism and *Don Juan*'s social perceptions to answer why it is quasi-Byron instead of Byron himself celebrated in his celebrity. Byron and his audience are both subjective parties; the dislocation is part of real human life, signifying the inability to achieve perfect comprehension; this uncertainty is just what Byron appealed to in his blasphemous representation. His willingness to approach this is confirmed and reflected in his poetry, and it is important to acknowledge this through analysing his celebrity identity.

Celebrity culture as a theatre clearly stages Byron's experiments and adjustments of his way of creation and discourse during his poetic career. For Byron and his readers, celebrity culture stimulated these two parties to connect with each other on the basis of their common sense of blasphemous concerns. 'The patron saint of

radicalism' was a result of the blurring boundaries Byron and readers cooperated to bring about and, in turn, expanded the readership. This is the mutual advancement realised in the entanglement of Byron's blasphemy and celebrity. Dislocation confirms, however, their subjective efforts to realise their pursuits. Byron kept trying to approach his readers from different classes and backgrounds and believed this was good, which by itself composes Byron's blasphemous challenge against social morality and belief based on polite narratives; as mentioned in the Introduction, 'we are placed with the common against the [polite] culture'. Objectively, Byron's blasphemous spirit and his self-downgrading as an aristocratic celebrity both composed the deconstruction of his own class, the hierarchical system he posited, and his own authority in his celebrity. This deconstruction represents the blasphemy of Byron's celebrity and celebrity culture itself at this period, and I can recall my argument in Chapter Two about Byron's dramatisation of the different social beliefs and orders to devastate the orthodox authorities and legitimacy of all hierarchical systems.

The over-representation of a broader public belief, in fact, is similar to what I introduce at the very beginning about the religionists' taking public agreement for granted; another similar mode exists in the English law system to conduct and confirm the King's power in the name of God and the people's. On the contrary, acknowledging the inability to communicate also helps in deconstructing the legitimacy of these tyrannical systems. The inability—yet willingness—to communicate, represented by my model of quasi-Byron, undermines the principle of public representation; at the same time, it witnesses and affirms that the greatness of human beings lies in their actions in the face of uncertainty and even impossibility. As Thorslev states, '[w]e are left with human love as the one sure value in a world of irrational conflict…a respect for the rights of individual men'.[566] Under such circumstances, from Chapter Three, I aim to argue for the human subjectivity revealed in Byron's poetic representations and which belongs to human beings and surpasses God and King's established authorities: Manfred abandons his great power and embraces death for his mortal self; George

[566] Thorslev, *The Byronic Hero*, p. 199.

conducts his human action, after stripping all secular powers off, to slip into the gate of heaven in chaos; Cain dispels God's punishment through human actions and reestablishes his social identity in the wilderness. This spirit poses against the claimed and confirmed perfection and Almighty with worldly and imperfect humanity. It leads to my argument in Chapter Four for the sublime of humanity, which supports Byron to quit the God-centred systems of certainty to dive into the darkness of uncertainty, imperfection, and impossibilities and sing for real human life.

'Actions—actions', Byron said (*BLJ 3: 220*). When Byron walked 'in the dark' (*BLJ* 5: 216), his poetry kept serving as actions. Noticing his readers' reactions, Byron adjusted his actions. As I argued in the Introduction, blasphemy is not intrinsically a crime but is judged by the authorities for their interests. However, '[y]ou have so many "*divine*" poems, is it nothing to have written a *Human* one?' (*BLJ* 6: 106) And people would feel 'his merits and his power', as John Clare noted upon Byron's funeral, and react to it with a sigh of human love, feeling, and intimacy.[567] One day, when blasphemy is no longer seen as a tool of resistance to authority and no longer triggers anxiety in those in power, it will represent the best outcome, signalling humanity's liberation from the binary hierarchical systems that Byron and his protagonists once endured.

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