

**"FIRE FROM THE MIND":
A STUDY OF BYRON'S PROMETHEANISM**

ESSAYS IN LITERATURE

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"FIRE FROM THE MIND":
A STUDY OF BYRON'S PROMETHEANISM

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
Marsha Kent Savage

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ABSTRACT

Byron's images of fire and allusions to the Promethean theft of fire from heaven provide an element of continuity in his varied poetic career. Byron uses the Promethean theft of fire from heaven as an analogy for the process of artistic creation. Byron's Prometheanism also involves a fundamental paradox of human nature: man's efforts to transcend inevitably end in destruction.

Although some Byron critics have noted his imagery of fire or acknowledged his allusions to Prometheus, no one has ever traced Byron's Prometheanism throughout his poetry or explored the relationship between image and myth. A study of Byron's imagery of fire reveals that Prometheanism not only permeates every aspect of his poetic career but also affords insight into his view of human nature. Byron's increasingly pessimistic view of man is reflected in his emphasis on Promethean punishment rather than aspirations.

The figure of the Promethean artist represents Byron's view of human nature at its most positive. Man is unable to transcend, but he is afforded heroism in defeat. In Cain Byron is less assured of man's capacity to achieve Promethean stature. Cain undertakes no Promethean theft of fire from heaven; images of fire in Cain are associated only with the deity. Don Juan represents Byron's view of human nature at its most pessimistic. Man is chained to cold earth. His attempts to transcend constitute travesties of the Prometheanism of Byron's earlier poems. In the icy world of the final cantos of Don Juan, man is afforded no aspirations that can even parody those of Prometheus.

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To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a Thesis written by Marsha Kent Savage entitled "'Fire From the Mind': A Study of Byron's Prometheanism." I recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, with a major in English.

Lewis C. Tatham
Major Professor

We have read this thesis and
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. INTRODUCTION	1
II. BYRON AND POPE: TOWARD A DEFINITION OF BYRON'S ROMANTICISM .	9
III. BYRON'S TURKISH TALES: LOVE AND VIOLENCE	19
IV. THE PROMETHEAN ARTIST	25
V. BYRON'S <u>CAIN</u> : THE DECLINE OF THE MYTH	47
VI. PRELUDE TO <u>DON JUAN</u> : MAN IN THE FALLEN WORLD	53
VII. <u>DON JUAN</u> : BYRON'S NEGATIVE PROMETHEANISM	59
VIII. CONCLUSION	71
BIBLIOGRAPHY	74

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Inherent in Byron's fire symbology are both the enlightening and destructive qualities of fire. Fire becomes the essence of the creative mind, a favorite Byronic analogy for the power of the imagination. In the third canto of Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, the following simile compares fire to the imaginative quality of the mind: "Fire from the mind as vigour from the limb."¹ The most imaginative artists, those who best fulfill Byron's expected function of the artist, achieve Promethean stature. The metaphor of the theft of fire from heaven, Byron's rendition of the Promethean myth, underlies all of Byron's poetry. The Promethean figure, a Byronic ideal, voluntarily undertakes the theft of fire from heaven, effecting his own destruction.

Byron's Promethean myth also involves the paradoxical composition of man. "Half dust, half deity," man, like Prometheus, is "alike unfit to sink or soar" (Manfred, I, ii, 40-41). Promethean man is unable to achieve a synthesis between his thrusting ambitions and the limitations of the human condition. In the fallen world of Don Juan the negative aspect of Prometheanism is emphasized.

Commentators frequently discuss discrepancies in Byron's career rather than trying to discover an element of continuity. Imagery of fire

¹Canto III, line 71. 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, 6 vols. (1898-1901; rpt. New York: Octagon Books, 1966). Subsequent references will be indicated parenthetically within the text.

and allusions to Prometheus prove to be significant throughout Byron's career. Furthermore, Byron's attitude toward the Promethean myth affords insight into his attitude toward human nature. As Byron becomes increasingly despairing of man's condition, his use of the Promethean myth exhibits a similar decline.

Although critics comment on Byron's Prometheanism or mention fire as one of his dominant images, no critic has fully explored the relationship between the image and its myth or traced the myth throughout Byron's career. Byron himself acknowledged the importance of the Promethean myth throughout his poetic career: "The Prometheus, if not exactly in my plan, has always been so much in my head, that I can easily conceive the influence over all or any thing that I have written." Byron also states: "Of the Prometheus of Aeschylus I was passionately fond as a boy (it was one of the Greek plays we read thrice a year at Harrow)."² Byron suggests that his career is like that of any poet who tries to elevate mankind. Byron defines a poet as one "Whose works have raised our thoughts above this sphere of common everyday existence, and who, Prometheus-like, has stolen fire from Heaven to animate the children of clay."³

The importance of Byron's Prometheanism to the history of ideas is revealed in Bertrand Russell's inclusion of a section on Byron in his

²Letter to John Murray, Oct. 12, 1817, reprinted in The Works of Lord Byron: Letters and Journals, ed. Rowland E. Prothero, 6 vols. (1898-1901; rpt. New York: Octagon Books, 1966). This quotation is from IV, 174-175.

³This remark is cited by G. Wilson Knight, Lord Byron: Christian Virtues (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1952), p. 246. Knight's source is the 1834 edition of Lady Blessington's Conversations of Lord Byron.

History of Western Philosophy.⁴ Russell establishes the figure of the "Titan at war with himself" as the Byronic ideal.⁵ Russell describes the aristocratic rebel such as Byron as a convergence of Titanic assertion and Satanism:

It may be that love of power is the underground source of their discontent, but in their conscious thought there is criticism of the government of the world, which, when it goes deep enough, takes the form of Titanic cosmic self-assertion or, in those who retain some superstition, of Satanism. Both are to be found in Byron.⁶

G. Wilson Knight makes a similar statement about Byron's Promethean-ism, finding it "as near the Satanic as the Divine."⁷ Knight devotes an entire chapter of his book to "The New Prometheus."⁸ Although Knight makes numerous allusions to Byron's life and a few references to his poetry, he does identify the archetypal figure of Prometheus as Byron's ideal: "Prometheus opposed tyranny in the cause of human advance; he is the fire-bringer and fore-thinker, nourishing the divine spark in man and looking to his great futurity."⁹ The most important concept that Knight adds to Russell's discussion is his definition of the Promethean figure as an artist, not necessarily a poet by profession but rather an individual

⁴Bertrand A. Russell, A History of Western Philosophy (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1945), pp. 774-780.

⁵Russell, p. 750.

⁶Russell, p. 747.

⁷Knight, Lord Byron: Christian Virtues, p. 248.

⁸Knight, Lord Byron: Christian Virtues, pp. 225-281.

⁹Knight, Lord Byron: Christian Virtues, p. 241.

with poetic sensibilities, "an incarnation of poetry."¹⁰ Robert F. Gleckner also notes that Byron's Prometheus is more than a conventional mythological symbol, being also a poet.¹¹ The concept of the Promethean artist proves an integral part of this study: the culmination of the creative-destructive paradox is seen in the figure of the Promethean artist.

Harold Bloom's discussion of Promethean man¹² provides the best analysis of the paradox inherent in artistic creation. Bloom's discussion of Byron's lyric ode "Prometheus" affords insight into the "Godlike crime," artistic creation. Bloom emphasizes the importance of the Promethean myth to Byron's poetry, making a statement that applies to all of Byron's nonsatiric works: "Byron's entire poetic career at its most serious . . . can be understood as an attempt to justify the theft of fire by creating, with its aid, while never forgetting that precisely such creation intensifies the original Promethean 'Godlike crime.'"¹³ Bloom, however, includes Don Juan in his list of works that attempt to justify the theft of fire. Consequently, Bloom describes passages which debase the Promethean theft of fire as "unfortunate,"¹⁴ rather than accepting such passages as deliberate travesties of the Promethean myth.

¹⁰Knight, Lord Byron: Christian Virtues, p. 244.

¹¹Robert F. Gleckner, Byron and the Ruins of Paradise (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1967), p. 252.

¹²Harold Bloom, The Visionary Company: A Reading of English Romantic Poetry, 2nd ed. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1971), pp. 238-255.

¹³Bloom, p. 246.

¹⁴Bloom, p. 261.

George Ridenour's excellent study of Don Juan draws a parallel between the Prometheus myth and the fall of man. Ridenour identifies the "waste and icy clime" of the modern world as an analogy for the fallen condition of Prometheus.¹⁵ Although Ridenour discusses man's passions as the "unforgiven fire,"¹⁶ he does not recognize such as debasements of the Promethean myth. At times, Ridenour is more optimistic about the capacity of man to transcend than is supported by Byron's debasement of the Promethean myth.

Only one critic, W. Paul Elledge, has noted Byron's pervasive imagery of fire. Elledge discusses fire and its companion image, clay, as two of Byron's favorite metaphors:

"Fire" and "clay" are Byron's favorite metaphorical vehicles for illustrating the paradoxical composition of human nature: the first representing variously passion, aspiration, freedom, motion, emotion, energy, infinity, divinity; and the second typifying intellect, frustration, bondage, ennui, sterility, finitude, and mortality. In almost every major poem the figure will appear with its diametric opposite explicit or implied.¹⁷

Elledge's contention that intellect is associated with clay is not supported by Byron's poetry. In Byronic poems such as Manfred or Cain, intellect and the search for knowledge are part of man's Promethean spark. Elledge's study contains only scattered references to images of fire in different poems, and he excludes consideration of Don Juan and other satiric poems.

¹⁵George M. Ridenour, The Style of Don Juan (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1960), p. 33.

¹⁶Ridenour, pp. 51-88.

¹⁷W. Paul Elledge, Byron and the Dynamics of Metaphor (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1968), p. 8.

Byron's Prometheanism has often been mentioned by critics, but very rarely discussed in depth. No critic has ever suggested that Byron's pervasive imagery of fire and his direct allusions to Prometheus constitute an element of continuity in Byron's varied career. Moreover, the use Byron makes of the creativity-destruction paradox of the Promethean myth proves a standard against which to measure Byron's increasingly pessimistic view of human nature. This study organizes Byron's images of fire and his allusions to Prometheus into a logical and coherent pattern that affords insight into Byron's changing attitudes.

Before examining Byron's poetry for imagery of fire and Promethean elements, this study considers in Chapter Two the relationship between Byron and Pope. Although Byron has always been regarded as an admirer of Pope, this chapter considers Pope as a possible source of Byron's Prometheanism and defines Byron's Romanticism in terms of his departure from the Augustan scale of values. Other renditions of the Promethean myth are also noted in this chapter in an attempt to isolate Byron's innovations and different emphases.

Chapter Three begins the study of the imagery of fire used to characterize man's capacity for both creativity and destruction. In the Turkish tales, studied in this chapter, fire is associated with love, an expression of man's creativity, and violence, the manifestation of man's destructive capacity. The Turkish tales are significant in that they provide important background for the more fully developed Promethean characters cited in Chapter Four.

The most creative and, consequently, the most destructive figure, the Promethean artist, is discussed in Chapter IV. The Promethean artist

is the author of a voluntary theft of fire from heaven, establishing himself as the source of great creativity and great destruction. Unable to achieve a synthesis between his thrusting mind and the limitations of his flesh, the Promethean artist represents a pessimistic view of life because man is unable to transcend his imprisoning clay. Promethean aspirations and heroic endurance in the inevitable defeat constitute Byron's view of human nature at its most positive.

As Byron becomes more pessimistic about man's capacities, his poetry manifests a similar decline in his use of the Promethean myth. Chapter Five is devoted to a study of Cain, Byron's drama of an individual who, unwilling to undertake a theft of fire from heaven, merely rebels against the deity who he feels is responsible for his human limitations. Images of fire in Cain are associated with agents of the deity rather than with Cain, who has undertaken no Promethean theft.

Rather than abandoning Prometheanism entirely in his satiric works, Byron emphasizes the negative aspects of the Promethean myth. Chapter Six provides a transition to the satiric world of Don Juan by examining similar works. Chapter Seven, the study of Don Juan, presents Byron's total negation of the aspiring elements of the Promethean myth. Man is like Prometheus only in that he is chained to a cold earth. Man's efforts to transcend constitute travesties of the Prometheanism of Byron's earlier poems. In Don Juan Prometheanism is mocked: man shows neither Promethean aspirations nor heroic endurance in the inevitable defeat.

This study, thus, combines Byron's images of fire and allusions to the Promethean myth to demonstrate that Prometheanism permeates every aspect of Byron's poetic career. Byron's Prometheanism involves the

fundamental paradox of human nature that underlies all of Byron's works.

The pattern also extends to Don Juan, a work frequently regarded as having little in common with Byron's other poetry.

CHAPTER II

BYRON AND POPE: TOWARD A DEFINITION OF BYRON'S ROMANTICISM

Critics such as Amarsinghe and Knight acknowledge Byron's admiration for Pope. Byron's own poems and letters contain numerous allusions to Pope and suggest that Byron considered Pope a poetic standard to emulate. Byron's own Popean satires underscore a fundamental similarity of Byron and his model at the same time that they signify Byron's departure from the eighteenth-century scale of values in many respects. Commentators accept the obvious influence of Pope on Byron's Popean satires. However, such critics are unable to discern any Popean influence in Byron's other poetical works. They deplore the discrepancies between the Augustan values Byron admires and Byron's early poems, such as the Turkish tales. A consideration of Pope's influence on Byron, as well as Byron's departure from the Augustan values, affords insight into the nature and a possible source of Byron's Romanticism.

Byron's allusions to Pope in his poetry support Amarsinghe's contention that Byron was the most ardent supporter of the poetry of Pope in the early nineteenth century.¹ Byron refers to Pope eighteen times in his poetry,² establishing Pope as his own standard and suggesting that his contemporaries should do likewise. In English Bards and Scotch

¹Upali Amarsinghe, Dryden and Pope in the Early Nineteenth Century (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1962), p. 204.

²Pamela Howard Ikerd, "Rime and Reason in the Couplets of Byron's *Ottava Rima Poems*," Thesis, Austin Peay State University, 1972, p. 9.

Reviewers Byron establishes Pope as his model and describes his own poetic career as an attempt to "venture o'er/The path which Pope and Gifford trod before" (93-94). In the same poem Byron cites "Milton, Dryden, and Pope" (187) as the great poets of the past who are ignored in "these degenerate days" (103).

Numerous allusions to Pope are found in both Byron's private letters and those intended for publication.³ Among Byron's private letters, one written to John Murray presents Byron's appreciative evaluation of Pope and the tradition of which he is a part: "As to Pope, I have always regarded him as the greatest name in our poetry."⁴ Byron's participation in the Bowles controversy involved publicly defending Pope. His defense of Pope at its most eloquent cites Pope as the "most perfect of English poets."⁵ Byron's "Reply to Blackwood's Magazine" constitutes another public defence of Pope. In this reply Byron expresses his belief that "Pope's work is the Christianity of English poetry."⁶

Byron's references to Pope in both his poetry and his letters require no explication. Byron eloquently defends Pope and declares his

³I am indebted to both Ikerd (pp. 10-12) and G. Wilson Knight, The Poetry of Pope: Laureate of Peace (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1955), pp. 128-137, for their references to the letters of Byron.

⁴This letter is reprinted in The Works of Lord Byron: Letters and Journals, ed. Rowland E. Prothero, 6 vols. (1898-1901; rpt. New York: Octagon Books, 1966), V, 273-274. The quote is from p. 274.

⁵The Works of Lord Byron: Letters and Journals, IV, p. 559.

⁶The Works of Lord Byron: Letters and Journals, IV, 486.

intention to emulate him. Byron's Popean satires constitute Byron's most obvious attempt to imitate Pope; however, these satires also indicate Byron's departure from Popean ideals. The following discussion of Byron's Popean satires examines such works first to reinforce the concept of Pope's influence on Byron. After elements of similarity have been cited, Byron's departures from the Augustan scale of values are also noted.

Leslie Marchand describes English Bards, and Scotch Reviewers as Byron's most successful Popean satire.⁷ Printed privately in 1808 under the title British Bards, English Bards, and Scotch Reviewers reflects both the style and ideas of Pope. An analysis of English Bards, and Scotch Reviewers is difficult because, like Pope's classical satires on which it is modeled, it is loosely structured. In fact, there is no plot or overall plan; the poem is a succession of comments on literary figures. In English Bards Byron praises Crabbe, Campbell, Rogers, and Gifford for adherence to the principles of sense, wit, taste, and correctness established by Pope. Although English Bards has a distinctly Byronic tone and color, there is no significant departure from Popean ideals.

Byron's second Popean satire, Hints from Horace, is both a sequel to English Bards and a Byronic rendition of the Horatian platitudes of Ars Poetica. Byron's version of Horace's passage on the ages of man becomes his prediction of the future English gentleman. Byron's discussion of "Freshman," (225) the future Englishman, has a distinctly Augustan tone. Freshman marries for money and is consumed by avarice.

⁷Leslie A. Marchand, Byron's Poetry: A Critical Introduction (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1965), p. 21.

All creativity is smothered as he unquestioningly follows the path of his father: "Launch'd into life, extinct his early fires,/He apes the selfish prudence of his sire" (243-244).

Byron's imagery of fire in Hints from Horace, however, carries him beyond both his earlier satire and Pope's. The passage on Freshman indicates a Byronic rather than a Popean emphasis on creativity. Moreover, Byron insists that correctness must give way to the creative genius:

And must the bard his glowing thoughts confine
 Less censure hover o'er some faulty line?
 Remove whate'er a critic may suspect
 To gain the paltry suffrage of correct?
 Or prune the spirit of each daring phrase,
 To fly from error, not to merit praise?

(Hints from Horace, 417-422)

Obviously, Byron emphasizes inspiration and genius more than Pope does; Pope would feel that it is neither necessary nor desirable to sacrifice correctness for "spirit."

In The Curse of Minerva Byron creates a cultural satire in the pattern of Pope with certain images that are characteristic of Byron. The sun, in Byron's poetry, has imagistic associations of fire and energy; in The Curse of Minerva the sun is related to mental liberation. Illustrative of Byron's imagistic consistency in different types of poetry is the fact that the glowing sunset passage at the beginning of the poem is transferred appropriately to the beginning of the third canto of The Corsair:

Slow sinks, more lovely ere his race be run
 Along Morea's hills the setting sun;
 Not, as in northern climes, obscurely bright
 But one unclouded blaze of living light.

(Curse of Minerva, 1-4)

The actors on the stage, the Parthenon, are Athena, Byron, and Elgin. Athena maintains that of all "war and wasting fire" (95) the worst offender is the pillager of the crumbling Greek monuments, Lord Elgin.

The curse of the title is that which Athena places on Elgin and his descendants:

First on the head of him who did this deed
My curse shall light,--on him and all his seed:
Without one spark of intellectual fire,
Be all the sons as senseless as the sire:
If one with wit the parent brood disgrace,
Believe him bastard of a brighter race.

(Curse of Minerva, 163-168)

Byron here approaches Pope's ideal of maintaining an intelligible community of beliefs; however, within the total framework of the poem, Byron's opinion is that such an ideal is no longer possible to achieve.

The Curse of Minerva presents a typically Byronic juxtaposition of the fire of intellect and the fire of destructive warfare. Gleckner describes the figure of Lord Elgin and his "paradical plundering" as a metaphor of "wasteful war and ruin, of past glory, wisdom, and art now decayed and irretrievable." He suggests that the poem might have appropriately been named The Fall of Minerva, the sunset at the beginning of the poem symbolic not only of Elgin's ravishment of the ruined statues but also of the darkness that is descending upon England's glory.⁸ The Curse of Minerva is obviously written by a pessimistic Byron, who predicts that future generations of Englishmen will be without "intellectual fire."

To understand more fully the changes Byron makes in his Popean models, it is necessary to look at a similar satire by Pope. Although echoes of several Popean works may be discerned in Byron's works, the work most influential in the development of Byron's fire symbolism is The Dunciad. A study of The Dunciad affords insight into Byron's imagery of fire and also into the nature of Byron's Romanticism. The significance

⁸Gleckner, p. 33.

of the Promethean myth to Byron's poetic career has been suggested in Chapter I. The Dunciad may be a surprising source of two fundamental metaphors that Byron incorporates into his Promethean myth.

The first of these is Pope's pervasive metaphor of ascent and descent. Intellectual activity in Pope is associated with ascent; Dulness in The Dunciad functions as a natural force exerting a downward pull. The pervasive movement of the whole poem is downward. Numerous allusions to diving and sinking of various sorts are associated with the Dunces' process of composing. Cibber

. . . gnaw'd his pen, then dashed it on the ground,
Sinking from thought to thought, a vast profound!
Plunged for his sense, but found no bottom there.
(Dunciad, I, 117-119)

The great climax of the heroic games is the diving contest; the Dunces compete in slime and dive in excrement.

Byron incorporates a similar metaphorical pattern into his Promethean myth. Byron, like Pope, associates ascent with mental activity, but Byron substitutes mortality for the downward-pulling force of Dulness. Byron thus asserts that the aspiring and restraining forces to which man is subjected are both internal forces. Man's Promethean spark or mental fire constitutes his aspiring element; he is held back by his human limitations. Although Pope would feel that aspiring to the level of deity would destroy the order of the cosmos, Pope also uses imagery of fire to suggest the relationship between the divinity and man.

Fire is the second metaphor from The Dunciad that functions as an element of Byron's Promethean myth. The fire imagery of The Dunciad is part of a private-public-divine hierarchy. The darkness at the conclusion of The Dunciad is the result of the extinguishing of all three elements

of the hierarchy:

Nor public Flame, nor private, dares to shine;
Nor human Spark is left, nor Glimpse divine!
(Dunciad, IV, 651-652)

The light of private intellectual activity does not rate particularly high in the Augustan scale of values. The extinguishing of the public flame is more serious, a fact that reflects the Augustan concern for maintaining an intelligible community of ideas and beliefs. Dulness goes even further, obliterating every "human spark" and obscuring the "Glimpse divine," the imperfect vision of a higher level of light of which the human spark is only a reflection.⁹

A similar process of divine inspiration for human creation is seen in Pope's Essay on Criticism. Aden suggests that in Essay on Criticism Pope uses the term "Nature" to mean a divine light:¹⁰ "Unerring Nature, still divinely bright" (I, 70). In view of Aden's definition of Nature, Pope's instruction to "First follow Nature" (I, 68) may apply to divine inspiration. In a passage that sounds very much like Byron, Pope states that critic and poet "alike from Heaven derive their light,/Those born to judge as well as those to write" (I, 13-14).

Byron's poetry reflects the concept of creativity as fire and the concept of divine inspiration. Byron, however, makes significant departures from the Augustan scale of values. Byron emphasizes the private flame; in a society in which an intelligible community of beliefs is no longer possible, Byron suggests that the flame of private

⁹A similar discussion of the conclusion of The Dunciad is presented in Thomas R. Edwards, Jr., This Dark Estate: A Reading of Pope (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963), pp. 117-118. Edwards, however, draws no parallel between Pope and Byron.

¹⁰John M. Aden, "'First Follow Nature': Strategy and Stratification in the Essay on Criticism," Journal of English and Germanic Philology, 55 (1956), 614-615.

intellectual activity is the redeeming element. This is the basis for Byron's Romantic belief in the value of individual creativity. Moreover, Byron goes beyond Pope's concept of divine inspiration. Byron's Prometheanism makes man's spark the divine element within man. Because man is part divine, he is afforded a more significant role in Byron's Romanticism than he is in Pope's philosophy. However, because the fire of Prometheus is stolen from heaven, Byron has ambivalent attitudes toward the process of creating with the aid of Promethean fire. Poetic creation is an attempt to justify the theft of fire by creating with its aid; the crime that made such expiation necessary is, paradoxically, that which makes such expiation possible.¹¹

Pope, thus, proves to be a surprisingly important source for Byron's Romanticism. Because Prometheanism is such a significant part of Byron's Romanticism, it is necessary to consider the ways in which Byron's Prometheus differs from the Promethean figures in other literary works. From the Prometheus Bound of Aeschylus to Byron's contemporary, Shelley, the Promethean figure has been used by numerous poets and playwrights. Although Byron's Prometheus shares similarities with these, there are also important differences.

Thorslev traces the Promethean figure from Aeschylus to Goethe. The Prometheus of Aeschylus' Prometheus Bound is a Titan hero, the savior of mankind, and the bringer of fire. Moreover, he is a proud rebel, triumphant in the punishment his action incurs. The Aeschylean legend survived through the Middle Ages as a subject for allusion. During the

¹¹I am anticipated here by both Bloom (p. 246) and Ridenour (p. 88).

Middle Ages a connection was frequently made between Prometheus and God. A rebel against God, Goethe's Prometheus is the creator of clay images, or man, which he hopes to bring to life. The hero of Goethe's Prometheus does not suffer the punishment of divine wrath.¹²

From Aeschylus Byron perhaps gets his basic figure, that of a proud defeated Titan who achieves a kind of victory in defeat. The connection between Prometheus and God made during the Middle Ages is similar to Byron's concept of the Promethean spark as the element of divinity in man. Goethe's Prometheus affords an interesting contrast to Byron's. Because Byron maintains that the Promethean spark in man is his aspiring element, he would not want a Prometheus who creates clay images, symbols of human limitations.

Finally, Byron's Prometheus must be compared with that of Byron's contemporary, Shelley. Shelley's Prometheus, like Byron's, is a Titan, a sufferer, a rebel against God, and the benefactor of man. Both Byron and Shelley see Prometheus as symbolic of the free creative mind. However, Shelley introduces an element of compromise that is not in Byron. In suffering, Shelley's Prometheus acquires the capacity to forgive his enemies; he recalls his curse against Jupiter. Moreover, Shelley's Prometheus moves toward a union with Asia, who represents love, an action which initiates a new Promethean age of perfection. Byron creates no such union of Asia and Prometheus, allowing Prometheus no escape from his sufferings and man no escape from his human limitations.

¹²Peter L. Thorslev, The Byronic Hero: Types and Prototypes (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1962), pp. 113-115.

Byron is obviously not the first to use the Promethean myth. However, when Byron's allusions to Prometheus and his images of fire are considered, it becomes apparent that the concept of Prometheus permeates most of his works. Moreover, tracing Byron's own rendition of the Promethean myth affords insight into Byron's Romanticism and, consequently, into Byron's view of mankind.

CHAPTER III

BYRON'S TURKISH TALES: LOVE AND VIOLENCE

Byron's Oriental tales involve the combination of love and violence; imagery of fire is used to describe a passion that destroys the object of its love. Marchand describes these tales as outlets for emotional impasses, as "escape valves for the lava of his imagination."¹ Although Byron apologized for these tales, claiming he had written them hurriedly without revision,² they display the same imagistic pattern found in Byron's more carefully constructed poems. Man's capacity for passion is a manifestation of his creative spark; like other forms of creativity, it is inextricably mixed with destruction. This connection between fire and the paradox of creativity and destruction cannot always be made directly. In some cases, the imagery of fire is associated with the individual who manifests the capacity for both creativity and destruction, rather than with the attributes themselves. Whether the connection is made directly or indirectly, the implications are the same.

The Giaour, the first of the Turkish tales, features the Byronic theme of love--a flame unextinguishable and destructive. The story is that of a Turkish girl cast into the sea for infidelity and the revenge of her Christian lover, the Giaour, on her husband, Hasson. Both Hasson and the Giaour are men betrayed by their passions; they destroy rather than create love and beauty. Both Hasson and the Giaour manifest "a spark

¹Marchand, p. 60.

²Marchand, p. 61.

of that flame perchance of heavenly birth" (101). Love is associated directly with imagery of fire from heaven:

Yes, Love indeed is light from heaven;
 A spark of that immortal fire
 With angels shared, by Alla given,
 To lift from earth our low desire.
 (Giaour, 1131-1134)

Leila, the object of their love, is also elevated beyond the level of mere human: the fisherman-narrator describes her as more than "breathing clay" (481).

The destructive capacity of the passion of the Giaour and Hasson is first suggested by the change the death of Leila effects in the Giaour. Once "scathed by fiery passion's brunt" (95), his "sad shrouded" eye "fires not, wins not, weeps not, now" (79). The Giaour is now a "wither'd frame, the ruin'd mind,/The wrack by passion left behind" (1253-1254). Ironically, the personal clash of the two heroic figures is seen as an embrace stronger than that of lovers, an image that supports the dominant imagery of fire. The Giaour, realizing that the intense love of Hasson and himself has destroyed the object of their love as well as each other, confesses to the Friar at the conclusion: "I grant my love imperfect" (1141).

In The Bride of Abydos Selim manifests the capacity for both love and violence. Giaffir, to whom Selim seems soft and feminine, suggests that Selim steal strength and masculinity from the sun:

Would that yon Orb, whose matin glow
 Thy listless eyes so much admire,
 Would lend thee something of his fire!
 (Bride of Abydos, I, 90-92)

The image of Selim stealing fire from the sun foreshadows his ultimate involvement in the masculine world of violence. The fire associated with

Zuleika is pure passion: "Her heart confess'd a gentler flame" (I, 260). In Selim, however, fire is associated with both passion and violence. Marshall draws a similar conclusion: he describes Zuleika as the "Love figure," Giaffir as the "Death figure," and Selim as representative of a fusion of the two.³ In the meeting of Zuleika and Selim in which Selim announces his plans to oppose the forces of Giaffir, Selim's thoughts of violence, resulting in death, are mixed with his love for Zuleika:

. . . his keen eye shone
With thoughts that long in darkness dwelt;
With thoughts that burn--in rays that melt.
(Bride of Abydos, I, 329-331)

The final images of fire in The Bride of Abydos allude to the mythological lovers, Hero of Sestos and Leander of Abydos. Each night Leander swam the Hellespont to be with Hero, guided by a torch Hero always set blazing on the top of a tower. One night the light was blown out by the wind, and Leander drowned. His body was washed up on the shore, and Hero, finding it, killed herself.⁴ In The Bride of Abydos Zuleika's "turret-torch was blazing high" (II, 7) as she awaited the arrival of Selim. As she and Selim are approached by the forces of Giaffir, he notices a "blazing torch" (II, 982). As in the legend of Hero and Leander, Selim is killed and his body washed upon the shore: Zuleika dies of a broken heart. Thus, in The Bride of Abydos Byron connects his imagery of fire to both the mythological legend and the concept of love ending in violence.

³William H. Marshall, The Structure of Byron's Major Poems (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1962), p. 41.

⁴Edith Hamilton, Mythology (New York: New American Library, 1942), p. 41.

The Corsair presents a similar pattern of love and destruction. The protagonist, Conrad, is a profile of the melancholy Byronic hero: "That man of loneliness and mystery" (I, 173). Conrad is characterized by images of fire: "Through his dark eyebrows shades a glance of fire" (I, 196). With "Fire in his glance and wildness in his breast" (I, 531), his "spirit burning" (II, 334) finds the flash of lightning "more genial than the midnight star" (III, 261).

Conrad's one "softer feeling" (I, 282) is his love for Medora. Violence and passion merge, as images of fire become associated with bloodshed: "And flame for flame and blood for blood must tell" (II, 237). The Corsair's "fire" is extinguished at Medora's death: he is "sunk and chill'd, and petrified at last" (III, 667). The imagery of fire is transferred to Gulnare. In murdering her lord to save the Corsair, she instructs Conrad not to "fear the fire that lights an Eastern heart" (III, 353).

Lara, frequently considered a sequel to The Corsair,⁵ carries the history of the man of mystery to its tragic conclusion. Regardless of whether Lara is the Corsair of the earlier tale or simply a corsair, he is significantly a Byronic hero in whom the "chill" replacing the fire of his youth is most graphically portrayed. Moreover, in his return to his

⁵In the advertisement prefixed to the first edition of Lara, Byron indicates that the reader may regard it as a sequel to The Corsair. Byron erased from his manuscript the phrase "Lara, the sequel of The Corsair." These variants are noted in The Works of Lord Byron: Poetry, ed. Ernest Hartley Coleridge, III, 323.

Marchand (p. 64) indicates that Lara is a sequel to The Corsair. Marshall (p. 50) and Gleckner (p. 153) maintain that Lara suggests itself as a sequel.

ancestral home, he is accompanied by the page Kaled, whose fire and warmth parallels the passions of the youthful Lara. The fact that the imagery is transferred from Conrad to Gulnare at the end of The Corsair and the same imagery associated with Kaled in Lara could be cited in support of the theory that Lara is a sequel to the earlier tale. However, Byron's imagistic consistency, seen in different types of poems, could logically account for this similarity in two of his Oriental tales.

The absence of his former fiery passions effects a "coldness of mein" (I, 70) in the countenance of Lara:

That brow in furrow'd lines had fix'd at last,
And spake of passions, but of passions past.
The pride, but not the fire, of early days.

His "fiery passions" having "poured their wrath/In hurried desolation o'er his path" (I, 327-328), he now "coldly" bypasses mankind, for his blood in "icy smoothness" flows (I, 354).

With all the images of fire and coldness used to describe Lara, he provides a striking contrast to Kaled, who is described in images of fire and heat. Kaled is marked by a "latent fierceness that far more became/His fiery climate than his tender frame" (I, 581). Kaled's frequent blush reveals a "hectic tint"

That for a burning moment fevered there;
And the wild sparkle of his eye seemed caught
From high, and lightened with electric thought.
(Lara, I, 535-537)

Specific allusions to the sun connect Kaled's "hectic tint" with the climate from which he comes: Kaled's brow is "darkly delicate . . . whereon his native sun had sate" (I, 529).

An emotional conversion is effected through Lara's gesture toward Kaled and the blaze of sun in the East; at the time of his death Lara

acknowledges a residual spark of the youthful, promising passionate Lara. Though he and Kaled are both destroyed, the "haughty spirit of that humble clay" (II, 501) illuminates his disdainful rebuff of the holy beads (II, 481). In his death Lara responds as a Byronic hero, manifesting the Promethean quality of heroic endurance in defeat.

Each of the Turkish tales involves a pattern of love and violence. Although love seems to lead inevitably to violence, it constitutes an attempt to transcend the human condition, an attempt that affords a kind of heroism in defeat. In his Oriental tales Byron is not concerned with developing creative artists of Promethean stature, such as Manfred or Childe Harold. Instead, he is exploring one aspect of life's creativity-destruction paradox and at the same time providing his reading public with exciting tales of exotic, far-eastern lands. For the manifestation of the creative spark in the Promethean artist, it is necessary to turn to other Byron poems.

CHAPTER IV

THE PROMETHEAN ARTIST

Fire, in Byron's poetry, is the essence of the creative mind. The most imaginative writers, those who best fulfill Byron's expected function of the poet, achieve Promethean stature. The metaphor of the theft of fire from heaven, Byron's rendition of the Prometheus myth, underlies all of his discussion of the creative artist. Inherent in Byron's fire symbology and his rendition of the Prometheus myth are both the enlightening and destructive qualities of fire. Images of fire are associated with the creativity-destructiveness paradox both directly and by implication. In some cases the images are applied to the Promethean artist, a character who constitutes an inextricable mixture of creativity and destruction. In other cases the images are applied to the attributes themselves.

A consideration of Byron's lyric ode "Prometheus" affords insight into Byron's attitude toward Prometheus. Allusions to Prometheus throughout Byron's poetry suggest an underlying similarity between the Titan's gift of fire and the activity of the creative artist. Bloom's discussion of "Prometheus" emphasizes its relationship to the Prometheanism of Byron's other works. Bloom maintains that Byron "gathers the diffused Titanism" of his other works, emphasizing the heroic rather than the sinful aspect of Prometheus' action. But, Bloom suggests, "even here

there is a troubled undersong, and a refusal to negate the darker implications of the fire stolen from Heaven."¹

The first forty-four lines of the poem present the Prometheus of Aeschylus--the proud rebel triumphant in eternal punishment. However, as Bloom notes, the emphasis is different. The pride of silent suffering blends the Titan with the Byronic figure, "the Pilgrim of Eternity," who does not show his agony although he senses his sin:²

A silent suffering, and intense;
The rock, the vulture, and the chain,
All that the proud can feel of pain,
The agony they do not show,
The suffering sense of woe,
Which speaks but in its loneliness
And then is jealous lest the sky
Should have a listener, nor will sigh
Until its voice is echoless.
("Prometheus," 6-14)

The accuracy as well as the compassion of Prometheus' observation of human reality parallels the function Byron tries to fulfill in his poetry:

Titan! to whose immortal eyes
The sufferings of mortality,
Seen in their sad reality,
Were not as things that gods despise;
What was thy pity's recompense?
("Prometheus," 1-5)

The beginning of the second strophe attributes to Prometheus the

"Byronic conflict of negations":

Titan! to thee the strife was given
Between the suffering and the will,
Which torture where they cannot kill.
("Prometheus," 15-17)

¹Bloom, p. 245.

²Bloom, pp. 246-247.

Like Byron, Prometheus suffers from the impious nature of his drive to bring relief to mankind. Bloom states:

Byron's will cannot bring fire to us, but can create an art that returns the Titanic gift with the human offering of a poem, itself a mark of creative grace but also an agency of further suffering, as it increases our guilt.³

This paradox is reinforced by the final strophe of the poem. The action of the Titan is oxymoronically a "Godlike crime":

Thy Godlike crime was to be kind,
To render with thy precepts less
The sum of human wretchedness,
And strengthen man with his own mind;
But baffled as thou wert from high,
Still in thy patient energy,
In the endurance; and repulse
Of thine impenetrable Spirit,
Which Earth and Heaven could not convulse,
A mighty lesson we inherit.

("Prometheus," 35-44)

Bloom comments: "The stolen fire, thus imperfectly received, is itself a torture to us. What survives unmixed in our Titanic inheritance is the emblem of 'patient energy.'"⁴ The Promethean artist is "part divine" (47); he is tortured by his inability to achieve a synthesis between his divine element and the limitations of the human condition.

Byron's discussion of the Apollo Belvedere in the fourth canto of Childe Harold's Pilgrimage makes the connection between Prometheus and the creative artist more concrete. Byron indicates that the statue manifests the Promethean fire of the artist who created it. Byron's attitude toward Prometheus again emerges as Byron describes the fire as

³Bloom, p. 247.

⁴Bloom, p. 247.

stolen, something to be endured, not enjoyed:

And if it be Prometheus stole from Heaven
 The fire which we endure--it was repaid
 By him to whom the energy was given
 Which this poetic marble hath arrayed
 With an eternal Glory--which, if made
 By human hands, is not of human thought--
 And Time herself hath hallowed it, nor laid
 One ringlet in the dust--nor hath it caught
 A tinge of years, but breathes the flame with which
 'twas wrought.

(Childe Harold, IV, 11459-11467)

Bloom cites this stanza as illustrative of Byron's unwillingness to attribute timelessness to a merely human creation: "The statue breathes the stolen flame that wrought it, but the aid of more than human inspiration vivifies it."⁵

Because of the relationship between Prometheus and the creative artist, images of fire are appropriately used to describe the writers whom Byron admires. In English Bards, and Scotch Reviewers imagery of fire enables Byron to characterize the true poet at the same time he attacks those who fail to achieve poetic stature. George Richards, whose poem entitled The Aboriginal Britons Byron admired,⁶ "wakes a genuine poet's fires" (989) while the Muse looks less favorably upon the work of Thomas Moore: "Pure is the flame which o'er her altar burns;/From grosser incense with disgust she turns" (291-292). Byron also outlines the function of satire in English Bards, and Scotch Reviewers. In the present

⁵Bloom, p. 244.

⁶This information is found in Marshall's notes to Lord Byron: Selected Poems and Letters, ed. William H. Marshall (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1968), p. 499.

age, Byron maintains, the guilty escape the wrath of both the law and the poet. The works of the poet-satirist should "blaze with guilty glare through time,/Eternal beacons of consummate crime" (827-828).

In Hints from Horace Byron insists on the fires of poetic inspiration. Jeffrey's failure is described as the absence of "Fires, such as gentle Caledonians feel" (591). In contrast, Byron declares of himself: "How wakes my bosom to its wonted fires!" (590).

The most creative artists are characterized not only by imagery of fire but also by allusions to Prometheus and the theft of fire from heaven. In "Monody on the Death of the Right Hon. R.B. Sheridan," Byron adds a Promethean note to his portrayal of Sheridan. Sheridan, "charged with fire from Heaven" (90), leaves the stage "Bright with the hues of his Promethean heat" (56). He is compared to the sun, the most powerful natural agent of intense fire: "The flash of Wit--the Bright Intelligence,/The beam of Song--the blaze of Eloquence" (27-28). Byron also compares Sheridan favorably with Fox, Pitt, and Burke,⁷ the "wondrous Three!/Whose words were sparks of Immortality!" (103-104). Although Knight suggests that Byron "tells the truth less of Sheridan than of Byron,"⁸ perhaps it is more accurate to consider the artist presented in "Monody" as Byron's ideal, an ideal completely realized by neither Byron nor Sheridan.

Sheridan is one of the three Irish orator-statesmen featured in "The Irish Avatar." In the poem the term "avatar" is ironically applied to George IV, who is "but the commonest clay" (30); Byron satirizes the

⁷This information is found in Marshall's notes to Lord Byron: Selected Poems and Letters, p. 450.

⁸Knight, Lord Byron: Christian Virtues, p. 248.

servility of the Irish people when George IV enters Dublin. George IV is without the redeeming element of fire:

Without one single ray of her [Ireland's] genius,
without
The fancy, the manhood, the fire of her race--
("Irish Avatar," 93-94)

As foils to George IV Byron presents Sheridan, Curran, and Grattan. Grattan's Promethean quality is juxtaposed to the "clay" of George IV:

With the skill of Orpheus to soften the brute;
With the fire of Prometheus to kindle mankind;
Even Tyranny listening sate melted or mute,
And corruption shrunk scorch'd from the glance of
his mind.

("Irish Avatar," 45-48)

Byron further develops the figure of the Promethean artist in The Prophecy of Dante. In this poem Byron contrasts the real and the potential artists. Those with the capacity to become poets who "never penned/Their inspiration" (IV, 1-2) "compressed/The God within them" (IV, 4-5), smothering their divine spark. Poets are those

Whose Intellect is an o'ermastering Power
Which still recoils from its encumbering clay
Or lightens it to spirit. . . .

(Prophecy of Dante, IV, 22-23)

Byron's reflection on the function of the artist and the poet suggests that the fate of Prometheus awaits those who share his aspirations:

And be the new Prometheus of new man,
Bestowing fire from Heaven, and then, too late
Finding the pleasure given repaid with pain,
And vultures to the heart of the bestower, . . .

(Prophecy of Dante, IV, 14-17)

In the same poem Byron describes Ariosto as a Promethean figure, "his Fire/Like that of Heaven" (III, 112-113). In Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, Canto III, Byron presents Gibbon and Voltaire as Promethean figures, who,

"Titan-like" (III, 982), have "Thoughts which should call down thunder and the flame/Of Heaven again assailed" (III, 983-984).

One of Byron's most vividly portrayed Promethean artists is Rousseau. The imagery of fire used to characterize Rousseau in Childe Harold's Pilgrimage presents him as a paradoxical mixture of creativity and destruction. Rousseau's "dust was once all fire" (III, 719). He cast

O'er erring deeds and thoughts, a Heavenly hue
Of words, like sunbeams, dazzling as they past
The eyes, which o'er them shed tears feelingly and
fast.

(Childe Harold, III, 731-733)

Rousseau's "burning page" (III, 742) reveals the philosophy of the prophet of love. For Rousseau, the fire stolen from heaven is equated with human existence. The fire both kindles and blasts: Rousseau is so consumed by an elemental flame of desire for the ideal that he is blind to the limited capacities of human beings:

His love was Passion's essence--as a tree
On fire by lightning; with ethereal flame
Kindled he was, and blasted; for to be
Thus, and enamoured were in him the same.
But his was not the love of living dame,
Nor of the dead who rise upon our dreams,
But of an ideal beauty, which became
In him existence, and o'erflowing teems
Along his burning page, distempered though it seems.
(Childe Harold, III, 734-742)

"Passion's essence" invests Rousseau's Julie with life and accounts for his own "fevered lip" (III, 746) and the flash of "love-devouring heat" (III, 749). Beaty cites Rousseau's Julie, ou la Nouvelle Héloïse as influential; according to Beaty, Byron felt strong "affinities with Rousseau's revolutionary principles that were to help liberate mankind by reforming society."⁹ Byron, however, sees the irony of the prophet of

⁹Frederick L. Beaty, "Byron's Concept of Ideal Love," Keats-Shelley Journal, 11 (1962), 38.

love's becoming the oracle of revolution and war: "Those oracles which set the world in flame, / Nor ceased to burn till kingdoms were no more" (III, 763-764).¹⁰

The portrait of Napoleon in Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, Canto III, attributes to Napoleon the characteristics of a Promethean creative artist. In fact, Napoleon is Byron's prototype of the artist whose ambitions reach Promethean dimensions. Napoleon's establishment of an empire constitutes for Byron a form of creativity: Byron generalizes about the nature of "all unquiet things" (III, 382) such as Napoleon, grouping him with "Sophists, Bards, Statesmen" (III, 382).

The "antithetically mixed" (III, 317) spirit that characterizes both Napoleon and Byron eventually leads to destruction. In Byron's description of Napoleon are reflected traits of all Byron's Promethean individuals:

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, 370-378)

¹⁰ The combination of love and violence is not limited to the Turkish tales. In addition to Rousseau, the third canto of Childe Harold presents two other such combinations in imagery of fire. The "glow" of love (III, 194) at the ball on the eve of the Battle of Waterloo is juxtaposed to the destructiveness of battle (III, 239-243). Also illustrative of both love and violence is the antithetical history of the barons--the bloodshed of their wars and the softer annals of chivalrous love. Although the love of these two examples is not Rousseau's love of ideal beauty, they reinforce the underlying paradox of Childe Harold, Canto III.

Byron continues his comparison of Napoleon and Prometheus, suggesting that in defeat Napoleon is like a fallen Titan, his domain reduced to "an Empire's dust" (III, 145). Although Napoleon entertains Promethean aspirations, he fails to emulate Prometheus' heroic endurance in defeat. In his "Ode to Napoleon Buonaparte," written April 10, 1814,¹¹ two years before he wrote Childe Harold, Canto III, Byron is more critical of Napoleon. In this ode Byron maintains that in defeat Napoleon's "hero dust/Is vile as vulgar clay" (100-101), animated by no "higher spark" (105). Byron is critical of Napoleon's failure to follow the example of the "thief of fire from heaven" (136), sharing "His vulture and his rock" (139). Prometheus, unlike Napoleon, "in his fall preserved his pride,/And, if a mortal, had as proudly died" (143-144). Byron's description of Napoleon's unheroic attitude in defeat was written one day before the Treaty of Fontainebleau decreed Napoleon's abdication and banishment to Elba.¹²

Byron has been frequently criticized for his portrait of Napoleon in Childe Harold, Canto III. Because Rousseau is generally considered to be a greater Promethean than Napoleon, critics such as Bloom criticize Byron for making his portraits of the two so similar.¹³ The fact that these portraits occur in the third canto of Childe Harold partly justifies Byron's appraisals. Regardless of whether the narrator at this point is

¹¹This information is found in Marshall's notes to Lord Byron: Selected Poems and Letters, p. 515.

¹²This information is found in Marshall's notes to Lord Byron: Selected Poems and Letters, p. 515.

¹³Bloom, p. 242.

Harold, Byron, or Harold-Byron, a problem that will be considered in the discussion of Childe Harold, the third canto of Childe Harold is the most personal and passionate of the whole work. The figures chosen for discussion share characteristics of both Harold and Byron: they are aspiring individuals whose aspirations end in destruction.

The figure of Prometheus, thus, dramatically affects Byron's interpretation of history. The creative individuals whom Byron admires are those who, in his opinion, most nearly approximate their Promethean model. The figure of Prometheus also shapes Byron's own heroes. Byron presents the characters of Childe Harold and Manfred as most illustrative of life's paradox: endowed with extraordinary creative abilities, they are capable of the greatest destruction.

The problem of Byron's personae in Childe Harold makes it difficult to isolate the character of Harold. Gleckner maintains that the "monolithic identification of Harold and Byron" is losing support as a critical theory.¹⁴ Thorslev maintains that the first two cantos of Childe Harold have three different poetic characters: Harold, a minstrel-narrator, and Byron's persona. Thorslev suggests that none of these is kept clearly distinct from the others and that, in the fourth canto, Byron drops the first two voices.¹⁵ The theory of Gleckner, while allowing that there is a split between Harold and the poet, describes Harold as the "teller of the tales" and Byron as the "controlling element" in

¹⁴Gleckner, p. 48.

¹⁵Thorslev, pp. 128-129.

the third and fourth cantos.¹⁶ Gleckner's theory is most conducive to a study of the character of Harold. In the cantos in which Byron is the "controlling force," there is a close affinity between Byron and Harold; moreover, Byron carefully shapes the poetic environment of the third canto to reinforce the creative-destructive nature of Harold.

The Harold of the first two cantos is a child of nature transformed by his burnt-out passions, secret sins, haughty pride, and cold reserve. In the past Harold has loved, "Or dreamed he loved, since Rapture is a dream" (I, 810). Harold was bound to only one individual:

And there was one soft breast, as hath been said,
Which unto his was bound by stronger ties
Than church links withal; and--though unwed,
That love was pure. . . .

(Childe Harold, III, 487-490)

The secret sin of his one love was all that was afforded him; and these "days/Of Passion had consumed themselves to dust" (III, 470).

Similar to Harold's capacity for love, which seems in him "strange of mood" (III, 470), is his former communion with nature. In his youth Harold manifests a Wordsworthian faith in the beneficence of nature, a faith he has now rejected. Realizing that he has little sense of communion with mankind, he rejects the company of man for that of the natural world:

The desert, forest, cavern, breaker's foam,
Were unto him companionship; they spake
A mutual language, clearer than the tone
Of his land's tongue, which he would oft forsake
For Nature's pages glassed by sunbeams on the lake.
(Childe Harold, III, 113-117)

¹⁶Gleckner, p. 49.

Bloom suggests that in the third and fourth cantos of Childe Harold Byron's "faltering Prometheanism becomes the vehicle for myth."¹⁷ Ridenour similarly regards Childe Harold as an original reading of the Prometheus myth.¹⁸ Images of fire become associated with Harold's burning, feverish soul. Harold achieves Promethean stature in his inability to bridge the gulf between the claims of flesh and the aspirations of his spirit.

The claims of the flesh are metaphorically presented by images of clay and chains. Harold finds the limitations of the human condition oppressive:

Still round him clung invisibly a chain
Which galled for ever, fettering though unseen,
And heavy though it clanked not. . . .

(Childe Harold, III, 77-78)

Harold fails to achieve happiness because his human condition renders impossible a totally spiritual life:

Could he have kept his spirit to that 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, 122-126)

Harold's Promethean spark is his means of "Spurning the clay-cold bonds which round our being cling" (III, 697). His Promethean spark is reflected in his refusal to "yield dominion of his mind/To Spirits against whom his own rebelled" (III, 105-106). His defiance is manifested also in his statement of rebellion: "I have not loved the World, nor the World

¹⁷Bloom, p. 240.

¹⁸Ridenour, p. 21.

me" (III, 1049). Harold's Titanic quality reemerges in the fourth canto:

Though I be ashes; a far hour shall wreck,
The deep prophetic fullness of this verse,
And pile on human heads the mountain of my curse.
(Childe Harold, IV, 1204-1206)

The character of Harold, by itself, is rather shallow and superficial. It is the "controlling element" of Byron that shapes the third canto of the poem. By controlling the imagistic structure of Canto III, Byron uses the natural element, fire, to make psychic states and human conditions concrete.¹⁹ Fire is associated with the mood of the third canto, which is more personal and emotional than that of the earlier cantos. Byron also uses images of fire to underscore the fundamental paradox of the human condition. The destructiveness of man's fiery acts is juxtaposed to the cool benisons of nature, the "fresh green tree" (III, 264) and the fields "with fruits and fertile promise" (III, 267).

At the beginning of the third canto Byron insists on what Ridenour terms the "compensative function" of the creative artist. The artist, by virtue of his imagination, can create an ideal world:²⁰

'Tis to create, and in creating live
A being more intense that we endow
With form our fancy, gaining as we give
The life we image. . . .
(Childe Harold, III, 47-50)

Although artistic creation is an attempt to transcend the human condition, its destructive capacity is also acknowledged:

¹⁹ Fire is the most common of Byron's correlatives in Childe Harold, Canto III. Eighteen images of fire are found in this canto, as well as nine images of clay and dust.

²⁰ Ridenour, p. 154.

Too long and darkly, till my brain became,
 In its own eddy boiling and o'erwrought,
 A whirling gulf of phantasy and flame.

(Childe Harold, III, 55-58)

While the character of Harold is superficial when isolated from the other Byron personae, in the character of Manfred, the Promethean artist acquires an element of psychological complexity that is missing in Harold. Manfred exists apart from a Byron personae; Byron's shaping hand is seen only in the manipulation of images.²¹ As in the case of Harold, there is a marked contrast between Manfred's past and his present condition. In Manfred this contrast acquires cosmic overtones. Manfred's attempts to transcend his mortality end in disappointment. Like Harold, Manfred achieves Promethean stature in his refusal to yield. Manfred's Prometheanism, however, permeates every aspect of his life and illuminates his endurance as he faces death.

The contrast between the past and the present in Manfred involves a sharp imagistic contrast. Manfred's destiny affords him the opportunity to lead a life of "fresh and fair" (I, i, 112). The Seventh Spirit explains:

The Star which rules thy destiny
 Was ruled, ere earth began by me:
 It was a World of fresh and fair
 As e'er revolved round Sun in air;
 Its course was free and regular,
 Space bosomed not a lovelier star.
 (Manfred, I, i, 110-115)

²¹The Promethean imagery in Manfred is more subtle than that in Childe Harold. While Childe Harold, Canto III has eighteen allusions to fire, Manfred has only four. However, in Manfred the metaphor of the theft of fire from heaven is conveyed by ten allusions to Prometheus, immortality, and the deity in man. Thirteen allusions to clay and dust are found in Manfred.

Manfred's spirit "had its birthplace in a star condemned/The burning wreck of a demolished world" (I, i, 44-45). Manfred's spirit is thus allied with the fire of cosmic destruction. Both Manfred and the star that rules his destiny have become

A wandering mass of shapeless flame,
A pathless Comet, and a curse,
The menace of the Universe.

(Manfred, I, i, 117-119)²²

Byron's imagistic framework underscores the cosmic overtones of Manfred's present destructive powers. There is an obvious parallel between Manfred's psychic state and the Titanic elements of nature:

Where the slumbering Earthquake
Lies pillowed on fire,
And the lakes of bitumen
Rise boilingly higher.

(Manfred, I, i, 88-91)

Even the sun, an image in Byron's poetry representing creativity and energy, becomes fatal to Manfred now. Manfred describes the sun as

. . . the idol
Of early nature, and the vigorous race
Of undiseased mankind,

(Manfred, III, ii, 3-5)

Manfred maintains that man is akin to the sun: "Our inborn Spirits have a tint of thee" (III, ii, 22); however, it is this element that proves fatal to man. Manfred concludes his apostrophe to the sun by reviewing his past and present relationship to the sun:

. . . . As my first glance
Of love and wonder was for thee, then take
My latest look: thou wilt not beam on one
To whom the gifts of life and warmth have been
Of a more fatal nature.

(Manfred, III, ii, 25-29)

²² This image of cosmic destruction is similar to that presented in Byron's poem "Darkness," in which the end of the world is characterized by fiery acts of destruction in a futile attempt to maintain light.

Byron clearly outlines the aspects of Manfred's nature that have been responsible for his present condition. Manfred's career is similar to that of Childe Harold: "From my youth upwards/My Spirit walked not with the souls of men" (II, ii, 50-51):

My joys--my griefs--my passions--and my powers,
Made me a stranger; though I wore the form of flesh,
I had no sympathy with breathing flesh,
Nor midst the Creatures of Clay that girded me.
(Manfred, II, ii, 55-58)

Manfred has been made a stranger to "Creatures of Clay" because they do not share his aspirations. The First Destiny sees that Manfred has more in common with immortals than with humans:

. . . his sufferings
Have been of an immortal nature--like
Our own; his knowledge and 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.
(Manfred, II, iv, 53-59)

Manfred's mortality is compared to a "clankless chain" (I, i, 259-260).

As foil to Manfred Byron presents the character of the chamois hunter, whose "humble virtues" (II, i, 64-65) and pious patience afford a marked contrast to the "scorched" soul of Manfred (II, i, 73). Although Manfred acknowledges the virtue of the chamois hunter's life, it is a life that Manfred cannot emulate. Renouncing the idea of patience, Manfred maintains that such a concept is appropriate only to creatures of clay: "Preach it to mortals of a dust like thine,--/I am not of thine order" (II, i, 37-38).

Manfred's attempts to transcend the human condition involve both love and the search for knowledge. Both attempts end in failure. Manfred's creativity and capacity for love have been destroyed by a "nameless" guilt:

Powers, passions--all I see in other beings,
Have been to me as rain unto the sands,
Since that all-nameless hour.

(Manfred, I, i, 22-24)

The paradox of the destructiveness of love is exemplified in the relationship (probably incestuous) of Manfred and Astarte. Of all the "Creatures of Clay" there is but "One" (II, ii, 58-59) with whom Manfred can identify. The relationship of Manfred and Astarte is described by Manfred: they "loved each other" as they "should not love" (II, i, 27). Manfred can feel an affinity only with a mortal who shares his aspirations; Astarte is such a person:

She was like me in lineaments--her eyes--
Her hair--her features--all, to the very tone
Even of her voice, they said were like to mine;
But softened all, and tempered into beauty:
She had the same lone thoughts and wanderings,
The quest of hidden knowledge, and a mind
To comprehend the Universe; nor these
Alone, but with them gentler powers than mine.

(Manfred, II, ii, 105-112)

Manfred realizes the destructiveness of his love and the paradoxical nature of life:

My injuries came down on those who loved me
On those whom I best loved; I never quelled
An enemy, save in my defense--
But my embrace was fatal.

(Manfred, II, i, 84-87)

Admitting that he "loved her, and destroyed her" (II, ii, 117), he asks Nemesis to summon the phantom of Astarte. Astarte, however, refuses to give him forgiveness or to say she loves him.

The search for forbidden knowledge is also a manifestation of Manfred's aspirations toward deity. He finds, however, that

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.

(Manfred, I, i, 10-12)

Manfred has essayed "Philosophy and science, and the springs/Of Wonder, and the wisdom of the World" (I, i, 13-14) to no avail; science proves to be only "an exchange of ignorance for that/Which is another kind of ignorance" (II, iv, 62-63). In relation to the imagery of fire that characterizes Manfred's aspiring for knowledge, it is interesting to note that in the original version of Manfred, Herman and Manuel's conversation concerning the mysteries of Manfred is interrupted by Herman's noticing that the magical tower is ablaze. They bring Manfred out of the conflagration, burned beyond hope of life.²³ Although this melodramatic conclusion effects dramatic and thematic failure, in association with the idea that creativity and the search for knowledge end in destruction, it is highly appropriate that Manfred be devoured by the flames of his magic art in his tower of forbidden lore.

Gleckner maintains that by "aspiring to be more than he is,"²⁴ man becomes less. However, Gleckner states that there is an alternative to destruction: "Man may indeed surrender that cherished illusion of the dominion of his mind and the divinity of his heart, accept his mortality and meet the world on its own terms." Such men

. . . breathe
The breath of degradation and of pride,
Contending with low wants and lofty will
Till our Mortality predominates.
(Manfred, I, ii, 42-45)

Man may shrink "back/To recreant mortality" (II, ii, 125-126)

²³The original version of the third act of Manfred is found in The Works of Lord Byron: Poetry, ed. by Ernest Hartley Coleridge, IV, 129-130.

²⁴Gleckner, p. 263.

. . . and soothe, and sue
And watch all time, and pry into all place,
And be a living Lie.

(Manfred, III, i, 117-119)²⁵

Obviously, Manfred does not choose this course. Knowing that he is destroyed by his aspirations, he submits to neither the claims of mortality nor the spirits against whom he rebels. Manfred's Promethean quality is clearly indicated in his haughty reply to the spirits in the first scene of the drama:

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, 145-157)

Manfred also refuses to yield to the Witch of the Alps:

I will not swear--Obey! and whom? the Spirits
Whose presence I command, and be the slave
Of those who served me--Never!

(Manfred, II, ii, 158-160)

In his last hour of life, Manfred's Promethean spark illuminates his reply to the demons who have come to claim his soul:

I stand
Upon my strength--I do defy--deny
Spurn back, and scorn ye!
(Manfred, III, iv, 119-121)

Manfred's Promethean reply to the demons reveals echoes of Milton's Satan:

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

Even death, mortality's final claim, will be met on Manfred's terms.²⁶ He tells the demons that he, not they, has been his "own

²⁵Gleckner, p. 264.

destroyer" (III, iv, 139) and that the "Hand of Death" is on him, but not that of the demons (III, iv, 141). Unconquerable to the end, Manfred extends to the Abbot his hand, saying, "Old man! 'tis not so difficult to die" (III, iv, 151). The quality of Manfred's death serves as an index to the intensity of his life.

Manfred is, thus, the tragedy of one "Half dust, half deity, alike unfit/To sink or soar" (I, i, 40)--the tragedy of the immortal human mind confined in the mortality of clay. The destructiveness of such a combination is inevitable:

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. . . .

(Manfred, III, i, 160-167)

The Promethean artist constitutes a Byronic ideal. The Promethean artist, "half dust, half deity," is unable to achieve a synthesis between these two opposing elements. Images of fire allude to the theft of fire from heaven and reveal the fundamental paradox of the human condition: the Promethean artist, the individual who is the most creative, also proves to be the most destructive.

Byron's lyric poem "Prometheus" reveals Byron's attitude toward Prometheus. Byron finds a fundamental similarity between Prometheus's gift and the activity of the creative artist. The Promethean artist commits a "Godlike crime"; consequently, he suffers because of the impious nature of his drive to alleviate human suffering. Byron also

indicates that artistic creations manifest the "stolen" Promethean fire of the artist who creates them.

Because of the connection between Prometheus and the creative artist, Byron's images of fire, used to characterize artists he admires, connect such artists with his Promethean ideal. Byron also characterizes the most creative artists by direct allusions to the Promethean theft of fire from heaven. The distinction between Promethean potential and the actualization of such potential constitutes for Byron the essential distinction between the real and the potential artist. Byron cites artistic figures who successfully fulfill the role of the poet, "the new Prometheus of new men."

Byron attributes to Rousseau and Napoleon characteristics of the Promethean artist. In Rousseau the fire stolen from heaven is equated with ideal love, which becomes for him existence. A paradoxical mixture of creativity and destruction, Rousseau is associated with a fire that both kindles and blasts. Napoleon becomes the prototype of the individual whose aspirations reach Promethean dimensions. Napoleon's ambitions prove fatal to him, as they have to all who have shared his aspirations.

The Promethean figures that Byron creates represent the same combination of creativity and destruction that is found in the Promethean figures Byron cites from history. In Childe Harold and Manfred Byron creates two characters who refuse to yield dominion of their minds or to submit to the bonds of mortality. Each is unable to bridge the gulf between the aspirations of spirit and the claims of flesh. The figure of the Promethean artist reaches its culmination in Manfred, a drama in which the immortal mind spurns the mortal flesh until the moment of death, mortality's final claim.

40

The Promethean artist represents Byron's most optimistic view of the human situation. Utilizing the Promethean myth to the fullest extent, he creates an individual who, endowed with fire from heaven, strives to transcend the human condition. Although he is inevitably defeated, the Promethean artist is afforded a heroism in defeat. The Promethean myth itself affords no higher level of achievement. Byron's later works reveal a less optimistic view of mankind; consequently, in Cain there is a decline in Byron's use of the Promethean myth.

CHAPTER V

BYRON'S CAIN: THE DECLINE OF THE MYTH

The Promethean man exhibits a divine spark which illuminates his struggle to transcend the human condition. Although Byron always indicates that man will be destroyed, there is a Promethean heroism afforded man in his inevitable defeat. Byron's writing of Cain signifies a decline in his use of the Promethean myth. Cain undertakes no Promethean theft of fire from heaven. He is clearly a creature of clay, who, instead of transcending his human limitations with the aid of stolen fire, merely rebels against the deity, the potential source of such fire. Only when the fire is stolen does it become for the individual who has stolen it creative and destructive. The fiery emissaries of God make Cain resentful; because he does not share the divine fire, it is for him a prohibitive force.

Two imagistic patterns support the concept of Cain as illustrative of a decline of the Promethean myth in Byron's work. The first is the imagery of fire that resides only in the deity, because Cain has committed no Promethean theft. The second is the dominant imagery of clay and dust in Cain. The abundance of these favorite Byronic images of mortality suggests that Byron's emphasis is on Cain's failure to steal fire from heaven and his consequent inability to make a Promethean effort to transcend.

In regard to the fiery cherubim guarding the Eastern border of Eden, Byron does not significantly alter the Biblical account.¹ However, when Byron's other fire imagery is considered, it becomes apparent that Byron's associating imagery of fire only with the deity and its agents is significant. Cain, who does not steal fire from heaven, is resentful of the fiery emissaries of God. Cain remembers these fire-armed angels on five occasions. Cain's conception of the "fire-armed angels" (I, i, 91) and the "fiery-sworded Cherubim" (I, i, 173) who patrol the boundaries of Paradise suggests Cain's attitude toward the deity. As emissaries of God, these cherubim personify what Cain considers to be the true nature of the deity, a god of power and wrath who bullies mankind.

When Cain is astonished by the size of the creatures in Hades, he describes them as taller than the "cherub-guarded walls of Eden" (II, ii, 139) and notes the strangeness of their eyes "flashing like the fiery swords which fence" Paradise (II, ii, 140). Cain's attitude toward the deity reemerges here: any allusion to these angels evokes images of their brilliant weapons and their obstructive function. The other allusions to the cherubs of God also emphasize their prohibitive function. Such allusions help provide motivation for Cain's defiance of God.

Steffan cites the gate, the walls, and the battlements around Eden as Miltonic rather than Biblical. Steffan's argument that Byron's additions are not merely ornamental provides important insight into Cain's attitude toward God:

¹The Biblical account of the cherubim is found in Genesis 3:24: "So he drove out the man Adam; and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden a flaming sword to keep the way of the tree of life."

These were not ornaments, for they become on more grievance, a constant reminder of the prohibition against man's liberty and an obstacle to his aspirations for knowledge and immortality. Cain hated these walls and feared their guardians so intensely that he fancied that he might see, lurking in their shadows, "chequered/By the far-flashing of the Cherub's swords," the great unknown--Death (I, i, 270-277).²

Thus, the fire of Cain is associated not with an immortal part of Cain but with fiery emissaries of God who remind Cain of his own mortality. Imagery of fire is also associated with the act of sacrifice; the response of God to sacrifice confirms for Cain his suspicions regarding the nature of God. Significantly, the imagery of fire describing sacrifice merges with the imagery of blood,³ a pattern that is found in some of Byron's Oriental tales as well as in Cain.

When Abel's "burnt flesh-off'ring prospers better" (III, i, 284) than his own more natural offering of grain, Cain feels that his suspicions about God have been confirmed: "How heaven licks up the flames when thick with blood!" (III, i, 285). Cain sees something unnatural in a god who demands a fire-and-blood sacrifice that destroys life:

The fumes of scorching flesh and smoking blood
To the pain of the bleating mothers, which
Still yearn for their dead offspring? or the pangs
Of the sad ignorant victims underneath
Thy pious knife?

(Cain, III, i, 299-303)

²Truman Guy Steffan, Lord Byron's Cain: Twelve Essays and a Text with Variants and Annotations (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1968), p. 88.

³Imagery of fire occurs in twenty-one variations in the last three hundred lines of Cain; in the lines following line 225, blood represents Cain's revulsion to the sacrifice.

Smashing in his brother's altar, Cain screams, "Thy God loves blood!" (III, i, 310).

Elledge, who has noted a similar pattern of blood and fire imagery, describes God as "a bloodthirsty, fire-consuming brute to Cain," a god who, within the imagistic framework of the drama, is "diametrically opposed to the sun and sunlight."⁴ The prohibitive function of the fiery cherubim and the fire-and-blood sacrifice demanded by a god who has little respect for life provide motivation for Cain's slaying Abel, the representative of submission to divine authority. However, the imagery of fire associated with the deity does not provide all the motivation for Cain's action. The figure of Lucifer, who taunts Cain with his mortality, is also significant.

Since Cain does not steal Promethean fire, the most nearly Promethean figure is Lucifer. Although imagery of fire is not associated directly with Lucifer, he is defiant, with courage never to submit or yield. Although Lucifer is not a Promethean artist, he is a kind of Titan: his state as fallen angel is similar to that of Prometheus. Lucifer affirms that thought is the immortal part of man and that it can never be quenched:

. . . Nothing can
Quench the mind, if the mind will be itself
And centre of surrounding things--'tis made
To sway.

(Cain, I, i, 213-216)

Moreover, Lucifer argues that the immortal part of man can transcend and control external matter; Cain can create his own inner reality:

⁴Elledge, pp. 141-142.

Think and endure,--and form 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.
 (Cain, II, ii, 463-466)⁵

Although Lucifer argues for Cain's capacity for Promethean achievement, Byron suggests that the "servile mass of matter" (II, i, 51) to which Cain is chained renders him unable to steal the divine fire, associated in Cain only with superhuman individuals. The dominant image in Cain is not fire, but clay. Dust and clay, favorite Byronic images of mortality, occur twenty-five times in Cain.⁶ Lucifer associates clay and dust not only with the human condition but also with misery and destruction:

But changes make not death except to clay;
 But thou art clay--and canst but comprehend
 That which was clay, and such thou shalt behold.
 (Cain, II, i, 163-165)

Lucifer explains to Cain that the deity tantalizes him:

. . . after flatt'ring dust with glimpses of
 Eden and Immortality, resolves
 It back to dust again--for what?
 (Cain, III, i, 72-74)

⁵Cf. Paradise Lost, III, iv, 129-132:
 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.

This is one of the most significant of the numerous verbal parallels between Cain and Paradise Lost. Obviously, there is a similarity between Byron's Lucifer and Milton's Satan, and Byron borrowed various other details from Paradise Lost. Other important similarities between the two dramas are outlined by Samuel C. Chew, Jr., The Dramas of Lord Byron: A Critical Study (New York: Russell and Russell, 1964), pp. 123-125.

⁶Dust occurs sixteen times in Cain, and clay, nine times, with the connotations of mortality.

Lucifer's low evaluation of mortal man is similar to that of Mephistopheles. Mephistopheles tries to impress upon Faust the narrow limitations of man and the impossibility of progress. Lucifer tempts Cain by turning the image of dust into a contemptuous epithet: "Dust! Limit thy ambition" (II, ii, 406). Referring to Cain as "Poor clay" (I, i, 217), Lucifer mocks Cain:

What are they which dwell
So humbly in their pride, as to sojourn
With worms in clay?

(Cain, II, i, 83-85)

Cain, in murdering Abel, is rebelling against the deity who made him capable of revolt and his own limitations that prevent him from stealing fire from heaven. Cain is unable to achieve a synthesis between his aspirations and the limitations of his flesh. He rebels against a superhuman deity because he senses his own limitations; he is punished by a superhuman agent--the Angel of the Lord. By the time he wrote Cain in 1821, Byron was less assured of a divine element in man. He no longer argues as he did in Manfred that man is "half dust, half deity," but that man is a creature of clay, who is not capable of a Promethean theft of fire. No longer illuminated by a Promethean spark, man, like Cain, is at best a Romantic rebel. No longer part divine, man can only rebel against the deity that denies his immortality.

By the time Cain was completed in 1821, Byron had also completed five cantos of Don Juan. In Don Juan Byron's attitude is perhaps best described as unrelenting cynicism. Man is unable to transcend his human condition and reveals Promethean heroism in neither his aspirations nor his defeat.

CHAPTER VI

PRELUDE TO DON JUAN: MAN IN THE FALLEN WORLD

By the time Byron wrote Cain in 1821, he had completed five cantos of Don Juan. If Byron is critical of Cain's unwillingness to undertake a theft of fire from heaven, he is even more despairing of man's activities in Don Juan. As Byron moves towards the pessimism of Don Juan, he emphasizes the negative aspects of Prometheanism. Man is like Prometheus in that he has fallen; the imagery of fire in Byron's satiric works is associated with attempts to transcend that are less than heroic in the light of their Promethean prototype.

The satiric effect largely depends on the attitude the author assumes in regard to the persona or the character in a work. Other Byronic poems in addition to Don Juan manifest the satiric quality of discrepancy between Byron and his persona. Although not all poems of this nature must be classified as satiric or regarded as totally cynical or ironic, a study of such poems provides valuable insight into the nature of Byron's satire in Don Juan.

A Byronic poem that at first appears totally straightforward, "Ode to a Lady whose Lover was killed by a Ball, which at the Same Time shivered a Portrait next his Heart," manifests a surprising element of discrepancy between the attitudes of the speaker and those of Byron. A first reading of this poem suggests an affinity with the Turkish tales; a

careful examination of the poem reveals that in technique, theme, and underlying paradox, it has a stronger connection to the satire of Don Juan.¹ The pattern of fire imagery in "Ode to a Lady" at first suggests the early Byronic attitude that love is fire from heaven, the act of stealing it leading inevitably to destruction. However, in this poem Byron is perhaps mocking the attitude of the persona. The persona assumes that love is inextricably involved in violence; through his manipulation of imagery and the level of diction, Byron maintains that going to war should not be the inevitable consequence of true passion. Byron has the speaker provide no explanation for the lover's going to war.

Byron's imagery of fire is less than Promethean. "True Passion (34), not the love of "common mortals" (30), burns itself out and wrecks the lovers:

The Fruit of Fire is Ashes,
The Ocean's Tempest dashes
Wrecks and the dead upon the rocky shore.
("Ode to a Lady," 31-33)

The persona maintains that "True Passion" leads to death and that her lover died as "All/Who truly love should die" (59-60). At his death her fire, too, is extinguished. Although the concept of fidelity until death is an early Byronic ideal, there is little to admire in the Lady's remaining an icy vestal to her dead lover:

Thy heart was withered to its Core
Its hopes, its fears, its feeling o'er
Thy Blood grew Ice when his was shed
And Thou the Vestal of the Dead.
("Ode to a Lady," 55-58)

¹Ridenour describes the poem as "centrally Byronic," exhibiting "in miniature" many of the characteristics of Don Juan (p. 65).

The similar imagery of ice that appears in the English cantos of Don Juan suggests that Byron connects the Lady's response to her lover with the fallen condition of man.

Another of Byron's poems illustrating to some extent the satiric mode of Don Juan is Mazeppa. Written in 1818, Mazeppa presents a speaker whose Promethean pretensions become the object of Byron's ridicule. In this poem, the ridicule is not harsh. The poem consists of a long, dramatic monologue told by Mazeppa; the emotional intensity that Mazeppa affects becomes the object of Byron's satire.

Mazeppa recalls the affair that he had in his "twentieth spring" (127) with the youthful wife of an old count. His passionate relationship with the count's wife is described by imagery of fire:

Involuntary sparks of thought,
Which strike from out the heart o'erwrought,
A form of strange intelligence,
Alike mysterious and intense,
Which link the burning chain that binds,
Without their will, young hearts and minds;
Conveying, as the electric wire,
We know not how, the absorbing fire.

(Mazeppa, 236-243)

The association of the imagery of fire with imagery of chains makes the fire of the speaker merely human, not elevated to the level of Prometheus.

The speaker, however, fails to see that he never attains the Promethean standards to which he aspires. Seeing no irony in his story, Mazeppa proceeds to interrupt the chronological sequence of the narrative to announce his revenge for the punishment the count had inflicted upon him. Fire becomes associated with Mazeppa's desire to pay "their insult back again" (392) and the actualization of his revenge:

I saw its turrets in a blaze
 Their crackling battlements all cleft,
 And the hot lead pour down like rain
 From off the scorched and blackening roof,
 Whose thickness was not vengeance-proof.
 (Mazeppa, 402-406)

Direct allusions to Prometheus also suggest that Mazeppa is trying to elevate his situation to the Promethean. "Chained to the chill and stiffening steed," Mazeppa has thoughts of accepting defeat (764-765). Byron's images obviously negate the effect Mazeppa wants to achieve: the fallen aspect of Prometheus is emphasized. Mazeppa regards the "Cossack maid" (817) who nurses him back to health as an agent of a divine force who rescues him from the fate of Prometheus. He is "released/From adding to the vulture's feast" (815-816).

At the end of the poem the reader is reminded of the reason Mazeppa has told his story; he is attempting to divert the downhearted Charles XII from graver concerns. The fact that Mazeppa succeeds reveals Byron's attitude toward Mazeppa's Prometheanism. At the emotional climax of the story, King Charles falls asleep.

Marshall offers a similar interpretation of the poem, which does not relate Mazeppa to Prometheanism but does suggest the poem to be a travesty of "traditional stories of death and rebirth." According to Marshall, "in the words of the garrulous and egoistic old man" Byron presents a situation involving "sin but no atonement, rescue but no salvation, recollection but no selfless understanding."² Although Marshall's interpretation is more Christian than Promethean, it does suggest that Mazeppa fails to achieve heroic stature. If Mazeppa may be recognized as

²Marshall, p. 123.

a travesty of a traditional story, then the imagery of fire suggests that perhaps the story being mocked is the Promethean myth.

Beppo, written in 1817, is Byron's first poem in ottava rima. A Venetian anecdote with no allusions to Prometheus, Beppo, nevertheless, is the poem closest in spirit to Don Juan. The speaker, as in Don Juan, is an ironic observer of life, who advises polite acceptance of the fallen condition. Marshall describes the speaker in Beppo as an ironic figure "whose naiveté and simplicity clash sharply with the nature of the story he is going to tell."³

The atmosphere of the Carnival, ironically interpreted as a time to bid "farewell to flesh" (42), sets the tone for the entire poem. The major characters in the poem, Beppo's wife Laura and her lover, the Count, are people who are unable to bid "farewell to flesh" and thus are unable to achieve any kind of spiritual transcendence. The love of Beppo is not the ideal love of the Promethean artist, Rousseau:

Love, in full life and length, not love ideal,
No, nor ideal beauty, that fine name,
But something better still, so very real.
(Beppo, 106-108)

Love, rather than being an act of Promethean transcendence, is associated with imagery of chains:

When love links two people in one fetter,
Vile assignations and adulterous beds,
Elovements, broken vows, and hearts and heads.
(Beppo, 126-128)

Laura and the Count constitute a "happy pair,/As happy as unlawful love could make them" (425-426). When Beppo returns, he and the Count become friends; the chains between Laura and the Count are "so slight 'twas

³Marshall, p. 167.

not worth while to break them" (428). The speaker's attitude is matter-of-fact; man is offered no alternative to polite acceptance of his fallen state.

Thus, by the time Byron wrote Don Juan, he had already written other works with basically the same type of satiric implications. Byron emphasizes the negative aspect of Prometheanism. Man is unable to transcend; his efforts to do so constitute at best a parody of Prometheanism. Love has degenerated to the level of lust. In Don Juan Byron's despair at the condition of human beings reaches its level of highest intensity; consequently, Byron's Prometheanism reaches its lowest level, a level in which the myth is divested of all its connotations of heroism.

CHAPTER VII

DON JUAN: BYRON'S NEGATIVE PROMETHEANISM

The Prometheanism that emerges from Don Juan is negative in its implications. From the Promethean myth Byron finds the condition of the fallen Prometheus an analogy for the condition of modern man. Man is chained to the cold earth as Prometheus was chained to icy Caucasus. Ridenour describes the "icy clime" of the English cantos as a state natural to fallen man, the symbol of a fallen world.¹ However, the images of fire suggest that Byron does not totally ignore the heroic implications of the Prometheus myth, but that the positive aspects of the myth are overshadowed by the pervasive tone of negation. Man still tries to alleviate his sufferings through poetry, love, and glory, but his efforts appear ludicrous in the light of their Promethean counterparts. In the fallen world poetry provides merely the illusion of transcendence, Promethean fire from heaven is reduced to the level of lust, and glory proves superficial. All such attempts to transcend are belittled by the emphasis on Promethean punishment.

In Don Juan Byron is no longer confident that a Promethean artist can exist in a fallen world. The Aurora Borealis stanzas provide the most graphic description of the nature of poetry in a fallen world. Rather than providing true transcendence, poetry provides only temporary illusion.²

¹Ridenour, p. 33.

²Ridenour's discussion of this passage is, in my opinion, too optimistic. He attributes to poetry the function of helping man come to terms with his fallen condition (p. 33). Byron's images indicate that the "versified Aurora Borealis" is illusion.

Poetry, like love and glory, produces a light that deceives the icy inhabitants of the fallen world:

Chill and chained to cold earth, we lift on high
 Our eyes in search of either lovely light;
 A thousand and a thousand colours they
 Assume and then leave us on our freezing way.
 (Don Juan, VII, i)³

The speaker's "non-descript and ever-varying rhyme" is also an illusion; "A versified Aurora Borealis, / Which flashes o'er a waste and icy clime" (VII, ii). Man's attempts to alleviate human suffering in the fallen world are a travesty of Promethean attempts to transcend.

Byron's travesty of Prometheanism is continued as he discusses the impermanence of poetry, associating it with human mortality rather than Promethean transcendence.⁴ Poetry, formerly associated with passion, is now debased because it answers to the demands of fashion:

Yet there will still be bards: though Fame is smoke,
 Its fumes are frankincense to human thought;

 Thus, to their extreme verge the passions brought
 Dash into poetry, which is but Passion
 Or, at least, were so ere it grew a fashion.
 (Don Juan, IV, cvi)

Images of soaring and flight are important in Don Juan for their Promethean connotations. The Prometheanism of these allusions is,

³Because the lines of Don Juan function within the context of the octave, citations to Don Juan indicate canto and octave number rather than line number.

⁴This concept is a direct inversion of the early Byronic concept of the permanence of artistic creations:

The Beings of the Mind are not of clay:
 Essentially immortal, they create
 And multiply in us a brighter ray
 And more beloved existence.
 (Childe Harold, IV, 37-40).

however, debased. In the Dedication to Don Juan Byron states that he is content to associate with "pedestrian Muses," making no attempt to soar on "the wingèd steed" (viii). Byron also describes the perils of poetry in imagery of flight; poetry is now an attempt to strain beyond one's proper powers:

Nothing so difficult as a beginning
 In poesy, unless perhaps the end;
 For oftentimes when Pegasus seems winning
 The race, he sprains a wing, and down we tend,
 Like Lucifer, when hurled from Heaven for sinning;
 Our sin the same and hard as his to mend,
 Being Pride, which leads the mind to soar too far,
 Till our own weakness shows us what we are.
 (Don Juan, IV, i)

In the English cantos, even man's loftiest soarings are subject to the activity of the digestive system:

For ever and anon comes indigestion
 (Not the most "dainty Ariel"), and perplexes
 Our soarings with another sort of question.
 (Don Juan, XI, iii)

The poetry of the fallen world, thus, provides only an illusion of transcendence. The only poet associated with fire is John Keats, and his is a fire that is extinguished. The octave describing Keats has undergone extensive revision. In the introduction to the Variorum Edition of Don Juan, Steffan outlines the significance of Byron's revised imagery:

Imagery that is the result of revision is usually functional, giving point to his laughter, and depth and substance to his skeptical or contemptuous view of men and their affairs. . . . When Byron quickly transforms literal or abstract phrasing into vigorous, concrete figures, he is not only saying more than he did at first and telling us unmistakably how he feels about it, but also waging his continuous battle against dullness.⁵

⁵Truman Guy Steffan, Byron's Don Juan, Volume I: The Making of a Masterpiece, 2nd ed. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1971), p. 143.

Steffan's comments are particularly applicable to the Keats passage of Don Juan. Only in the third version does Byron achieve the effect of a mental fire that is potentially Promethean, but extinguished: "'Tis strange the mind, that very fiery particle,/Should let itself be snuffed out by an article" (XI, ix). The imagery of this third version places such emphasis on the Promethean quality of the mind that Byron wonders at its being so easily extinguished.⁶

The octave on Keats represents the closest Byron comes to the Prometheanism of his nonsatiric works. Keats is more esteemed than, for example, Wordsworth who does not even soar, but creeps (III, xcvi-c). Neither, however, achieves true Promethean stature. The imagery of fire suggests that man's attempts to transcend through poetry are travesties of Promethean aspirations.

The Promethean fire absent in the "poets" of the fallen world does appear in Don Juan. The Promethean fire brought down to man from heaven makes its appearance in the form of love. However, the love of Don Juan is frequently only sexuality with the resultant deceit, jealousy, and intrigue. Passionate love in the individual reenacts the fall of Adam from paradise. Although Byron is somewhat critical of Prometheus in his nonsatiric works, the allusions to Prometheus' action in Don Juan transforms it into a form of petty theft. Byron alters the following

⁶Variant readings of this octave are found in Byron's Don Juan: A Variorum Edition, ed. Truman Guy Steffan and Willis W. Pratt, 2nd ed. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1971), III, 293. One of the earlier versions of "fiery particle" is "celestial particle," an image that reinforces the Promethean quality of the mind.

passage to show that the fire is stolen, inserting the slang verb "filch"⁷ to indicate his attitude toward the crime. Byron divests Prometheus' actions of heroic import as he associates passionate love directly with the "unforgiven/Fire which Prometheus filch'd for us from Heaven" (I, cxxvii).

The only love relationship of Don Juan that approaches Promethean dimensions is that of Juan and Haidée. However, the Promethean fire of their relationship shows a debasement to the level of the physical.⁸ As Beaty maintains, the Haidée episode is possible only under ideal circumstances.⁹ The passionate love of Juan and Haidée can thrive only in a prelapsarian state of youth and innocence.

The fire of the Haidée episode is associated with the sun, the symbol of the kinetic energies of nature. The narrator of Don Juan, however, ironically identifies the sun with lust. The sun figures prominently in the dawn and twilight scenes of the Haidée episode and becomes specifically identified with the passion of human nature; Byron describes Haidée in the following passage:

⁷Byron's revision shows the word "filch'd" substituted for "gave." This revision is noted in Byron's Don Juan: A Variorum Edition, II, 90. The Oxford English Dictionary indicates that the verb "to filch" appeared in the English language in the sixteenth century as a slang usage.

⁸As noted before, the connection between images of fire and Byron's characters cannot always be made directly. Fire imagery is used to describe a character who has certain characteristics. The images of fire are discussed not only in connection with the individual to whom they are applied directly, but are applied indirectly in this study to the characteristics or attributes of that person.

⁹Beaty, p. 37.

Haidée was Passion's child, born where the sun
Showers triple light and scorches even the kiss
Of the gazelle-eyed daughters.
(Don Juan, II, ccii)

When Juan and Haidée indulge in their kiss of immeasurable length and strength, Byron alludes to fire from heaven: the kiss is "kindled from above" (II, clxxvi). In youth the blood is "lava, and the pulse a blaze,/Each kiss a heartquake" (II, clxxvi). When Haidée is "overwrought with Passion and Despair,/The fire burst forth from her Numidian veins" (IV, lvii).

Even though the couple's union is sanctified by nature, their condition cannot last indefinitely. Passion

Prompts deeds Eternity can not annul,
But pays off moments in an endless shower
Of hell-fire.

(Don Juan, II, cxcii)

Haidée's innocent heart is "scorched, pierced, and riven" by the experience (II, ccxiv). The most significant Promethean allusion is Haidée's disturbing dream. Haidée sees herself chained to one of the jagged cliffs of the shore (IV, xxxi). This allusion suggests that Haidée has fallen to the level of humanity, "chill, and chained to cold earth." The relationship of Juan and Haidée is possible only in a state of total innocence.

Byron's debased Platonism in the Juan-Julia episode becomes a form of Byron's debased Prometheanism. Platonism is defined as follows:

. . . the use of our eyes
With one or two small senses added, just
To hint that flesh is form'd of fiery dust.
(Don Juan, II, ccxii)

The Donna Julia story is described by Ridenour as a "careful study in moral and personal degeneration resulting from acquiescence in passion." Like Haidée's, Julia's passion is associated with the climate of her birth; the speaker attributes the fault to

Who cannot leave alone our helpless clay . . . that indecent sun
 But will keep baking, broiling, burning on.
 (Don Juan, I, lxiii)

Julia does attempt to suppress her passion. Her eye, large and dark, suppresses "half its fire" (I, lx). Julia's efforts, however, only lead to the violence of the final explosion. Her heart

. . . had deeper thoughts in store
 She must not own, but cherished more the while
 For that compression in its burning core.
 (Don Juan, I, lxxii)

The speaker in Don Juan makes a distinction between "Love divine" (I, lxxii) and Julia's debased Platonism that leads to physical involvement.

The relationship of Juan and Gulbeyaz is even further removed from the prelapsarian innocence of Haidée and Juan. Gulbeyaz tries to command love from Juan, a love that is not far from lust. Imagery of fire helps to present the antithetical nature of Gulbeyaz. Her eyes "flashed always fire" (V, cxxxii) revealing a "mixture of sensations" which "might be scanned,/Of half voluptuousness and half command" (V, cviii). Part of Gulbeyaz's lust is attributed to the climate: the speaker maintains that "chastity in these unhappy climes/Is not a thing of that astringent quality" (V, clvii).

At the court of Catherine the Great Juan falls not into love, but into "that no less impervious passion"--"self-love" (IX, lxvii). The speaker here distinguishes between physical and spiritual love only to discover that all love in the fallen world is primarily physical:

. . . the Sovereign was smitten,
 Juan much flattered by her love, or lust,--
 I cannot stop to alter words once written
 And the two are so mixed with human dust
 That he who names one, both perchance may hit on.
 (Don Juan, IX, lxxvii)

Although the various love relationships in which Juan participates show different degrees of the human clay's smothering the divine spark, each is followed by some type of violence or destruction. This pattern, noted in Byron's early poems such as the Turkish tales, is repeated four times in Don Juan. Ridenour notes this pattern, finding that the first three episodes of Don Juan end in violence while the fourth is prefaced by it.¹⁰ The pattern is an integral part of Byron's travesty of Prometheanism.

Several times in Don Juan Byron rather blandly pairs "Love and War" (I, cc) as things appearing together naturally in his epic. Byron later states as his theme "Fierce loves and faithless wars" (VII, viii). He lists love indifferently along with "Glory, the Grape," and "Gold" (II, clxxix). At the end of Canto II Byron's conceit concerning passions springing from the "entrail" liver describes such passions as "Earth-quakes from the hidden fire called 'central'" (II, clxxix). The conceit suggests that the first passion, love, leads to other less desirable passions--"Rage, fear, hate, jealousy, revenge, compunction" (II, ccxv).

Even the idyllic Haidée episode causes Juan to conclude that there is something "in this world of ours/Which makes it fatal to be loved" (III, ii). The elegaic lines on Haidée's death point toward the same conclusion about love:

Valour was his, and Beauty dwelt with her:
 If she loved rashly, her life paid for wrong--
 A heavy price must all pay who thus err,
 In some shape; let none think to fly the danger,
 For soon or late Love is his own avenger.
 (Don Juan, lxxiii)

¹⁰ Ridenour, p. 77.

Because of the inextricable combination of love and violence noted in the four love relationships of the poem, Byron presents the concept of the lover as warrior. Although this concept is presented at the end of the first three episodes, it is best illustrated in the Siege of Ismail, which constitutes a preface to the Juan-Catherine episode. The superficiality of the glory of battle is presented in Byron's discussion of the development of the arts. In a fallen world, war, like the other arts, becomes a travesty of a Promethean effort to transcend:

. . . these young people, just thrust out
 From some fresh Paradise and set to plough,
 And dig, and sweat, and turn themselves about,
 And plant, and reap, and spin, and grind, and sow,
 Till all the arts at length are brought about,
 Especially of War and taxing,
 (Don Juan, IX, xl)

In the Siege of Ismail Byron presents the ambiguous and anomalous glory effected by the art of war. Not only is war totally lacking in constructive value, but it also involves meaningless brutality, sheer horror and sordidness, and indiscriminate ruthlessness. Only wars of liberation and those waged in defense of country did Byron feel were justified. He regards modern warfare as similar to that of the ancients only in the resultant bloodshed; modern warfare lacks any element of romance.

The glory of war is only a euphemism for homicide. Incomplete offensive units delay "what story/Sometimes calls 'Murder' and at others 'Glory'" (VII, xxvi). Byron describes the mercenary soldier of the Russian army as one whose "high, heroic bosom burn'd" (VII, lxiv) for cash and conquest. Ironically, Byron suggests that man should be proud of his destructive abilities because they are superior to those of the deity.

"Heaven's flashes/Spare, or smite rarely--Man's make millions ashes!" (VIII, vi). Warfare is divested of any redeeming quality; any glory resulting from it cannot compensate for its destructiveness: "a man's name in a bulletin" cannot make up for a "bullet in his body" (VII, xxi).

Thus, warfare and its accompanying glory constitute another debasement of Promethean aspirations. In the English cantos, the condition of mankind is like that of Prometheus chained to the earth. The dominant imagery of cold and ice in the English cantos¹¹ and the absence of imagery of fire emphasize the negative aspect of the Promethean myth: man has no aspirations that can even parody those of Prometheus. Although the fire of the earlier cantos of Don Juan is a debasement of its Promethean prototype, Byron condemns even more the hypocritical chastity of the cold, virtuous North.

Neither the ice nor the restraint of the English cantos is invested with much grandeur. Byron ridicules the monotonous and slavish conformity to conviction the English manifest: all is "polish'd, smooth, and cold" (XIII, cx) in a society "smoothed to that excess,/That manners hardly differ more than dress" (XIII, xciv). The members of English society are also described in images of cold and ice. Lord Henry Amundeville, the typical English phlegmatic character, is a "cold, good, honourable man" (XIV, lxx). Lady Adeline, the chief subject of Byron's satire, is the acquiescent hostess to all the hypocrisy and pretense at Norton Abbey.

¹¹ The ice of the English cantos is in marked contrast to the kinetic energies of the sun which infuse Haidée, Julia, and Gulbeyaz with passion. In the moral North ice predominates. Fifteen allusions to ice, snow, and cold are found in the English cantos. It is no coincidence that Byron made ices (XV, lxxii) one of English society's favorite refreshments.

The marriage of Lord Henry and Adeline constitutes the ideal English society marriage: "Their union was a model to behold, /Serene and noble,--conjugal, but cold" (XIV, lxxxvi). Sitting between "that prim, silent, cold Aurora Raby" (XV, xlix) and Lady Adeline, Juan is compared to a "good ship entangled among ice" (XV, lxxvii).

Two specific incidents in the English cantos indicate the total negation of Promethean fire in icy English society. One incident is the Duchess of Fitz-Fulke's appearing to Juan in the guise of the ghost of the Black Friar. This incident symbolizes what Lovell terms a land "where the sensual comes draped in the spiritual while a country girl in a red cape is brought before the lord of the manor and charged with immorality."¹² Another example of the repression of Promethean fire is the banquet at Norton Abbey. Not only is the dietary excess comic, the guests at the banquet drag the mind down with the body, thwarting any Promethean attempt to transcend:

Though swallowed with much jest upon the whole;
And "entremets" to piddle with at hand,
Gently to lull down the subsiding soul.
(Don Juan, XV, lxvi)

Ridenour makes a similar comment about the banquet, concluding that the guests at the banquet fasten "a particle of the divine spirit to earth."¹³ However, in the fallen world of Don Juan, such an inversion of Prometheanism is nothing worse than amusing.

¹²Ernest J. Lovell, Jr., "Irony and Image in Don Juan," Twentieth Century Interpretations of Don Juan, ed. Edward E. Bostetter (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1969), p. 26.

¹³Ridenour, p. 37.

The frozen world of the English cantos is Byron's most despairing view of human limitations. The entire poem may be described in terms of its increasingly pessimistic view of man. At the beginning of Don Juan Byron emphasizes the "waste and icy clime" of fallen man as a parallel to the punishment of Prometheus. Although man's attempts to transcend constitute travesties of Promethean aspirations, in the frozen, icy world of the English cantos, he is no longer capable of Promethean aspirations. At the conclusion of Don Juan, man is merely frozen clay, animated by no divine spark. Byron's mocking and final negation of the aspiring aspect of the Promethean myth is the vehicle for his most despairing expression of the human condition.

CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSION

Critics of Byron tend to deplore Byron's lack of continuity. Byron is frequently dismissed as an erratic personality whose poetry may be regarded as similarly eccentric. Such investigations are based primarily on Byron's personality rather than his poetry. However, even those critics who base their studies in Byron's poetry often deplore discrepancies between his attitudes in different poems; such commentators feel that Byron's works, seen in their entirety, present a bizarre spectacle. Commentators find it difficult to believe that the gloomy Byronic hero, wrestling with the world and torn by an inner taint, is the product of the author of Don Juan. Some have even suggested that only a split personality could enable Byron to write such different works.

The imagery of fire and allusions to Prometheus, found throughout Byron's work, prove an element of continuity in a varied career that is disparagingly described as inconsistent. The author of Childe Harold and the poet of Don Juan share an important characteristic: both maintain the figure of Prometheus as an ideal. Byron's attitude toward Prometheus never varies; Byron's Prometheanism varies because Byron becomes increasingly despairing of man's capacity to emulate Prometheus in the fallen world. From his early Popean satires to Byron's development of the character of the Promethean artist, Byron insists that the function of the creative artist is to create with stolen fire, realizing that the act of creating is an impious act that also renders him the author of the greatest destruction.

Irreconcilable opposites and inextricable paradox are emphasized throughout Byron's career. Images of fire and clay prove to be Byron's most flexible vehicles for different combinations of creativity and destruction. In the Turkish tales Byron presents characters whose attempts to transcend through love end in defeat. The Promethean artist is the epitome of Byron's paradox: endowed with the greatest capacity for creation, the Promethean artist proves to be the source of the greatest destruction. Irreconcilable opposites are still present in Don Juan, but the emphasis differs. In Don Juan the force of mortality's clay bonds prevents man from aspiring like Prometheus.

Byron's Prometheanism proves to be an neglected element of continuity in a varied career. At the same time, however, Byron's Prometheanism reveals a spectrum of attitudes toward man's capacity to emulate Prometheus and consequently toward human nature. Byron's view of human nature at its most positive is that of unrelenting pessimism: man is unable to transcend his human condition. Promethean aspirations and heroic endurance in the inevitable defeat are the only manifestations of a divine spark afforded the creature of clay. Byron's decline in his use of the Promethean myth in Cain signifies a less positive view of mankind. Man is unable to undertake a theft of fire from heaven and unable to transcend. Man at this point is at best a Romantic rebel. In the satiric world of Don Juan Byron emphasizes the negative aspects of the Promethean myth. Byron's attitude in Don Juan is one of unrelenting cynicism. Man is unable to transcend, and his attempts to do so constitute travesties of Promethean aspirations. In the fallen world of Don Juan Promethean fire from heaven is debased to the level of lust; attempts to transcend through love, glory, and poetry prove insignificant.

The transition from man as "half dust, half deity" to man as frozen clay, animated by no higher spark, is the pattern of Byron's poetic career. A study of Byron's Prometheanism reveals that Byron does not drop the pose of Prometheanism he maintains in his earlier works but that he consciously mocks this pose. Recognition of the conscious artistry in Byron's career should encourage new appraisals of the surprisingly unified career of an eccentric personality. Moreover, a study based on Byron's poetry rather than his personality affords new insights into Byron's attitudes. Byron's rendition of the Promethean myth reveals Byron's conscious artistry at the same time it manifests Byron's increasingly pessimistic attitudes toward man.

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70

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