Byron and the Levels of Landscape

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BYRON'S status as a "Nature poet" has always been ambiguous, and will continue to be so for as long as critics are content to see him as a bastard son of Wordsworth.[1] Of a Wordsworthian influence in his verse there can be no doubt; poets are not closed shops, any more than mathematicians, physicists or biologists. But Byron's ecological poetry is as much a reply to Wordsworth as a derivative from him. His "Nature tortured twenty thousand ways" (*Don Juan*, V, lii) is a victim as much of poets as profiteers.

"Ecological poetry" is a vile phrase but may serve to focus certain distinctions. Almost alone among the Romantics, Byron felt the vulnerability of the environment. Almost alone, again, he refuses to divorce the countryside from the city. With the Augustans, and with Blake — "Where man is not, nature is barren" — he sees Nature as a landscape with figures. Man interacts with his environment on the physical, the spiritual and the mythical level. There is a passing in and out whereby man becomes more natural, the landscape more human.

Man is a contract-making animal and he is not too keen on sticking to his contracts. Israel's covenant with Jehovah is replaced by Christianity's "new small-rented lease,"[2] and this may be upset by a Faustian pact with the Devil. The marriage partnership is a fragile affair. The famous "Social Contract" thought up by Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau crumbled before the onslaught of the French Revolution. Wordsworth in England, Chateaubriand in France "yielded up moral questions in despair." Where was a new insurance against the basic instability of the human condition to be found? Not for Wordsworth the optimistic but

basically mechanistic "unholy alliance" of science and poetry concluded by Erasmus Darwin in *The Botanic Garden.*[3] His pact with Nature will be a marital but asexual one,

> wedded to this goodly universe
> In love and holy passion . . . .
> (*The Excursion,* Preface, II. 53-54)

There will be no botanising, but equally there will be no canoodling. "The pulse of the machine" beat for Wordsworth in his cosmic as in his human wife at a safe, steady seventy-five a minute.

Byron "love[s] Earth only for her earthly sake" (*Childe Harold,* III, lxxi) but on all the levels along which earth functions in the universal scheme of things. There is the Homeric, primeval earth where man moves in ritual patterns of work and worship with his environment. In a Christian context the Monk of Athos (II,xxvii) connects the God-man-nature levels. Modern society, profit-directed, presents us with the spectacle of an earth ravaged by a "vile strength" in aid of purely human or (one might rather say) inhuman gain. The ignoring of these European equivalencies accounts, maybe, for such inadequacies of response as are found in Professor Ernest J. Lovell, Jr., Ph.D.'s *Byron: The Record of a Quest.* Nature may be for him "civilisation's great opposite":[4] it was not so for Byron, a Mediterranean man, for whom cities emerged from nature and sank into them again: deriving the stone of their temples and palaces and forums from the living rock of their surrounding mountains, the foods of their peoples from the sacred olive and vine and wheat under the aegis of Pallas, Dionysus and Demeter. In return, the divine city radiated its charisma over its nourishing countryside.

The cyclic, Heracleitan theme of the dying-into-each-other elements is, as I have suggested elsewhere,[5] the groundwork of Byron's thought and nowhere more so than in his landscapes — which are, of course, landscapes with figures. There is no stability. Figure dies into landscape, landscape gives birth to figure. So, on the architectural

level, "Pendeli's marbles [quarries] glare" in providing the stone for Athenian temples; the temples crumble in the course of ages, "commingling slowly with heroic earth." Comparison with Wordsworth's exquisitely local "Nature" is useless. We move in another dimension. Anaximander's dictum comes to mind: "Things perish into those things out of which they have their birth, according to which is ordained; for they give reparation to [or pay the penalty to] one another according to the disposition of time." Things, and human beings among them, paying the penalty to each other for the crime of existence outside the divine totality: this is of the essence of Byron's thought.

Wordsworth and Byron were the only poets of the English Romantics to be brought up among lakes and mountains. Both responded with fervour, but along very different wavelengths. Clearly Wordsworth was, from the beginning, a solitary. The episodes that move us in *The Prelude* — the bird-snaring, the boat-borrowing, the skating — circle round solitude with a dreadful fascination. The child seems to be pulled into vortices of loneliness from which he barely escapes with his sanity. And at each escape there is a modification of consciousness towards the asocial. Byron, on the other hand, while just as alone physically in his wanderings in the Highlands, moves in a complex of relationships historical, mythological, dynastic and natural. His escape is not from society to solitude, but through solitude from a superficial to a deep and a traditional society. Take *Lachin Y Gair* in *Hours of Idleness* as an example. The "hard primitivism" of the Highlands is opposed to the civilisation of England: "the rocks where the snow-flake reposes" to the "gay landscapes" and "gardens of roses" of Newstead Abbey. But the mountains are the home of "traditional story, / Disclos'd by the natives of dark Loch na Garr." He listens to the stories of the natives; he hears the voices of the "shades of the dead," glimpses the "forms of [his] Fathers." And more than this, he discerns in the

very bleakness of the scene, in the snow-capped peaks, a subtle relationship:

> Restore me the rocks, where the snow-flake reposes,
> Though still they are sacred to freedom and love . . . .

Mountains are traditionally sacred to freedom, as guerilla strongholds, and to love, as Virgil's "inhabitant of the rocks," a love tested in adversity. But the image of the rock and the snowflake initiates another and a more original theme in Byron's poetry, that of the relationship of strength and weakness, the Pauline "strength made perfect in weakness," the nexus of the above and the below. The snowflake survives, and can only survive, because of the altitude and the granite hardness of the peak on which it falls: warm low-lying plains would melt it at once. The ethereal, the skyflower, is protected by the adamantine solidity of the rock.

Interesting extrapolations from this are to be found in the Turkish Tales. Snowflakes are replaced by the delicate Mediterranean flowers; Loch na Garr by the Greek mountains, warmer but perhaps even more barren. The landscape cannot be isolated from the political-social scene. The Greco-Turkish conflict is an aesthetic rape. Greece is a "fairy land," her islands are "Edens of the Eastern wave." Her flowers create perfumes, her olives extract life-giving oils from the bare rock and sandy soil. Nature's miracles proceed day after day, year after year, unnoticed, unthanked. War is an "unnatural contract," a pact of man with man against nature:

> Strange — that where Nature loved to trace,
> As if for Gods, a dwelling place,
> And every charm and grace hath mixed
> Within the Paradise she fixed,
> There man, enamoured of distress,
> Should mar it into wilderness,
> And trample, brute-like, o'er each flower
> That tasks not one laborious hour;
> Nor claims the culture of his hand
> To bloom along the fairy land,
> But springs as to preclude his care,
> And sweetly woos him — but to spare!
> (*The Giacour,* II. 46-57)

It is precisely because the wild flowers ask no cultivation from man's hand that they are despised and trampled on. The Giaour's indifference to the fairy land which is the stage of his feud against Hassan is the outward and visible sign of the insensibility to Leila's danger which brings him too late to her rescue. The same lesson is pressed home in *The Corsair*. Conrad deserts Medora to pursue his quarrel with Seyd, oblivious of consequences. Disaster strikes him, and destroys "the gentle plant" which it was his first duty to protect. The values of "Lachin Y Gair" are projected in the Turkish Tales. Conrad's is a noble heart, but "warped to wrong"; rocklike, but worn by tempests, and now shattered by the lightning of defeat.

> There grew one flower beneath its rugged brow,
> Though dark the shade — it sheltered — saved till now.
> The thunder came — that bolt hath blasted both,
> The Granite's firmness, and the Lily's growth:
> The gentle plant hath left no leaf to tell
> Its tale, but shrunk and withered where it fell;
> And of its cold protector, blacken round
> But shivered fragments on the barren ground!
> (*The Corsair*, III, xxiii)

Byron's synthetic vision conflates the human and the natural vulnerabilities. He is pretty nearly the first "conservationist" among our poets, conscious of the extreme fragility of the man-nature symbiosis. Cowper's "The Poplar-Field" anticipates him, Hopkin's "Binsey Poplars, felled 1879" voices a Victorian protest: Blake, of course, had deplored the pollution of England's rivers and the blackening of England's green and pleasant land, and his approach is close to Byron's in its refusal to separate the exploitation of the natural from that of the human environment. The dark Satanic mills are stationed in the heart of man.

Such an approach might be called "emblematic," and we may be inclined to take Byron's "Nature poetry" less seriously than Wordsworth's because, with Wordsworth, we want our Nature separated off from "the mean and vulgar works of man" as a refuge and a compensation. Coleridge

called Wordsworth a "spectator ab extra." Byron and Blake work with interplay, as the Augustans did but at a new level of insight. The rocks and flowers of "Lachin Y Gair" and of the Tales are as real as those of the *Lyrical Ballads,* and so are the lark and the wild thyme of *Milton*: but they are something more. The marvellous chorus of "all the Living Creatures of the Four Elements" in *Milton* begins with "Thou hearest the Nightingale begin the Song of Spring" and modulates through "Thou percievest the Flowers put forth their precious Odours,/ And none can tell how from so small a center comes such sweets, / Forgetting that within that Center Eternity expands / Its ever during doors," to end with "And flower & Herb fill the air with an innumerable Dance, / Yet all in order sweet & lovely. Men are sick with Love." Birds, flowers, insects — yes, in the same poem, "The Earwig arm'd, the tender Maggot, emblem of immortality, / The Flea, Louse, Bug, the Tape-Worm, all the Armies of Disease" — are gathered together into the final statement: "Men are sick with Love."

Byron's exordium to *The Bride of Abydos* hails "the land where the cypress and myrtle / Are emblems of deeds that are done in their clime." If we are pure Wordsworthians, we shall reject this syncretist approach and prefer to consider nature as a goddess (Blake called her a "bitch goddess") to be approached by man with awe and worship. "Tintern Abbey" is the paradigm of this approach. Byron, building on the foundations of Pope, Thomson and Beattie, works within a much more unified nature-man context. In *Childe Harold* the original above-below insights are not forgotten — the snowflake and the rock, the rose and the nightingale — and this may be called the vertical dimension of the paradise of love; but the horizontal is "expansed" in the Childe's trajectory over the Mediterranean and Central European scenes, and enriched by the wide variety of his travel experiences.

Canto I of *Childe Harold* is almost purely "horizontal"

in its insights. Byron and Hobhouse are on the move over the Peninsular theatre of war. We have reports from our war correspondent. The landscape is fairly lightly sketched, with a purple patch in the opening "Adieu, adieu! my native shore" passage and another in the Cintra stanzas. But the vertical dimension is active on the subconscious level. Byron is impressed by his first contact with southern luxuriance:

> Oh, Christ! it is a goodly sight to see
> What Heaven has done for this delicious land!
> What fruits of fragrance blush on every tree!
> What goodly prospects o'er the hills expand!

but — and here we have Byron's first expression of the environmentalist indignation which I have anticipated in comment on the later Tales —

> But man would mar them with an impious hand:
> And when the Almighty lifts his fiercest scourge
> 'Gainst those who most transgress his high command,
> With treble vengeance will his hot shafts urge
> Gaul's locust host, and earth from fellest foemen purge.
> (I,xv)

Reading "earth" with the lack of attention usually given to Cantos I and II, we register a cliché: the world must be made free from war; but Byron meant *earth* — the element, the soil, the creative matrix — it is the desecration of "the kindest mother" which will eventually be visited with treble vengeance.

If "Dear Nature is the kindest mother still!" (II,xxxvii), "still" may be taken in a variety of senses. In its old meaning of "always" it conveys Nature's beneficence. In its meaning of "nevertheless" it conveys both "after all is said and done" and "after all man's ill-treatment of her." All these are important for Byron. He loves Nature on a level of equality. When he uses the hopelessly prosaic word "interviews" (*Childe Harold* IV, clxxiii) he is being strictly accurate. Byron looks at the mountains, bathes in the seas; the mountains look at Byron, the seas return his embrace. There is a strongly sexual overtone. This worries such commentators as Professor E. J. Lovell, Jr., Ph.D.,

of Texas, who remarks on the "kindest mother still" stanza that its "emotional associations and surroundings" tend to "highlight the essential difference between such a stanza . . . and the true Wordsworthian note, with which it is easily confused." I think it is only easily confused if we are determined to posit Wordsworthianism as the "genuine religion of nature" at which Byron is trying his best to arrive. This in fact is Professor Lovell's stance throughout his book. It is not an original stance; it was put forward here and there by some of Byron's less perceptive contemporary critics, and assumed as a dogma by the Victorians — though not by Arnold or Swinburne.[6]

The accepted dogma is that Byron was not much interested in nature — except as a "picturesque tourist" — until he met Shelley in 1816. The dogma is supported by a determined rejection of interest in Byron's verse up to this period. But if we resist the prejudice that Wordsworthianism is the ultimate with which all other approaches must be compared, and if we look at Byron's early verse from the standpoint rather of his eighteenth century predecessors, we are led, I think, to the conclusion that Byron has achieved an original view of — or rather relationship with — nature as early as *Hours of Idleness* and that this is developed throughout the period of the Levantine tour and the 1812-16 "years of fame." Summing up at this point, I would say that Byron's attitude concurs with Wordsworth's insofar as it is founded in early delight in wild landscape, in solitude, and in an expansion of consciousness which is anti-city and anti-society; it diverges from Wordsworth's as Byron moves out from childhood restrictions to the European scene and merges with Mediterranean cultures and landscapes. Wordsworth's strength depends on his isolation; he makes his corner in the Lakes, and mines it to impressive effect. Byron expands, conflates and reticulates. His early tough-and-tender insight (the peak and the snowflake, the rock and the flower) merges with an historical perspective in his Peninsular and Levantine tour, and

is enriched with a sense of nature's southern bounties which Britain could not give him. Robert F. Gleckner rightly points out that stanzas xxiii-xxviii of *Childe Harold,* II anticipate what he rather less accurately calls "the Shelleyan-Wordsworthian stanzas in Canto III."[7] Elsewhere I have attempted an analysis of some later stanzas (lxxxv-lxxxviii) which implements what I have to say in the present context about his reticulation of the natural, the human, and the divine and his persistent sense of the tough-tender oxymoron in nature. Cantos III and IV are not a new departure: they expand the insights he has arrived at in Cantos I and II. Canto III is inevitably a "nature" canto, since in it Byron is cut off from his other correlatives of history and art: the concentration has to be on mountains, lakes and glaciers, but even so "feeling comes in aid / Of feeling" and "diversity of strength attends" Byron in a conflation of familial, dynastic, personal and literary memories. He is able to feel himself into the Alpine scene through tentacles of Rousseau, Gibbon, Voltaire, and no doubt Shelley and Wordsworth.

The association of Gibbon and Voltaire with Rousseau demonstrates immediately that even in the high Alps, "earth's great and growing region" (III,cix), Byron's concern could never be with an isolated, dehumanised nature. Historian, satirist, enthusiast — all three draw sustenance from the region and repay their borrowing in a kind of mystical manuring. The concept is so unWordsworthian and so remote from any man-nature relationship acceptable by modern thought that commentators simply ignore it. Perhaps it *is* nonsense, perhaps man is, with Lara, "a stranger in this breathing world," cut off from his environment except to exploit it materially or sentimentally (coal-mines or week-end cottages). Byron saw the situation otherwise. Already, in Canto II, he has seen the Attic bee flying in the freedom of its mountain air over enslaved Athens; he has marked the crumbling temples and the barrows of Marathon "commingling slowly with heroic

earth"; he has noted Minerva's owl circling over the ruined Parthenon: "grey flits the shade of power." What remains? Wisdom has died, in Hellas, with Socrates; power with Alexander. There remains the *tertium quid*: love. Canto III is at once the celebration of love in nature, and of nature as it is animated by love:

> The feeling with which all around Clarens, and the opposite rocks of Meillerie, is invested, is of a still higher and more comprehensive order than the mere sympathy with individual passion; it is a sense of the existence of love in its most extended and sublime capacity, and of our own participation of its good and of its glory: it is the great principle of the universe, which is there more condensed, but not less manifested; and of which, though knowing ourselves a part, we lose our individuality, and mingle in the beauty of the whole . . . .

Byron marks the "peculiar adaptation" of Clarens and its surroundings "to the persons and events with which it has been peopled."[8] Man and his works are latent in the landscape, from which they emerge at the appointed time; dying, they are reabsorbed, to fertilize new combinations in the cycles of time.

"Men are sick with Love." Men — and that extended Man which for Blake and Byron was Nature. Man does not "come into" this world, he comes out of it, manifests himself and his actions at the appointed times; it is earth which is the matrix, "the kindest mother still." This is a kind of *participation mystique* closer to Lévy-Bruhl than to Wordsworth. In another place[9] I have commented on Wordsworth's fear of the instinctive, passional side of Nature. Shelley called him "a kind of moral eunuch" in *Peter Bell the Third.* And Swinburne has a penetrating comment in his 1866 essay:

> Coleridge and Keats used nature mainly as a stimulant or a sedative; Wordsworth as a vegetable fit to shred into his pot and pare down like the outer leaves of a lettuce for didactic and culinary purposes. All these doubtless in their own fashion loved her, for her beauties, for her use, for her effects; hardly one for herself.
>
> Turn now to Byron or to Shelley. These two at least were not content to play with her skirts [the image is already there in *Peter Bell the Third*] and paddle in her

> shallows. Their passion is perfect, a fierce and blind desire which exalts and impels their verse into the high places of emotion and expression. They feed upon nature with a holy hunger, follow her with a divine lust as of gods chasing the daughters of men. Wind and fire, the cadences of thunder and the clamours of the sea, gave to them no less of sensual pleasure than of spiritual sustenance . . . . To them the large motions and the remote beauties of space were tangible and familiar as flowers . . . .

The writing is overcharged, and the "feeding upon nature" is a Wordsworthian rather than a Byronic activity; but in his insistence on the fusion of the sensual with the spiritual in Byron's nature poetry Swinburne has established an important critical point of departure. So too in his stressing of the elemental, the energetic and the unbounded in Byron's (and Shelley's) cosmic picture. There is a basic surrender to the incalculable which we do not find in Wordsworth: a desire for self-losing which reminds us far more of the ecstatic death-wish of the Continental poets and philosophers who were Byron's contemporaries — Hoelderlin, Kleist, Novalis, Schelling, Chateaubriand — many of whom, like Byron and Shelley, died young, than of the cautious clinging to "tenure" of Wordsworth and Coleridge.

Wordsworth, as Geoffrey H. Hartman notes in a remarkable essay, [10] "*reads* landscape as if it were a monument or grave." He has "turned the tables" on old Matthew by substituting the book of Nature for those human volumes which breathe the spirit of wisdom "From dead men to their kind." This elegiac quality, an extrapolation from the "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard," robs the landscape of its colours while opening up an inner dimension of dark intensity. It is noteworthy that those who have found an especial comfort in Wordsworth — Coleridge, Arnold, Mill are among them — were themselves peculiarly "deprived" or dominated in childhood. In stressing the healing and compensatory virtues of Wordsworth's poetry — "He laid us as we lay at birth / On the cool flowery lap of earth" — Arnold is revealing the needs in himself which

responded to the Wordsworthian therapy. As to Byron, in the same "Memorial Verses," "He taught us little; but our soul / Had *felt* him like the thunder's roll." That, one might think, should be enough; but no, there are dangers in feeling; better repose with Wordsworth on — or under — the cool flowery lap of earth.[11]

Swinburne characteristically comments on Byron in sea terms — "paddle in her shallows . . . . the cadences of thunder and the clamours of the sea." Wordsworth is an inland poet, remote from disturbing images of flux, tempest and fecundity. His few references are cautious: "The sea lay laughing at a distance"; "The gentleness of heaven broods o'er the sea." With the profound shock occasioned by the drowning of his brother John even such anodyne images vanish from his poetry. A clause of the unsocial contract has been broken. Wordsworth presses more heavily on the inland clauses: on the natural piety of green fields and mountains and rivers in their quiet, unspectacular flow (the Duddon sonnets are peculiarly revealing here). And if this fails, there remains the revealed piety of the Established Church as an extra insurance.

In contrast, Byron's sea is basic. There are levels of seascape as there are of landscape. An interesting oxymoron could be drawn between the emergence of conscious life — in poets, heroes, legislators — from "heroic earth" and the emergence of unconscious, elemental forces from the thalassic slime (cf. *Childe Harold* IV, clxxxiii): an oxymoron dramatised in *The Island*. The sea is Byron's main eikon of freedom from *Hours of Idleness* onward: of personal freedom, cancelling the curse of his club-foot in the act of swimming; of racial freedom, cancelling gravity, offering man an amphibious existence where he can dive and float with fishes and algae; of elemental freedom, water invading the mineral obstinacies of earth, dissolving barriers and disinfecting pollutions with salt and iodine; of dynamic freedom, in mergence with the liberating/destructive forces of tides and tempests.

Byron moves from the northern sea, wild, tempestuous, challenging, to the Mediterranean which is warm, seductive, feminine, but just as dangerous in its changing moods; thence to the lagoons of Venice, eikons of stagnation, and the inland stretches of Italy; a violent reversal in 1823 returns him to his "old friend the Mediterranean." But the levels of seascape have not been forgotten in the inland journey. The physical levels from foam to slime are there in the concluding stanzas of *Childe Harold,* with their vistas in human/geological time opening up in contrast between "monsters of the deep" and those monsters of the surface which are the warring warships; historical time connects "Alike the Armada's pride" with "spoils of Trafalgar." A remarkable synoptic vision includes the pageant of vanished empires (clxxxii) with the "mirror" (clxxxiii) of an undecipherable divine purpose. The element which is "The image of Eternity — the throne/Of the Invisible" is also the slimy matrix of "The monsters of the deep." And yet "— thou goest forth, dread, fathomless, alone."

The next stanza returns us, with Byronic abruptness, to the personal:

> And I have loved thee, Ocean! and my joy
> Of youthful sports was on thy breast to be
> Borne, like thy bubbles, onward . . . .

This moving fragment of autobiography is dramatically reinforced, four years later, in the brilliant *swimgesang* by which, through the lips of Jacopo Foscari (*The Two Foscari,* Act I, sc. i, 104-21), Byron expresses his revulsion from a "cicisbean" existence in the lap of the Countess Guiccioli. I have commented on this passage in an earlier essay: no need to repeat, but the *levels* of the experience, in aid of my present argument, may be noted: the "wave all roughened," cloven by the swimmer's arm; the momentary surfacing,

> laughing from my lips the audacious brine,
> Which kissed it like a wine-cup, rising o'er
> The waves as they arose . . . .

then the

> plunging down
> Into their green and glassy gulfs, and making
> My way to shells and sea-weed, all unseen
> By those above, till they waxed fearful; then
> Returning with my grasp full of such tokens
> As showed that I had searched the deep . . . .

Dissatisfaction with sex as it is, a projected fantasy of sex as it ought to be, a demand on the physical to respond to the longings of the ideal, these are currents threading Byron's "inland" verse and climaxing in the womb-poem of *The Island.* The "levels" of this, Byron's major poem, written in full flow of *Don Juan* which is not so much a poem as a verbalised catharsis, are too complex to be discussed in a page or two: even a summary must be inadequate. The dramatic levels are three: the ship, the sea, the island; we move among these in the orders of time and space. The moral levels are likewise three: duty, freedom, love, corresponding to the dramatic, but freed from the temporal order. If we focus on the island (which is the purpose of Byron's poem) the factor of duty is removed and we return to the love-freedom synthesis of *Hours of Idleness* — where in fact we started. "Loch na Garr with Ida looks o'er Troy" (*The Island,* XII,291), and looks also over Toobonai, the tropical island, "the unreach'd Paradise of our despair." If we focus again on the landscape aspects of Paradise, our present theme, we meet the same dichotomy of love and freedom. A dichotomy resolved only, the poem suggests, by reverting from the conscious level on which such concepts as duty exist to a preconscious level of pure existential enjoyment. There, on the magic island, time and space, those troublesome co-ordinates of our existence, are abolished.

> What deem'd they of the future or the past?
> The present, like a tyrant, held them fast:
> Their hour-glass was the sea-sand, and the tide
> Like her smooth billow, saw their moments glide . . . .
> (xv)

Delivered from clock time, Neuha and Torquil live in an eternal now which is delightfully varied with the fluctua-

tions of light and dark, spasm and release, sleep and waking. But Nemesis, always on the watch for human happiness, pursues them in the shape of a British warship. Duty is not so easily outwitted. The social contract holds them as "fast" as the existential present. What escape? Only by drowning. Neuha dives, Torquil follows her, fearing the worst but committing himself by an act of faith to the unknown. The miracle happens:

> Deep — deeper for an instant Neuha led
> The way — then upward soared — and as she spread
> Her arms, and flung the foam from off her locks,
> Laughed, and the sound was answered by the rocks.
> They had gained a central realm of earth again . . . .
> (IV, vi)

The "spacious cave" in which they find themselves, submarine except for an entrance for light and air, is their womb-centre for the achievement of a new and richer existence. They emerge, when the danger has passed, into a primeval paradise: "A night succeeded by such happy days/As only the yet infant world displays" (xv). Byron's wheel has come full circle from the "hard primitivism" of "Lachin Y Gair" via the environmentalist indignation of the original Tour and the humanistic conflation of nature with civilisation in the second Tour to the "soft primitivism" of Toobonai. If Ferenczi's thesis in *Thalassa* is accepted, we see this as Oedipal: Byron is returning to an amniotic existence, as all men strive to do in the sexual act: the womb representing the original sea from which life emerged and to which it now longs to revert. But that this is not the whole story is clear from the over-all dramatic pattern of *The Island,* which curiously reproduces Byron's own life-schema (the voyage in search of sustenance — Bligh's bread-fruit, Byron's self-knowledge — the discovery of a southern paradise of love and freedom, the relinquishing of it in a return to Europe and its values, the revulsion from such values and the urge to return, even at the cost of mutiny — Christian's repudiation of Bligh, Byron's break-away from English society — to the paradisal state . . . and

at this point the pattern begins to fall apart, Byron fulfilling in the imagined story of Torquil and Neuha something botched in his half-way house of Italy and Teresa.) Or shall we call the sequel prophetic? Prophetic and oddly recapitulatory. For, looked at even more closely, the levels of *The Island* are seen as projecting the levels of "Lachin Y Gair" in reverse. Toobonai is "still sacred to freedom and love," even if the freedom is more licentious, the love more untrammeled. Where the snowflake drifted down from the cold sky, geometrical in its perfection, on to the granite rock which protected it, in "Lachin Y Gair," now, in *The Island,* the coral polyp slowly creates from below, in the warm sea tides, the tropical paradise of Toobonai. The snowflake dies, in the "unimaginable zero summer," to melt into water which creates and nourishes the soil from which the mountain flowers spring; giving up its individual life, it passes into the levels of the cyclic process. The coral polyp dies and its skeleton becomes the prize of the Polynesian diver whose very existence then and there depends on the island it has created. These are the physical levels: on the psychological, the sexual, Neuha's "sun-born blood" throws

> O'er her clear nut-brown skin a lucid hue,
> Like coral reddening through the darkened wave,
> Which draws the diver of the crimson cave . . . .
> (II, vii)

Neuha is the sea, is the coral: we cannot separate nucleus from context. "Herself a billow in her energies" (II, vii), she opens up to Torquil the freedom of the southern seas. Like the "tender nautilus" on the sea's surface, "The sea-born sailor of his shell canoe,/The ocean Mab, the fairy of the sea" (I, vii), that last eikon of Byron's great strength-weakness antithesis, Neuha in her ocean depths defeats the power of "the sordor of civilisation" (II, iv) by a pliancy which interweaves, reticulates, works through, without exploiting, the cosmic levels. "Mirror on mirror mirrored is all the show"; that line of Yeats, which he may have derived from a Sufi source,[12] focuses the Byronic

brilliancies. We serve him ill by reading him along the monochromatic Wordsworthian gamut: there is a richer (I don't say a deeper) experience here than could have been gained in the Lakes, gathering up Byron's seemingly chaotic life-patterns into structures which fuse individual existence, racial tradition, and the levels of landscape. It is from these levels that Byron, on the 150th anniversary of his death, continues to address us.

NOTES

[1]According to Moore, Wordsworth himself claimed paternity, insisting that the "the whole third canto of 'Childe Harold' was founded on his style and sentiments," Thomas Moore, *Memoirs, Journal and Correspondence,* ed. Lord John Russell (London: Longman, Brown, Green & Longman, 1853-56), III, 161.

[2]George Herbert, "Redemption," *Works,* ed. F. E. Hutchinson (Oxford: Clarendon, 1941), p. 40.

[3]"Unholy Alliance" is Professor Basil Willey's phrase in *The Seventeenth Century Background* (London, Chatto & Windus, 1934), p. 297.

[4]Ernest J. Lovell, Jr., Ph.D., *Byron: the Record of a Quest* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1949), p. 24.

[5]Bernard Blackstone, *Byron: Lyric and Romance,* Writers and Their Work, No 215 (London: Longman, 1970), p. 15.

[6]Professor Lovell, who holds that "it is unprofitable at times to examine too closely the exact meaning of a given line or stanza in Byron" (*op. cit.* p. 190), does not in fact give us any critical analysis of Byron's poetry. He relies for support of his "Wordsworthian" interpretation of Byron's Nature passages on remarks alleged to have been made to such unreliable reporters as Medwin, Trelawny, and Lady Blessington: and on one direct quotation from Byron himself: "Of *Childe Harold,* IV, he said, it is 'not a continuation of the Third. I have parted company with Shelley and Wordsworth . . .'" (p. 125). A decisive piece of evidence; but if, puzzled by the un-Byronic tone of the remark, we take the trouble to look it up (*Byron's Works: Poetry,* ed. E. H. Coleridge, II, 311) we find that the words are not Byron's but represent his editor's surmise as to what was in Byron's mind in the summer of 1817. The mistake is repeated on pp. 181-82 of Mr. Lovell's book; regrettably, it is left uncorrected in the reprint issued by Archon Books in 1966.

[7]Robert F. Gleckner, *Byron and the Ruins of Paradise* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1967), p. 78.

[8]William J. Calvert, *Byron: Romantic Paradox* (Chapel Hill: U. of N. Carolina Press, 1935), p. 147, noted parallels to Byron's thought and phrasing here in Shelley's letters from Geneva. He assumes that the borrowing is on Byron's part; but this kind of "idealism," as Mr. Calvert calls it (I would call it animism, if anything) is *not* "in stark contrast to anything that had appeared in Byron's mind before," and only a determined cold-shouldering of the earlier verse could bring anyone to believe it is.

[9]Bernard Blackstone, "The Life of Things: Some Notes on Wordsworth's Perception," in *Wordsworth's Mind and Art*, ed. A. W. Thomson (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1969).

[10]Geoffrey H. Hartman, "Wordsworth, Inscriptions, and Romantic Nature Poetry," in *From Sensibility to Romanticism*, ed. Frederick W. Hilles & Harold Bloom (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965).

[11]The two death-wishes are radically different. Byron's is to escape from a "fond and false identity" into union with cosmic energies; Wordsworth's is to escape from the stress of desires into a "cool" limbo where conflicts cease.

[12]Cf. Hafiz's "The world of Nature is many forms in One Mirror; nay, One Form in divers mirrors," and "the cosmos is 'a thought within a thought' (*khayalin fi khayalin fi khayal*)" in R. A. Nicolson, *Studies in Islamic Mysticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1921), pp. 153, 118.