

THE GREAT CHAIN OF BEING IN
LORD BYRON'S POETRY

STEPHEN RUSSELL HALE

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LORD BYRON'S POETRY

An Abstract
Presented to
the Graduate Council of
Austin Peay State University

In Partial Fulfillment of
the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by
Stephen Russell Hale

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ABSTRACT

The Great Chain of Being metaphorically represents the eighteenth-century view of universal order. The confinement inherent in this view is contrary to Byron's romantic spirit of independence. The portrayal of man's heroic struggle with his confinement on the Great Chain of Being is a major theme in Byron's works. The two areas of confinement which most concern Byron are: the reflection of the universal hierarchy in government and society, and the position of man as a hybrid creature linked between the spiritual and the material segments of the Chain of Being.

Byron's point of departure with eighteenth-century thought is not in accepting the reality of their concept of universal order, but, rather, in accepting the justice of that reality. While eighteenth-century thought perceived justice from the perspective of universal good, Byron views justice from the perspective of individual good--which never interferes with individual freedom.

Regarding common man, whose hopes do not exceed his place in the universal order, Byron sees no injustice. Uncommon man, however, is born with a soaring spirit which cannot be happily "tamed down" to his prescribed position in the universal order. He is limited further by his clay

element which confines the desires of his soaring spirit. Byron views this chained desire as a gross inequity.

The injustices which uncommon man must suffer involve three areas of his life: his ambition, his intellect, and his love. Although the source of their confinement can vary, generally, uncommon man's aspiration to improve his position is thwarted by the universal hierarchy as reflected in the government; his desire for hidden knowledge is confined by his clay element; and his passion for forbidden love is restricted by society as a mirror of universal order.

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To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a Thesis written by Stephen Russell Hale entitled "The Great Chain of Being in Lord Byron's Poetry." I recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Arts, with a major in English.

Lewis C. Tatham

Major Professor

We have read this thesis
and recommend its acceptance:

Edward E. Irwin

Second Committee Member

David A. Vail

Third Committee Member

Accepted for the
Graduate Council:

William H. Ellis

Dean of the Graduate School

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In the eighteenth century the universe was viewed as an orderly whole made up of a sequence of existences ranging in hierarchical order from God to microorganism. This universal order was referred to metaphorically as the Great Chain of Being. The harmony of the universe depended upon the proper functioning of each "link" in the place designed for it. The principles and precepts associated with the Great Chain of Being touched almost every aspect of eighteenth-century life.

Those same principles and precepts affected the poetry of George Gordon, Lord Byron--who was born at the ebb of the century--almost as pervasively as they affected eighteenth-century life. In his appreciation of the "Chain's" harmonious effect on nature, Byron does not quibble with the traditional attitude. However, where eighteenth-century attitudes welcomed the harmony and comfort of man's well-defined position on the scale of the Chain, Byron considers man's station on the Chain of Being as slavery--especially for the man who aspires to think freely and love without bounds. His desire for freedom is confounded by his unique position on the Chain as the link between the ethereal and the material. Man becomes aware

of the confinement inherent in his position when his ethereal side aspires and his material side holds him back.

The imposed order and restraint that the Chain of Being represents to Byron is contrary to the freedom and independence of the romantic spirit. Therefore, most of Byron's poetry involves a protagonist who resists the order imposed by the principles and precepts of the Great Chain of Being. Out of this resistance Byron forms a distinctive character type which he attributes to a number of protagonists throughout his works. Through superior intelligence the character becomes aware of the irresolvable human condition; he chooses independence--although futile--over conformity to the principles of the Great Chain; he accepts responsibility for his decisions; he perseveres in his cause for freedom with a purity of purpose; and he finds his only victory in maintaining his pride and self-sufficiency. In twentieth-century literature he would be considered an existential hero; however, for the purpose of this study the character type will be referred to as Byron's champion of individuality.

Numerous works of scholarship have been written on areas that are discussed in this thesis. The Byronic hero has been extensively examined. The hierarchical notions of the times have been noted. Leonard M. Trawick, for example, maintains that "the Neoplatonic hierarchy of being

pervades the poetry of all the romantics."¹ The paradoxical composition of human nature has been explored in works such as Byron and the Dynamics of Metaphor, in which W. Paul Elledge studies the imagery of clay and fire.² None of these works, however, recognize the significance of the Great Chain of Being in Byron's thought. No critic has pointed out the importance of the Chain concept in shaping the Byronic hero. This thesis, consequently, though traversing some familiar territory, offers a unique perspective on Byron's philosophy.

Following this introductory chapter, the second chapter, "The Great Chain of Being," explains the concept of the Chain and its importance to nineteenth-century thought. The third chapter, "Nature, Common Man, and the Chain: The Harmony," distinguishes uncommon man from common man and points out Byron's attitude toward the effects of the Chain in nature. Byron's objection centers on the confinement it imposes, especially regarding man's position on the Chain, which is the subject of the fourth chapter, "Half Dust, Half Deity: The Discord." This chapter serves as a preliminary for the next three chapters. "The Soaring Spirit, the Fettering Clay" discusses man's predestined

¹Leonard M. Trawick, Backgrounds of Romanticism (Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1976), p. xx.

²W. Paul Elledge, Byron and the Dynamics of Metaphor (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1968), p. 8.

position and the results of ambition. "The Soaring Mind, the Fettering Clay" deals with Byron's frustration with limited knowledge. The seventh chapter, "The Soaring Heart, the Fettering Clay," discusses the consequences of love outside the order of the Chain.

CHAPTER II

THE GREAT CHAIN OF BEING

The concept of the Great Chain of Being originated from an attempt to explain universal order through a combination of Christian doctrine and Neoplatonic philosophy. Generally, the concept depicted the universe as "an orderly whole presided over by a benevolent God."¹ Metaphorically, this universal order took several forms, including a great ladder; however, the most universally accepted form was that of the Great Chain of Being.² The metaphor of the Great Chain was derived from references in the Iliad to Zeus' golden chain--"Whose strong Embrace holds Heav'n, and Earth, and Main."³

The concept illustrated by the Great Chain of Being maintained that the universe featured three principles of existence: plenitude, continuity, and gradation.⁴ The

¹Trawick, p. ix.

²Ibid.

³This information is found in Mack's footnotes to The Poems of Alexander Pope: An Essay on Man, III, i, ed. Maynard Mack (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1964), p. 17. Mack quotes from Pope's Iliad, VII, 26.

⁴Arthur O. Lovejoy, The Great Chain of Being (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1957), p. 183.

principle of plenitude, introduced by Aristotle, asserts that the universe displays a maximum variation of types of existences.⁵ Plotinus, the formulator of Neoplatonism, explains how and why the creation of this "full" universe came about:

The One [God] is perfect because it seeks for nothing, and possesses nothing, and has need of nothing; and being perfect, it overflows, and thus its superabundance produces an Other.⁶

The principle of continuity states that the universe is composed of an immeasurable sequence of existences, each of which shares at least one quality with its adjoining existences.⁷ The third principle, that of linear gradation, asserts that this sequence of existences ranges in hierarchical order from a near non-existence through every level of being up to God.⁸ This principle led to the formulation of the metaphor of the Chain. This Chain consisted of two segments. On the spiritual end were "God in Trinity, the nine orders of angels, minor spirits, and the soul of man."⁹ On the material end were "the high heavens (where

⁵Lovejoy, pp. 52, 55.

⁶Lovejoy, p. 62, citing Enneads, V, 2, 1; Volkmann ed. (1884), II, 176.

⁷Lovejoy, pp. 55-56.

⁸Lovejoy, p. 59.

⁹Hardin Craig, The Enchanted Glass (N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 1936), p. 2.

stood the throne of God), the solar system, the earth, man on his corporeal side (divided into classes and orders within the church, the state, and the family), the animals, the plants, and the metals and minerals."¹⁰ Man's position in the cosmic hierarchy was not midway in the Chain, "but well down towards the lower end of it." Although "he had been made a little lower than the angels, he was lower than the lowest of the angels." Man was "the 'middle link' in the sense that he was at the point of transition" between the flesh and the spirit.¹¹

Violations in the order of Being had to be accounted for. Out of God's super-abundance the "maximum number of possible modes of being were actualized, thus producing a system that is "full of existences--a plenum formarum whose very nature would leave no gaps."¹² The continued "fullness" of the system depended upon harmonious order--which required "the proper functioning of every part in the place designed for it."¹³ Therefore, "any effort to ascend the scale must be an act of rebellion" against the universe.¹⁴ "Man's duty [was] to remain fixed at his natural

¹⁰Craig, pp. 2-3.

¹¹Lovejoy, p. 190.

¹²Mack, p. 19.

¹³Craig, p. 11.

¹⁴Lovejoy, p. 202.

rank in creation, between the animals and the angels; to sink below the human and to aspire to higher knowledge and power are equally sinful and dangerous."¹⁵

Because of God's infinite wisdom it was believed He would choose the best of all systems for the formulation of universal order.¹⁶ Therefore, it seemed reasonable that the form of government "should mirror the order of the macrocosm, [which ranged] from the lowest creature to God." The concept of an ideal cosmic hierarchy was easily extended "to justify a static social hierarchy from peasant to king."¹⁷ Since monarchy could be justified as "the best form of government," all men were expected to "be contented with their stations in life."¹⁸ Consequently, prideful ambition was considered one of the most sinful of all passions--dangerous not only to governmental but to universal harmony as well.¹⁹ Cultivated by poets and nurtured by kings, the concept of the Great Chain of Being grew from its third-century beginnings in Neo-platonism to almost universal acceptance among the educated. The concept

¹⁵Trawick, p. xi.

¹⁶Mack, p. 19.

¹⁷Trawick, p. xi.

¹⁸Craig, p. 12.

¹⁹Ibid.

reached its peak in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, as reflected in the poetry of Shakespeare, Dryden, and Pope.²⁰

Over two hundred years before Byron began writing, Shakespeare, through Ulysses in Troilus and Cressida, eloquently described a belief in the Chain of Being and its reflection in government:

The heavens themselves, the planets and this center,
Observe degree, priority, and place,
Insisture, course, proportion, season, form,
Office, and custom, in all line of order . . .²¹

Take but degree away, untone that string,
And hark, what discord follows! Every thing meets
In Mere oppugnancy.²²

John Dryden accredited love as the unifying principle of the Great Chain:

The cause and Spring of motion, from above,
Hung down on earth the golden chain of love.
Great was th' effect, and high was his intent,
When peace among the jarring seeds he sent.
Fire, flood, and earth, and air by this were bound,
And love, the common link, the new creation crown'd.
The chain still holds; for tho' the forms decay,
Eternal matter never wears away.²³

²⁰Lovejoy, p. 183.

²¹William Shakespeare, Troilus and Cressida, Act I, Scene 3, ll. 85-88, in The Complete Works of William Shakespeare, ed. G.B. Harrison (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1966), p. 983.

²²*Ibid.*, ll. 109-11.

²³John Dryden, Palamon and Arcite, III, 1024-31, in The Poetical Works of Dryden, ed. George R. Noyes (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin Company, 1950), p. 782.

Byron's strongest influence regarding the Great Chain of Being came, most likely, from the poetry of Alexander Pope, who described and explored the significance of the Great Chain in Essay on Man:

Vast chain of being! which from God began,
 Natures aethereal, human, angel, man,
 Beast, bird, fish, insect, what no eye can see,
 No glass can reach; from infinite to thee,
 From thee to nothing.--On superior pow'rs
 Were we to press, inferior might on ours;
 Or in the full creation leave a void,
 Where, one step broken, the great scale's destroy'd;
 From Nature's chain whatever link you strike,
 Tenth, or ten thousandth, breaks the chain alike.²⁴

In his youth, much of Byron's picture of universal order was most likely provided through his studies of Pope's poetry. Evidence of Byron's continued appreciation of Pope may be found in his poetry and letters. In an apologia defending his own satiric style Byron writes in English Bards, and Scotch Reviewers that he has followed "The path which Pope . . . trod before" because he would rather "err with Pope, than shine with" a lesser poet.²⁵

²⁴Epistle i, lines 237-246. This and all subsequent quotations from the poetry of Pope are from The Poems of Alexander Pope, Volume III, i: An Essay on Man, ed. Maynard Mack (London: Methuen; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1951).

²⁵Lines 94 and 102. This and all subsequent quotations from the poetry of Byron are from George Gordon Byron, The Works of Lord Byron: Poetry, ed. Ernest Hartley Coleridge, 7 vols. (1898-1901; rpt. New York: Octagon Books, 1966). Subsequent references will be indicated parenthetically within the text.

Appreciation of style alone probably would not have influenced Byron regarding Pope's view of universal order. In a letter to John Murray, Byron eulogizes Pope with a statement that incorporates far more than an appreciation of style: "As to Pope, I have always regarded him as the greatest name in our poetry."²⁶ In his "Reply to Blackwood's Magazine" Byron staunchly defends "Pope's work [as] the Christianity of English poetry."²⁷ Such a statement requires, at the very least, respect for Pope's poetic precepts--those of content as well as those of style.

Although strongly influenced by Pope, Byron is an appreciator, not a disciple. Occasionally, Byron seems to lead insanctimonious rebellions against many of the beliefs espoused by Pope. Most notably, where Pope advises conformity to the principles of the Great Chain of Being, Byron chants, "Freedom." However, Byron's reactions are not iconoclastic in intention. He reacts with a purity of purpose for the cause of individual freedom. It is out of his thrust for freedom from the confinement of the Great Chain that Byron develops his champions of individuality. The development of these champions will be detailed in subsequent chapters.

²⁶George Gordon Byron, The Works of Lord Byron: Letters and Journals, ed. Rowland E. Prothero, 6 vols. (1898-1901; rpt. New York: Octagon Books, 1966), V, p. 274.

²⁷Letters, IV, p. 486.

CHAPTER III

NATURE, COMMON MAN, AND THE CHAIN: THE HARMONY

Lord Byron's poetic struggle with the confinement inherent in the principles of the Great Chain of Being does not involve the doctrine; he does not seek to challenge the existence of a universal order or the assumed reality of its principles. Nor does Byron object to the harmonious effects of the Chain of Being in relation to nature or to "common" man's place on the Chain. The struggle centers on the confinement and injustice imposed on Byron's alter ego character--hereafter referred to as "uncommon" or "aspiring" man. The distinction between Byron's uncommon man and common man begins in the poet's appreciation of the harmony in nature--and the significant limits to his appreciation.

The significance of Byron's limited appreciation of universal harmony may be illustrated through a comparison with Alexander Pope's description of the Chain of Being from An Essay on Man:

Vast chain of being! which from God began,
Natures aethereal, human, angel, man,
Beast, bird, fish, insect, what no eye can see,
No glass can reach; from Infinite to thee,
From thee to nothing.

(i, 237-241)

Pope's awed description spans the full spectrum of existence, from God to man to microorganism. When Byron celebrates the

beauty of the elements of nature harmonized in a chain of existence in Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, he does not include the great upper portion of the Chain metaphor. He limits his celebration to the elements below man:

. . . From the high host
Of stars, to the lulled lake and mountain-coast,
All is centered in a life intense.
Where not a beam, nor air, nor leaf is lost,
But hath a part of Being, and a sense
Of that which is of all Creator and Defence.

. . . it is a tone,
. . . which makes known
Eternal harmony, and sheds a charm

.
Binding all things with beauty.

(III, xxxix, xc)

The principles of the Great Chain of Being maintain that, although all things are divided into varying levels on the scale of existence, they share a commonality in that all have received an equal amount of God's love, and they all have an equally important function in maintaining universal order, as Pope explains:

Look round our World; behold the chain of Love
Combining all below and all above.

.
Nothing is foreign: Parts relate to whole;
One all-extending, all-preserving Soul
Connects each being, greatest with the least.
(iii, 7-8, 21-23)

Byron's love of nature and his communion with it is viewed as a pleasurable duty in Childe Harold:

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?¹

¹"(Is not) the universe a breathing part?" (MS.), cited by Coleridge, p. 263.

Byron has difficulty extending his love of nature, however, to common man--with whom he feels nothing in common. He continues in the same stanza,

All objects, if compared with these? and stem
 A tide of suffering, rather than forego
 Such feelings for the hard and worldly phlegm
 Of those whose eyes are only turned below,
 Gazing upon the ground, with thoughts which dare not
 glow?

(III, lxxv)

The final lines of this stanza define several characteristics of the common, "grounded" human. He seems to be aware only of his clay element. His thoughts are common, unsoaring, grounded; he lacks the courage and desire to aspire beyond his prescribed place. The lines on common man in the stanza above are written with an attitude of condescension which implies the writer views himself as above the common order.

The distinction between the two orders of man is delineated in Byron's Manfred wherein the grounded man, the Chamois Hunter, serves as a foil to define the aspiring man Manfred. Comparing himself to the eagle or hawk,² Manfred distinguishes himself from the Chamois Hunter:

Patience . . . that work was made
 For brutes of burthen, not for birds of prey!
 Preach it to mortals of a dust like thine,--
 I am not of thine order.

(II, i, 35-38)

² Byron describes man's aspiring nature through the metaphor of the eagle or hawk in Manfred and other works. See Chapter IV for further examples.

Later Manfred details the common hopes of grounded man as seen in the life of the Chamois Hunter:

. . . hopes
Of cheerful old age and a quiet grave,
With cross and garland over its green turf,
And thy grandchildren's love for epitaph!
(II, i, 67-71)

Although Manfred has met the Chamois Hunter for the first time, he can accurately depict the characteristics of his life, the "days of health and nights of sleep" (II, i, 67), because that is the conduct prescribed for grounded man; he knows his place on the Chain.

In contrast, Byron reveals the distinguishing characteristics of uncommon, aspiring man in Manfred through the voice of the First Destiny:

. . . This man
Is of no common order, as his port
And presence here denote: his sufferings
Have been of an immortal nature--like
Our own; his knowledge, and his powers and will,
As far as is compatible with clay,
Which clogs the ethereal essence, have been such
As clay hath seldom borne; his aspirations
Have been beyond the dwellers of the earth,
And they have only taught him what we know--
That knowledge is not happiness. . . .
(II, iv, 51-61)

Without these inborn attributes which compel him to defy the principles of the Great Chain, no dilemma would exist. He would be of the common order.

The closet drama Cain: A Mystery offers further distinctions between grounded and aspiring man through the characters of Adam and Cain. Adam is described by Cain as

"calmed down" (I, 180). Obedient to the prescribed order in his worship and his speech, Adam never questions God's authority, and his well-manicured answers to Cain's probing questions have the sound of order and practiced banality. Adam is first man, but Cain is first uncommon man. Like Manfred, his aspirations for knowledge alienate him from all mankind:

. . . I feel the weight
Of . . . constant thought: I look
Around a world where I seem nothing, with
Thoughts which arise within me, as if they
Could master all things--but I thought alone . . .
(I, 174-78)

Cain suggests that his desire for knowledge may have been derived from having been born too soon after his parents left Eden, before the ambition for knowledge had been "tamed" out of them. Thus, he was born into a family with a "tamed down" father and with a mother who

. . . has forgot the mind
Which made her thirst for knowledge at the risk
Of an eternal curse.
(I, 181-82)

Rarely in the descendants of Cain's brother Seth the uncommon germ will reappear, and these men who dare to soar above the common order, like Manfred and Childe Harold, will share the trait of alienation.

Although Childe Harold's isolation was not as encompassing as Cain's and Manfred's, he shares their feeling:

. . . he had mixed
 Again in fancied safety with his kind,
 And deemed his spirit now so firmly fixed
 And sheathed with an invulnerable mind,
 That, if not joy, no sorrow lurked behind;
 And he, as one, might 'midst the many stand
 Unheeded, searching through the crowd to find
 Fit speculation. . . .

(III, 82-89)

Alienation is the natural, painful result of being apart from the order of the chain and its common herds.

Byron graphically depicts uncommon man's isolation in Heaven and Earth wherein Japhet gradually becomes alienated from those about him. The isolation is complete in the final stage directions where "the waters rise" on the common men groveling for survival. Above them "Japhet remains upon a rock, while the Ark floats towards him in the distance."

Another characteristic of uncommon man is uncommon beauty. For one who is more of eternal intellect than of clay, "The eternal beauty of undying things" (Heaven and Earth, ii, 8) seems to manifest itself in the aspect of the man. In Heaven and Earth, Byron depicts all those of the lineage of Cain, the first uncommon man, as "fairest in their favour" (iii, 407), characteristically more beautiful than the descendants of Seth. All the uncommon-man characters, beginning with Childe Harold, seem to possess a superior handsomeness. However, dominance of the eternal intellect over the clay element is not the only contributor

to superior beauty. Aspiration plays its part, for "a being that is beautiful/ Becometh more so as it looks on beauty" (Heaven and Earth, ii, 6-7). For this reason, Lucifer seems more "beautiful and powerful" (Cain, I, 508) than the rest of the angels.

Common man, dull, comfortable, and plain, is seen as well-suited for his position on the Great Chain of Being. Thus Byron does not object to the position of common man in the order of Being or to nature's links in the Chain.

CHAPTER IV

HALF DUST, HALF DEITY: THE DISCORD

The discord arises from Byron's awareness of being half dust and half deity--a free soul fettered to an unyielding clod. His attitude toward man's predicament is contrary to the proper eighteenth-century attitude which upheld that man, due to his limited vision, could not comprehend why he is "This hour a slave, the next a deity" (Pope's Essay, i, 68). Man could find peace in accepting his position and condition in the order of Being as the best they could be, as Pope explains:

Then say not man's imperfect, Heaven in fault;
Say rather, man's as perfect as he ought:
His knowledge measured to his state and place.
(Essay, i, 69-71)

In order for the plenum formarum to be "full" of the maximum number of existences, obviously, "There must be, somewhere, such a rank as Man" (Essay, i, 48). Like Byron, men of the eighteenth century were aware of man's equivocal position:

Placed on this isthmus of a middle state,
.....
In doubt to deem himself a god, or beast.
(Essay, ii, 3, 8)

Unlike Byron, they generally considered their relative level of being as inconsequential since all beings were given an equal potential for happiness:

Order is Heav'n's first law; and this confest,
 Some are, and must be, greater than the rest,
 More rich, more wise; but who infers from hence
 That such are happier shocks all common sense,
 Heav'n to Mankind impartial we confess,
 If all are equal in their Happiness.

(Essay, iv, 49-54)

While eighteenth-century thought found great comfort in having a formula which "proved" the world was completely in order and man had his proper place in it, Byron bore a soaring romantic spirit for which confinement to a chain of order was slavery to a mean existence, as experienced by Childe Harold:

Still round him clung invisibly a chain
 Which galled for ever, fettering though unseen,
 And heavy though it clanked not; worn with pain,
 Which pined although it spoke not, and grew keen,
 Entering with every step he took through many a scene.
 (III, ix)

Byron's feeling of imprisonment stems primarily from an awareness of man's dualistic condition. Man is both soul and body; he is a hybrid being--the middle link between spirit and flesh:

. . . I can see
 Nothing to loathe in Nature, save to be
 A link reluctant in a fleshly chain,
 Classed among creatures, when the soul can flee.
 (III, lxxii)

The equivocal position of man is "an unhappy uniqueness" which "results in incongruities of feeling, inconsistencies of behavior, and disparities between his aspirations and his powers, which render him ridiculous."¹

¹Lovejoy, p. 199.

Byron describes these disparities in Manfred, where he metaphorically juxtaposes an eagle in flight with man in the middle link. The eagle can look down "with a pervading vision" (I, ii, 36) and appreciate the beauty of the world since it is free to soar, unbound by nature. Manfred, in contrast to the eagle, "cannot love" (I, ii, 9) the earth since he is confined to it, caught up in the human predicament:

Half dust, half deity, alike unfit
To sink or soar, with our mixed essence make
A conflict of its elements, and breathe
The breath of degradation and of pride,
Contending with low wants and lofty will,
Till our Mortality predominates.
(I, ii, 40-45)

The frustration of confinement is intensified by his instinct for spiritual flight; he is "a wild-born falcon with clipt wing" (Childe Harold, III, xv). The instinct for flight is inborn through an unfortunate mixture of elements. It is reasonable to assume that in the process of gradation some in the human link would be formed with more of the ethereal element than others. This concept would be in keeping with the principle of continuity wherein the gradation of kindred elements could produce ethereal man, common man, and then bestial man. It would be a part of uncommon man's intrinsic nature to instinctively aspire to higher realms. He is predestined by the nature of his birth to cause chaos in the order of Being. The chaos in this unfortunate mixture of elements is described in the character of Manfred

by the Abbot of St. Maurice:

This should have been a noble creature: he
Hath all the energy which would have made
A goodly frame of glorious elements,
Had they been wisely mingled; as it is,
It is an awful chaos--Light and Darkness--
And mind and dust--and passions and pure thoughts
Mixed and contending without end or order,--
All dormant or destructive.

(III, i, 160-167)

Byron's passage describing Manfred is similar to Pope's passage describing an eighteenth-century view of man:

Chaos of thought and passion, all confused;
Created half to rise, and half to fall.

(Essay, ii, 13, 15)

Since justice was perceived from a universal perspective, eighteenth-century thought insisted that man's position on the Great Chain of Being was as perfect as possible. Byron, from the perspective of justice for the individual man, views uncommon man's chained desire as a gross inequity.

Uncommon man's instinct for higher realms is abetted by his experiential knowledge gained by brief flights of spirit:

Could he have kept his spirit /in/ . . . flight
He had been happy; but this clay will sink
Its spark immortal, envying it the light
To which it mounts, as if to break the link
That keeps us from yon heaven which woos us to its brink.
(Childe Harold, III, xiv)

Here, the principal characteristic of man's link in the Great Chain is, by nature, paradoxical. Man's spiritual awareness lures him to explore higher realms, yet the

physical half of the link denies all aspiration and demands compliance to man's natural place.

Every denial of spiritual flight is viewed by Byron as a small death extending the meaning of the scripture: "Dust thou art and unto dust shalt thou return" (Gen. 3:19). Through Cain, Byron blames God

With making us the nothing which we are;
And after flattering dust with glimpses of
Eden and immortality, resolves
It back to dust again. . . .

(Cain, III, 71-74)

Through Lucifer, in Cain, Byron dramatizes the extremes of coupling the aspiring spirit and intellect of a god with the base body of a beast:

But if that high thought were
Linked to a servile mass of matter--and
Knowing such things, aspiring to such things,
And science still beyond them, were chained down
To the most crass and petty paltry wants,
All foul and fulsome--and the very best
Of thine enjoyments a sweet degradation,
A most enervating and filthy cheat
To lure thee on to the renewal of
Fresh souls and bodies, all foredoomed to be
As frail, and few so happy----

(II, i, 50-60)

The "renewal of/ Fresh souls and bodies" is in compliance with the principle of plenitude which requires the continued fertility of the physical portion of the Great Chain of Being to assure an orderly balance perpetually. This principle was most likely devised to explain the commandment: "Be fruitful and multiply." Sexual pleasure is viewed by uncommon man as merely a lure to perpetuate the links of the

Great Chain and, thus, to multiply the miseries of man, as Cain describes:

. . . all the few that are,
And all the unnumbered and innumerable
Multitudes, millions, myriads, which may be,
To inherit, agonies accumulated
By ages!

(I, 446-450)

Cain's feeling of hopelessness for his children is not shared by his wife. Adah sees hope of a blessed existence for all mankind, including Cain. To be blessed, from the viewpoint of common (wo)man, is to enjoy the peace of conformity within the order of Being, but submitting to the confinement of the Chain is not blessed from the viewpoint of Lucifer and uncommon man:

CAIN. But there are spirits loftier still--
The archangels.

LUCIFER. And still loftier than the archangels.

ADAH. Aye--but not blessed.

LUCIFER. If the blessedness
Consists in slavery--no.

(I, 417-420)

In Cain, Eden functions as a physical symbol of the higher spiritual/intellectual level which seems to be denied man by divine forces. Eden lies luringly within sight so Cain often stands outside the gates and desires to enter. His only hindrances are the divine law enforcers who stand at her gates.

However, Eden is not a Paradise of the intellect. Rather, it is a Paradise of bliss, or as Lucifer terms it:

A Paradise of ignorance, from which
Knowledge was barred as poison.
(Cain, II, ii, 101-102)

Cain, therefore, is depicted as caught between the spiritual ideal and the physical ideal with no hope of attaining either.

Lucifer discredits the principle of plenitude wherein the order of the universe was created out of the super-abundance and goodness of God. Rather, out of anger from creating one imperfect world, the Creator resorted to

Destruction and disorder of the elements,
Which struck out a world to chaos, as a chaos
Subsiding has struck out a world.

(II, ii, 81-83)

Lucifer's version of the creation challenges the divine perfection of the order of Being.

The source of the Creator's anger may have been the "Mighty Pre-Adamites who walked the earth of which ours is the wreck" (II, ii, 359), whose great intelligence may have generated such aspiration that a previous order of Being was greatly disturbed. Whatever the reason, the pre-Adamite beings were swept away "By a most crushing and inexorable/ Destruction" (II, ii, 80-81) similar to the Deluge which occurred when God repented having made rebellious man. Significantly, the pre-Adamites were replaced by a less intelligent, thus, more subservient man.

After viewing the "Mighty Pre-Adamites" and glimpsing the potentiality of knowledge, Cain looks back on himself and sees the total depravity of the human condition:

CAIN.
Nothing.

Alas! I seem

LUCIFER. And this should be the human sum
Of knowledge, to know mortal nature's nothingness.
(II, ii, 420-422)

Uncommon man's awareness of the nothingness of his nature and of the hopelessness of his condition could swallow him up in depression if he were not given a prototype with a purposeful course of action--a champion as a model for other champions.

The prototype of the champion of individuality is Prometheus. Byron's strong appreciation of the Prometheus of Aeschylus began early in his school studies. Elements of the Promethean character appear in most of his protagonists. Byron writes of the Promethean influence in one of his letters:

The Prometheus, if not exactly in my plan, has always been so much in my head, that I can easily conceive its influence over all or any thing that I have written.²

In Byron's "Prometheus" he refers to "the rock," which is a symbol of the barren earth, and "the chain" (7), which is a symbol of man's fixed position, his uncompromising link in the Great Chain of Being. Prometheus' predicament is an epic-scale type of man's, as Byron states:

Thou art a symbol and sign
To Mortals of their fate and force;
Like thee, Man is in part divine,
A troubled stream from a pure source;

²Letters, October 12, 1817, iv, pp. 174-175.

And Man in portions can foresee
His own funereal destiny;
His wretchedness, and his resistance,
And his sad unallied existence:
To which his Spirit may oppose
Itself--an equal to all woes.
(45-54)

His pride and predicament, his triumph in defiance, his acceptance of responsibility for his actions, his victory in death, all are characteristics which establish Prometheus as Byron's primal champion of individuality.

CHAPTER V

THE SOARING SPIRIT, THE FETTERING CLAY

Byron received from eighteenth-century thought a belief that every existence had a place in the hierarchy of the Great Chain of Being that had to be maintained for the sake of universal harmony, as Pope explains:

And if each system in gradation roll
Alike essential to the amazing Whole,
The least confusion but in one, not all
That system only, but the Whole must fall.

(Essay, i, 247-250)

Because of the Chain's dependency on order, "man's duty was to keep his place and not seek to transcend it."¹ Whenever man yielded to prideful ambition in an effort to ascend the scale, he was considered to be violating the divine principles of gradation and continuity. Pope echoes the attitude of his time toward prideful ambition:

In pride, in reasoning pride, our error lies;
Men would be angels, angels would be gods.
Aspiring to be gods, if angels fell,
Aspiring to be angels, men rebel:
And who but wishes to invert the laws
Of order, sins against the Eternal Cause.

(Essay, i, 123-130)

Byron does not refute the divine law of continuity but he does defend those who aspire to emulate the greatness they admire, for such admiration of higher existences is a natural (forgivable) aspiration:

¹Lovejoy, p. 200.

Ye stars!

--'tis to be forgiven,
That in our aspirations to be great,
Our destinies o'erleap their mortal state,
And claim a kindred with you; for ye are
A Beauty and a Mystery, and create
In us such love and reverence from afar,
That Fortune,--Fame,--Power,--Life, have named
themselves a star.

(Childe Harold, III,
lxxxviii)

Because of their properties, stars serve ideally for Byron as symbols of spiritual essences--to be admired, but not to be attained except by "the living great [who]/ Some higher sparks should animate" ("Ode," 104-105).

The attribute which gives man star-quality is not found in his physical greatness, as Byron explains:

Weigh'd in the balance, hero dust
Is vile as vulgar clay.

("Ode," 100-101)

This verse refers to the epigraph to the "Ode to Napoleon Buonaparte," a quote from Juvenal, Sat. X: "Expende Annibalem: --quot libras in duce summo Invenies?"² From a purely physical perspective, uncommon man and grounded man weigh the same. The ethereal side of man is the essence which gives fame to the clay.

From Pope's work, Byron would have been aware of the eighteenth-century attitude that if man can overcome his pride and ambition he can find happiness in conforming to the order of the Great Chain of Being:

²Translated: "Weigh Hannibal: --how many pounds do you find in the greatest leader?"

The bliss of man (could pride that blessing find)
Is not to act or think beyond mankind.

(Essay, i, 189-190)

A chain is bondage only to the man who seeks to step beyond its bounds. For the grounded man, therefore, the principle of continuity in the Great Chain of Being is a source of comfort. He accepts the eighteenth-century attitude toward conformity and prescribed order; and he is rewarded with a sense of place, the peace of belonging in the universal order. This existence is expected of grounded man, but for Byron's uncommon man to seek submission would be an act of cowardice.

Byron's champions of individuality brandish the sword of freedom with a purity of purpose. To aspire for the sake of power, or to create chaos, or to impose restriction is not heroic. A champion retains his pride and his drive for the cause of freedom.

Napoleon Buonaparte is portrayed by Byron in "Ode to Napoleon Buonaparte" and Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, Canto III, as one with great potential as a champion of individuality who lost his honor through tainted intentions--a Lancelot in the round link of uncommon man. The freedom of his spirit was heroic, and the effect of his ambition denied the bounds of the human link. Napoleon had sought to "aspire/ Beyond the fitting medium of desire" and in doing so he "shattered (the) links of the World's broken chain" (Childe Harold, III, xlii, xviii).

When Byron compares man's adoration of Napoleon before the fall to the worship of idols "With fronts of brass, and feet of clay" ("Ode," 27), he alludes loosely to Nebuchadnezzar's dream recorded in the second chapter of the book of Daniel. The phrase "fronts of brass" refers to the "kingdom of brass, which shall bear rule over all the earth" (2:39). "Feet of clay" refers to the clay element in the feet of the "great image, whose brightness was excellent" (2:31). The brass is the eternal metal or heroic spirit of Napoleon which attained for him the throne of the world and the clay is the natural element which pulled him down. Napoleon, as any other man, was predestined by the principles of the Great Chain to be limited by his clay-ness.

However, the inevitable limitation imposed by the clay element is not the factor which eliminates Napoleon from being considered a champion of individuality. Although his spirit is heroic--"That spirit poured so widely forth" ("Ode," 134)--his violations of purity of purpose are many. He betrays the cause of freedom for personal glorification:

. . . thou art nothing, save the jest of Fame,
Who wooed thee once, thy Vassal, and became
The flattered of thy fierceness--till thou wert
A god unto thyself. . . .

(Childe Harold, III,
xxxvii)

The pursuit of fame for solely personal glory lowers him, in spirit of purpose, below grounded man:

Nor till thy fall could mortals guess
Ambition's less than littleness!
("Ode," 17-18)

Byron's condemnation of Napoleon is much akin to the eighteenth-century idea of ambition's just deserts:

He who surpasses or subdues mankind,
Must look down on the hate of those below.
(Childe Harold, III, xlv)

Further tainting his qualifications as a champion, Napoleon created chaos and restriction. Byron refers to him as "the Eagle . . . with bloody talon," "Lion," "Despot," (Childe Harold, III, 158-159, 169, 172), and "Desolator" ("Ode," 37). These characteristics are contrary to the cause of individual freedom.

Still the heroic spirit of Napoleon's greatness might have been preserved if he had not submitted to the order of the Chain in the end:

And that last act, though not thy worst
The very Fiend's arch mock;
He in his fall preserved his pride,
And, if a mortal, had as proudly died!
("Ode," 141-144)

If Napoleon had chosen "To die a prince" rather than to "live a slave" ("Ode," 44), he would have "died as Honour dies" (95), a martyr for those "who would soar" (98).

Napoleon's aspiration and ensuing fall are compared with Lucifer's in the "Ode." Commenting on the success of Napoleon's ambition, Byron writes that since Lucifer, neither "man nor fiend hath fallen so far" (9). Later in the "Ode," Byron makes the association certain by referring to Napoleon as "The very Fiend's arch mock" (142).

Lucifer, like Napoleon, is a near-champion with tainted intentions. He is Promethean in his preference of "an independence of torture/ To the smooth agonies of adulation" (Cain, I, 382-383), in his pride (which, unlike Napoleon, he defiantly maintains), and in his gift of the mind to humanity. However, the character of Lucifer is not heroic. The reader finds reasons to question his intentions. He deceives Cain and Adah with half-truths and clever omissions. He causes chaos, "Jarring and turning space to misery" (Cain, II, ii, 387). He implements restriction for the purpose of personal glory, for his whole purpose in rebellion is "To reign" (Cain, II, ii, 389).

Byron suggests in his lines on Napoleon and Lucifer that a man may justify his ambition to "invert the laws of order" only if he maintains a purity of purpose. The heroic qualities of Napoleon and Lucifer are tainted with a lust for personal glorification. They fall short of exemplifying Byron's ideal; however, they do serve well in delineating the characteristics of Byron's champions of individuality.

Unlike Napoleon and Lucifer, the Prisoner of Chillon is depicted as a true champion. Byron writes "Sonnet on Chillon" in honor of Freedom and her martyrs. Liberty, in the opening of the sonnet, first refers to the imprisonment of free man at the hand of political tyranny. However, there is an underlying, ultimate reference to man's imprisonment in the Great Chain at the hand of God. The

final section of the sonnet recalls the imprisonment of French patriot Francois Bonivard. Byron writes that the steps in the path which Bonivard wore in the stone floor while imprisoned should be preserved as a monument "For they appeal from tyranny to God." The reference to God expands the scope of the poem. Two objections to the Great Chain may be implied in the "Sonnet": for man's confinement in the Chain (specifically, for the embodiment of a spiritual mind), and for the existence of the Chain as a model, giving the tyrant mock authority for his method of ruling.

Bonivard, a victim of hierarchical tyranny, never submits to the order forced upon him. He is presented as a martyr for the cause of freedom.

Byron's poetic struggle with the restriction of the Great Chain and of its reflection in government extends beyond the areas of ambition. Any attempt to exceed one's prescribed station, even in the areas of intellect and love, was considered ambitious. Therefore, the following chapters on the soaring mind and on the soaring heart will further develop Byron's portrayal of uncommon man's ambitious struggle against the confinement of hierarchical order.

CHAPTER VI

THE SOARING MIND, THE FETTERING CLAY

The eighteenth-century attitude toward the pursuit of forbidden knowledge was an extension of the attitude toward ambition. Man's knowledge was not to go beyond certain boundaries of theology and reason. As Pope explains, "His knowledge [has been] measured to his state and place" (Essay, i, 69-71) on the Great Chain of Being by an infinitely wise God. To aspire beyond the human realm would be in violation of the principles of continuity and gradation, which required that "all must full or not coherent be" (Essay, i, 45). Because of the potential for universal cacophony, it would be "absurd for any part to claim/ To be another, in this general frame" (i, 236-264). From the eighteenth-century point of view, "to reason right is to submit" (i, 164). But theirs was an objective point of view, wherein "right-ness" was determined from a universal perspective.

Byron determined rightness from an individual perspective; his point of view was subjective. Universal principles did not concern him unless they interfered with individual freedom. Submission was for the common man. Seemingly in response to Pope's edict "to reason right is to submit," Byron boldly proclaims:

Abandonment of reason to resign
 Our right of thought--our last and only place
 Of refuge; this, at least, shall still be mine:
 Though from our birth the Faculty divine
 Is chained. . . .

(Childe Harold, IV, 1135-1140)

The defiance of principles designed for the good of the universe was not Byron's only concern regarding intellectual freedom. He had to confront the awareness that man was a hybrid creature, the middle link between dust and deity. He had to deal more with experiential fact than with moral philosophy. Men of the eighteenth century were not unaware of man's difficult position in the hierarchy of existence. Pope describes man hanging between the two states, "in doubt his mind or body to prefer" (ii, 7-9). Reflecting eighteenth-century thought, he contended that man's equivocal position "must be right with respect to the whole system of things [and] with respect to man himself [since the harmony of the universe] contributes to his well-being":¹

But as he fram'd a Whole, the Whole to bless,
 On mutual Wants built mutual Happiness,
 So from the first eternal ORDER ran,
 And creature link'd to creature, man to man.
 (Essay. iii, 111-114)

The route to happiness was considered to be through submission for the good of the universe.

Byron's uncommon man is incapable of happiness through submission. He is intrinsically unable

¹Mack, p. 19.

. . . to tame
/His/ mind down from its own infinity--
 To live in narrow ways with little men,
 (Prophecy of Dante, I, 159-161)

because "the heat/ of his impeded Soul would through his bosom eat" (Childe Harold, III, XV). Uncommon man apparently is a product of the principle of plenitude whereby the fullness requiring a maximum number of types of existences would produce a being with more of the "immortal part" than is common. By birth he is predestined to be uncommon. Submission to commonality would be a denial of his primary element. His passion to aspire is natural, and once he has tasted forbidden knowledge, his appetite is insatiable:

But Quiet to quick bosoms is a Hell,
 And there hath been thy bane; there is a fire
 And motion of the Soul which will not dwell
 In its own narrow being, but aspire
 Beyond the fitting medium of desire;
 And, but once kindled, quenchless evermore,
 Preys upon high adventure, nor can tire
 Of aught but rest; a fever at the core,
 Fatal to him who bears, to all who ever bore.
 (Childe Harold, III, xlii)

Uncommon man's desire to soar intellectually is so strong that he would never be able to find happiness through submission.

Unfortunately, uncommon man cannot find happiness in defiance either. In man's first violation against the order of the Great Chain of Being at the Tree of Knowledge in the Garden of Eden, the pursuit of knowledge proved to be a bitter fruit. Byron explains the results of aspiring to knowledge in Manfred's opening soliloquy:

Sorrow is Knowledge: they who know the most
 Must mourn the deepest o'er the fatal truth,
 The Tree of Knowledge is not that of Life.
 (I, i, 10-12)

Later in the poem Nemesis refers to freedom as "the forbidden fruit" (II, iii, 71). This reference is not necessarily contradictory with the first; to taste of forbidden knowledge man must, at the same time, taste of freedom from the order of Being, however brief.

Sustained freedom from the clay element is necessary for man to have the god-like knowledge promised of the fruit of the Tree. Adam and Eve were not told that the god-like knowledge they could receive would have the limitation of clay:

Methinks the Tree of Knowledge
 Hath not fulfilled its promise:--if they sinned,
 At least they ought to have known all things that are
 Of knowledge.

(Cain, I, 457-460)

Blessed of mind and damned of clay, man has paid the price for his aspiration without receiving the benefit:

It is not with the earth, though I must till it,
 I feel at war--but that I may not profit
 By what it bears of beautiful, untailing,
 Nor gratify my thousand swelling thoughts
 With knowledge. . . .

(Cain, II, ii, 125-129)

Although uncommon man must always suffer the degradation of clay, his meditations may still take him--for a time--into realms of forbidden knowledge where he may become "familiar with Eternity" (Manfred, II, ii, 90).

Byron's idea of uncommon man's "lone wanderings" and "bodiless thought" may have been derived from Neo-platonic trances whereby "he that dares soar above the gross impediments of flesh, to converse with divine objects, will become little less than a God."¹

Frequently, while conversing with divine objects, Byron's uncommon man displays the traits of a champion of individuality. Manfred demonstrates heroic independence when he refuses to bow to spirits who are supposedly higher in the rank than he:

The Mind--the Spirit--the Promethean spark,
The lightning of my being, is as bright,
Pervading, and far darting as your own,
And shall not yield to yours, though cooped in clay!
(Manfred, I, i, 154-157)

Heroic potential begins in uncommon man when an independent spirit combines with the forbearance to persist and the courage to resist:

...man are inevitable. We must bear,
And some of us resist--and both in vain,
Lucifer' but it is worth the trial. . . .
(Cain, I, 489-491)

Creator, but still he proclaims
"It is worth the trial" because the alternative is true; but no superior" (Cain, II, 1).
Obviously, Byron's ascribing the man's desire urging Byron's champions of individuality to aspire.

Manfred maintains his intellectual pride during his conversation with the Spirit of Hell: "I have commanded/ the flesh with Satan." Ironically, however, the of the Great Chain of Being seem to support the concept of Things of an essence greater far than thine" (III, iv, 84-85).

¹William E. Marshall, Lord Byron: Selected Poems and Letters, p. 58, quoting G.B. Gelli, Circe, tr. H. Laying, 1745, p. 225.

A part of his pride is a self-sufficiency which dares to deny the Demons their right to his soul, even in the final hour of his life:

I do defy ye,--though I feel my soul
Is ebbing from me. . . .

. . . . I stand
Upon my strength--I do defy--deny--
Spurn back, and scorn ye!

(III, iv, 99-100, 119-121)

In the closet drama Cain, Byron may have had in mind William Blake's line, "All deities reside in the human breast" (The Marriage of Heaven and Hell), for his characterization of Lucifer and the Creator appears to be a representation of man's conflicting elements. As the creator of physical existence, God is associated with the clay element in man, and Lucifer represents the intellectual element. The conflict between the Creator and Lucifer mirrors the warring elements of man. Just as the intellectual aspirations of man are inevitably restricted by his clay element, Lucifer's aspirations were restricted by the conqueror Creator, but still he proclaims proudly, "I have a Victor--true; but no superior" (Cain, II, ii, 426).

Obviously, Byron's ascribing the material element to God is a reversal of biblical teachings which associate the flesh with Satan.² Ironically, however, the principles of the Great Chain of Being seem to support the concept

²William H. Marshall, Lord Byron: Selected Poems and Letters, "Notes to the Poems," p. 532.

Byron presents in Cain. Since all material existences are a part of the Chain which is His divine order--and of which He is a part--then the material/clay element would rightly be ascribed to God. Further, since the divine scale of Being served to define evil in the privative sense,³ separation from the divine order through intellectual aspiration would be evil. Thus, the intellect could rightly be ascribed to Satan. As Lucifer explains, "we reign/Together; but our dwellings are asunder" (II, ii, 375-376)

Since Cain had rebelled against the order prescribed by God, Lucifer was quick to claim him:

He who bows not to him had bowed to me,
 . . . not worshipping
 Him makes thee mine the same.
(Cain, I, 317, 319-320)

He is Lucifer's only in a privative sense. Since he did not submit to clay, he affirmed the intellectual realm which Lucifer rules. Despite Lucifer's claim, Cain maintains his heroic independence--he bows to no one.

Byron uses the perspective of the Great Chain of Being not only to reverse the concept of associating the material element with Lucifer, but to reverse the association of eternal life with God. Death, in terms of the intellect, means freedom from the bondage of clay--"Death leads to the highest knowledge" (II, ii, 164)--but in terms of the material, Death means passing into non-existence.⁴

³Lovejoy, p. 64.

⁴Marshall, p. 533.

When Cain asks how man may have Life, Lucifer answers:

Yourselves, in your resistance. By being
 Quench the mind, if the mind will be itself
 And centre of surrounding things. . . .
 (I, 212-215)

Lucifer further explains how Cain (uncommon man) can
 "transcend and control external matter," thus creating "his
 own inner reality"⁵ without submitting to the order of the
 Chain or to chaos:

Think and endure,--and from an inner world
 In your own bosom--where the outward fails;
 So shall you nearer be the spiritual
 Nature, and war triumphant with your own.
 (II, ii, 463-466)

Similarly, Manfred creates a world within his mind while
 claiming full responsibility for his decisions and deeds:

The Mind which is immortal makes itself
 Requital for its good or evil thoughts,--
 Is its own origin of ill and end--
 And its own place and time.
 (III, iv, 129-132)

Man cannot reasonably hope to overcome the principles of
 the Chain of Being and alter his plight, but he can know
 a small victory through the pride of self-sufficiency.

Lucifer suggests that man's salvation comes not
 with the giving of Life--man already possesses the spiritual
 intellect which "must survive" (II, i, 72)--but with the
 giving of the understanding that Death is a freedom from

⁵Marsha Kent Savage, "'Fire From the Mind': A Study
 of Byron's Prometheanism," Thesis, Austin Peay State
 University, 1974, p. 50.

the bondage of clay. The salvation is immediate with the understanding; he is saved from the fear of Death. When Lucifer explains that Death "is the prelude," Cain responds, "Then I dread it less,/ Now that I know it leads to something definite" (II, ii, 412-413). Cain's previous wish was to have never been born, since he feared Death too much to wish for it. Upon understanding the potential freedom in Death he declares:

Let what is mortal of me perish, that
I may be in the rest as angels are.

(II, i, 76-77)

Death is discussed with fond anticipation in Childe Harold. The narrator/Byron looks forward to the time when he can "remount at last/ . . . on delighted wing,/ Spurning the clay-cold bonds which round our being cling" (III, lxxiii). Death will be the realization of the "inward dream" of "bodiless thought":

. . . when, at length, the mind shall be all free
From what it hates in this degraded form.

(III, lxxiv)

An understanding of the positive aspects of death prepares the champion of individuality for martyrdom. Since all champions would maintain their pride and self-sufficiency to the end, all die martyrs for the cause of individual freedom, and while they live in the agony of confinement to the clay element of the Chain, like Manfred, they die in peace.

Byron's champion of individuality defiantly breaks away from his place in the universal order of things. His self-sufficiency allows him to "find a life within himself." His pride will not let him submit to order or chaos, regardless of the price. Out of the dust of the shattered link, Byron forms his champion of individuality, as exemplified in Childe Harold:

But soon he knew himself the most unfit
 Of men to herd with Man, with whom he held
 Little in common; untaught to submit
 His thoughts to others, though his soul was quelled
 In youth by his own thoughts; still uncompelled,
 He would not yield dominion of his mind
 To Spirits against whom his own rebelled,
 Proud though in desolation--which could find
 A life within itself, to breathe without mankind.
 (III, xii)

Byron's uncommon man, incapable by his nature to find happiness in submission or in defiance, must turn to the cause of individual freedom for pride and purpose in life. Significantly, his quest is viewed through Byron's perspective of right and wrong, of life and death. The perishable clay element of man is associated with death; thus, submission to the clay--to man's assumed rightful place in the order of existence--is submission to death. Byron's association of life with the intellect elevates his champions of individuality who persevere with a purity of purpose to a level of honor equivalent to Catholicism's sainthood. The purity of Byron's champions is especially significant in his treatment of love outside the prescribed order.

¹Lovejoy, p. 205.

²Lovejoy, pp. 205-206.

CHAPTER VII

THE SOARING HEART, THE FETTERING CLAY

The order of the Great Chain of Being often served to define human bounds. Since the order of the Chain issued from God, it was considered "the best of all systems."¹ The hierarchy of the Chain was the standard by which all other systems were measured.² Social hierarchy and monarchy, therefore, could be easily justified as the systems preferred by God. Since these correlative social and governmental orders mirrored the divine order of the universe, any departure from their order could be considered a crime.

Byron deals with the "crime" of loving beyond the bounds of hierarchical design in "The Lament of Tasso." Byron depicts Tasso as a poet who has been imprisoned for falling in love with Duke Alphonso's sister. Such a violation of order was considered madness. The charges of madness are refuted by Tasso, who explains his actions as delirium of the heart:

I was indeed delirious in my heart
To lift my love so lofty as thou art.
(50-51)

Tasso cries for justice--for an end to his punishment for a love which he never expected to be requited because of his

¹Lovejoy, p. 205.

²Lovejoy, pp. 205-206.

station. He does not challenge the rightness of the hierarchical order:

. . . my love without ambition grew;
I knew thy state--my station--and I knew
A Princess was no lovemate for a bard.
(121-123)

Tasso revered her from a proper distance, but for the wrong reason. She was worshipped not as a ruling princess, but as the Princess of his Love.

. . . if it were
Presumptuous thus to love without design,
That sad fatality hath cost me dear.
(139-141)

His punishment for loving outside the confined order of social design is imprisonment. His restriction is doubled. He is denied his freedom in life as well as in love.

Byron writes further of Tasso's predicament in Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, Canto IV. Duke Alphonso is described as a "miserable Despot" who "could not quell" Tasso's mind by imprisoning him among "maniacs" (xxxvi). Alphonso and Tasso, unbound from their positions by death and viewed objectively through the perspective of past time, are presented as deserving reverse roles. Byron observes that Alphonso's only claim to fame is his ill-formed "link" with Tasso, and that if he were born to "another station" (more deserving of his character) he would be "Scarce fit to be the slave of him thou mad'st to mourn" (xxxvii).

While Tasso's love violated the hierarchical design of man, the love of a brother and sister beyond the set

boundaries of morality was a violation of universal continuity--of relationship and proportion. The rebellious love of brother and sister is an autobiographical reference Byron makes in many of his works. In "Stanzas for Music," Byron writes:

Too brief for our passion, too long for our peace,
Were those hours--can their joy or their bitterness
cease?
We repent, we abjure, we will break from our chain,--
We will part, we will fly to--unite it again!
(II, 5-8)

Although the "chain" in the above verse refers primarily to the forbidden love which links them, the image of the Great Chain, whose rules of order pull them apart, can be seen as a concurrent opposite. These contrasting, concurrently existing images intensify the struggle between passion and propriety, between soaring heart and fettering clay. Byron is pulled between the two in a wavering tug of warring wills.

His passion for his sister is impelled by the longing of an isolated man for a kindred spirit, as he implies in Manfred:

From my youth upwards
My Spirit walked not with the souls of men,
Nor looked upon the earth with human eyes,
My joys--my griefs--my passions--and my powers,
Made me a stranger; though I wore the form,
I had no sympathy with breathing flesh,
Nor midst the Creatures of Clay that girded me
Was there but One . . .
With whom I wore the chain of human ties.

(II, ii, 50-52, 55-60, 102)

For the man who dares to soar beyond the set order of the universe, she was the perfect match:

She had the same lone thoughts and wanderings
The quest of hidden knowledge, and a mind
To comprehend the Universe. . . .

(Manfred, II, ii, 109-111)

"To love as they have loved" was "the deadliest sin"

(II, iv, 23), a violation of the order of the Chain, a crime against the universe which could lead only to destruction.

Thus Byron "destroyed her . . . / Not with his hand, but heart" (Manfred, II, ii, 117-118).

In Cain, Byron seeks to legitimatize incest.

Byron's reversals of orthodox belief in this drama, especially the ascribing of the material element to the Creator, offers the reader a new perspective on the nature of evil.

Since the Creator is associated with sinful flesh, then perhaps His "Good" is evil--it becomes a matter of perspective, as Lucifer explains:

He as a conqueror will call the conquered
Evil; but what will be the Good he gives?
Were I the victor, his works would be deemed
The only evil ones.

(II, ii, 443-446)

Presenting "Evil and Good as things in their own essence" (II, ii, 452) allows Byron to broaden the realm of possible Good. When Lucifer tells Cain's sister-wife, Adah, that incest will one day be a sin in her children, Adah protests:

Shall they not love and bring forth things that love
Out of their love?
.
What is the sin which is not

Sin in itself? Can circumstance make sin
 or Virtue?--if it doth, we are the slaves
 Of----

(I, i, 368-369, 380-383)

Lucifer interrupts to say, "Higher things than ye are slaves," to emphasize God's tyranny throughout the hierarchy of Being. Love confined, even by God, is slavery.

In "Heaven and Earth: A Mystery" Byron explores love outside the hierarchy of Being through the aspirations of the "daughters of men" for the "sons of God." Rebellion against the divine design would be impious, and when Anah warns of their impiety, Aholibamah retorts, "And where is the impiety of loving/ Celestial natures?" (i, 10-11).

Later Noah reminds the angels Azaziel and Samiasa of the elemental limitations designed by God between clay and spirit:

Has not God made a barrier between Earth
 And Heaven, and limited each, kind to kind?
 (iii, 475-476)

The limitation of "kind to kind" is important to the Great Chain of Being; otherwise the principle of plenitude, which provides for the perpetuation of each material link, would be threatened.

Raphael the Archangel compares the fall of the "second host from heaven" seduced by Anah and Aholibamah with the fall of man seduced by the serpent. "The snake but vanquished dust"; but to disrupt the order of Being with their love was "to break Heaven's law" (iii, 592-593).

Aholibamah and Anah convey the characteristics of uncommon man in their beauty, in their pride (ii, 11), and in their "eternal essence" (i, 120):

Thou art immortal--so am I: I feel--
 I feel my immortality o'ersweep
 All pains, all tears, all fears, and peal,
 Like the eternal thunders of the deep,
 Into my ears this truth--"Thou liv'st for ever!"
 (i, 110-114)

The aspiration of their love leads them to the uncommon resolution of martyrdom:

Let us . . .
 . . . meet the wave, as we would meet the sword,
 . . .
 And wailing less for us than those who shall
 Survive in mortal or immortal thrall.
 (iii, 624-627)

They would prefer the freedom of death to life in bondage.

Perhaps the greatest of Byron's champions of individuality, other than Prometheus, are the angels Samiasa and Azaziel. Although the characterization of the two angels is limited in the poem, Byron successfully communicates the depth of their sacrifice, the brightness of their defiance, and the purity of their purpose. When Raphael bids the angels to return to their proper seat in the celestial order, Samaisa responds, "We have chosen, and will endure." Their quality of perseverance is enlarged by a vision of self-sufficiency; Azaziel tells Anah to leave our "prison" of a world to explore

A brighter world than this, where thou shalt breathe
 Ethereal life . . .
 These darkened clouds are not the only skies.
 (iii, 821-823)

The soaring bird image is glorified in the characters; their ability to soar the universe exceeds even the eagle and the falcon with unclipped wing. The two angels are similar to Lucifer in the grand scale of their rebellion. However, the angels are distinguished from Lucifer by their capacity to love and in their purity of purpose.

Byron presents the love of angels as a manifestation of love without bounds. In portraying rebels against the Great Chain of Being as figures of beauty and heroic stature, Byron attempts to loosen the grip of his contemporaries who still clung closely to rigid order--and condemned him for his actions. A similar result is attempted in Cain with Evil and Good presented as "things in their own essence" (II, ii, 452), and in Childe Harold's Pilgrimage with Tasso and Alphonso presented as deserving reverse positions. Except for Manfred, all these characters have a pervasive quality of innocence which defies condemnation. Manfred's guilt is born not from the wrongness of his love from a universal perspective, but from the destructive results his love had upon his lover. As in his treatment of ambition and intellect, Byron views love subjectively--based upon the quality of his characters rather than upon precepts involving universal order.

CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSION

The Great Chain of Being metaphorically represents the eighteenth-century view of universal order. The confinement inherent in this view is contrary to Byron's romantic spirit, and the portrayal of man's heroic struggle against it is a major theme in Byron's work. The two areas of confinement which most concern Byron are the reflection of universal hierarchy in government and society, and the position of man as a hybrid creature linked between the spiritual and the material segments of the Chain of Being.

Byron departs from eighteenth-century thought not in denying the reality of the traditional concept of universal order, but, rather, in denying the justice of that reality. While eighteenth-century thought perceived justice from the perspective of universal good, Byron views justice from the perspective of individual good--which never interferes with individual freedom.

Regarding common man, whose hopes do not exceed his place in the universal order, Byron sees no injustice. Uncommon man, however, is born with a soaring spirit which cannot be happily "tamed down" to his prescribed position in the universal order. He is limited further by his clay element which confines the flight of his soaring spirit. Byron views this restraint as gross inequity.

The injustices which uncommon man must suffer involve three areas of his life: his ambition, his intellect, and his love. Although the source of confinement can vary, generally, uncommon man's aspiration to improve his position is thwarted by the universal hierarchy as reflected in the government; his desire for hidden knowledge is confined by his clay element; and his passion for forbidden love is restricted by society in its mirroring of universal order.

Byron confronts these injustices by reversing the perspective of traditional concepts and by developing heroic characters who persevere for the cause of individual freedom. Throughout Byron's work, his heroic characters are given traits which distinguish them as champions of individuality. These champions persevere in the cause of freedom with pride and purity of purpose. Byron's portrayal of rebels against the Great Chain of Being as honorable figures of heroic stature emphasizes the smallness of men who submit. Byron offers a counterview of the traditional attitude that man should not seek to transcend his place in the universal order.

Through reversals of traditional beliefs, Byron offers new perspectives which support the cause of individual freedom. When he reverses the traditional association of the material element with Lucifer, he reverses the

association of eternal life with God. Byron proposes that death, in terms of the material, means passing into non-existence, but, in terms of the eternal intellect, death means freedom from the bondage of clay. Life, Byron implies, may be found in intellectual self-sufficiency, rather than in submission to the clay element.

Byron reverses the traditional concept of good and evil--or, at least, widens the realm of possibility--by presenting right and wrong as the prerogative of the one who rules. Good and evil, then, become matters of perspective. This new perspective allows Byron, in his treatment of love, intellect, and ambition, more freedom to view right and wrong subjectively--based upon the quality of his characters rather than upon precepts involving universal order.

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