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ÚSTAV ANGLOFONNÍCH LITERATUR A KULTUR

“And thus the heart will break, yet brokenly live on”: The Layers of Intimacy in *Childe*

Harold's Pilgrimage

“Tak srdce puká v nás, však puklé dále žije”: vrstvy intimity v *Childe* Haroldově pouti

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KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA

Lord Byron, *Childe Haroldova Pout'*, britský romantismus, intimita, erotika

KEY WORDS

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THESIS ABSTRACT

Lord Byron is undeniably one of the most prominent representatives of both British and European Romanticism. He is most known for his flamboyant lifestyle, rebellious heroes and passionate poetry. His works, which overflow with great emotional intensity and intellectual depth, precisely capture the spirit of the Romantic era. Byron's influence transcends the realm of literature, impacting art, music, culture, and political movements.

Childe Harold's Pilgrimage was published between 1812 and 1818, and occupies a significant place among Byron's work. After all, it was this poem that went on to change the trajectory of the poet's life and catapult him to immediate stardom. Byron began writing the poem during his Grand Tour which lasted from 1809 to 1811. Although the Grand Tour had long figured as an essential part of the education of young aristocrats, Byron's choice to depart at a time of the raging Napoleonic Wars, made his tour truly unique in many ways.

There are two key elements which set the poem apart from others of its time — the places it described and the intimacy of the poetic voice. I believe it was especially the latter that contributed most significantly to the enormous success of the poem. This thesis thus focuses on the different manifestations of intimacy as presented in the four cantos of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*.

To reach my goal, I have thoroughly researched Byron's personal life, paying close attention to areas most relevant to my analysis — the numerous love affairs and scandals, close friendships, family dynamics and marital life. I have also explored Lord Byron's (much debated) sexuality as well as the personal and social circumstances accompanying the publication of the poem. I have identified two distinct types of intimacy in the poem — physical and emotional. These are explored in their own designated chapters, which are further separated into subchapters according to the analysed themes.

ABSTRAKT

Lord Byron je bezpochyby jedním z nejvýznamnějších představitelů britského i evropského romantismu. Proslavil se zejména svým okázalým životním stylem, vzpurnými hrdiny a vášnivou poezií. Jeho díla, která se vyznačují pozoruhodnou citovou intenzitou a intelektuální hloubkou, přesně vystihují ducha romantické éry. Lord Byron ovšem neovlivnil pouze literaturu, ale také svět výtvarného umění, hudbu, kulturu či politická hnutí.

Báseň Childe Haroldova pout', která byla publikována mezi lety 1812 až 1818, zaujímá výjimečné místo mezi Byronovými díly. Právě tato báseň naprosto změnila životní dráhu básníka a katapultovala ho k okamžité slávě. Byron započal kompozici tohoto díla během své kavalírské cesty, která probíhala v letech 1809 až 1811. Ačkoliv kavalírská cesta byla již léta nedílnou součástí vzdělávání mladých aristokratů, Byronova volba vydat se na cestu v době, kdy v Evropě zuřily napoleonské války způsobila, že jeho cesta byla v mnoha ohledech skutečně výjimečná.

Můžeme identifikovat zejména dva klíčové prvky, které nejvíce přispěly k jedinečnosti této básně: vyličená místa a intimita básnického hlasu. Domnívám se, že zejména druhý z těchto faktorů nejvýznamněji přispěl k obrovskému úspěchu básně. Tato bakalářská práce se tedy bude soustředit na rozmanité projevy intimity prezentované ve čtyřech zpěvech Childe Haroldovy pouti.

Tato práce se skládá z několika částí, které společně slouží k dosažení tohoto cíle. K lepšímu porozumění básnickových vyobrazení různých druhů intimity, jsem se nejprve zaměřila na Byronův osobní život a věnovala pozornost zejména oblastem, které jsou pro mou analýzu nejvíce relevantní. Těmi oblastmi jsou například básnickovy četné milostné románky a skandály, významná přátelství, rodinné soužití či manželský život. Dále jsem se zaměřila na otázku Byronovy sexuality a také na osobní a společenské okolnosti, které doprovázely publikaci

básně. V druhé části této práce jsem v rámci básně identifikovala dva různé typy intimity: intimitu fyzickou a citovou. Každé z nich následně přísluší samostatná kapitola a samotný rozbor je rozdělen do podkapitol dle probírané problematiky.

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1 Theoretical Background

1.1 Introduction

If one thinks of the term “Romanticism” in any of its connotations, sooner or later, one is bound to think of Lord Byron — a man, who not only became synonymous with both British and European Romanticism, but whose life encapsulated the foundational principles associated with this movement. Virtually the first celebrity of the modern age, Byron possessed the glamour of a rockstar coupled with the genius of a great poet, his dashing looks and charisma only further adding to the allure of his persona. But Byron’s influence certainly stretches further than the realm of art and literature. His dedication to the cause of liberty and his willingness to sacrifice his life for the ideals he believed in, made him an emblematic figure for the oppressed. He died a martyr for Greek independence and his death ignited a widespread support for the Greek cause and rendered him the most venerated foreign figure in the nation's history, attested to by state ceremonies conducted in his honour on the bicentenary of his death earlier this year. But Byron's revolutionary influence extended beyond the confines of Western Europe. Notably, when the Decemberists were brought to their execution, following their failed uprising against Nicholas I's assumption of the throne, one of the leaders, the poet Kondratii Theodorovich Ryleev, is recorded as carrying a volume of Byron’s poetry.¹ Byron’s enduring legacy also echoes through more recent history, as evidenced by its resonance with the Polish Solidarity movement. During their commemoration of the workers’ murders at the Lenin Shipyard, the gate was adorned with flowers, photographs and a piece of paper containing the following lines from Byron’s *Giaour* (1813)²:

For Freedom’s battle once begun,
Bequeathed by bleeding Sire to Son,

¹ Fiona MacCarthy, *Byron: Life and Legend* (London: John Murray Press, 2014), 550.

² Magdalena Kubow, “The Solidarity Movement in Poland: Its History and Meaning in Collective Memory,” *The Polish Review* 58, no.2 (2013): 11, <http://www.jstor.com/stable/10.5406/polishreview.58.2.0003> .

Though baffled oft is ever won.³

Although Byron does not enjoy a widespread readership today, especially not in his native country, unfortunately, he is a poet who still remains exciting thanks to his image as the rebellious poster child of Romanticism. After all, this is a man, who kept a pet bear at Cambridge, swam across the Hellespont and is the author of relatable quotations such as “I only go out to get me a fresh appetite for being alone.”⁴ But the greatest legacy of Byron is his invention of the iconic Byronic hero who is regarded as “the figure with the most far-reaching consequences for nineteenth-century Western literature.”⁵ We can trace this legacy to the untamed heroes of the Brontë sisters’, Heathcliff and Rochester, or to one of the most horrifying heroes of American literature, Captain Ahab. Across Europe Byron’s legacy stretches far and wide — perhaps most famously, Pushkin was inspired to create his Eugene Onegin in the fashion of Childe Harold. As Peter Thorslev notes: “he [Byron] is the one poet in the Romantic Movement whose hero was his poetry, or whose poetry existed for his hero.”⁶ But the use of the adjective “Byronic” has been rising in popularity even nowadays. It occupies a significant position in popular culture and is often used to describe the mysterious, morally ambiguous and handsome heroes of modern film and fiction. About this phenomenon, Sam Leith recently noted in his article on the lasting Byronic legacy in modern popular culture:

To be Byronic is to be willful, ardent, brooding, superhumanly attractive, and to have a thrilling disregard for bourgeois convention. It is to be an existential hero. It is, admittedly, usually to have a flaw — but the flaw is of the ennobling, Tragic Flaw sort, like being too tempestuous and passionate.⁷

³ George Gordon Byron, *The Giaour: A Fragment of a Turkish Tale* (London: John Murray, 1813), 123-125.

⁴ George Gordon Byron, “Journal Entry of 12th December 1813,” *Byron’s Correspondence and Journals Vol. 9*, ed. Peter Cochran, <https://petercochran.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2009/02/04-london-181310.pdf>

⁵ Peter Thorslev, *The Byronic Hero: Types and Prototypes* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1962), 3.

⁶ Thorslev, *The Byronic Hero*, 4.

⁷ Sam Leith, “Why chicks still dig Byronic heroes,” *UnHerd*, March 14, 2024, <https://unherd.com/2024/03/why-chicks-still-dig-byronic-heroes/>.

Among his vast body of work, *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* emerges as a work of immense importance. The publication of the first two cantos in March of 1812 made Byron an overnight sensation and established him as one of the most compelling and controversial poets of the era. *Childe Harold* follows the journey of the disillusioned young Harold as he explores the diverse parts of Europe, but the poem is not merely a travelogue capturing Europe's picturesque or sublime landscapes and their history but also a profound, innovative exploration of different forms of intimacy — both physical and emotional.

The goal of my thesis is to closely examine the intricate depictions of intimacy and analyse the ways in which intimacy is poeticised and rendered throughout the poem. The focus of my analysis extends beyond the conventional boundaries of intimacy as romantic love, encompassing the many multifaceted connections presented in the poem. It is essential to acknowledge this varied nature of intimacy in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*. While the term “intimacy” may mostly evoke images of romantic entanglements or passionate rendezvous, Byron's poetic vision transcends such simplistic categories — the sense of intimacy to be found in the poem encompasses a whole spectrum of human relationships, from the bonds of friendship to the familial love between father and daughter. Furthermore, Byron extends his exploration of intimacy beyond the human realm through his intense, bespoke engagement with nature and history. His vivid descriptions of landscapes and historical sites, both recent and distant, help to inspire a sense of intimacy with the past in his readers, inviting them to reflect on their own experiences and the transient nature of life, as well as inciting in them the actuality of history come to life for the brief and impossible connection across the oceans of time. Likewise, Byron's connection with nature offers him an escape from the human crowd and brings him a fleeting moment of tranquillity and satisfaction.

The following text will thus be divided into three main sections. Firstly, I will look at the publication history and cultural impact of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* which will provide a

framework that allows for a more nuanced and comprehensive analysis. This background is essential as the cantos were written at very different stages of the poet's life and this information will ensure a better understanding of Byron's evolving perspectives and highlight the ways in which his personal life shaped his portrayal of intimacy. Furthermore, I will focus on — the issue of Byron's sexuality, a crucial element of his identity and one that permeates his writing and is thus essential for analysing Byron's portrayal of intimate relationships. Taking into account Byron's complex sexuality will also help to uncover layers of meaning related to hidden desires or societal constraints tied to sexual expression. The second and most extensive chapter — the analysis — will be devoted to examination of the theme of intimacy throughout the four cantos of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*. The analysis will be divided into the sections — first of these dealing with instances of emotional intimacy and the second with those of physical intimacy. First of these sections will focus on the verses commemorating the loss of John Wingfield and John Edleston, verses to his daughter Ada as well as the instances of profound connection with nature and history. The second section will explore Byron's erotic fascination with the ladies of Cádiz and the homoerotic relations Harold encounters at the court of Ali Pasha. This analysis will illustrate how Byron portrays various kinds of intimate connections and how his personal experiences and complex sexuality inform his portrayal of intimacy in the poem. Lastly, the thesis will end with a conclusion, offering a summary and a short overview of my findings.

1.2 Publication History and Legacy

It is rather difficult to imagine a time when Lord Byron did not consume both the hearts and minds of the British reading public. But it is important to realize that prior to the publication of the first two cantos of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* in 1812, Byron was a relatively unknown poet — yes, he was known among his Cambridge classmates — but relatively unknown to the vast reading public. Prior to *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, Byron published only one poetry

collection titled *Hours of Idleness* (1807) which received mixed reviews.⁸ As a response to the criticism of his work, Byron wrote *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers* (1809) in which he took on the British literary establishment defining his goal “not to prove that I can write well, but, if possible, to make others write better.”⁹

After the publication of the first two cantos of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, Byron famously noted that he awoke one morning to suddenly find himself famous. And he was not exaggerating — *Childe Harold* and his author were the talk of the town as the Duchess of Devonshire noted in one of her letters:

The subject of conversation, of curiosity, of enthusiasm almost, one might say, of the moment, is not Spain, Portugal, Warriors or Patriots, but Lord Byron! ... This poems ? on every table, and himself courted, visited, flattered, and praised wherever he appears. He has a pale, sickly, but handsome countenance, a bad figure, animated and amusing conversation – the men jealous of him, the women of each other.¹⁰

Byron began writing the first canto in Ioannina at the end of 1809 and completed it later that year in Athens. He would finish writing the second canto a year later in Smyrna, today's Izmir in Turkey. The first two cantos were published by John Murray on March 3rd 1812. One of the first readers of the poem was one of Byron's most beloved authors — Sir Walter Scott. He regarded the poem as one of “most extraordinary power” which “may rank its author with our first poets.”¹¹ The estimated price of a bound copy was about 50 shillings which was at that time equivalent to 50 percent of a person's income. Yet, all copies were sold out within the first three days. The first cantos would go on to be reprinted eight times within the span of the next

⁸ MacCarthy, *Byron: Life and Legend*, 62.

⁹ George Gordon Byron, “English Bards and Scotch Reviewers,” *Byron's Poetical Works, Vol. 1*, ed. Ernest Hartley Coleridge (New York: Humanities Press International, 1972), Project Gutenberg, <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/8861/8861-h/8861-h.htm#section114a> .

¹⁰ MacCarthy, *Byron: Life and Legend*, 159.

¹¹ MacCarthy, *Byron: Life and Legend*, 157-158.

six years with over 20 000 copies sold.¹² Due to the high price, the readers of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* were mostly members of the upper class, and Byron would only enjoy a wider readership later on with the cheap publications of *Don Juan*. This was a result of him parting ways with his publisher John Murray due to the increasingly controversial cantos of *Don Juan* and his transgressive biblical dramas. The previous success of Walter Scott's long poem *The Lady of the Lake* (1810) illustrates the public's yearning for exploration of remoter lands through the eyes of wandering heroes. But the essential part distinguishing the narrative from any of the preceding ones is best described by John Hobhouse, Byron's travel companion and Cambridge friend, who praised Byron's expression of "certain feelings which every one must have encouraged in the melancholy & therefore masked hours of existence, and also to the intimate knowledge which he has shown of the turns taken by the passions of women."¹³ Later on, Puskin, a great lover of Byron's work, would admire Byron's ability to catch in this work "the mood of his generation."¹⁴ Even years later, many would recall the strong impression left upon them by the first two cantos:

There was something tremendous, and almost fiendish, in the air
with which he first surveyed the first scenes of his wanderings;
and no proof of the strength of genius was ever exhibited so strong
and unquestionable, as the sudden and entire possession of the
minds of Englishmen by such a being as he then appeared to be.¹⁵

Published in 1816 in the wake of Byron's personal crisis, the mood of the third canto stands in stark contrast to the previous two. The readers are immediately faced with the strong influence of William Wordsworth whose work Byron was encouraged to take more seriously by P.B. Shelley, now his companion in the exile of the breath-taking Swiss Alps. The pantheistic

¹² MacCarthy, *Byron: Life and Legend*, 159.

¹³ MacCarthy, *Byron: Life and Legend*, 159-160.

¹⁴ MacCarthy, *Byron: Life and Legend*, 550.

¹⁵ John Wilson quoted in *The Romantics Reviewed: Contemporary Reviews of British Romantic Writers, Part B: Byron and Regency Society Poets*, ed. Donald H. Reiman (New York: Garland Publishing, 1972): 908.

mode, so characteristic of the former author's work, is palpable throughout the canto, much to the dislike of both Wordsworth and Hobhouse. Upon reading the canto, the latter described it as "very fine in parts" but disliked "the air of mystery & metaphysics about it."¹⁶ Fiona MacCarthy notes that such complaints may stem from Hobhouse's jealousy of the influence Shelley held over Byron.¹⁷

Byron began writing the last canto of the poem in 1817 during his time in Venice. At the initial stages of his stay in the "city of the heart"¹⁸, Byron had forsaken writing for more sensuous pleasures as is apparent from his letters: "Venice and I agree very well - in the mornings I study Armenian, and in the evenings I go out sometimes — and indulge in coition always."¹⁹ But after a few months, he returned again to poetry. He abandoned the metaphysical mode of the third canto and instead depicted a journey from Venice through Italy, via Arquá, Ferrara, and Florence. Hobhouse left Venice on January 8th, 1818, carrying the manuscript of Canto IV which would be published April 28th 1818.

These pressing circumstances surrounding the creation and publication of the final canto endow the already intricate framework of the poem with a further layer of immediacy and intimacy. Particularly significant is the decision to part ways with Hobhouse, arguably Byron's closest friend and confidant. This separation mirrors the poem's preoccupation with the themes of departure and separation — be it with places, lovers, friends or family. The fact that the poem was published just three months after Hobhouse's departure from Venice adds a sense of further immediacy. Given Byron's infamous celebrity status, contemporary readers, who were eager for any kind of details concerning the poet's personal life, certainly would have been aware of

¹⁶ MacCarthy, *Byron: Life and Legend*, 308.

¹⁷ MacCarthy, *Byron: Life and Legend*, 308.

¹⁸ George Gordon Byron, *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, in *Lord Byron: The Major Works*, ed. Jerome J. McGann (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), IV.18.2. (Hereafter referred to as *CHP*)

¹⁹ George Gordon Byron, "Letter to Douglas Kinnaird of 20th January 1817," *Byron's Correspondence and Journals Vol. 9*, ed. Peter Cochran, <https://petercochran.files.wordpress.com/2009/02/09-venice-1816-18174.pdf>.

the recent events accompanying the creation of the canto, lending it a more emotionally charged atmosphere. This final introspective canto conveys a depth of emotion and stimulates a sense of personal connection with Byron and, perhaps, cultivates a sense of empathy for the self-exiled author. I believe that it is this intimacy, in combination with the universal themes explored throughout the poem, that forms the basis for the poem's enduring legacy and influence.

Although Jerome McGann did not consider the first two cantos of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* great poetry, he acknowledged its importance as “one of the most important works in Western literature.”²⁰ Its significant influence on Romantic literature and the cultural landscape of the time is unparalleled. The work was essential to the development of confessional poetry and “sincerity” as an aesthetic principle.²¹ Furthermore, *Childe Harold* redefined the whole essence of the Grand Tour, giving it a more adventurous and sensual connotations rather than purely educational and instructive ones. It also led to a creation of a new kind of traveller's texts like the nineteenth-century poetic travel book.²²

Always enraged by the presence of the English abroad, Byron certainly would have hated the massive groups of tourists eager to invade all the places captured in the poem. From commoners to aristocrats, and artists, it seems that everyone yearned to follow in the poet's footsteps. Such places then became major tourist attractions — such as The Bridge of Sighs in Venice, relatively unknown until Harold/Byron stood on it, the very act immortalized in the opening line of Canto IV.

²⁰ Jerome J. McGann, *Fiery Dust: Byron's Poetic Development* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1968), 94.

²¹ McGann, *Fiery Dust*, 95.

²² James Buzard, “The Uses of Romanticism: Byron and the Victorian Continental Tour,” *Victorian Studies* 35, no.1 (Autumn, 1991): 36, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3827763> .

A whole generation of writers was inspired by the poem and tried to incorporate similar themes and stylistic elements into their work. For instance, Oscar Wilde's Newdigate Prize winning poem "Ravenna" (1878), with its meditation on the bygone glory of the city, showcases clear inspiration by *Childe Harold*. Some even went as far as writing their own sequels, such as *Dernier Chant du pèlerinage d'Harold* (1825) by the French Romantic poet, Alphonse de Lamartine.²³

To music composers such as Rossini, Berlioz, or Liszt, Byron and his work were a major inspiration. Berlioz was inspired by the poem and composed *Harold in Italy*, describing the role of the viola within his composition as that of a poetic commentator, "a kind of melancholy dreamer in the style of Byron's *Childe Harold*."²⁴ Liszt, who, in a very Byronic fashion, travelled to Switzerland with his married mistress, composed *Années de Pèlerinage*. One of its most famous pieces, "Au lac de Wallenstadt", captures the sounds of waves and rhythms of the oars on the water and is prefaced by a passage from *Childe Harold*:

‘thy contrasted lake,
With the wild world I dwelt in, is a thing
Which warns me, with its stillness, to forsake
Earth's troubled waters for a purer spring.²⁵

It seems as if every place became much more powerful and took on almost a magical quality because of Byron's presence, his "having been there", as Stephen Cheeke discussed in his book *Byron and Place* (2003).²⁶ The opportunity to travel along the same paths as the poet once did, to set foot on the identical ground he once graced, created almost a transcendental experience for a whole generation of his readers and continues to draw literary tourists to the places depicted in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*.

²³ MacCarthy, *Byron: Life and Legend*, 548.

²⁴ MacCarthy, *Byron: Life and Legend*, 551.

²⁵ Byron, *CHP* III. 85.1-4.

²⁶ Stephen Cheeke, *Byron and Place* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 15.

This outline of the publication history of *Childe Harold* provides us with an essential background for analysing the nuanced portrayal of intimacy throughout the poem. It also lays foundation for the next chapter, focusing on Byron's sexuality, which directly influences the depiction of various forms of intimate connection in the poem.

1.3 Byron and Sexuality

In the Oxford anthology of *Romantic Poetry and Prose*, Harold Bloom argued that Byron was “basically homosexual.”²⁷ But putting any kind of label on Byron’s sexuality seems rather inadequate and constraining, especially in our own time when gender and sexual categories are being updated to accommodate all possibilities. Sigmund Freud argued that one’s libido is attached to one of two things — sexual object or sexual aim. “Sexual object” is the desired person one wants to have sex with, whereas “sexual aim” refers to the specific act one wishes to perform with said person. Emily Jackson argues that Byron had neither — he did not care for a specific type of person or what he did with them.²⁸ Given the number of Byron’s personal letters and journals, combined with his almost obsessive need for confession, it becomes immediately clear that Byron was more than interested in both sexes regardless of class or age. It seems that Byron revelled in relationships in which the constraints of traditional commitment were out of question — affairs, homosexual relationships, and incest.

Byron allegedly fell in love for the first time at the age of eight. The object of his desire was his cousin, Mary Duff. Looking back at this infatuation, Byron recollects the intensity of his obsession:

I had and have been attached fifty times since that period; yet I recollect all
we said to each other, all our caresses, her features, my restlessness,

²⁷ Harold Bloom, “Introduction,” in *George Gordon, Lord Byron*, ed. Harold Bloom and Heike Grundmann (New York: Bloom’s Literary Criticism, 2009), xii.

²⁸ Emily A. Bernhard Jackson, “Least like saints: the vexed issue of Byron's sexuality,” *Byron Journal* 38, no.1 (June 2010): 33, Gale Literary Sources, <https://doi-org.ezproxy.is.cuni.cz/10.3828/bj.2010.6> .

sleeplessness, my tormenting my mother's maid to write for me to her, which she at last did, to quiet me.²⁹

When he was fifteen, Byron fell in love with his distant cousin, Mary Ann Chaworth, whom he met during his stay in Southwell, near Newstead Abbey, the Byron family country estate in Nottinghamshire. But it would soon be uncovered that his feelings were unrequited. There is some discussion as to the manner in which Byron find out — did he overhear the conversation or did someone reiterate it to him? Whatever the case may be, Mary Chaworth is reported as stating that she could never be interested in that “lame, bashful, boy lord.”³⁰ The reference to Byron's bodily defect must have been especially painful to young Byron, and we know from his letters that he was also fairly overweight at this stage of his life, adding to his youthful embarrassment. Years later, following the separation from her husband and Byron's rise to stardom, Mary tried to reconnect with Byron but her efforts were in vain.

Byron's first sexual experience, which marks his as a child victim of sexual abuse, was at the hands of his nursemaid, Mary Gray, a devoted Calvinist who taught him the Bible.³¹ About this experience he wrote: “My passions were developed very early — that few would believe me — if I were to state the period — and the facts which accompanied it.”³² Byron regarded this traumatic experience as the cause of his melancholy, which lead to a kind of forced maturity:

Perhaps this was one of the reasons which caused the anticipated melancholy of my thoughts—having anticipated life. — My earlier poems are the thoughts of one at least ten years older than the age at which they were written, — I don't mean for their solidity, but their Experience”.³³

²⁹ George Gordon Byron, “Journal Entry of 26th November 1813,” *Byron's Correspondence and Journals Vol. 4*, ed. Peter Cochran, <https://petercochran.files.wordpress.com/2009/02/04-london-181310.pdf>.

³⁰ MacCarthy, *Byron: Life and Legend*, 33.

³¹ MacCarthy, *Byron: Life and Legend*, 67.

³² George Gordon Byron, *Detached Thoughts*, ed. Peter Cochran, https://petercochran.files.wordpress.com/2009/03/detached_thoughts.pdf.

³³ MacCarthy, *Byron: Life and Legend*, 67.

Byron's introduction into the world of homosexual relationships came when he was a young teenage student at Harrow. According to Hobhouse, it was here that Byron was thrust into the realm of "fagging and flogging and homoerotic initiation".³⁴ The basis of the institution's curriculum was formed by works of classical authors and as such, the boys would have been familiar with the concept of the so-called Greek love. Later on, Byron's circle at Cambridge would employ the term "Horatian" as a code word for "homosexual".³⁵ Among Byron's numerous male lovers, the best documented and the most significant was the relationship with the Trinity College choirboy, John Edleston. Edleston was an inspiration for many poems including "The Cornelian" or "To Thyrsa". Lines lamenting Edleston's death also form the climax of the second canto of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*. During his stay in Greece in 1809, Byron formed a relationship with the fourteen-year-old Nicolo Giraud who accompanied him during his travels in Greece and taught him Italian. It is believed that Giraud did not hold a special place among Byron's lovers since there were never any poems written about him, though Byron paid for his education in Malta. Giraud would later become a poet in his own right. During his final months in Greece, Byron unsuccessfully pursued a relationship with a young page, Loukas Chalandritsanos.

Prior to his stardom, Byron's affairs with women were mostly confined to prostitutes and servants. But everything changed after the publication of the first two cantos of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* in 1812. Byron suddenly found himself famous, becoming the first European cultural celebrity of the modern age. Upon first meeting her future lover, Caroline Lamb noted in her diary: "That beautiful pale face is my fate", unaware that her sentiments would be shared by thousands of women (and men) in England and elsewhere. Byron's future wife would go on to describe this fascination with the poet as "Byromania". Well aware of the effect his

³⁴ Letter of John Cam Hobhouse quoted in *George Gordon, Lord Byron*, ed. Harold Bloom and Heike Grundmann (New York: Bloom's Literary Criticism, 2009): xii.

³⁵ MacCarthy, *Byron: Life and Legend*, 39.

dashing looks may have on the sales of his book, Byron became the first author to propose that his portrait should form the frontispiece of his publications.³⁶ Throughout his career, Byron would receive plethora of fan mail from his female admirers moved by his work, such as the following:

My Lord, I have been indebted to your muse, for soothing & interesting some of my Saddest hours, I have wept over Child Harold's griefs & sympathized in his wrongs. I would have rejoiced when he rejoiced but there seems no joy for him in this World.³⁷

The tumultuous relationship with Lady Caroline Lamb was Byron's first affair with a woman of such elevated status. The two were allegedly close to eloping but Byron soon grew tired of Caroline's jealousy and lack of discretion, and eventually ended the affair. Unable to cope with the end of the relationship, Lamb even went as far as to sneak into Byron's house disguised as a page. She continued to harass Byron for years after. On February 3rd, 1813, Byron wrote to Francis Hodgson: "You can have no idea of the horrible and absurd things she has said and done...since I withdrew my homage."³⁸ In a letter to Lady Byron, Lamb claimed that Byron confided in her about his bisexuality and "confessed that from his boyhood he had been in the practice of unnatural crime" and "mentioned 3 schoolfellows whom he had thus perverted."³⁹ It is not surprising, then, that Lamb is the author of Byron's famous epithet: "mad, bad and dangerous to know" as well as the author of the widely read, thinly-disguised portrait of Byron, *Glenarvon* (1816).

³⁶ MacCarthy, Byron: *Life and Legend*, 63.

³⁷ "Letter of 'Anna' to Byron of 3rd September 1812," quoted in *Byron and Women (and men)*, ed. Peter Cochran (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010), xliv. EBSCO Host, <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=e000xww&AN=524166&lang=cs&site=ehost-live> -

³⁸ George Gordon Byron, "Letter to Francis Hodgson of 3rd February 1813," *The Works of Lord Byron: Letters and Journals Vol.2*, ed. Rowland E. Prothero (London: John Murray, 1899), 186.

³⁹ Peter Gunn, *My Dearest Augusta: A Biography of the Honourable Augusta Leigh, Lord Byron's Half-sister* (London: The Bodley Head, 1968), 186-188.

Due to his financial problems and the urging of his beloved half-sister, Byron decided to get married. He once remarked that, if he were ever to get married, he would need to find a woman “rich enough to suit me and foolish enough to love me, I will give her leave to make me miserable if she can. Money is the magnet....”.⁴⁰ And so he found his bride-to-be, ironically a cousin, by marriage, of Caroline Lamb; Anne Isabella Milbanke or as Byron nicknamed her “The Princess of Parallelograms.”⁴¹ At first, Annabella refused Byron’s proposal, seemingly impressing Byron: “I am more proud of her rejection than I can ever be of another’s acceptance...the hope of obtaining her...was more pleasing than the possession of St. Ursula and the 11 000 virgins.”⁴² But after a while, Milbanke gave in and the Byron wedding took place in the drawing room at Seaham at eleven o’clock on Monday, January 2nd 1815. The marriage was doomed from the beginning and lasted only a year. It produced Byron’s only legitimate child — Augusta Ada Byron, later Ada Lovelace. Byron’s second daughter, Clara Allegra Byron, was born in 1817 as a result of Byron’s affair with Mary Shelley’s stepsister, Claire Clairmont.

Due to Byron’s affairs and crude behaviour, Millbanke started the process for separation on the basis of cruelty and adultery, as well as citing her husband’s madness as a likely cause of his erratic behaviour. Despite Lamb’s influence on Anabella, an amicable separation was reached in the end. Nonetheless, Byron still had to face a trial in the court of public opinion — to the previous accusations of sodomy, Lamb added accusation of incest between Byron and Augusta. Incest would certainly shock the British society but accusations of homosexuality could destroy Byron. Enraged by these accusations, Byron wrote to Anabella in March of 1816:

⁴⁰ Peter Gunn, *My Dearest Augusta*, 76.

⁴¹ MacCarthy, *Byron: Life and Legend*, 188.

⁴² George Gordon Byron, “Letter to Lady Melbourne of 20th October 1812,“ *The Byron-Lady Melbourne Correspondence, 1812-1813*, ed. Peter Cochran, <https://petercochran.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/08/byron-and-lady-melbourne-1.pdf>.

My name has been as completely blasted as if it were branded on my forehead...you are understood to say—that you are not responsible for these — that they existed previous to my marriage—and at most were only revived by our differences”. Lady Byron they did not exist—but even if they had—does the revival give you no feeling?... is it with perfect apathy you quietly look upon this resurrection of Infamy?⁴³

Thanks to the help of the ever-loyal Hobhouse and John Wilmont, Byron’s cousin, Anabella agreed to sign a kind of disavowal of these rumours. The separation agreement was signed on April 21st and Byron left England four days later, this time forever.

The woman, whom Byron loved the most and arguably the most important woman in his life, was Augusta Leigh. Augusta Maria Leigh was Byron’s half-sister, the only child of “Mad Jack” Byron and his first wife, Amelia Osbourne. The earliest correspondence between the two did not survive but it has been established that they were in contact since 1802. Their first meeting took place in the spring of 1803 at Portland Place when Byron was fifteen and Augusta twenty. The two clicked from the very beginning, in part due to their similarities of character — both were highly sensitive, shy and shared an ironic sense of humour and mockery. It is impossible to pinpoint the exact moment when Byron’s affection towards Augusta shifted into something more serious, something that would change the trajectory of both of their lives forever. But we can determine that by August 22nd, Byron started to refer to the relationship more cryptically. In a letter to Moore, he writes: “...the fact is, I am at this moment in a far more serious, and an entirely new, scrape that any of the last twelve months, — and that is saying a good deal. It is unlucky we can neither love with nor without these women.”⁴⁴ We can find traces of Augusta in a variety of Byron’s works — *Manfred* (1817), *The Bride of Abydos*

⁴³ George Gordon Byron, “Letter to Lady Byron of 25th March 1816,” *Byron’s Correspondence and Journals Vol. 6*, ed. Peter Cochran, <https://petercochran.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2009/02/06-london-1815-18168.pdf>.

⁴⁴ George Gordon Byron, “Letter to Thomas Moore of 22nd August 1813,” *Byron’s Correspondence and Journals Vol. 4*, ed. Peter Cochran, <https://petercochran.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2009/02/04-london-181310.pdf>.

(1813), *Lara* (1814) etc. In the light of Byron's flee from England, *Manfred* in particular was read through the lens of the incest scandal.

It is also widely speculated that Byron was the father of Augusta's third daughter, Elizabeth Medora, born 1814 and supposedly named after one of the heroines of *The Corsair* (1814). Throughout Byron's life, Augusta remained his unyielding supporter and the only woman who could understand and keep up with Byron's various moods. The depth of feeling and attachment for Augusta is best represented in their shared correspondence. In May of 1819, Byron writes to Augusta:

My dearest love...I have never ceased nor can cease to feel for a moment that perfect and boundless attachment which bound me and binds me to you — which renders me utterly incapable of *real* love for any other human being — for what could they be to me after *you*? They say absence destroys weak passions — and confirms strong ones — Alas! *mine* for you is the union of all passions or of all affections — Has strengthened itself but will destroy me...⁴⁵

The reasons for Byron's self-imposed exile were numerous. Besides the mounting debts and rumours of incest as well as a threatening arbitration on behalf of Lady Byron after the legal separation, a vital factor contributing to his decision was the anti-same-sex legislature imposed in England. In comparison to the continent, the price paid for the crime of sodomy was much more severe in England. In France, although homosexuals from low and middle classes faced punishment, the aristocrats, whose tastes were often very well known, escaped both legal punishment and social ostracism. In contrast, a bishop and a peer were hanged in England during the same period.⁴⁶ Crompton argues that “to be a sodomite in England was to be a double

⁴⁵ George Gordon Byron, “Letter to Augusta Leigh of 17th May 1819,” *Byron's Correspondence and Journals Vol. 10*, ed. Peter Cochran, <https://petercochran.files.wordpress.com/2009/02/10-venice-1818-18196.pdf>.

⁴⁶ Louis Crompton, *Byron and Greek Love: Homophobia in 19th Century England* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 64.

anomaly, violating both the natural and the national order.”⁴⁷ Unfortunately, such hostile public opinion lasted long after Byron’s time, e.g. Oscar Wilde at the end of the century and even well into the 20th, as the tragic case of Alan Turing exemplifies. After Byron’s departure, the feeling of fury and hatred towards England is commonplace in both his poetry and correspondence:

I am sure my Bones would not rest in an English Grave—or my Clay mix with the earth of that Country: — I believe the thought would drive me mad on my deathbed could I suppose that any of my friends would be base enough to convey my carcase back to your soil—I would not even feed your worms—if I could help it. ⁴⁸

This bitter sentiment permeates the lines of *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage* and is tangible in the poet’s introspective journey and his complex relationship with different landscapes and cultures. Detached from his homeland, Harold yearns for solace and connection in distant lands. Byron’s blunt rejection of being buried in England reflects a sentiment of disconnection and alienation from his own country and emphasizes the poem’s theme of longing for a deeper, more intimate connection with a place that resonates with his soul.

⁴⁷ Crompton, *Byron and Greek Love*, 63.

⁴⁸ George Gordon Byron, “Letter to John Murray of 7th June 1819,” *The Works of Lord Byron: Letters and Journals Vol. 4*, ed. Rowland E. Prothero (London: John Murray, 1900), 313.

2 The Analysis

2.1 Emotional Intimacy

2.1.1 Education in Woe

Throughout the first two cantos of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, the poet experiences a series of gradual personal changes under the weight of external events and his disillusionment is mirrored in the increasingly gloomy and introspective mood of the poem. Some of the most moving stanzas of the first two cantos, which shall be examined here, describe the loss of Byron's loved ones — John Wingfield and John Edleston. Struck by the events of 1811, Byron decided to write these additional stanzas into the already existing structure of the cantos. Since these losses are the poet's very own personal burdens, they further serve to accentuate the centrality of Byron's own persona to the poem, once again raising the question regarding the role of the poet's surrogate, the young nobleman Harold.⁴⁹

Between August and September of 1811, upon his return to England from Greece, the last stop of his Grand Tour, Byron's world was shattered by a series of deaths — that of his mother and friends Charles Skinner Matthews, John Wingfield, Hargreaves Hanson, and John Edleston. In the notes to the first cantos, Byron writes: "In the short space of one month I have lost her who gave me being, and most of those who made that being tolerable."⁵⁰ Just a week after receiving the news regarding the death of his mother, the devastating news of Matthews' drowning reached him. Byron's letter to Scrope Bedmore Davies well illustrates the state of the grief-stricken author:

My Dearest Davies, — Some curse hangs over me and mine. My mother lies a corpse in this house; one of my best friends drowned in a ditch. What can I say, or think, or do? I received a letter from him yesterday. My dear Scrope, if you can spare me a moment, do come

⁴⁹ McGann, *Fiery Dust*, 71.

⁵⁰ George Gordon Byron, "Byron's Notes to Cantos I-II," in *Lord Byron: The Major Works*, ed. Jerome J. McGann (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 85.

down to me — I want a friend. Matthew’s letter was written on Friday — on Saturday he was not...Come to me Scrope, I am almost desolate—left almost alone in the world...⁵¹

Upon learning of John Wingfield’s death, Byron writes to Dallas:

Besides her who gave me being, I have lost more than one who made that being tolerable. — The best friend of my friend Hobhouse, Matthews, a man of the first talents, and also not the worst of my narrow circle, has perished miserably in the muddy waves of the Cam, always fatal to genius:—my poor schoolfellow, Wingfield, at Coimbra—within a month; and whilst I had heard from *all three*, but not seen *one*.⁵²

John Wingfield was Byron’s former Harrow classmate. The two had known each other for ten years, as Byron remarked: “the better half of his life, and the happiest part of mine.”⁵³ Byron enrolled at Harrow in 1801 and soon formed a tight circle of friends including Edward Noel Long, George, Duke of Dorset and John Wingfield. These men were among Byron’s “juniors and favourites, whom I spoilt by indulgences.”⁵⁴ Byron’s schoolmates would go on to appear in “Childish Recollections”, a poem Byron described as a “parting song” to the institution.⁵⁵ In the poem, Wingfield assumes the role of “Alonzo” and Byron describes him as the “best and dearest of my friends.”⁵⁶

Wingfield eventually became a member of the mixed army (British, Portuguese and Spanish) that was led by Marshal William Beresford against the French during the Peninsular

⁵¹ George Gordon Byron, “Letter to Scrope Berdmore Davies of 7th August 1811,” *The Works of Lord Byron: Letters and Journals Vol. 1*, ed. Rowland E. Prothero (London: John Murray, 1898), 324.

⁵² George Gordon Byron, “Letter to R.C.Dallas of 12th August 1811,” *The Works of Lord Byron: Letters and Journals Vol. 1*, ed. Rowland E. Prothero (London: John Murray, 1898), 325.

⁵³ Paul Elledge, “Chasms in Connections: Byron Ending (in) ‘Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage I and II,’” *ELH* 62, no. 1 (Spring 1995): 125, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/30030263>.

⁵⁴ Elledge, “Chasms in Connections,” 122.

⁵⁵ Elledge, “Chasms in Connections,” 125.

⁵⁶ George Gordon Byron, “Childish Recollections,” in *The Works of Lord Byron, Vol. 7*, ed. Ernest Hartley (London: John Murray, 1904). Project Gutenberg, <https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/27577/pg27577-images.html>.

War. He was stationed in Coimbra where he died of fever on May 14th, 1811, just two days before the famous Battle of Albuera took place. Byron visited the site of the battle during his Grand Tour of 1809 while on his way to Seville and Cadiz. He would go on to portray that “glorious field of grief” in stanza 43 of the first canto:⁵⁷

Who could foresee thee, in a space so brief,
A scene where mingling foes should boast and bleed!
Peace to the perished! may the warrior’s meed
And tears of triumph their reward prolong!⁵⁸

The eulogy to Wingfield, contained in stanzas 91 and 92, forms the climax of the first canto. The death of a soldier two days before a glorious battle may seem to many as undignified and unremarkable, paling in comparison to the heroic death of those dying on the battlefield. And thus, the poet deems that he will be forgotten by all except the “lonely breast.”⁵⁹ It appears that to Byron, the exclusion by which Wingfield becomes “unlaurel’d to descend in vain”, is what makes Wingfield superior to those who fell in the battle, those, who will go on to be crowned a “meaner crest.”⁶⁰

The opening lines of the next stanza are as follows: “Oh, known the earliest, and esteem’d the most! / Dear to a heart where nought was left so dear!”⁶¹ I believe that these lines refer directly to the persona of Wingfield given that two met early on in their life and from the various descriptions Byron gives of Wingfield, it seems that he was the closest and most esteemed among his peers at Harrow. The speaker is overcome by despair as he acknowledges that his “hopeless days” are now “lost” and forever overshadowed by the loss of a beloved friend.⁶² The

⁵⁷ Byron, *CHP* I.43.1

⁵⁸ Byron, *CHP* I.43.3-6

⁵⁹ Byron, *CHP* I.91.6

⁶⁰ Byron, *CHP* I.91.5-6

⁶¹ Byron, *CHP* I.92.1-2

⁶² Byron, *CHP* I.92.3

next line contains Byron's final plea as he hopes to find solace in visions or memories : "In dreams deny me not to see thee there!"⁶³ Elledge believes that this stanza traces "emotional passage from dejected egocentrism through a self-renewing realization of the magnitude of loss to a reversal of sorts in the dark consolation of a fancied reunion."⁶⁴ In the last line, Byron denies the separative power of death and instead, views it as a force which shall unite him with his fallen friend: "Till my frail frame return to whence it rose, / And mourn'd and mourner lie united in repose."⁶⁵

While writing the stanzas commemorating Wingfield, Byron was not yet aware of the death of his "almost constant associate", John Edleston, which occurred in May of that year.⁶⁶ It seems that this death was the most devastating of all as is apparent from a letter to Francis Hodgson:

I heard of a death the other day that shocked me more than any of the preceding, of one whom I once loved more than I ever loved a living thing, & one who I believe loved me to the last, yet I had not a tear left for an event which five years ago would have bowed me to the dust; still it sits heavy on my heart & calls back what I wish to forget, in many a feverish dream.⁶⁷

Three days later he writes to Hobhouse:

At present I am rather low, & don't know how to tell you the reason—you remember E[dleston] at Cambridge—he is dead—last May—his sister sent me an account lately—now though I never should have seen him again [...] I have been more affected than I should care to own

⁶³ Byron, *CHP* I.92.4

⁶⁴ Elledge, "Chasms in Connections," 130.

⁶⁵ Byron, *CHP* I.92.8-9

⁶⁶ Byron, "Letter to Elizabeth Pigot of 5th June 1807," *Byron's Correspondence and Journals Vol.1*, ed. Peter Cochran, <https://petercochran.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2009/02/01-england-1791-180921.pdf> .

⁶⁷ Byron, "Letter to Francis Hodgson of 10th October 1811," *The Works of Lord Byron: Letters and Journals Vol.2*, ed. Rowland E. Prothero (London: John Murray, 1898), 51.

elsewhere; Death has been lately so occupied with everything that was mine...”⁶⁸

Considering the influence of Byron’s many male lovers on his work, it’s evident that John Edleston held a special place among them. Byron entered Trinity College in 1805 and his relationship with the young choirboy supposedly began after Byron saved him from drowning.⁶⁹ Byron describes his protégé as follows: “he has been my almost constant associate since October 1805 when I entered Trinity College; his voice {first} attracted my notice, his countenance fixed it, & his manners attached me to him forever.”⁷⁰ Unfortunately, their relationship did not survive their parting from Cambridge but the two still kept in touch, as is apparent from Edleston’s several letters. Three months after leaving Cambridge, Byron published his fourth collection, *Poems Original and Translated* (1808). Many of the poems contained in this collection are addressed to specific people — “To Edward Noel Long”, “To George, Earl Delawarr” etc. But there is also a poem, which was later suppressed, titled “The Cornelian”. The title refers to the name Byron used when referring to Edleston, supposedly based on the precious stone pendant Byron received as a gift from his lover. Byron speaks about the painful parting from his beloved in a letter to Elizabeth Bridget Pigot:

at this moment I write with a bottle of Claret in my Head, & tears in my eyes, for I have just parted from “my Cornelian” who spent the evening with me; as it was our last Interview ... Edleston & I have separated for the present, & my mind is a Chaos of hope & Sorrow.⁷¹

Byron also dedicated one of his elegies “To Thyrsa” to Edleston, disguising the addressee behind a feminine name. The unparalleled intensity of feeling Byron had for his lover

⁶⁸ Byron, “Letter to John Cam Hobhouse of 13th October 1811,” *Byron’s Correspondence and Journals Vol.3*, ed. Peter Cochran, <https://petercochran.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2009/02/03-london-1811-181212.pdf> .

⁶⁹ Peter Cochran, “Byron’s Boyfriends,” in *Byron and Women (and men)*, ed. Peter Cochran (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010), 33. EBSCO Host, <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=e000xww&AN=524166&lang=cs&site=ehost-live> .

⁷⁰ Byron, “Letter to Elizabeth Pigot of 5th June 1807,” *Byron’s Correspondence and Journals Vol.1*, ed. Peter Cochran, <https://petercochran.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2009/02/01-england-1791-180921.pdf> .

⁷¹ Byron, “Letter to Elizabeth Pigot of 5th June 1807”

is further illustrated by Lady Byron who reports Byron as saying: “I think I love you—better even than Thyrsa” but she also remarked that throughout their relationship, Byron “lamented that he could not feel as once he felt.”⁷²

We cannot definitely determine whether stanza nine of the second canto refers to John Edleston since there is some speculation about the possibility of these lines being written earlier while Byron was still in Greece. But I believe that these lines, with their intense disparity over the loss of the beloved one, refer to Edleston:

There, thou!—whose love and life together fled,
Have left me here to love and live in vain—
Twined with my heart, and can I deem thee dead,
When busy memory flashes on my brain?⁷³

As has been noted, stanzas to Wingfield form the climax of the first canto. Similarly, Edleston becomes the focus of the closing stanzas of Canto II. In the first of these stanzas, Byron expresses his despair over the loss of a beloved, who remains distinct and superior to all the others:

Thou too art gone, thou loved and lovely one!
Whom youth and youth's affections bound to me;
Who did for me what none beside have done,
Nor shrank from one albeit unworthy thee.⁷⁴

The stanza then takes on almost an accusatory tone, perceiving the death of the beloved as a betrayal: “What is my being? thou hast ceased to be! / Nor stayed to welcome here thy wanderer home.”⁷⁵ In light of his loss, the act of homecoming becomes meaningless, ceasing to be united with his beloved, nothing urges an end to his journey. Paul Elledge notes the sense

⁷² Malcolm Elwin, *Lord Byron's Wife* (London: Macdonald, 1962), 282.

⁷³ Byron, *CHP* II.9.1-4.

⁷⁴ Byron, *CHP*, II.95.1-4

⁷⁵ Byron, *CHP*, II.95.5-6

of vacancy which corresponds “not only with the wish to evacuate memory of Edlestonian deposits but with the stanza's obsessive negativity.”⁷⁶

In the next stanza, the vacancy is overpowered by the presence of memories:

Oh! ever loving, lovely, and beloved!

How selfish Sorrow ponders on the past,

And clings to thoughts now better far removed!⁷⁷

The poet strives to remove himself from the past and rid himself of painful memories. Byron recalls the ghost of Edleston but knows that “Time shall tear thy shadow from me last.”⁷⁸ The remainder of the stanza reinvokes the earlier accusatory tone, this time blaming death for taking his “parent, friend, and now the more than friend” and thus robbing the poet of “the little joy that life had yet to lend.”⁷⁹ It is apparent that “more than a friend” refers to Edleston, although Byron (understandingly) claims otherwise in his notes.⁸⁰

These personal additions endow the early cantos with an emotional depth and vulnerability, helping to intertwine Byron's personal experiences with the broader themes explored in the poem. In these cantos, Byron builds intimacy through an introspective exploration of his own emotions, experiences, and relationships. Incorporation of the string of personal losses further amplifies the emotional charge of the poem and prompts the readers to empathize with the narrator's sorrow. Within these passages, we glimpse Byron at his most vulnerable, raw and honest. Offering the most intimate details of his personal life, the poem transcends a fictional narrative — it becomes a deeply personal exploration of love and loss.

⁷⁶ Elledge, “Chasms in Connections,” 138.

⁷⁷ Byron, *CHP*, II.96.1-3

⁷⁸ Byron, *CHP*, II.96.4

⁷⁹ Byron, *CHP*, II.96.6-9

⁸⁰ Byron, *CHP*, II.96.6

Through his ornate language and imagery, Byron is able to capture the complexities of human emotion, depicting intimacy both in its beauty and pain.

2.1.2 The Child of Love

Written in the aftermath of Byron's self-imposed exile from England, the third canto deals with the emotional aftermath of the break-up of Byron's marriage, its pain multiplied by the separation from his infant daughter, Ada, whom he was never to see again. As stated in stanza four, the canto explores the poet's attempt to "wean" himself "from the weary dream", he tries to do so in two ways — his imaginative power and communion with nature.⁸¹ This aim is already foreshadowed in Byron's telling choice of this canto's epigraph: "... so that this hard work will force you to think of other things. There is in truth no remedy other than that, and time."⁸²

Byron's only legitimate daughter was born on December 10th 1815 and was named Augusta Ada, after Byron's half-sister, Augusta Leigh. The second name came from a woman, who married into the Byron family during the reign of King John.⁸³ Byron left England when Ada was only five months old, aware that he would most likely never get to see her again. She would later become known as Ada King, Countess of Lovelace. Ada was a remarkable woman, a gifted mathematician —taking after her mother, whom Byron nicknamed the "Princess of Parallelograms"⁸⁴ — and created algorithms for Charles Babbage's prototype of the digital computer. As such, she is considered to be the first computer programmer. Byron's influence would manifest itself in her formidable imagination and creativity as well as in her original reason to pursue the design of algorithms, namely winning at cards.

⁸¹ Byron, *CHP*, III.4.6

⁸² George Gordon Byron, "Epigraph to Canto III," in *Lord Byron: The Major Works*, ed. Jerome J. McGann (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 104, translated from the French original ("... afin que cette application vous forçât à penser à autre chose. Il n'y a en vérité de remède que celui-là et le temps")

⁸³ MacCarthy, *Byron: Life and Legend*, 261.

⁸⁴ MacCarthy, *Byron: Life and Legend*, 188.

The verses to Ada, which form the beginning and conclusion of the third canto of *Childe Harold* were added later, as is apparent from Byron's letter to Murray: "recollect also that concluding stanzas — (those to my daughter) which I had not made up my mind to publish or not when they were first written [...] I had (& have) fully determined to publish with the rest of the Canto..."⁸⁵

Such personal and detailed addition shows Byron's determination to no longer conceal himself behind the persona of Harold. Throughout the whole canto, there seem to be only five stanzas which we can attribute to Harold — stanzas 47 to 51 of the "Journey Along the Rhine" sequence.⁸⁶ This is supported by the first line of stanza 52, where the poet directly assigns the previous lines to Harold: "Thus Harold inly said."⁸⁷ In stanza 46, the narrating poet notes that like himself, Harold too "gazes on a work divine."⁸⁸ The rest of the stanza offers the poet's general description of the surrounding landscape with the following five stanzas expressing the significance of the scene for the speaker, offering no indication that the speaker is the narrating poet. This gradual distancing between the narrating poet and Harold will reach its peak later, in the final canto of the poem.

In the opening four and half lines of the canto, Byron poses a question to his daughter:

Is thy face like thy mother's, my fair child!

Ada! sole daughter of my house and heart?

At first glance, it seems that Byron is inquiring about the resemblance of the child to her mother. But some critics approach these opening lines differently, arguing that the author is not questioning his daughter's physical traits, rather, he is questioning her allegiance — is Ada's

⁸⁵ George Gordon Byron, "Letter to John Murray of 9th October 1616," *The Works of Lord Byron: Letters and Journals Vol. 3*, ed. Rowland E. Prothero (London: John Murray, 1899), 373.

⁸⁶ McGann, *Fiery Dust*, 69.

⁸⁷ Byron, *CHP*, III.52.1

⁸⁸ Byron, *CHP*, III.46.5

face set against him, just like that of her mother?⁸⁹ Furthermore, the first line includes the whole of the family unit — “thy face”, “thy mother’s”, and “my.”⁹⁰ Whereas in the second line, the unit is reduced to the “sole daughter” and her father.⁹¹ It seems as if Byron directly excluded the mother as a means to completely exclude the idea that the regrets accompanying his departure include her also.⁹² In the following lines, Byron reminisces about their final parting:

When last I saw thy young blue eyes they smiled,
And then we parted, -- not as now we part,
But with a hope.⁹³

The rest of the stanza describes Byron’s departure from the English shore. Here, once again, the motif of water appears:

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.⁹⁴

These lines are reminiscent of the first, albeit less melancholic, departure of the poet contained in stanzas 12 and 13 of the first canto. But whereas in the first canto, the speaker is “glad to waft him from his native home”⁹⁵, here, the speaker is completely detached from his homeland, whose shores can no longer “grieve or glad mine eye.”⁹⁶

⁸⁹ Paul Elledge, “Talking Through the Grate: Interdict as Meditation in Byron’s *Pilgrimage*, Canto 3,” *Essays in Literature* 21, no.2 (Fall 1994): 202. Gale Literary Sources. <https://link-gale-com.ezproxy.is.cuni.cz/apps/doc/A17011694/LitRC?u=karlova&sid=bookmark-LitRC&xid=79c3de4b>.

⁹⁰ Byron, *CHP*, III.1.1

⁹¹ Byron, *CHP*, III.1.2

⁹² Elledge, “Talking Through the Grate,” 203.

⁹³ Byron, *CHP*, III.1.5

⁹⁴ Byron, *CHP*, III.1.5-9

⁹⁵ Byron, *CHP*, I.12.2

⁹⁶ Byron, *CHP*, III.1.9

The farewell to Ada contained in stanzas 115-118 form the closure of the canto. The first of these stanzas reveals Byron's certainty about the finality of their departure: "Albeit my brow thou never should'st behold."⁹⁷ Nevertheless, he hopes that one day, his daughter shall know her father through his work: "My voice shall with thy future visions blend / And reach into thy heart."⁹⁸ The next stanza reveals Byron's painful awareness of the fact that the role of a father "was not reserv'd for me."⁹⁹ He accepts that he will never be able to witness Ada's "dawn of little joys"¹⁰⁰, her "knowledge of objects"¹⁰¹ or to hold her "tightly on a gentle knee."¹⁰² The second to last stanza expresses his strong belief that his daughter will love him, despite being taught "hate as duty": "I know that you wilt love me; though my name / Should be shut from thee."¹⁰³

The final stanza encapsulates the poet's wishes and hopes for "the child of love".¹⁰⁴ He has accepted that "born in bitterness"¹⁰⁵, she will be "nurtured in convulsion" of her "sire."¹⁰⁶ He desires a different outcome for her, hoping that Ada, unlike her father, will be "more tempered" and her hope "far higher."¹⁰⁷ Still, the end of the canto is laced with helplessness — the poet would gladly send "such blessings" but he does not do so.¹⁰⁸ As Vincent Newey noted: "the Canto ends with an affirmation that concedes impotence..., even this blessing tells of want, separation and a sense of 'wretched identity.'¹⁰⁹ As such, the quest for liberation from the painful past, described at the very beginning of the canto, is unsuccessful. Although the canto

⁹⁷ Byron, *CHP*, III.115.6

⁹⁸ Byron, *CHP*, III.115.6-7.

⁹⁹ Byron, *CHP*, III.116.7.

¹⁰⁰ Byron, *CHP*, III.116.2.

¹⁰¹ Byron, *CHP*, III.116.4.

¹⁰² Byron, *CHP*, III.116.5.

¹⁰³ Byron, *CHP*, III.117.2-3.

¹⁰⁴ Byron, *CHP*, III.118.1.

¹⁰⁵ Byron, *CHP*, III.118.1.

¹⁰⁶ Byron, *CHP*, III.118.2.

¹⁰⁷ Byron, *CHP*, III.118.5.

¹⁰⁸ Byron, *CHP* III.118.8.

¹⁰⁹ Vincent Newey, "Authoring the Self: Childe Harold's Pilgrimage III and IV," in *Byron and the Limits of Fiction*, ed. Bernard Beatty and Vincent Newey (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1988), 164.

presents moments in which forgetfulness is achieved, still, the void created in both his own and his daughter's life is something he cannot escape from: "Still round him clung invisibly a chain / Which gall'd for ever."¹¹⁰

After his initial hesitation, the choice to publish the verses dedicated to his daughter deepens the emotional charge of the poem by showcasing the personal and emotional connection between the poet and his child. This intimate gesture humanizes Byron and reveals him in a new role, that of an anxious and vulnerable father, a role that surely must have shocked his audience which was so accustomed to the poet's enigmatic and rebellious image. In the heartfelt outset of the canto, Byron speaks directly to Ada, expressing his hopes and fears for her future and thereby establishes a personal bond between himself, his daughter, and the reader. This rare and vulnerable moment stands in contrast with the broader themes explored in the poem and adds a sense of tenderness and humanity to Byron's journey. Returning to Ada in the canto's closing lines, Byron ends his mediation with a reminder of the everlasting presence and power of the paternal bond. It should also be noted that following the scandal of his leaving England, the poet needed to win back his vast readership and the entire third canto of the poem is a case in point of that very strategy — a gentler, more humane Byronic voice, was needed for this to succeed, and succeed it did.

2.1.3 A Ruin Amidst Ruins

This chapter shall focus on Byron's intimate connection with history and historical sites. History is alive everywhere in Byron's work and transcends being a mere backdrop to the poetic action and becomes a central feature contributing to the poem's emotional resonance. Especially in the course of the last two cantos, we find ourselves in the embrace of history, haunted by its ghosts who, resurrected by Byron, give their testimony and speak to us, once again, across the

¹¹⁰ Byron, *CHP* III.9.5-6.

gaps of centuries. On the other hand, history as a theoretical concept is, for the most part, perceived negatively in the majority of Byron's work. This is also the case in the final canto as Byron famously writes: "History, with all her volumes vast, / Hath but ONE page."¹¹¹

It is also important to highlight the absence of Harold in the last two cantos. It is well known that Byron had always been annoyed at the public's tendency to perceive his heroes as representation of himself, Harold included. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Harold appears only briefly during the course of the third canto and essentially disappears in the fourth. During the course of the third canto, it becomes increasingly clear that Harold's role is merely formal as he becomes a mere instrument of Byron's ironic distancing from the autobiographical and confessional tone of the poem.¹¹² Another reason for Harold's disappearance may be the fact that, at the time of the composition of the last two cantos, Byron was exiled from his country and thus did not have to hide behind the mask of Harold in order to avoid public outrage. His outlooks, ideas and personal anecdotes were now of lesser consequence to his well-being and reputation.

But let us now turn back to the topic of history. The records of Byron's personal library showcase his wide-ranging interest in history, which he called his "grand passion."¹¹³ Stephen Cheeke argues that the poet's view of history is essentially Gibbonesque — that of history of repetition, fatalism and patterns of decline.¹¹⁴ Gibbon is also referred to in stanza 145 as the

¹¹¹ Byron, *CHP*, IV.108.5-6.

¹¹² Martin Procházka, "Byron a moderní epika – fakt, fikce a hrdina v Childe Haroldově pouti a Donu Juanovi," *Vektory kulturního vývoje: identity, utopie, hrdinové*, ed. Petr A. Bílek, Martin Procházka and Jan Wiendl (Praha: Filozofická fakulta Univerzity Karlovy, 2016): 210. EBSCO Host, <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=1457608&lang=cs&site=ehost-live>. (my translation from Czech)

¹¹³ Stephen Cheeke, "Byron, History and the Genius Loci," *Byron Journal* 27, no.1 (1999): 37, Gale Literary Sources.

¹¹⁴ Cheeke, "Byron, History and the Genius Loci," 38.

“pilgrim”¹¹⁵, who believed that the fall of Rome would lead to that of mankind: “‘When falls the Coliseum, Rome shall fall; / And when Rome falls — the World’.”¹¹⁶

The vivid and evocative descriptions of the landscapes and historical sites encountered by Harold on his journey sealed Byron's reputation as a poet of *genius loci*. Byron's ability to capture the essence and atmosphere of different places, from the beauty of nature to the remnants of ancient civilizations, was highly acclaimed by his contemporaries and greatly contributed to the fabulous success of the poem. It is especially Byron's portrayal of historical sites such as ancient ruins, castles, and monuments that further highlights his intimate bond with history and is an element which gives shape to the fourth canto. It is not surprising that a poet, who perceived himself as a kind of fallen angel, found solace in a landscape “united in ruin.”¹¹⁷ For Byron, such places embody “psychic states” with almost a “mystical manuring” at work.¹¹⁸ Cheeke argues, that the places observed by the poet — especially those associated with famous dead — enable him to reach a kind of “inplacement” and act as sites against which Byron can measure himself. Most of these places highlight his out-of-placeness against models of historical duration.¹¹⁹

But let us now focus on the third canto in which Byron ventures to a site of more recent, and personally relevant history — the Battle of Waterloo. In his notes to the canto, the poet describes his arrival to the rather ordinary site:

I went on horseback twice over the field, comparing it with my recollections of similar scenes. As a plain, Waterloo seems marked out for a scene of some great action, though this may be mere imagination. I have viewed with attention those of Platea, Tory, Matinea, Leuctra, Chaeronea, and Marathon; and the field around Mont St. Jean and Hougoumont appears

¹¹⁵ Byron *CHP*, IV.145.4

¹¹⁶ Byron, *CHP*, IV.145.1-2

¹¹⁷ Andrew Rutherford quoted in Paul Douglass, “Paradise Decomposed: Byron's Decadence and Wordsworthian Nature in Childe Harold III and IV,” *Byron Journal* 34, no. 1 (2006): 13, Gale Literary Sources.

¹¹⁸ Cheeke, “Byron, History and the Genius Loci,” 34.

¹¹⁹ Cheeke, “Byron, History and the Genius Loci,” 38.

to want little but a better cause, and that undefinable but impressive halo which the lapse of ages throws around a celebrated spot, to vie in interest with any or all of these, except perhaps the last mentioned.¹²⁰

If we compare Byron's first impression with the poetic portrayal of Waterloo, it is impossible not to wonder about how much the evocation of the *genius loci* is based solely on Byron's imagination. Nevertheless, this diary entry offers an insight into Byron's creative process and his desire to find something grandiose in the battlefield despite convincing himself that it is already there.

Byron expresses his surprise at the ordinariness of the scene, the absence of a "colossal bust"¹²¹ or "a column trophied for triumphal show"¹²² that would mark "the grave of France."¹²³ But the poet suggests that the mundanity of the historic site is, in fact, the moral of the story: "but the moral's truth tells simpler so, / As the ground was before, thus let it be."¹²⁴ But the plain of Waterloo also bears a personal significance for the poet — it was here that Byron's cousin, Sir William Augustus Gordon, the "young, gallant Howard", died.¹²⁵ Byron finds himself at the very spot of William's death:

There have been tears and breaking hearts for thee,
And mine were nothing – had I such to give;
But when I stood beneath the fresh green tree,
Which living waves where thou didst cease to live,¹²⁶

The imagery of the tree's living waves, contrasted with the absence of life, only further amplifies the emotional impact of the loss and gives way to a more introspective mood as the poet

¹²⁰ George Gordon Byron, "Byron's Notes to Canto III," in *Lord Byron: The Major Works*, ed. Jerome J. McGann (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 140.

¹²¹ Byron, *CHP* III.16.3.

¹²² Byron, *CHP* III.16.4.

¹²³ Byron, *CHP* III.17.2.

¹²⁴ Byron, *CHP* III.17.5-6.

¹²⁵ Byron, *CHP* III.29.9.

¹²⁶ Byron, *CHP* III.30.1-4.

describes his heart as “a broken mirror, which the glass / In every fragment multiplies; and makes [...] /The same, and still the more, the more it breaks.”¹²⁷ Furthermore, Byron’s refusal to indulge in any creation of Nationalistic myths is especially refreshing. Rather, he raises the question of the futility of war: “but is Earth more free? /Did nations combat to make ONE submit / Or league to teach all kings true sovereignty?”¹²⁸

Byron's depiction of Napoleon, “the greatest – nor the worst of men”, reflects the ambivalent attitude of the second-generation British Romantics towards the French emperor whom they both admired and later condemned as a tyrant. Byron acknowledges Napoleon's military genius and his ability to rise from humble origins to become one of the most powerful figures in European history. Moreover, he describes Napoleon's victories on the battlefield with a sense of awe, highlighting his strategic brilliance and audacity in the face of overwhelming odds. He admires Napoleon's military success and even places him alongside “Philip’s Son”, Alexander the Great.¹²⁹ Yet, he criticises the emperor’s daring, which “made thy rise as fall” and creates a picture of a man, who is willing to sacrifice thousands of lives in pursuit of his own ambitions.¹³⁰ In the end, it is this ruthless ambition that causes his downfall: “However deeply in Men’s Spirits skilled, / Look through thine own, nor curb the lust of war, / Nor learn that tempted Fate will leave the loftiest Star.”¹³¹ This sentiment recalls that of Byron’s earlier poem, *Ode to Napoleon Buonaparte* (1814). Byron also dedicates one stanza of the final canto to Buonaparte but the picture Byron paints here of the emperor is one of a tragic and lonely figure, abandoned in his exile on the island of Saint Helena:

And fought and conquer'd, and the same course steer'd,

At apish distance; but as yet none have,

¹²⁷ Byron, *CHP*, III.33.1-4.

¹²⁸ Byron, *CHP*, III.19.2-4.

¹²⁹ Byron, *CHP*, III.41.7.

¹³⁰ Byron, *CHP*, III.36.7.

¹³¹ Byron, *CHP*, III.38.7-9.

Nor could, the same supremacy have near'd,
Save one vain man, who is not in the grave,
But, vanquish'd by himself, to his own slaves a slave —¹³²

The journey across Italy in the last canto holds a promise of a new beginning for the poet as indicated in the initial stanzas: “Watering the heart of whose early flowers have died, / And with a fresher growth replenishing the void.”¹³³ At the offset of the canto, we find ourselves on a bridge in the floating city, a place that would soon become notorious thanks to the poet:

I stood in Venice, on the Bridge of Sighs;
A palace and a prison on each hand:
I saw from out the wave her structures rise
As from the stroke of the enchanter's wand:¹³⁴

The rest of the stanza creates a picture of Venice as a decaying city tainted by the passage of time, yet still somehow magically alluring. The poet highlights the contrast between the city's glorious past and its current state of decline:

A thousand years their cloudy wings expand
Around me, and a dying glory smiles
O'er the far times when many a subject land
Looked to the winged Lion's marble piles,
Where Venice sate in state, throned on her hundred isles!¹³⁵

Venice is depicted as a place of faded magnificence and crumbling grandeur. Byron describes the decaying architecture, the “palaces crumbling to the shore” and the fading glory of the once proud noble families.¹³⁶ The city's canals, which were once vibrant and bustling

¹³² Byron, *CHP*, IV.89.5-9.

¹³³ Byron, *CHP*, IV.5.9.

¹³⁴ Byron, *CHP*, IV.5.9.

¹³⁵ Byron, *CHP*, IV.1.4.

¹³⁶ Byron, *CHP*, IV.3.3.

with activity, are now devoid of “Tasso's echoes.”¹³⁷ Nevertheless, beauty still remains in Venice: “Perchance even dearer in her day of woe / Then when she was a boast, a marvel and a show.”¹³⁸ George Simmel’s interpretation of the ruins, helps us understand Byron’s thinking here:

The ruin of a building [...] means that where the work of art is dying, other forces and forms, those of nature, have grown; and that out of what of art still lives in the ruin and what of nature lives in it, there has emerged a new whole, a characteristic unit [...] a unity which is no longer grounded in human purposiveness but in that depth where human purposiveness and the working of non-conscious natural forces grow from their common root [...] the ruin often strikes us as so often tragic [...] because destruction here is not something coming senselessly from the outside but rather a realization of a tendency inherent in the deepest layer of the existence of the destroyed.¹³⁹

Previously, we saw Byron imagining himself as a broken man, whose heart breaks, yet he “brokenly lives on”, just like the crumbling Venice.¹⁴⁰ It is also plausible that the ruins of Venice also made him reminisce about his lost ancestral home, Newstead Abbey. However, it is also worth noting that Venice is yet for Byron the “fairy city of the heart” when later Rome would become the “city of the soul.” Where the faded past of the free Venetian Republic is mourned prodigiously here, and the present Austrian occupation duly reviled, Byron also uses the same political subtext to raise the stakes of this ruined place in the abstract book of history — where Venice becomes half-historic, half-literary city of dreams and setting of plays, spun by the creative imagination of Byron’s British compatriots, Shakespeare and Otway, with Byron creating his own due part of this ongoing myth of Venice for future generations.

¹³⁷ Byron, *CHP*, IV.3.1.

¹³⁸ Byron, *CHP*, IV.18.8-9.

¹³⁹ George Simmel quoted in *Byron and Italy*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017), 82.

¹⁴⁰ Byron, *CHP*, III.32.9.

As the canto progresses, we find ourselves at the final destination of the pilgrimage — Rome. “The city of the soul”¹⁴¹ is a kind of promised land for “the orphans of the heart”¹⁴² and serves as a kind of “perpetual memento mori”, a place where death and decay are ever-present.¹⁴³ It is place, where Byron’s tormented spirit may finally stand “a ruin among ruins.”¹⁴⁴

One of the central passages of the journey through Rome is that describing the Colosseum. This structure is also featured in *Manfred* as “the gladiators' bloody Circus” which stands as a “noble wreck in ruinous perfection.”¹⁴⁵ Here, the ruin seems to be restored to its former glory by the moonlight, which “fill'd up / As 'twere, anew, the gaps of centuries.”¹⁴⁶ And thus “making that which was not, till the place / Became religion.”¹⁴⁷ The choice of the word “religion” is especially interesting. It seems that to Byron, the process of resurrection of the bygone sites of history and the weight of such task makes him reach for the word “religion.”¹⁴⁸ After its restoration, “religious” encounter between the self, place and history can take place.¹⁴⁹

Prior to the introduction of the Colosseum in *Childe Harold*, we encounter the spirit of the place that is “Nameless, yet thus omnipotent.”¹⁵⁰ This evoked spirit is so powerful that one becomes “a part of what has been / And grow unto the spot, all-seeing but unseen.”¹⁵¹ The introduction of the Colosseum comes in the next stanza but instead of admiration, Byron points out its irony — the most preserved historical site of such a great civilization is a place, where man are “Butchered to make a Roman holiday”¹⁵²:

¹⁴¹ Byron, *CHP*, IV.18.2.

¹⁴² Byron, *CHP*, IV.78.2.

¹⁴³ Malcolm Kelsall. "George Gordon, Lord Byron," *The Literary Encyclopedia*, accessed February 3, 2024, <https://www.litencyc.com/php/speople.php?rec=true&UID=683> .

¹⁴⁴ Kelsall. "George Gordon, Lord Byron." (Ibid)

¹⁴⁵ George Gordon Byron, *Manfred* (London: John Murray, 1817), III.4.29

¹⁴⁶ Byron, *Manfred*, III.4.34-35.

¹⁴⁷ Byron, *Manfred*, III.4.3-40.

¹⁴⁸ Cheeke, “Byron, History and the Genius Loci, 39.

¹⁴⁹ Cheeke, “Byron, History and the Genius Loci, 40.

¹⁵⁰ Byron, *CHP*, IV.138.2.

¹⁵¹ Byron, *CHP*, IV.138.8-9.

¹⁵² Byron, *CHP*, IV.141.7.

And here the buzz of eager nations ran,
In murmur'd pity, or loud-roar'd applause,
As man was slaughter'd by his fellow man.
And wherefore slaughter'd? wherefore, but because
Such were the bloody Circus' genial laws,
And the imperial pleasure. -- Wherefore not?
What matters where we fall to fill the maws
Of worms -- on battle-plains or listed spot?
Both are but theatres where the chief actors rot.¹⁵³

Suddenly, a ghost of the past raises before us — a gladiator dying in the arena:

He leans upon his hand -- his manly brow
Consents to death, but conquers agony,
And his droop'd head sinks gradually low --
And through his side the last drops, ebbing slow
From the red gash, fall heavy, one by one,
Like the first of a thunder-shower; and now
The arena swims around him -- he is gone,
Ere ceased the inhuman shout which hail'd the wretch who won.¹⁵⁴

The image of the Gladiator is inspired by a famous statue of “The Dying Gaul” that Byron encountered during his Italian travels. The poet creates a picture not of a heroic fighter but that of a gladiator who is out of place, far from his home just like the author himself, and sacrificing himself for the entertainment of a foreign crowd. Here, Byron creates an intimate link between himself and the gladiator — Byron’s reputation has been butchered to make entertainment in England, just as the gladiator has been killed in order to entertain the Romans. This personal projection is even more apparent if we consider the previous stanzas (130-138) in which Byron

¹⁵³ Byron, *CHP*, IV.139.1-9.

¹⁵⁴ Byron, *CHP*, IV.140.2.

expresses his feelings regarding the failure of his marriage and the consequent social environment which forced him to leave England. Suddenly, we are transformed from the image of the fighter's public death into the interior of his heart:

He heard it, but he heeded not—his eyes
Were with his heart, and that was far away;
He recked not of the life he lost nor prize,
But where his rude hut by the Danube lay,
THERE were his young barbarians all at play,
THERE was their Dacian mother—he, their sire,
Butchered to make a Roman holiday—
All this rushed with his blood—Shall he expire,
And unavenged? — Arise! ye Goths, and glut your ire!¹⁵⁵

Cheeke asserts that the significance of this passage resides in its double telescoping of historical perspectives.¹⁵⁶ In this very moment, the future invasions and subsequent downfall of Rome by the barbarian tribes are born. At the same time, Byron is commenting on contemporary Italian politics — specifically the possible reversal of the power between Italy and the Austrian Empire. If we apply the cyclical theory of history, then, if Italy can gain freedom and independence once, it will be able to do so again. As such, historical cycles can be liberating rather than always constraining. This concept is embodied in the figure of the Gladiator — he is dying in the “bloody circus” but he is also “There...”.¹⁵⁷

I would also like to pay attention to stanzas 104-106 as I believe they mark an important shift in the poet's spiritual journey. Standing in front of the tomb of Cecilia Metella, Byron feels a strange connection with its dweller: “but standing thus by thee / It seems as if I had thine inmate known.”¹⁵⁸ Here, he declares the death of his old self and seems determined to, at last,

¹⁵⁵ Byron, *CHP*, IV.141.1-9.

¹⁵⁶ Cheeke, “Byron, History and the Genius Loci,” 43.

¹⁵⁷ Cheeke, “Byron, History and the Genius Loci,” 43.

¹⁵⁸ Byron, *CHP*, IV.104.1-2.

break away from his past: “where should I steer? / There woos no home, nor hope, nor life, save what is here”.¹⁵⁹ The howling sea winds and the melancholy of the “the Owlets’ cry” singing to each other across the desolate Palatine shall be his “music” and offer solace from the continuous anxiety that plagues him. It seems that this moment offers a rare moment of tranquillity to the otherwise agonized poet: “Upon such a shrine / What are our petty griefs?”¹⁶⁰ It is this kind of poetic immediacy and carefully poised intimacy that greatly contributes to ensuring the lasting appeal of *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage*.

For Byron, the encounters with historical sites always ultimately lead to reflections of his own personal history, to intertwining of his own experiences and emotions with the broader course of human history. His mediations of history also give way to a profound critique of both social and political climate of his time — political corruption, imperialism, and the loss of individual as well as political freedoms. By juxtaposing the historical past with the present, Byron raises key questions about whether humanity has learned from its past mistakes and how the cycles of history continue to repeat themselves. This connection allows Byron to explore a wide range of emotions as well as to reflect on the passage of time and the transient nature of human existence. His introspective musings on the ruins of ancient civilizations serve as a vehicle for exploring universal themes of love, loss, and mortality and thereby creating a sense of lasting intimacy with his readers. Through his portrayal of historical figures and events, Byron establishes a connection with mankind itself, highlighting the shared struggles and triumphs of humanity across time and space. He celebrates the achievements of past civilizations while also acknowledging the flaws and shortcomings of human nature, creating a nuanced portrait of mankind that resonates with readers on a personal level.

¹⁵⁹ Byron, *CHP*, IV.105.8-9.

¹⁶⁰ Byron, *CHP*, IV.106.8-9.

2.1.4 To Breathe Without Mankind

The theme of nature is present in all four cantos of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* but this chapter shall focus on Cantos III and IV, where, I believe, the connection with nature is perhaps most palpable. The sublime beauty of nature allows Byron to escape and find solace from the burdens of society as well as his own introspective thoughts. He seeks refuge in the wilderness and mountain solitude as a means of achieving spiritual and emotional freedom with nature being portrayed as a powerful force capable of soothing Harold's/Byron's troubled soul by providing moments of tranquillity. The various natural landscapes, from the sublime such as the Alps or, the Ocean, to various, more pastoral settings, are depicted in vivid detail, praising their grandeur and elevating qualities. Nature as such becomes Harold's sanctuary, allowing him to reflect on his inner thoughts and emotions in solitude, but not loneliness.

The influence of Wordsworth's poetry, which was dosed to Byron by Shelley, is unmistakable at times. Still, we should not view Byron as an imitator of Wordsworth, as he was often dubbed. As Bernard Blackstone put it "poets are not closed shops, any more than mathematicians, physicists or biologists."¹⁶¹ Wordsworth's poetry often reflects his pantheistic beliefs which hold that God or a higher power can be found in nature and the natural world. He frequently portrays nature as a spiritual force that connects humans to the divine. But for Byron, the landscape often reflects his own state of mind, it as a reflection of his own melancholy and brooding personality. But in the course of the cantos there are some instances in which the poet does contemplate the idea of escaping into a transcendental union with nature.

The third canto can be seen as Byron's extensive exploration of the human capacity for forgiveness. Fleeing from England in the scandalous aftermath of his separation, his "heart and harp have lost a string"¹⁶² and Byron longs to find a way of recovery from his pain, to set

¹⁶¹ Bernard Blackstone, "Byron and the Levels of Landscape," *Ariel* 5, no.4 (October 1974): 4, <https://journalhosting.ucalgary.ca/index.php/ariel/article/view/32033> .

¹⁶² Byron, *CHP*, III.4.2.

himself free from the shackles of memory and find a way to go on living: “Forgetfulness around me — it shall seem / To me, through to none else, a not ungrateful theme.”¹⁶³ As discussed in one of the previous chapters (“The Child of Love”), the poet hopes to be relieved from the torment of memory through two activities: imaginative creativity and a communion with nature in the line of Wordsworth — to achieve “that blessed mood / In which the burthen of the mystery, / In which the heavy and the weary weight [...] Is lightened.”¹⁶⁴ Through poetic imagination, Byron hopes to acquire “a being more intense”, viewing poetic creation as a means of strengthening man’s relationship with nature.

Perhaps the most Wordsworthian sentiment is found at the beginning of stanza 72 as Byron asserts: “I live not in myself, but I become Portion of that around me; / High mountains are a feeling.”¹⁶⁵ Yet, his mind still cannot help but wonder to the “peopled desert past,” the place of “agony and strife” where “for some sin, to Sorrow I was cast / To act and suffer.”¹⁶⁶ Stanza 75 resumes this sentiment as the poet contemplates the intimate connection of man and nature:

Are not the mountains, waves, and skies a part
Of me and of my soul, as I of them?
Is not the love of these deep in my heart
With a pure passion?¹⁶⁷

But this contemplation is swiftly left gone off in the next stanza: “But this is not my theme; and I return / To that which is immediate.”¹⁶⁸

¹⁶³ Byron, *CHP*, III.4. 8-9.

¹⁶⁴ William Wordsworth, “Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey,” *Poetry Foundation*, accessed March 20, 2024, <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/45527/lines-composed-a-few-miles-above-tintern-abbey-on-revisiting-the-banks-of-the-wye-during-a-tour-july-13-1798> .

¹⁶⁵ Byron, *CHP*, III.72.1-3.

¹⁶⁶ Byron, *CHP*, III.73.2-5.

¹⁶⁷ Byron, *CHP*, III.75.1-4.

¹⁶⁸ Byron, *CHP*, III.76.1-2.

This dynamic is also evident in Byron's *Alpine Journal*, which offers a great insight into the state of his mind during this period. It becomes increasingly clear that even the majestic and serene nature of the Alps could not prevent Byron from casting his mind back to his painful departure. Even here, he is ridden with anxiety and haunted by memory. The nature offers only a momentary solace to his heart:

I was disposed to be pleased – I am a lover of Nature – and an Admirer of Beauty – I can bear fatigue – & welcome privation – and have seen some of the noblest views in the world. – But in all this – the recollections of bitterness – & more especially of recent & more home desolation – which must accompany me through life – have preyed upon me here – and neither the music of the Shepherd – the crashing of the Avalanche – nor the torrent – the mountain – the Glacier – the Forest – nor the Cloud – have for one moment – lightened the weight upon my heart...¹⁶⁹

It seems that no matter how majestic the sight, Byron's vision is always tinted with melancholy. Not even the beauty of Lake Lemman with its "chrysal face" which acts as a mirror in which "the stars and mountains view" cannot distract from his inner turmoil.¹⁷⁰ In the last three lines of the same stanza, Byron already suspects that within him "shall Loneliness renew."¹⁷¹ In other instances, he directly projects his personal vows onto the landscape — the mountains seem to him as "lovers who have parted / In hate" who shall "meet no more, though broken-hearted."¹⁷²

The profound emotions and the transformative power experienced in solitude are encapsulated in stanza 90. In the stillness of "All heaven and earth", standing in "thoughts too deep:", Byron is able to perceive the unity of nature: "All is concentrated in a life intense, Where not a beam, nor air, nor leaf is lost, / But hath a part of being."¹⁷³ In such moments, "stirs the

¹⁶⁹George Gordon Byron, *Byron's Alpine Journal*, ed. Peter Cochran, https://petercochran.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2009/03/alpine_journal.pdf .

¹⁷⁰ Byron, *CHP*, III.68.1-2.

¹⁷¹ Byron, *CHP*, III.68.7.

¹⁷² Byron, *CHP*, III.94.2-4.

¹⁷³ Byron, *CHP*, III.89.6-7.

feeling infinite, so felt / In solitude, where we are least alone.”¹⁷⁴ It is in the embrace of solitude when we are seemingly isolated that we are able to feel most profoundly the boundless connection to something that transcends our own being. This truth “melts” and cleanses our being and frees us from our own self-centeredness.¹⁷⁵ Byron compares this experience to the tone of music, which is the essence and origin of eternal harmony and its power has the ability to enchant us. The stanza concludes by suggesting that, if imbued with the ability to harm, this power of solitude could even defeat Death itself.

From the transformative power of solitude, the canto then moves on to some prime Byronic themes such as the madness of Rousseau or the mountain storm. The repetitive turn to such themes is what Robert Glecker has called “the ruination of paradise”¹⁷⁶ — from the “floating whisper on the hill” and “starlight dews”¹⁷⁷, the focus shifts to the familiar imagery of the “night, / And storm, and darkness.”¹⁷⁸ Before setting his sights on Italy at the conclusion of the canto, it nearly appears that Byron found within himself a new resurgence of energy: “The clouds above me to the white Alps tend, / And I must pierce them, and survey whate’er / May be permitted.”¹⁷⁹

As the poem progresses into the last canto, Byron’s perception of nature becomes increasingly nuanced. The poet begins to realize that the natural world, although grand and breath-taking, also conceals within itself pain and suffering. It is in this final canto that Byron explores the juxtaposition of beauty and destruction and reveals the darker aspects of nature which coexist alongside its captivating beauty. Byron also pays close attention to the interconnectedness between nature and history. Describing the sinking ruin of Venice, the

¹⁷⁴ Byron, *CHP*, III.90.1-2.

¹⁷⁵ Byron, *CHP*, III.90.3.

¹⁷⁶ Robert Glecker, *Byron and the Ruins of Paradise* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1967), 251.

¹⁷⁷ Byron, *CHP*, III.87.5-6.

¹⁷⁸ Byron, *CHP*, III.92.1-2.

¹⁷⁹ Byron, *CHP*, III.109.5-7.

enduring power of nature is contrasted with the transience of human achievements: “Beauty still is here. / States fall, Arts fade – but Nature doth not die.”¹⁸⁰ The image of a ruin continues well into the canto, such as when Byron tells us of Italy:

Thou art the garden of the world, the home
Of all Art yields, and Nature can decree;
Even in thy desart, what is like to thee?
Thy very weeds are beautiful, thy waste
More rich than other climes’ fertility;
Thy wreck a glory, and thy ruin graced
With an immaculate charm which can not be defaced.¹⁸¹

Despite being a “wreck”, Italy remains enchanting despite its ruined state.¹⁸² The country is wrapped in the allure of art, shielded from the setbacks of history, and governed by the laws of nature.¹⁸³ Byron recognized this unique connection between nature and art earlier, in Venice where despite the rise and fall of states and the fading of artistic glory, nature endures and remembers the once beloved city. Italy, being the “the garden of the world”, stands as a testament to the heavenly touch of nature.¹⁸⁴ Even in its ruins, this special bond is evident as nature adorns the rundown structures with its foliage. For Byron, the ruined landmarks of Italy reflect not only history's tendency towards destruction but they also serve as platforms on which nature redeems the mistakes of the past and adorns them with its beauty. Man may shape the natural world and leave behind the ruins and remnants of ancient civilizations but in the end, it is nature that gradually reclaims these historical sites and thus ultimately blurs the distinction between the natural and the man-made, beautifying and rendering meaningless man’s plight and desire to rule over his surroundings over aeons of time.

¹⁸⁰ Byron, *CHP*, IV.3.5-6.

¹⁸¹ Byron, *CHP*, IV.26.3-9.

¹⁸² Byron, *CHP*, IV.26.8.

¹⁸³ Mauro Pala, “The Garden of the World,” in *Byron and Italy*, 84-85.

¹⁸⁴ Byron, *CHP*, IV.26.3.

The motif of the sea is one that is central not only to Byron's poetry but also to his life even earning him the title of “the poet of the sea.”¹⁸⁵ Byron found solace and a profound sense of personal liberation in its embrace which enabled him to transcend the physical constraints of his club foot through the act of swimming. In his work, sea acts as a metaphor for eternity and depth but also passion. This sentiment is echoed in stanza 178 in which Byron expresses the pleasure found in unpopulated natural landscapes and where the “deep Sea” with its “Music” and “roar” becomes a source of both sensory delight and emotional resonance:¹⁸⁶

There is a pleasure in the pathless woods,
There is a rapture on the lonely shore,
There is society, where none intrudes,
By the deep Sea, and Music in its roar;
I love not Man the less, but Nature more,
From these our interviews, in which I steal
From all I may be, or have been before,
To mingle with the Universe, and feel
What I can ne'er express – yet cannot all conceal.¹⁸⁷

In the final stanzas of the concluding canto, the Ocean is represented as a supreme power, an autonomous entity, an eternal source of life and energy. Leaders and empires may fall but the Ocean remains unchangeable “save for thy wild waves’ play — / Time writes no wrinkle on thine azure brow.”¹⁸⁸ Byron’s Ocean is “Dark-heaving;—boundless, endless, and sublime” and even “the oak leviathans” are the Ocean’s toys that “as the snowy flake / They melt into thy yeast of waves.”¹⁸⁹ To Byron the sea is “the Alpha of existence”, “The image of

¹⁸⁵ Alexander Pushkin, “To The Sea,” *Russian Legacy*, accessed March 21, 2024, <https://russianlegacy.com/poetry-pushkin-to-the-sea> .

¹⁸⁶ Byron, *CHP*, IV.178.4.

¹⁸⁷ Byron, *CHP*, IV.178.1-9.

¹⁸⁸ Byron, *CHP*, IV.182.7-8.

¹⁸⁹ Byron, *CHP*, IV.183.5.

Eternity”¹⁹⁰ that goes “forth, dread, fathomless, alone.”¹⁹¹ Here, the Ocean becomes an “infinitely objective consciousness”, able to perceive the course of human history.¹⁹² Charles Swinburne asserts that Byron’s stanzas to the Ocean showcase that his “spirit is mingled with the sea’s and overlooks with a superb delight the ruins and the prayers of men.”¹⁹³

The address to the Ocean is concluded by Byron’s moving and deeply personal stanza, describing the touching life-long companionship that has existed between him and that “glorious Mirror”:¹⁹⁴

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.¹⁹⁵

The Ocean has been Byron’s trusted companion since his youth so much that he feels himself to be “a child of thee,”¹⁹⁶ echoing the sentiment found in the third canto: “Where roll’d the ocean, thereon was his home.”¹⁹⁷ The image of the Ocean is transformed into that of a beloved horse — a powerful but tamed animal, on whose “Mane” Byron can lay his hand once again.¹⁹⁸ As is typical for Byron, the exchange with the Ocean bears some eroticised aspects in terms of

¹⁹⁰ Byron, *CHP*, IV.183.6.

¹⁹¹ Byron, *CHP* IV.183.9.

¹⁹² McGann, *Fiery Dust*, 136.

¹⁹³ Charles Algernon Swinburne, *A Selection from the Works of Lord Byron* (Whitefish: Kessinger Publishing, 2007), xv.

¹⁹⁴ Byron, *CHP*, IV.183.1.

¹⁹⁵ Byron, *CHP*, IV.184.1-9.

¹⁹⁶ Byron, *CHP*, IV.184.7.

¹⁹⁷ Byron, *CHP*, III.13.2.

¹⁹⁸ Byron, *CHP*, IV.184.9.

both agon and natural ontology.¹⁹⁹ The poet is both being dominated by (“trusted”) and dominating (“laid my hand upon”) as though the Ocean is a living thing capable of relation.²⁰⁰ Furthermore, the emphasis on regaining youthful vigour echoes the introductory stanzas dedicated to Venice — just as the Ocean persists in spite of apparent destruction, the same can be said for the future existence of Venice and Byron. Thus, when Byron describes Venice as a “ruin adorned with an untarnishable charm”, he foretells his own future. Even when both Venice and Byron are obliterated, they will endure in the dreams and imaginations of humanity.²⁰¹

¹⁹⁹ Mirka Horová, “Headlong he leapt--to him the swimmer's skill / Was native': Byron at Sea,” *Byron Journal* 47, no. 1 (June 2019): 9, Gale Literary Sources, <https://doi-org.ezproxy.is.cuni.cz/10.3828/bj.2019.4> .

²⁰⁰ Bernard Beatty, “Oceans and Lakes: Byron's Interactions,” *Byron Journal* 47, no. 2 (December 2019): 129, Gale Literary Sources, <https://doi-org.ezproxy.is.cuni.cz/10.3828/bj.2019.19> .

²⁰¹ McGann, *Fiery Dust*, 137.

2.2 Physical Intimacy

2.2.1 Spain's Dark Glancing Daughters

In these following two chapters, I will return back to the first two cantos of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* which are rich with vivid portrayals of erotic encounters. I will be focusing on two instances of such intimacy — the eroticized portrayal of the Spanish women of Cádiz and the homoerotic relations at the opulent court of Ali Pasha. The exotic settings of Spain and Albania serve as fitting backdrops for the exploration of passion and desire and help to evoke a sense of adventure and escapism, allowing readers to indulge in the thrill of their forbidden desires. Byron was able to precisely capture the spirit of these places, creating an authentic picture of the vibrant landscapes and their captivating inhabitants. Moreover, Byron's portrayal of physical intimacy serves as a selling point for his readers, offering a glimpse into the far-away lands that are both exotic and alluring.

The turn of the nineteenth century saw an increasing interest of the British public in Spanish history, language and culture. The main catalyst for this was the Peninsula War — the rebellion against the Napoleonic occupation, beginning in 1808 and lasting until 1814. This conflict turned Britain's archnemesis into a “beacon of political and cultural renewal.”²⁰² As such, it caught attention of the Romantics. Some of the most famous engagements of the British romantics with the southern country include William Wordsworth's *Cintra* (1809), Robert Southey's *Roderick* (1814) and, of course, Canto I of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*. Byron was one of the few writers — alongside Thomas Moore, Felicia Hemans and Thomas Stott, supportive of the country both during the Napoleonic episode and the following French

²⁰² Diego Saglia, “Introduction: Spain and British Romanticism,” in *Spain in British Romanticism: 1800-1840*, ed. Diego Saglia and Ian Haywood (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2018), 7. ProQuest, <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/cuni/detail.action?docID=5210821> .

invasion. Byron expressed his support for the Spanish cause for the first time in “The Girl of Cadiz” (1809).²⁰³

Before embarking on his journey, Byron was rather indecisive of its destination. At first, he thought of going to Russia, India, Persia or “to the Mediterranean, or to the West Indies, or to the devil.”²⁰⁴ Byron’s journey to Spain was a result of a series of accidents, he describes the circumstances accompanying his departure in a letter to Henry Drury:

We sail tomorrow in the Lisbon packet. ... The Malta vessel not sailing for some weeks we have determined to go by way of Lisbon, and as my servants term it to see ‘that there *Portingale*’ thence to Cadiz and Gibraltar and so on our old route to Malta and Constantinople”.²⁰⁵

Ultimately, it seems that the goal was to go anywhere in order to not stay in England, later he wrote: “any thing is better than England, and I am infinitely amused with my pilgrimage as far as it has gone.”²⁰⁶

Upon his arrival, Byron was undeniably captivated by the “renown’d, romantic” land.²⁰⁷ This is apparent from his correspondence: “I shall return to Spain before I see England, for I am enamoured of the country.”²⁰⁸ With its beautiful nature, egalitarianism and sensual women, Spain serves as a kind of safe haven that shields Byron from the austerity of his native north. The portrayal of Spain as a kind of Promised Land helps to balance Harold’s weariness and despair, which is apparent from passages describing the brutal and chaotic conflict.

²⁰³ Agustin Coletes Blanco, “A ‘Romantic Land’ Twice Invaded, and Twice Supported: Byron, Hemans, Moore, and ‘Hark’ on Spain, 1808-14 and 1820-23,” *Byron Journal* 48, no.1 (June 2020): 34, Gale Literary Sources, <https://doi-org.ezproxy.is.cuni.cz/10.3828/bj.2020.5>.

²⁰⁴ Byron, “Letter to Elizabeth Bridget Pigot of 26th October 1807,” *The Works of Lord Byron: Letters and Journals Vol. 1*, ed. Rowland E. Prothero (London: John Murray, 1898), 145.

²⁰⁵ Byron, “Letter to Henry Drury of 28th June 1809,” in *The Works of Lord Byron: Letters and Journals Vol. 1*, ed. Rowland E. Prothero (London: John Murray, 1898), 225.

²⁰⁶ Byron, “Letter to Francis Hodgson of 16th July 1809,” *The Works of Lord Byron: Letters and Journals Vol. 1*, ed. Rowland E. Prothero (London: John Murray, 1898), 231.

²⁰⁷ Byron, *CHP*, I.35.1

²⁰⁸ Byron, “Letter to Francis Hodgson of 6th August 1809,” *The Works of Lord Byron: Letters and Journals Vol. 1*, ed. Rowland E. Prothero (London: John Murray, 1898), 234.

The culmination of Harold's romantic notion of Spain is found in the lines describing Cádiz, the place Byron regarded as "the most delightful town I ever beheld" and, more importantly, "full of thee finest women in Spain."²⁰⁹ The poet is so enchanted by the city and its inhabitants that he feels that it recalls Eden: "Cadiz, sweet Cadiz! – the first spot in the creation."²¹⁰ The first description of the fair ladies of Cádiz is as follows:

Yet are Spain's maids no race of Amazons,
But formed for all the witching arts of love:
Though thus in arms they emulate her sons,
And in the horrid phalanx dare to move,
'Tis but the tender fierceness of the dove
Pecking the hand that hovers o'er her mate:²¹¹

Here, Byron suggests that contrary to the notion of Spanish women being fierce and ardent like the mythical Amazons, they possess a certain softness and charm that make them romantically captivating. Despite their ability to take on men in battle, they are inherently gentle and affectionate creatures and Byron compares their fierceness to that of a dove which may peck at a hand that hovers over its mate but ultimately displays tenderness. As such, Byron depicts Spanish women as complex and enticing creatures who possess both strength and softness and are able to embody not only the roles of lovers but also warriors.

In the next stanza, the adoration for the alluring capabilities of the maids takes on a more erotic tone:

Her lips, whose kisses pout to leave their nest,
Bid man be valiant ere he merit such:
Her glance, how wildly beautiful! how much
Hath Phoebus wooed in vain to spoil her cheek

²⁰⁹ Byron, "Letter to His Mother of 11th August 1809," in *The Works of Lord Byron: Letters and Journals Vol. 1*, ed. Rowland E. Prothero (London: John Murray, 1898), 236.

²¹⁰ Byron, "Letter to Francis Hodgson of 6th August 1809," 235.

²¹¹ Byron, *CHP*, I.57.1-6.

Which glows yet smoother from his amorous clutch!²¹²

Here, Byron creates a picture of Spanish women as almost siren-like creatures with intense and captivating glances whose lips are so enticing that they alone encourage men to be brave enough in order to be worthy of their kisses. Even Phoebus, the god of light, tried in vain to spoil the women's beauty, but their allure still remains. These captivating women make Byron think of the dames of his native England, who are lacking in comparison to their southern counterparts: “Who round the North for paler dames would seek? / How poor their forms appear? how languid, wan, and weak!”²¹³

Unfortunately, unlike Byron's relationships with Greece or Italy, very little attention is given to his engagement with Spain. The Spanish stanzas of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* are of utmost significance as they are the first to exhibit Byron's poetic take on eroticism as we have come to know it. Eroticism would go on to become an essential aspect inseparable from both Byron and his work. It would also form, as Jonathan Gross asserts, the foundation of Byron's political outlook.²¹⁴ This romantic country would go on to inspire Byron in writing his masterpiece *Don Juan* (1819) or *The Age of Bronze* (1823).

The portrayal of Spanish women in an erotic manner imbues the poem with an additional dimension of sensuality and fascination. Byron depicts Spanish women as alluring and seductive sirens, perhaps hoping to ignite a feeling of desire in his readers and transport them to a world of fantasy and adventure. By contrasting them with their British counterparts, the poet further highlights the sense of exoticism and mystery of the Spanish setting. Through the celebration of the sensuality and freedom of Spanish women, Byron once again creates a critique of his homeland — specifically, the social norms and constraints imposed upon women.

²¹² Byron, *CHP*, I.58. 3-7.

²¹³ Byron, *CHP*, I.58. 8-9.

²¹⁴ Jonathan David Gross, *Byron: The Erotic Liberal* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2000), 15.

2.2.2 At the Court of Ali Pasha

One of the key components behind the phenomenal success of the first two cantos of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* is certainly the description of the largely unknown and unexplored parts of Europe that proved to be exotic and thus attractive for the British reading public as well as other European readers of Byron's time. If we think of European regions most inaccessible to the British readers of the early nineteenth century — given that large swathes of the Continent were off limits due to the ongoing Napoleonic Wars — we should look no further than Albania. After all, in one of the notes to the second canto, Byron writes: “Of Albania Gibbon remarks, that a country ‘within sight of Italy is less known than the interior of America’.”²¹⁵ Moreover, Byron's/Harold's experiences in this mysterious country have a heavy homosexual overtone. Byron's private correspondence and journals contain numerous intimate descriptions and expressions of affection towards many of his male companions and Harold's admiration for their physical allure and longing for the kind of intimacy shared among them permeate the entirety of the canto. As such, most of the passages discussed in this chapter shall be those from the original manuscript, later removed on the advice of Byron's friends.

Byron was undoubtedly enchanted by the wild and beautiful country. In contrast to the other countries Byron visited during his unusual Grand Tour, Albania managed to remain unspoilt by civilisation. John Cam Hobhouse, Byron's friend and travelling companion, was equally charmed and would later describe this part of their shared voyage in his *Journey Through Albania* (1813). The ruler of the country was a feared and ruthless warlord whose military exploits earned him the title of “Napoleon of the East.”²¹⁶ Although formally submitted to the power of the sultan, Ali managed to remain independent through his connections with both France and England. Peter Cochran believes that Byron and Hobhouse ventured into

²¹⁵ George Gordon Byron, “Byron's Notes to Cantos I-II,” in *Lord Byron: The Major Works*, ed. Jerome J. McGann (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 87.

²¹⁶Crompton, *Byron and Greek Love*, 133.

Albania after their encounter with the British Consul, Spiridion Foresti, who persuaded them to abandon their initial plans of traveling to Egypt in favour of Albania. Cochran argues that Byron was sent as a kind of “apologetic sweetener” for the Ionian Islands – promised to Ali Pasha before the authorities changed their minds.²¹⁷

The duo was first shown Ali’s lavish palace by the Albanian governor and after a short stay at Janina, they set off on an eight-day journey through the wild terrain to Tepelenë.²¹⁸ Here they encountered the feared warlord. Byron describes the meeting in a letter to his mother as follows:

The Vizier received me in a large room paved with marble, a fountain was playing in the centre, the apartment was surrounded by scarlet Ottomans. He received me standing, a wonderful compliment from a Mussulman, & made me sit down on his right hand...His first question was why at so early an age I left my country?...He said I was certain I was a man of birth because I had small ears, curling hair, & little white hands, and expressed himself pleased with my appearance & garb.—He told me to consider him as a father whilst I was in Turkey, & said he looked on me as his son.—Indeed he treated me like a child, sending me almond & sugared sherbet, fruit & sweetmeats 20 times a day.—He begged me to visit him often, and at night when he was more at leisure.²¹⁹

Determining the motive behind such generous treatment of Byron is rather difficult. As far as his response to it, we can be sure of one thing; Byron was very proud of his aristocratic background and thus it is safe to assume that he was very flattered by Ali’s recognition of his noble features and stature. Some critics believe that a reason for this treatment was the fact that Byron had sexual relations with Ali or that he was a diplomatic envoy.²²⁰ But the recent research

²¹⁷ George Gordon Byron, *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage I and II*, ed. Peter Cochran, <https://petercochran.files.wordpress.com/2009/03/chp123.pdf>.

²¹⁸ Crompton, *Byron and Greek Love*, 137.

²¹⁹ George Gordon Byron, “Letter to His Mother of 12 November 1809,” *The Works of Lord Byron: Letters and Journals Vol. 1*, ed. Rowland E. Prothero (London: John Murray, 1898), 246.

²²⁰ Leslie A. Marchand, *Byron: A Biography* (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1957)

conducted by G. B. Rizzoli sheds some new light on the nature of the visit as well as the treatment of both Byron and Hobhouse.

It is clear from the letter above that Byron was under the impression that Ali Pasha was enamoured with him. But Ali had simply followed the same procedure as he did with most Western visitors; feed, house, flatter, spy on and manipulate. In addition, the unplanned arrival of two relatively unknown Englishmen was even more suspicious and the two were put under surveillance almost immediately. Unaware of these procedures, the two Brits fancied themselves special guests receiving luxurious treatment at the hands of the powerful warlord. But the true goal of such treatment was to obtain information, money or other services. The cold treatment of the two by Captain William Leake, the British consul at Ioannina, further supports the notion that Byron was not a diplomatic envoy but just another aristocrat on his Grand Tour.²²¹

As Byron notes in his letter, he perceived Ali receiving him standing as a “great compliment” but in reality, this was just one of the techniques Ali used to flatter his guests. Other important figures of the court, such as Ali’s son, received the two sitting. The delicacies sent to Byron were, in fact, just the ruler’s way of avoiding dining with the Englishmen. Ali’s use of a paternal attitude towards those he regarded as inferior was also commonplace. Ali analysed the appearance of his guests with the sole purpose of uncovering their real identity and intentions. The comments on Byron’s appearance have puzzled critics and led to much discussion, including the possibility of a sexual encounter. Hobhouse noted that Ali “looked a little leeringly” at Byron and questioned “how he could have had the heart to leave his

²²¹ G.B.Rizzoli, “Fact and Fantasy in Byron's Encounters with Ali Pasha: With a New Byron Letter,” *Byron Journal* 48, no.1 (June 2020): 21, Gale Literary Sources, <https://doi-org.ezproxy.is.cuni.cz/10.3828/bj.2020.4> .

mother.”²²² This suggests that Byron was viewed as a young sexually available boy who shouldn’t have left the care of his mother to expose himself to danger.²²³

Based on Rizzoli’s article, Albania had a rather distinct system of sexuality; the locals deemed the two as effeminate and young enough to serve as sex objects — Byron in particular, due to his feminine appearance. As such, Byron wouldn’t have been shown, much less offered, the prostitute transvestite boy dancers (*köçekler*) described both in Canto II and Hobhouse’s notes. These companions were reserved only for “manlier” visitors. What’s more, at the time of the visit, Ali was amidst negotiations with the British government and being well aware that Byron was a member of the British Parliament, any kind of proposition of such nature was out of question as it was deemed offensive by the local customs.²²⁴ Byron’s physical attraction to Ali is also questionable. When choosing male lovers, Byron had a preference for younger attractive men, as attested by his relationships with Nicolo Giraud or Loukas Chalandritsanos. Therefore, any kind of attraction on Byron’s behalf for the man he described as “very fat, and not tall” seems rather unlikely.²²⁵

However, there were other, more alluring men present at the court — the transvestite boy dancers, mentioned earlier. They are documented in various accounts — in his *Memoir on the Ionic Islands...Including the Life and Character of Ali Pacha*, de Vaudoncourt described Ali as someone who “is almost exclusively given up to Socratic pleasures, and for this purpose keeps up a seraglio of youths, from whom he selects his confidants, and even his principal

²²² John Cam Hobhouse, *The Diary of John Cam Hobhouse*, ed. Peter Cochran, <https://petercochran.files.wordpress.com/2009/12/04-greece2.pdf>.

²²³ Rizzoli, “Fact and Fantasy in Byron's Encounters with Ali Pasha,” 20-21.

²²⁴ Rizzoli, “Fact and Fantasy in Byron's Encounters with Ali Pasha,” 24-26.

²²⁵ Byron, “Letter to His Mother of 12 November 1809,” 246.

officers.”²²⁶ Hobhouse described these attendants as “young persons very magnificently dressed in the Albanian habit, and having their hair flowing half way down their backs.”²²⁷

Byron describes these men in the removed lines (5-9) of stanza 61, which depict Ali’s headquarters in Tepelenë. Later, these lines were replaced by a meditation of oriental motherhood:

For boyish minions of unhallowed love
The shameless torch of wild desire is lit,
Caressed, preferred even woman’s self above,
Whose forms for Nature’s gentler errors fit
All frailties mote excuse save that which they commit.²²⁸

The “unhallowed love” among the men of the court has deep religious roots. It is believed that the tribesmen, who stood behind the introduction of homosexual relations into the Greek military regiment, came from these parts. Georg von Hahn, a diplomat and a specialist on Albanian culture, described the men of Albania as follows: “young men between 16 and 24 love boys from about 12 to 17. A Gege marries at the age of 24 or 25, and then he usually, but not always gives up boy-love.”²²⁹ As an avid reader of Oriental literature, Byron was well-aware of the customs of the region. As a result, he even chose to send his beloved page, Robert Rushton, famously depicted alongside Byron in “Byron Landing from a Boat”, back home before leaving for Malta. He wrote about the reasoning to his mother: “but you know boys are not safe amongst the Turks.”²³⁰ Byron’s own infatuation with the men of Albania was apparent. In the same letter, he describes these men as “the most beautiful race in point of countenance

²²⁶ Frédéric Guillaume de Vaudoncourt, *Memoir on the Ionic Islands...Including the Life and Character of Ali Pacha* (London: Baldwin, Cradock and Joy, 1816), 278.

²²⁷ Hobhouse, *The Diary of John Cam Hobhouse*, 74.

²²⁸ Byron, “Canto I and II,” II.61.5-9.

²²⁹ Johann Georg von Hahn cited in Louis Crompton, *Byron and Greek Love* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 133.

²³⁰ Byron, “Letter to His Mother of 15th September 1809,” *The Works of Lord Byron: Letters and Journals Vol. I*, ed. Rowland E. Prothero (London: John Murray, 1898), 243.

in the world”, “They are totally unlike our lads, have painted complexions like rouged dowagers, large black eyes & features perfectly regular. They are the prettiest little animals I ever saw.”²³¹

This next removed stanza cryptically describes Childe Harold’s stay at the court:

Childe Harold with that chief held colloquy,
Yet what they spake, it boots not to repeat,
Converse may little charm strange ear, or eye; –
Four days he rested in that spacious seat
Of Moslem luxury, the choice retreat
Of sated Grandeur from the city’s noise,
And were it humbler, it in sooth were sweet;
But Peace abhorreth artificial joys,
And Pleasure, leagued with Pomp, the zest of both destroys.²³²

These lines reveal that if there was anything that made the hero uncomfortable during his stay at the court, it was the opulent environment and certainly not the ever-present homoerotic display of affection. While the place is comfortable, it is, ultimately, superficial. The poet suggests that true contentment cannot be achieved through grandeur and if pleasures are combined with "Pomp", their true essence is lost. This sentiment is further illustrated by the original stanzas, VI and VII, of the song of the Suliotes — Tambourgi! Tambourgi!:

I ask not the pleasures that riches supply,
My Sabre shall win what the feeble must buy;
Shall win the young minions with long-flowing hair,
And many a maid from her mother shall tear.²³³

²³¹ Byron, “Letters to Catherine Gordon Byron of 12th November 1809,” *Byron’s Correspondence and Journals Vol. 2*, ed. Peter Cochran, <https://petercochran.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2009/02/02-mediterranean-1809-181126.pdf> .

²³² Byron, “Canto I and II,” 7.

²³³ Byron, “Tambourghi,” 6.

Harold does not seek pleasures that can be provided by wealth. Rather, he believes that his strength will reward him with the admiration and affection of the young, attractive men as well as young women. The next stanza reveals the yearning for physical affection:

I love the fair face of the maid, and the youth,
Their caresses shall lull us, their voices shall soothe;
Let them bring from their chambers their many-toned lyres,
And sing us a song on the fall of their Sires.²³⁴

Here, the speaker asserts his love for the beauty of both young men and women, who can bring him comfort with their voice and physical affection. The subject of the song request brings a rather melancholic element to this otherwise idyllic scene.

Byron, of course, had to adhere to the social norms of his time and as such, these lines, describing his longing for both men and women, certainly could not be published. As a result, “The young minions with long flowing hair” would be rewritten to “young bride with her flowing hair.”²³⁵ Conversely, “the fair face of the maid, and the youth” would later go on to become “the fair face of the maid in her youth.”²³⁶

It is also important to note the plethora of orientalist clichés showcased in the Albanian stanzas. For example, in his description of Muslim women, Byron highlights the limited freedom and the strict supervision imposed on them: “And scarce permitted, guarded, veil’d, to move, / She yields to one her person and her heart.”²³⁷ More stereotypes surface in the poet’s description of the diverse inhabitants of Ali’s court:

Some high-capp’d Tartar spurr’d his steed away:
The Turk, the Greek, the Albanian, and the Moor,
Here mingled in their many-hued array,

²³⁴ Byron, “Tambourghi,” 7.1-4

²³⁵ Byron, “Tambourghi,” 7.1.

²³⁶ Byron, “Tambourghi,” 6.3.

²³⁷ Byron, *CHP*, II.6.2-3.

While the deep war-drum's sound announc'd the close of day.²³⁸

The wild Albanian kirtled to his knee,
With shawl-girt head and ornamented gun,
And gold-embroider'd garments, fair to see;
The crimson-scarfed men of Macedon,²³⁹

Byron's vivid descriptions of the different cultures' attire and appearance enhance the exotic nature and otherness of these people and further contribute to the adventurous mood of the poem. Such descriptions, portraying the various cultures as mysterious and vibrant, feed into the Romantic fascination with the Orient.

We can once again conclude that reality proves to be much less exciting than fiction. It seems that Byron's unawareness of Ali's cunning techniques and ulterior motives gave way to his fantasy of the ruler being somehow charmed by him. No real intimate encounter ever occurred between the two but the visit to Albania and the meeting with Ali would go on to become an important source of inspiration for Byron, as attested in *Childe Harold* and later in *Don Juan*. In the end, Byron played the part of just another unremarkable Western aristocrat visiting Albania. As Rizzoli puts it: "There was nothing special about Byron's Tepelenë visit except his ability to transform it imaginatively."²⁴⁰

In the discussed passages of the canto, we see Harold encounter a diverse array of intimate interactions at the court of Ali Pasha, each with its own implications and significance. Ali Pasha is described as a figure of immense power, surrounded by courtiers whose primary aim is to cultivate intimate ties with the ruler for the sake of acquiring influence. Byron highlights the intimate dynamics of power and authority underlying the relationships at the

²³⁸ Byron, *CHP*, II.57.6-9.

²³⁹ Byron, *CHP*, II.58.1-4.

²⁴⁰ Rizzoli, "Fact and Fantasy in Byron's Encounters with Ali Pasha," 28.

court — relationships marked by alliances, betrayals, and struggles for dominance. Moreover, the portrayal of homoerotic relations introduces a different form of intimacy into the poem. Harold observes the presence of intimate relationships between men, a phenomenon prevalent within the British aristocratic circles but concealed due to social taboos; in contrast, within Ali Pasha's court, such relationships are openly displayed. This exploration of homoerotic relationships adds depth to the poem's exploration of intimacy, challenging conventional notions of love and desire. The depiction of the court of Ali Pasha offers us a multifaceted exploration of intimacy, one that's closely connected with power, desire and betrayal.

3 Conclusion

Childe Harold's Pilgrimage serves as a great testament to Byron's intricate exploration of intimacy in all its different shapes and forms. In his exploration of both emotional and physical intimacy, Byron challenges the traditional notions of what intimacy is and moves past the superficial boundaries of romantic love or erotic infatuation. The poet offers us a more nuanced perspective, including friendships, family as well as one's profound connection with nature and history. Throughout the poem, intimacy enables Byron to explore and reflect upon the trials and wonders of the human experience in general as well as his own in particular.

In this bachelor thesis, I attempted to examine the various ways in which intimacy is portrayed in this long and varied narrative poem as well as analyse the ways in which it is rendered and poeticised throughout, taking into account Byron's own turbulent personal life which certainly plays a key role when it comes to portrayal of intimacy in the poem. *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* can thus be perceived as not only a meditation on the human condition but also a profound reflection of Byron's own life, with all the different experiences that helped to shape his unique poetic voice. The analysis of the publication history of *Childe Harold* provides a historical literary context, which enriches our understanding of these evolving depictions of intimacy, significantly influenced by Byron's complex sexuality and turbulent relationships pitched against the social constraints of his time.

Byron's tender verses, composed upon hearing of the premature deaths of his friend and lover, John Edleston, and a friend from his Harrow days, John Wingfield, form the closing of the first two cantos of the poem. These verses showcase Byron's vulnerability as he reflects on his own feelings in the wake of these tragic events, which enabled him to meditate on the long-lasting impact of emotional connections and its intricate nature, with all its beauty and the subsequent pain, which accompanies the loss of a beloved person. In the farewell to his infant daughter, Ada, we get a unique glimpse of Byron in the role of a father, who is both anxious

and hopeful about the future of his then only daughter. These verses, with their profound vulnerability and openness, constitute a unique point within the poem and certainly helped to humanize Byron to his readers, following the aftermath of his exile from England, and thus help win back his readership. Byron's incorporation of his own personal sorrows and heartbreaks into the narrative not only helps to create a further sense of authenticity and depth to the poem but also paints Byron as man of great sensitivity and emotional depth, who longs for connection — an aspect that still resonates with readers.

For Byron, nature and history do not figure as mere backdrops to poetic action. The world of nature functions as a mirror of his innermost feelings as well as a source of inspiration and solace, offering a refuge from the “peopled desert.”²⁴¹ The mountains, rivers and forests are his “Companionship” speaking a “mutual language.”²⁴² It is in the solitude of nature that the poet can fully perceive the interconnectedness of himself and the universe. Here, as in variety of Byron's work, the image of the Ocean holds a special importance — it is depicted as a dear and familiar companion since Byron's childhood days in Scotland but also an autonomous powerful, sublime entity, unchanged by the flow of time. The enduring nature of the Ocean reflects that of Venice and ultimately, Byron himself, suggesting their lasting impact on the imagination of humankind. Furthermore, the various historical sites give way to the poet's reflections of his own history and result in the contemplation of themes such as love, loss, and mortality. The address of such universal themes only further adds to the sense of intimacy established between the poet and his readers. Byron's examination of the course of human history also gives way to his critique of imperialism, greed and corruption. Overall, the vivid descriptions of natural landscapes and historical sites help to bridge the gap between the

²⁴¹ Byron, *CHP*, III.73.2.

²⁴² Byron, *CHP*, III.6-7.

external world and the poet's own internal emotional landscape, revealing the interconnectedness of the self with the cosmos.

But Harold's journey also leads us to the more alluring and sensual territories, notably those of Spain and Albania. The eroticised depiction of the ladies of Cádiz as passionate and siren-like creatures, adds an aura of sensuality to the poem, captivating the readers and indulging their fantasies. The women's allegedly lascivious nature prompts Byron to compare them to the "paler dames" of his homeland and critique the social constraints imposed on them.²⁴³ In Albania, the poet paints a picture of an opulent and almost decadent court of Ali Pasha. Here, intimacy is simply a powerful tool for advancing one's interests and authority. Furthermore, the portrayal of homoerotic relations, which are so openly displayed at the court, brings a new kind of intimacy to the poem. Byron's depiction of these erotic and homoerotic themes challenges the social norms of his time and enriches the poem with a broader spectrum of human intimacy.

Although the poem is structured as a travelogue, Byron chooses to shift his focus away from the external world of action and adventure and instead, turns inward, to the hero's soul and the narrator's contemplation of the various loci of European history. Harold is portrayed as an introspective and fragile hero dealing with his own existential questions and various emotional trials. Through his exploration of various types of human connection, Byron paints a nuanced picture of intimacy, presenting it as both a vital and magnificent part of the human experience as well as a source of sorrow and lasting pain. The honesty of Byron's depiction of romantic entanglements and the emotional turmoil, which comes with the subsequent disillusionment, I believe, presents one of the vital points that make the poem relatable to contemporary readers. As such, *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* undoubtedly remains a key work

²⁴³ Byron *CHP*, I.58.8.

of Romantic poetry, inviting readers to contemplate the intricate nature of intimacy and the enduring significance of human connections. Through this exploration, Byron's legacy of the “aristocratic rebel” endures, his influence reaching far beyond the literary realm into the cultural and historical discourse and popular culture.²⁴⁴

²⁴⁴ Gross, *Byron: The Erotic Liberal*, 15

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