

Prospects of Europe: The First Iteration of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*

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An analysis of the first two cantos of Byron's *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* in terms of the poet's aristocratic, classical education, and the ways of seeing people, landscape, and history it encouraged. Forms of vision are central to the first instalment of this great European poem, and are shot through with ambivalence.

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It is but opening the eye, and the scene enters. (Addison, *Spectator*, issue 411)

To introduce and contextualize the following discussion, I must repeat what has been written elsewhere:

Childe Harold is one poem, in four cantos, based on three pilgrimages: from Newstead to Athens, from Waterloo to Lake Geneva, and from Venice to Rome. A pilgrimage is a special form of travel: the destination is known beforehand and dominates the expedition, and as readers we expect a distinct moral contrast between the point of departure and the point of arrival. The pilgrim travels from darkness to light, from blindness to insight, confusion to order, and from worldly values towards spiritual ones.

But the three journeys that constitute *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* are bound together in two historical sequences: one going forward with Byron's life and career (in 1809–10, 1816, and 1818), the other going ever further backwards into European history:

The first is a journey through contemporary Napoleonic Europe, the Peninsular War, and the British-dominated Mediterranean to Greece as a 'sad relic' of its former greatness. The second starts at Waterloo and follows the Rhine upstream to its source in the Swiss Alps. In doing so it pursues the history of the French Revolution and Napoleon's empire to its source, in the persons of three representative Enlightenment intellectuals, all of whom had lived on the shores of Lake Geneva: Rousseau, Voltaire, and Edward Gibbon. The third journey looks back further yet, from Renaissance Italy to its origins in classical Rome. The tours get shorter but the temporal perspectives get longer. All three are

attempts to make sense of Byron's Europe in its chaos and violence, but also in its beauty, natural and man-made.¹

In this way the travels of a tourist do in fact become a set of pilgrimages (if only perhaps in retrospect — if such a thing is possible), and the places and objects encountered do in fact begin to constitute not the random series they appear to be but an intellectual sequence, formed by the poet's attempt to understand the present in terms of the past, from the Napoleonic wars back through the Enlightenment and the Renaissance to imperial and republican Rome. Philip Martin has summarized the poem as a whole in these terms exceptionally well:

It is the extent of that [European] political chaos, and its devastating consequence for the significance of history, that presents the appearance of medley or formlessness, for it distends the poem, wrenching it away from the stable structure of a travelogue into something less neat, more ambitious and more distorted, an irregular procession of declamations which deny the ordinance of reasoned argument, but present together a disillusioned evacuation of history's significance, the status of heroism, and the historical agency of great men. At the same time, these declamations effectively dramatise the disappointment that attends such a loss.²

'Onward he flies', as Byron wrote of his hero near the beginning of Canto One:

nor fix'd as yet the goal
Where he shall rest him on his pilgrimage;
And o'er him many changing scenes must roll
Ere toil his thirst for travel can assuage,
Or he shall calm his breast, or learn experience sage.³

The pilgrimage is emotional as well as intellectual — a matter as much of calming the breast as gathering 'experience sage' — and it is evidently one made up of 'changing scenes' along the way.

Byron's responses to such scenes make *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, in my view, the greatest *European* poem; the greatest poem *about* Europe — since the *Aeneid*, at any rate.⁴ In large part, in particular, it is a poem about Europe's prospects, literal but also metaphorical: prospects as puzzling and provoking in 2014 as they were in the Napoleonic era. But Byron's approach, like his renovation of Spenser's stanza, was his own. He did not, for example, as so many German and Russian thinkers had done and were to do, divide the Continent longitudinally, between East and West,

¹ Richard Lansdown, *The Cambridge Introduction to Byron* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 71. The source of the Rhine is at Lake Constance, not Lake Geneva; but the idea remains the same. Indeed, the idea of the third canto is strikingly similar to Thomas Mann's *The Magic Mountain* (1924): only Mann looks down from his Alpine sanatorium onto a Europe about to pitch itself into the second 'Great War', whereas Byron looks down onto a Europe licking its wounds after the first one.

² Philip W. Martin, 'Heroism and History: *Childe Harold* I and II and the Tales', in Drummond Bone (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Byron* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 80.

³ Lord Byron, *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, Canto I, ll. 328–32, in *The Complete Poetical Works*, ed. by Jerome J. McGann, vol. 2 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980); cited below parenthetically by canto and line.

⁴ If in this respect *Childe Harold* looks back to Virgil, the poem also anticipates that more ambiguous epic, Ezra Pound's *Cantos*, which also intermittently present 'an irregular procession of declamations' regarding Europe and its prospects.

narodnik and westernizer, between the native intellectual traditions of Russia and Germany (on the one hand) and the Western Enlightenment of France and Britain (on the other). Rather he divided it latitudinally, between North and South, the classical Mediterranean and the Gothic realm — a division that is itself classical by comparison with the distinctions and developments made out by the likes of Herder, Hegel, Peter Chaadayev, and Georg Simmel.

Byron's vision, that is to say, was of a northerner brought south, like Goethe in the *Italienische Reise* — and a classically educated northerner, at that.⁵ He did not deal with Europe's prospects in the large sense alone, but with what the Continent looked like to *him*, with all his knowledge of classical literature and history, compared with what it looked like to the people among whom he travelled — whose 'prospects' and whose views of and responses to the landscape were, as a rule, uninformed by reading, education, and scholarship. (Byron does not include the educated classes in his European conspectus, but the 'folk' are averted to frequently, especially, it should be said, in Cantos One and Two, before the poem takes a solipsistic turn in its second and third iterations.) 'The poem that resulted', Emily Bernhard Jackson remarks, 'offered its readers both sights from which they were barred [by war] and the opportunity to learn how to see these sights *like a lord*'.⁶ Jackson appropriately quotes Addison on the pleasures of the imagination alongside this comment: 'A man of polite imagination', Addison said,

is let into a great many pleasures, that the vulgar are not capable of receiving. He can converse with a picture, and find an agreeable companion in a statue. He meets with a secret refreshment in a description, and often feels a greater satisfaction in the prospect of fields and meadows, than another does in the possession. It gives him, indeed, a kind of property in everything he sees, and makes the most rude, uncultivated parts of nature administer to his pleasures: so that he looks upon the world, as it were in another light, and discovers in it a multitude of charms, that conceal themselves from the generality of mankind.⁷

Addison's, evidently, is a conservative view of what reading might do for a man, and it expresses with eighteenth-century confidence a firm and clear distinction between the polite and the vulgar, and the pleasurable and the rude. But even a nineteenth-century radical could see that an aristocratic education brought something with it. 'The Greek and Roman classics' that Byron had studied at Cambridge — albeit unsystematically and, it seems, wholly without academic guidance — were, Hazlitt wrote,⁸ 'a sort of privileged text-books' for young men like the poet. 'There is

⁵ 'Byron's early power', Ruskin argued, 'was founded on a course of general reading of the masters in every walk of literature, such as is [. . .] unparalleled in any other young life, whether of student or author' (John Ruskin, *Works*, ed. by E. T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn, 39 vols (London: George Allen, 1903–12), xxxv, p. 141). A sense of his reading is supplied in Byron's 'Reading List' of 1807 and the sale catalogues of his libraries, in Byron, *Complete Miscellaneous Prose*, ed. by Andrew Nicholson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), pp. 1–7, 231–54.

⁶ Emily A. Bernhard Jackson, *The Development of Byron's Philosophy of Knowledge: Certainty in Uncertainty* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 37; italics added.

⁷ Joseph Addison, *Works*, 6 vols (London: George Bell, 1900), III, p. 395.

⁸ William Hazlitt, *Collected Works*, ed. by P. P. Howe, 21 vols (London: J. M. Dent, 1934), VI, pp. 179–80.

certainly this advantage in a classical education, if not counteracted by other causes', Hazlitt suggested in his 'Advice to a Patriot' of 1806:

that it gives men long views; it accustoms the mind to take an interest in things foreign to itself, to love virtue for its own sake, to prefer fame to life, and glory to riches, and to fix our thoughts on the great and permanent instead of narrow and selfish objects. It teaches us to believe that there is something really great and excellent in the world, surviving all shocks of accident and fluctuations of opinion, and to feel respect for that which is made venerable by its nature and antiquity instead of that low and servile dread which bows only to present power and upstart authority.⁹

This is a somewhat romantic view of a liberal education, certainly (an education which Hazlitt himself received in a nonconformist and non-aristocratic way, having attended the Unitarian Hackney College); but it is not an entirely romantic one. What remains to be seen, I think, in considering the long views Byron inherited from this time-honoured style of tutelage, is the extent to which he retained the belief 'that there is something really great and excellent in the world, surviving all shocks of accident and fluctuations of opinion': 'the best that has been thought and said in the world', as Matthew Arnold put it, sixty years after Hazlitt. Perhaps long views and historical perspectives suggest the reverse: that *nothing* great and excellent survives the shocks and accidents of time, or only a random selection, or a privileged few. *Childe Harold* is, in part at least, but throughout its length, a meditation on that possibility, coming to an intellectual climax in Rome, in the fourth canto:

the desart, where we steer
Stumbling o'er recollections; now we clap
Our hands, and cry 'Eureka!' it is clear —
When but some false mirage of ruin rises near. (IV, ll. 726–29)

Byron's is a far more uncertain world than Addison's: one in which a long view was patently liable to turn into a mirage.

The classics were privileged tour-guides, as well as repositories. To travel in space on the grand tour was to travel in time for classically educated British graduates, and to see things in legendary places that those ignorant of the legend could not see. The scenes 'rolling over' Byron and his alter ego were not those rolling over an illiterate local — and vice versa, of course. A great deal of the vitality and intellectual interest in *Childe Harold*'s first volume lies in that contrast between the tourist's and the local's visions and prospects, the one manifest, the other accessible only intermittently: an appetite for contrasting points of view is therefore registered at the beginning of Byron's great poetry, and would persist and grow throughout it, from the 'Turkish tales' to the remainder of *Childe Harold*, and from the historical dramas to *Don Juan*.

'Byron is indeed obsessed with what he sees and how he sees it', as Mark Storey has argued at length; and his obsession marks a profound shift from Addison's confident sense that all one has to do is open the eye for the scene to enter. 'To describe what we see', after all, 'is no simple matter, and *Childe Harold* is the perfect demonstration of this'.

⁹ Ibid., I, p. 115.

The poem charts a journey in which the protagonist has to learn *what* he is looking at, and then *how* to look at it, which in turn affects what *it is* he is looking at, and how he *reacts* to it, and how that affects the way he *feels* about it. This is an extraordinarily complex process [...]¹⁰

... but also, one would have to say, an everyday one. It is not surprising to realize that the first two cantos of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* are positively saturated with the language of vision. 'The following poem', Byron wrote in his preface,

was written, for the most part, amidst the scenes which it attempts to describe. It was begun in Albania; and the parts relative to Spain and Portugal were composed from the author's observations in those countries. Thus much it may be necessary to state for the correctness of the descriptions. The scenes attempted to be sketched are in Spain, Portugal, Epirus, Acarnania, and Greece. There for the present the poem stops [...]¹¹

'Change of scene' is a first-order desideratum for the youth who 'from his native land resolv'd to go; / And visit scorching climes beyond the sea' (I, ll. 51–52). A by no means scientific survey of the lexicon of vision in the poem that follows gives us 'scene' nine more times in Canto One, eight times in Canto Two. ('Scene' is a term that Byron much prefers to the more neutral 'sight': used five times in Canto One, three times in Canto Two. The prospects of Europe on offer in *Childe Harold* are prospects onto a *theatrum mundi*.) 'View' and its cognates, as noun and verb, appear eleven times in Canto One, ten times in Canto Two. Plain unvarnished 'see' (including, indeed, 'unseen') is present twelve times in Canto One, sixteen times in Canto Two; 'look' (including 'o'erlook'), five and ten times, ditto; 'eye' (including 'ee') nineteen and thirteen times; and 'behold' six times in each canto. ('Lo!', once each.) Then there is all the language of looking in its various levels and phases of engagement: 'gaze' (including 'ygaz'd' and 'upgaz'd') three and twelve times; 'mark' three times in each canto; 'survey' and 'glance', present in both, 'discern' present only in the first. The second canto is lightly sprinkled with an even greater range: 'trace', 'watch', 'espy', 'stare', 'peer', and 'scan', all of which figure once or twice there.

The first point to make is that vision is by no means something confined to animate nature in *Childe Harold*. Sights themselves look on, at people or simply at one another. As many critics have pointed out, the poem is fascinated by borders at and along which entire countries, even continents, can contemplate their neighbours.¹² 'Through Calpe's straits survey the steepy shore', Byron instructs his reader; where 'Europe and Afric on each other gaze!' ('Lands of the dark-ey'd Maid and dusky Moor / Alike beheld beneath pale Hecate's blaze'; II, ll. 190–93.) 'Childe Harold saw', during Ramadan, 'like meteors in the sky, / The glittering minarets of Tepalen, / Whose walls o'erlook the stream' (II, ll. 491–93) in reciprocal fashion: he looking at

¹⁰ Mark Storey, *Byron and the Eye of Appetite* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1986), pp. 2, 82; italics added. Storey reminds us (p. 108) that 'To Ianthe', the introductory section to Canto One, imagines the *reader's* eye, 'wild as the Gazelle's', glancing 'o'er this page' in approbation (I, ll. 28, 31).

¹¹ Byron, *Complete Poetical Works*, II, p. 3.

¹² Byron's 'interweaving of the rhetoric of travel narratives, parody and burlesque, political irony and cultural relativism in the first two cantos', Susan Oliver remarks, 'establishes radical concepts of borders, as locations for wilful transgression of authority (including literary authority)' (*Scott, Byron and the Poetics of Cultural Encounter* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. 107). Philip Martin describes *Childe Harold* as a poem 'of unconventional travel and exile [...] whose scenery is that of Europe, and more particularly a Europe defined by two distinct features: its history, and its boundaries' ('Heroism and History', p. 77).

them, they looking at the river Aöus (now Vjosë). ‘Ah! Spain! how sad will be thy reckoning-day’, the narrator comments during the Iberian leg of the trip, ‘When soars Gaul’s Vulture, with his wings unfurld, / And thou shalt view thy sons in crowds to Hades hurled’ (I, ll. 546–48). Like Spain, Parnassus has witnessed many things, ‘But ne’er didst thou, fair Mount! when Greece was young’,

See round thy giant base a brighter choir,
Nor e’er did Delphi, when her priestess sung
The Pythian hymn with more than mortal fire,
Behold a train more fitting to inspire
The song of love, than Andalusia’s maids,
Nurst in the glowing lap of soft desire [. . .] (I, ll. 648–54)

~~Cadiz, accordingly, is a hyper feminine city of enchantment, and ‘boyish blood’ finds it impossible to resist its ‘magic gaze’ (I, ll. 662–63). At the other end of the Mediterranean Harold encounters an ultra masculine ceremony and song (‘at a little distance stood / And view’d [. . .] the revelrie [. . .] / In sooth, it was no vulgar sight to see’; II, ll. 640–43), in which it is a matter of martial pride that ‘Ye mountains, that see us descend to the shore, / Shall view us as victors, or view us no more!’ (II, ll. 691–92).~~

~~It is important to remember that the narrator and the hero of *Childe Harold* are by no means the same person; indeed, that their views and prospects are often in marked dramatic contrast. The scenes rolling over them are as different as the ones rolling over the tourist and the native inhabitant. ‘There is notable distinction’, William Galperin argues, ‘between Harold who “views” the world passively (or impassively as the case may be) and the appropriative, aggressive narrator’. ‘Unlike the narrator, who is disposed to “mark” the world according to his design’, he goes on,~~

~~Harold marks or observes the world independent of [historical] narrative. The ‘scenes of vanish’d war’ [at ‘Actium, Lepanto, fatal Trafalgar’: II, l. 356] are, in his view, precisely those: *scenes*, like Leucadia’s ‘spot’, [II, l. 355] where visibility and concretion take precedence over history.¹³~~

~~It is mostly the narrator, therefore, who steers and commands this facet of the poem, deploying a kind of ‘omniscience’ and ‘capacity to totalize’ that his hero does not share, and which takes charge of the poem practically in its entirety from the third canto onward.~~

~~As Galperin makes clear, above all the narrator has command of the ‘narrative’, historical and otherwise; the historical sense belongs to him. ‘Oh, lovely Spain! renown’d, romantic land!’; he asks,~~

~~*Where is that standard which Pelagio bore,
When Cava’s traitor sire first call’d the band
That dy’d thy mountain streams with Gothic gore?
Where are those bloody banners which of yore
Wav’d o’er thy sons, victorious to the gale,
And drove at last the spoilers to their shore?* (I, ll. 387–93; italics added)~~

¹³ William H. Galperin, *The Return of the Visible in British Romanticism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), pp. 249, 253.

~~There is the absent past — the long lost standard, the very memory of it retained, it seems, only by a historian of the Moorish occupation — and there is the visible present which overlays and obscures it. ‘What beauties doth Lisboa first unfold’ to the traveller; ‘*But now*’ her harbour is crammed with British shipping, there to save Portugal ‘from the wrath of Gaul’s unsparing lord’ (I, ll. 216–24; italics added.) ‘On sloping mounds, or in the vale beneath’ Cintra, ‘Are domes where whilome kings did make repair; / *But now* the wild flowers round them only breathe’ (I, ll. 270–72; italics added). Beckford planned ‘schemes of pleasure’ at his mansion nearby; ‘*But now*, as if a thing unblest by Man, / Thy fairy dwelling is as lone as thou!’ (I, ll. 279–82; italics added). Once there were Greek heroes, whose death ‘falling nations mourn’d around’; ‘*But now* not one of saddening thousands weeps, / Nor warlike worshipper his vigil keeps’ (II, ll. 39–41; italics added). Such visions are those of an informed historian, or at least an educated reader, who *knows* what poets have said about Lisbon, which kings have foregathered at Cintra, what self-indulgences Beckford anticipated in exile, and which Greek heroes are buried where. Readers back in England will either share this knowledge, or be impressed by it; the helots living and working amidst the scenes themselves will be staring at *unknown* unknowns.~~

~~So it is that *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage* ‘appears to be written not merely by an English nobleman travelling on the continent’, as Stephen Cheeke puts it,~~

~~but also by a sequence of places, or rather a sequence of geo-historical spots with pre-existent narratives, spots that in some sense speak for themselves. Looking at it this way round Byron might be seen as a brilliantly individual amanuensis to whom the European landscape is dictating its histories, while his psychological interiority is an effect that the poem’s places produce as their histories are articulated.¹⁴~~

~~Too much history, however, is a dangerous thing; you begin to see geo-historical irony everywhere you look:~~

~~Oh, Christ! it is a goodly sight to see
 What heaven hath done for this delicious land!
 What fruits of fragrance blush on every tree!
 What goodly prospects o’er the hills expand!
 But man would mar them with an impious hand [...] (I, ll. 207–11)~~

~~So much for the Portuguese littoral, and for Lisbon, too, ‘That, sheening far, celestial seems to be’ but which up close ‘many things unsightly’ shows ‘to strange ee’ (I, ll. 226, 228). Seeing is all about perspective, and perspective is something you bring with you, implanted in the ‘thinking bosom’ (I, l. 285) that you cannot leave behind.~~

~~Thinking bosoms are thin on the ground around the Napoleonic Mediterranean. There the ‘noblest scenes’ are inhabited only by ‘poor, paltry slaves’ (‘Why, Nature, waste thy wonders on such men?’; I, ll. 234–35). The Tagus is a border that means a great deal to the travelling geo-historian; very little to the local Spanish swain, except as a source of prejudice: ‘Here leans the idle shepherd on his crook, / And vacant on~~

¹⁴ Stephen Cheeke, *Byron and Place. History, Translation, Nostalgia* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. 41. ‘This poem has a ubiquitous concern with a re-reading of the historical landscape through which its wanderer proceeds’ (Martin, ‘Heroism and History’, p. 82).

the rippling waves doth look' (I, ll. 372–73), despite his proud sense of superiority to 'the Lusian slave, the lowest of the low' — an illusory sense, we are given to assume, seeing that the border constitutes 'a silver streamlet' and nothing more. (So much for the long view, and the mind taking an interest in things foreign to itself.) Seville parties on while Spain succumbs to war, but the countryside is full of averted glances: 'the rustic [...] lurks, nor casts his heavy eye afar, / Lest he should view his vineyard desolate, / Blasted below the dun hot breath of war' (I, ll. 495–98). Vision, and the pleasures of the imagination — which give 'a greater satisfaction in the prospect of fields and meadows, than does the possession' — is a luxury the poor cannot afford.

Still, 'the gentlemanly picturesque approach is open to challenge', as Mark Storey says.¹⁵ First of all, it is frequently associated in the poem with standing back, ordering, and putting things in perspective. 'Distance on the part of the viewer, with a standing back from the landscape and its inhabitants, was an essential convention of the picturesque as an aesthetic, and of picturesque travel writing', as Susan Oliver points out,¹⁶ and Byron often catches himself in the act of behaving in such a manner, and contrasting noble scenes with paltry slaves. The folk, in fact, can register and record things as it were organically, with an inherited intimacy beyond the bugbears of literacy and education. 'Teems not each ditty with the glorious tale' of the expulsion of the Moors?

Ah, such, alas! the hero's amplest fate!
 When granite moulders and when records fail,
 A peasant's plaint prolongs his dubious date.
 Pride! Bend thine eye from heaven to thine estate;
 See how the Mighty shrink into a song!

'Can Volume, Pillar, Pile preserve thee great?' the narrator concludes on a Popean note; 'Or must thou trust Tradition's simple tongue, / When Flattery sleeps with thee, and History does thee wrong?' (I, ll. 396–404). Pride must lower its eyes if 'tradition's simple tongue' can outlast the stiffer, more erroneous monuments of stone and print. This form of oral, informal history is itself a matter of preferring fame to life, and glory to riches, as Hazlitt put it. Albania involves 'lands scarce notic'd in historic tales' (II, l. 409), in traversing which Byron's long view generally yields to itinerant reportage, however brilliantly evocative. 'Oh! where, Dodona!', he pauses to ask at Jannina, nonetheless, 'is thine aged grove / Prophetic fount, and oracle divine?' 'All, all forgotten' by the local inhabitants (II, ll. 469–73), because they have achievements of their own to celebrate, in a war song like 'Tambourgi! Tambourgi!' The lyricist is intent on having his audience 'Remember the moment when Previsa fell' to Ali Pasha in 1797, and even a young woman captured in war is forced to 'sing us a song on the fall of her sire' (II, l. 677, 676). What should such people want from the Classical tradition, having a lively and autochthonous one of their own?

¹⁵ Storey, *Byron and the Eye of Appetite*, p. 90.

¹⁶ Oliver, Scott, *Byron and the Poetics of Cultural Encounter*, p. 114. As Alan Rawes puts it: 'the poem goes on to dramatize a tension between, on the one hand, sentiment, sympathy, and emotional response, and on the other hand, the desire to remain detached and objective' (*Byron's Poetic Experimentation: Childe Harold, the Tales, and the Quest for Comedy* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), p. 13).

~~And the folk can partake in history, not merely memorialize it. On the plain of Andalusia, beneath the Sierra Morena, a local recalls the campaign of a year or two before:~~

~~On yon long, level plain, at distance crown'd
With crags, whereon those Moorish turrets rest,
Wide scatter'd hoof marks dint the wounded ground;
And, scath'd by fire, the green sward's darken'd vest
Tells that the foe was Andalusia's guest:
Here was the camp, the watch flame, and the host,
Here the bold peasant storm'd the dragon's nest,
Still does he mark it with triumphant boast,
And points to yonder cliffs, which oft were won and lost. (I, ll. 513-21)~~

~~This time the 'here was' gesture is not a confined and privileged piece of knowledge the tourist shares vicariously with us, his readers ('Where is . . .?', 'But now . . .'). This time the peasant himself is proudly part of the historical sequence — though even here the 'Moorish turrets' of previous conflicts look down, embodying an ironical testimony to the cyclical futility of war.~~

~~Those Moorish turrets put the peasant's 'triumphant boast' into yet another long view, therefore. Who can see? Can see what? For how long? Does such a perspective itself encourage us only to give an educated shrug of resignation and indifference, seeing that all these things have happened so many times before, on different pretexts?~~

~~Flows there a tear of pity for the dead?
Look o'er the ravage of the reeking plain;
Look on the hands with female slaughter red;
Then to the dogs resign the unburied slain,
Then to the vulture let each corse remain,
Albeit unworthy of the prey bird's maw,
Let their bleach'd bones, and blood's unbleaching stain,
Long mark the battle field with hideous awe:
Thus only may our sons conceive the scenes we saw! (I, ll. 900-08)~~

~~If we are going to depend on bones and bloodstains to act as tutelary reminders of the brutality of conflict, we shall be clutching at straws. The Moorish turrets, after all, stand as just such records, and the French and the Allies massacred each other within sight of them.¹⁷ If ignoring history condemns us to repeat it, it seems the human race has a long, wilful, and bloody record of ignorance. The record history leaves is less one of battles fought and lost, and more like one of its own 'continuous defeat', as Philip Martin puts it, 'in the face of a devastated Europe'.¹⁸ Spain's landscape incarnates a perspective of this very kind:~~

¹⁷ Susan Oliver has an excellent passage on Byron's changes of perspective at Morena, switching as they do from the turrets in the distance to a 'shocking scene of indistinct destruction' near at hand: 'The mountain howitzer, the broken road', and so forth (I, ll. 531-40) (see Scott, *Byron and the Poetics of Cultural Encounter*, p. 126).

¹⁸ Martin, 'Heroism and History', p. 97. *Childe Harold* Canto Three seeks to enforce a distinction between battles for freedom (like Morat and Marathon) and ones of imperial aggrandizement (like Waterloo and Cannae). In Spain, the poet's point of view is more sceptical.

~~More bleak to view the hills at length recede,
 And, less luxuriant, smoother vales extend:
 Immense horizon bounded plains succeed!
 Far as the eye discerns, withouten end [...] (I, ll. 351–54)~~

~~Small wonder Harold ‘wends his lonely way’ at speed (I, l. 477), in search of pastures new.~~

Spain is a set of battlefields. As the fount and origin of the civilization tearing itself apart (Frenchman, Spaniard, Briton) on the Iberian Peninsula, surely Greece will provide the kind of long view that might set that conflict in perspective? Certainly Byron seems to hope so when he interrupts his account of Spanish femininity in Canto One to address Parnassus:

Oft have I dream’d of Thee! whose glorious name
 Who knows not, knows not man’s divinest lore:
 And now I view thee, ’tis, alas! with shame
 That I in feeblest accents must adore.
 When I recount thy worshippers of yore
 I tremble, and can only bend the knee;
 Nor raise my voice, nor vainly dare to soar,
 But gaze beneath thy cloudy canopy
 In silent joy to think at last I look on Thee! (I, ll. 621–29)

This certainly sounds like the object of a pilgrimage: something at which to ‘bend the knee’ and stare in wonder. Anyone ignorant of Parnassus is ignorant of ‘man’s divinest lore’, which sounds like a profound dereliction. But the fellow-worshippers have long since gone, and left no addresses. The narrator may not ‘unmov’d behold the hallow’d scene, / Which others rave of, though they know it not’, but the fact remains that ‘here no more Apollo haunts his grot, / And thou, the Muses’ seat, art now their grave’ (I, ll. 632–35). The nearer you get to the European sphinx, enthroned at the Parthenon, the more incoherent is her response to your enquiry:

Here let me sit upon this massy stone,
 The marble column’s yet unshaken base;
 Here, son of Saturn! was thy fav’rite throne:
 Mightiest of many such! Hence let me trace
 The latent grandeur of thy dwelling place.
 It may not be: nor ev’n can Fancy’s eye
 Restore what Time hath labour’d to deface.
 Yet these proud pillars claim no passing sigh,
 Unmov’d the Moslem sits, the light Greek carols by. (II, ll. 82–90)

If even the imagination reports nothing to see in this vale of polyglot indifference, what can the classically educated long view Hazlitt spoke of hope to offer? A sense that ‘there is something really great and excellent in the world, surviving all the shocks of accident and fluctuations of opinion’? What about the shock of apathy? A classically educated Englishman like Byron might believe there is something to value here; a classically educated Scotsman and fellow aristocrat like Lord Elgin (graduate of St Andrew’s) was perfectly sure there was — and he carted it away:

Cold is the heart, fair Greece! That looks on thee,
 Nor feels as lovers o'er the dust they lov'd;
 Dull is the eye that will not weep to see
 Thy walls defac'd, thy mouldering shrines remov'd
 By British hands, which it had best behov'd
 To guard these relics ne'er to be restored. (II, ll. 127–32)

These are examples of that 'movement from stridency to hesitancy' or that 'beleaguered eloquence' that Matthew Bevis has spoken of: 'so characteristic of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*'.¹⁹ There is what Stephen Cheeke calls a 'promiscuous and conflicted nature even in those places' — like Athens — 'singled out for an essential or absolute kind of authority'; 'a dissonance in these portrayals', as Emily Bernhard Jackson puts it, 'that suggests Byron is not simply striving for the demonstration of complexity that is irony's hallmark, but rather is seeking to challenge the idea of demonstration altogether'.²⁰ One could simply retreat altogether from the 'continuous defeat' of history by Europe's devastation:

More blest the life of godly Eremite,
 Such as on lonely Athos may be seen,
 Watching at Eve upon the giant height,
 That looks o'er waves so blue, skies so serene,
 That he who there at such an hour hath been
 Will wistful linger on that hallow'd spot;
 Then slowly tear him from the 'witching scene,
 Sigh forth one wish that such had been his lot,
 Then turn to hate a world he had almost forgot. (II, ll. 235–43)

Monasticism is one such blind alley; pastoral, another:

Scanty the hamlet, rare the lonely cot;
 But, peering down each precipice, the goat
 Browseth; and, pensive o'er his scattered flock,
 The little shepherd in his white capote
 Doth lean his boyish form along the rock,
 Or in his cave awaits the tempest's short-liv'd shock. (II, ll. 463–68)

There is not any way the author of the poem we are reading could share a fate such as these; it would not be in our hands to read if he had the making of either a monk or a goatherd. Rather than looking on the world 'as it were in another light', as Addison had said, and discovering in it 'a multitude of charms, that conceal themselves from the generality of mankind', the pilgrim seems to have lost the benefits of simplicity without gaining those of sophistication: a modern predicament, indeed. Everything is perishing, 'save well-recorded Worth', 'While strangers only not regardless pass, / Linger, like me, perchance, to gaze, and sigh "Alas!"' (II, ll. 809, 817–18). In the long view Addison and Hazlitt raved about everything actually is placed

¹⁹ Matthew Bevis, *The Art of Eloquence: Byron, Dickens, Tennyson, Joyce* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 41, 45.

²⁰ Cheeke, *Byron and Place*, p. 34, and Bernhard Jackson, *The Development of Byron's Philosophy of Knowledge*, p. 39.

exactly where it is most likely to be neglected, most likely to be ignored, most likely to slowly commingle with a heroic earth no one remembers any more.

Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, 'as almost everyone agrees', William Galperin suggests, 'improves in the later cantos'.²¹ My own feeling is that each iteration of the poem is equally successful at what it tries to do. The first two cantos give us something more memorable, and more interesting, for example, than 'a sort of *Citoyen du Monde*, surveying [...] the world of dispute and turmoil below'.²² To his great credit, there is nothing either Olympian or cosmopolitan about Byron. He could never retain or treat seriously the notion that the universe is a kind of *book*, as he quotes de Monbron saying in his epigraph, that one might leaf through and put to one side. Hazlitt was not entirely wrong about the long views a liberal education provided, and even Addison was not completely wrong to speak of that 'greater satisfaction' one person might gain 'in the prospect of fields and meadows, than another does in the possession' of them. Some people can converse with a picture, and find an agreeable companion in a statue. Human values and human qualities are not ciphers. But then neither can they be simply inherited, as a benefit or side effect of class and education. A sequence of geo-historical spots with pre-existent narratives to impart will tell you a good deal, but not everything. So, with all due respect to Bernard Blackstone, it may not be true — or not entirely true, at least — that the moral of *Childe Harold* is that 'Wisdom is *there* if we can but seize it, a heritage from the past, something to be recovered, not remade'.²³ On certain occasions it may have to be remade: and perhaps that is why the lexicon of vision fades almost completely from the second and third iterations of the poem. The eye is controlled by the mind, in the end, as Blake recognised:²⁴ 'As a man is, So he Sees'.

Notes on contributor

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²¹ Galperin, *The Return of the Visible in British Romanticism*, p. 255.

²² Rawes, *Byron's Poetic Experimentation*, p. 8.

²³ Bernard Blackstone, *Byron: A Survey* (London: Longman, 1975), p. 92.

²⁴ Geoffrey Keynes (ed.), *Letters of William Blake*, 3rd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), p. 9.