

A COMPLEX OF RELIGIOUS BELIEFS AS FOUND IN THE LIFE
AND WORKS OF LORD BYRON

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THESIS

Presented to the Graduate Council of the
North Texas State University in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

By

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Denton, Texas

August, 1967

PREFACE

This study of Lord Byron's religious beliefs as seen in a selected number of his works is by no means an attempt to state a specific set of beliefs or unchanged doctrines held by Lord Byron. To the contrary, it is an attempt to point out, in the life and works of this man, those beliefs that are insinuated or affirmed in his own behavior, his published opinions, and his poetry.

To substantiate the theme of this thesis, certain limitations have been placed upon the research. First, only those major works which trace Byron's private life and opinions, such as Don Juan and Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, and those which have obvious relationships with a religious theme, for example, Cain, Manfred, Heaven and Earth, "Prometheus," and "Darkness," have been considered. Second, Byron's letters have been a valuable source for the expression of his personal feelings.

The purpose of this thesis is to make an unbiased presentation of the many facets of Byron's religious beliefs. The reader may find it interesting to observe, in the discussions of Byron's life and works, the gradual accumulation of beliefs that shaped and limited this man's character.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
PREFACE	iii
Chapter	
I. FOUNDATIONS FOR BYRON'S RELIGIOUS VIEWS	1
II. BYRON'S PHILOSOPHY OF NATURE.	17
III. BYRON'S VIEWS ON PREDESTINATION, SIN AND PUNISHMENT	38
IV. BYRON'S VIEWS ON DEATH AND IMMORTALITY.	59
V. CONCLUSION.	75
BIBLIOGRAPHY.	83

CHAPTER I

FOUNDATIONS FOR BYRON'S RELIGIOUS VIEWS

I seldom talk of religion,
but I feel it, perhaps, more
than those who do.¹

Lord Byron was a man torn between a need for a faith and an inability to formulate a personal belief in an orthodox religion. As a result, his widespread reputation suffered, to a certain extent, from the supposition that Byron had no religion. But was he wholly an unbeliever? On this point Byron made himself quite clear. He confessed that "I believe doubtless in God, and should be happy to be convinced of much more. If I do not at present place implicit faith in tradition and revelation of any human creed, I hope it is not from want of any reverence for the creator, but the creature."² Undoubtedly, Byron was forced to create his own complex of religious beliefs.

Besides, I trust that God is not a Jew,
But the God of all Mankind; and as you
allow that a virtuous Gentile may be
saved, you do away with the necessity
of being a Jew or a Christian. I do

¹Countess of Blessington, A Journal of Conversations with Lord Byron (Boston, 1859), p. 124.

²André Maurois, Byron (New York, 1964), p. 259.

not believe in any revealed religion,
 because no religion is revealed: and
 if it pleases the Church to damn me
 for not allowing a nonentity, I throw
 myself on the mercy of the 'Great First
 Cause,' least understood.³

Byron was a descendant of the Gordon family--a family well known for its unconventional behavior in both its public and private affairs. Lady Byron told her son that he was born into a family whose members were, at one time, powerful chiefs and born of royal blood; but his governess, Mary Gray, filled Byron's head with stories of a less romantic and a more tragic belief about this family. She would tell her young charge "how the Gordons had murdered and been hanged and drowned--damned no doubt, by the Devil."⁴

Mary Gray's influence was of an ambivalent nature. She was a strict adherent to the Presbyterian faith. On the one hand she directed Byron toward a feeling for the beauty in religion, as in the melodious Psalms; on the other hand, she placed a strong fear of the Creator, of God, in him. At night as she dressed him for bed and bound his crippled foot in tight bandages, she had him repeat the Psalms that he had committed to memory. His favorites were the First and Twenty-Third Psalms, and these were the songs that he repeated most often to Mary. It was ironic that these two Psalms would have

³Hoxie Neale Fairchild, Religious Trends in English Poetry (New York, 1961), p. 405.

⁴Maurois, p. 25.

been his favorites, for the tone of each is in direct contrast to the other--one a very stern warning from a God full of wrath for the unrighteous⁵ and the other a gentle assurance of a God of love for the godly. This personal choice for these songs would best point out the paradox: here was a man torn by two opposing views on the character of his creator.

In Byron's younger years his beliefs appeared to be equally divided between these two views, but the belief in a wrathful God appeared to become predominant. On one occasion he said to Annabella, "I now come to a subject which, you have perceived, I always hitherto avoided--an awful one--Religion. I was bred in Scotland among Calvinists in the first part of my life, which gave me a dislike to the persuasion."⁶ Mary Gray told him of a cruel God and a wicked Satan, and when left alone at night, he could "feel evil things prowling about him." He "felt that there was that awful Satan, and the Lord, around him in the darkness."⁷ These feelings were obviously reinforced by his early education in the Scottish schools. "Satan and sin were regular subjects: there where the children learned to read in books of one-syllabled words. "'God made

⁵Ethel C. Mayne, Byron, Vol. I (New York, 1913), pp. 24-25.

⁶Maurois, p. 259.

⁷Ibid., p. 25.

man--let us love Him. . . ." and "'God made Satan--and Satan made sin. . . ."8

When Byron's work, specifically his slow development of reading skills, began to show that he was making little progress, Lady Byron hired two tutors for her son. The first tutor was Ross, a pious minister who inspired Byron with a love for history. The second was Paterson, a stern Presbyterian who did his best to teach his own Calvinistic beliefs to Byron.⁹ Paterson taught Byron these basic assumptions:

We are corrupt from our birth up, in that we have participated in Original Sin. Certain men, united to Jesus Christ by the Holy Ghost, can be raised to a life of holiness; those who are not thus saved are condemned to everlasting punishment. As for the operation of the Holy Ghost, that depends on the choice of God, who has predestined some to life everlasting, and others to damnation.¹⁰

Obviously, these teachings led Byron to some introspection. "Was he himself among the elect or among the reprobates? Surely these violent Gordons and Byrons had been almost all of them damned?"¹¹ Byron began to consider the feelings that he often had--feelings which he described as "sudden involuntary furies." During these moments he was not aware of the

⁸Ibid., p. 26.

⁹Ibid., pp. 26-27.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 27.

¹¹Ibid.

things that he did. "Could this be diabolic possession? And yet there were other moments when he felt himself so tender and good. It was all very frightening. But was it true?"¹²

Byron met with more pressure toward skepticism about the world and its religious views. His roommate, Charles Skinner Matthews, "completed the destruction of the lingering relics of Aberdonianism. Matthews believed in nothing, and he laughed at God and Devil alike."¹³ Byron's childhood faith had been shattered by a course in Voltaire, and the influence Matthews had upon him "confirmed him in his scepticism."¹⁴

"From this early background he learned, in time, to look on nature with exultant wonder; on life with open, if not always discerning eyes; and on humanity with the skeptical misgivings of the Calvinist."¹⁵ Byron was at once a Calvinist and not a Calvinist. "Calvinism presented an enigma, but it offered a way out; skepticism denied the solution."¹⁶ He never escaped the fatalistic philosophy that his early Calvinistic training had taught him. This feeling of fatalism was possibly strengthened by Byron's physical deformity, his lame foot.

¹²Ibid.

¹³Ibid., p. 102.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Henry M. Battenhouse, English Romantic Writers (New York, 1958), p. 129.

¹⁶William J. Calvert, Byron: Romantic Paradox (New York, 1962), p. 13.

In the trick that fate had played on him, Byron "saw the sign of his destiny."¹⁷

Yet as Byron grew older and his "core of certainty" narrowed, he wrote in The Deformed Transformed that men are "themselves alone the real 'nothings;' and yet we find no relaxation in the exposure of hypocrisy and cant, nothing of the frustration and hopelessness of a defeated man!"¹⁹ Byron continued to delve into the "mask that hides the face of reality in the world."²⁰ As he wrote in Don Juan: "I hope it is no crime/To laugh at all things--for I wish to know/What, after all, are all things--but a show?"²¹

Little escaped Byron's searching eye, for he enjoyed exposing all human vanities and signs of selfishness. ". . . they disgust and prevent his giving credit to the many good qualities that often accompany them."²² "Byron was a good hater and he hated many hateful things."²³ The sorrow was that his notions of what he was fighting for were not very

¹⁷Mario Praz, "Metamorphoses of Satan" as cited in Paul West, ed., Byron (New Jersey, 1963), p. 44.

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹Clarence D. Thorpe, ed., The Major English Romantic Poets (Carbondale, 1957), p. 161.

²⁰Ibid., p. 165.

²¹Lord Byron, Don Juan, Canto VII, Verse 2, ll. 14-16.

²²Blessington, p. 87.

²³Helen Gardner, "Don Juan" cited in West, p. 120.

clear; however, "he was quite clear as to what he was fighting against."²⁴

Byron was undoubtedly an idealist. This idealism, however, was damaged by Byron's ability to see the conditions of the world in which he lived as influenced by Calvinistic beliefs. As a result, Byron grew disillusioned and maintained a bitter outlook on life. As a result, an ambivalent nature was established toward life. According to Ernest Lovell, a man who could write, in Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, that "love . . . is the great principle of the universe" and then speak of "the ruling principle of Hate" elsewhere, in "Prometheus," was an enigma. Lovell continued by giving what he believed was an acceptable explanation of such actions. It "would seem to be that the one statement represents the wish, the other the fact, as it appeared to Byron's deepest consciousness."²⁵ Byron had his views, but unfortunately they were irreconcilable.²⁶ Like the hero of Cain, Byron "demands natural knowledge of supernatural mysteries; and he conceives of knowledge not as the crown of reason but as release from the pains of speculation!"²⁷ One expression of

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵Ernest J. Lovell, Jr., Byron: The Record of a Quest (Connecticut, 1966), p. 126.

²⁶Ibid., p. 208.

²⁷Fairchild, p. 447.

this "divided nature" is Byron's naive insistence on proof. "On the one hand, he would gladly accept Christianity because he longs for the peace of certitude. On the other hand, his romantic pride, though sadly battered by experience and frequently denied and mocked by Byron himself, remains too strong to permit him to pay the price of self-submission."²⁸

"Vistas of the depths and heights of theology . . . were not beyond him; and his early education . . . served to keep his conscience troubled throughout his life about questions of ethics and religion."²⁹ Byron continued to expose himself to his uncertainties through constant employment of his intellectual curiosity. He wrote:

So little do we know what we're about in
This world, I doubt if doubt itself be doubting.³⁰
· · · · ·
I would solicit free discussion
Upon all points--no matter what, or whose.³¹

Byron's intellectual curiosity did not appear to lose its spirit even though it was constantly faced with questioning doubts; in fact, Byron's most effete character, Sardanapalus, speaks for Byron when he announces that "there's something sweet in my uncertainty/I would not change for your Chaldean lore."³²

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹Battenhouse, p. 147.

³⁰Thorpe, p. 161.

³¹Ibid.

³²Lord Byron, Sardanapalus, ll. 263-264.

Byron felt that he would never be gratified with the discovery of answers to the eternal questions. However, he enjoyed philosophizing on them.

What are we? and whence came we? what shall be
Our ultimate existence? what's our present?
Are questions answerless, and yet incessant.³³

· · · · ·
How little do we know that which we are!
How less what we may be!³⁴

Byron felt that although he could never know the answers to those questions of the essence of being, he could make one deduction, taken from his fatalistic doctrine--man was mortal and was doomed from birth to death. In other words, his avowed position was that of philosophical skepticism. He stated in Don Juan: "For me, I know nought; nothing I deny,/ Admit, reject, contemn [sic] and what know you,/Except perhaps that you were born to die?"³⁵

Such a questioning faith as Byron possessed could not be confined within the tenets of an orthodox religion. He questioned the explicit reasons for the existence of those groups of believers of one particular creed or another. Byron did not feel that any group could have assured knowledge of eternal questions, such as:

³³Lord Byron, Don Juan, Canto VI, Verse 63, ll. 501-504.

³⁴Ibid., Canto XV, Verse 99, ll. 787-788.

³⁵Ibid., Canto XIV, Verse 3.

But what's reality? who has its clue?
 Philosophy? No; she too much rejects.
 Religion? Yes; but which of all her sects?³⁶

Byron believed that "the multiplicity of religions was proof of their weakness."³⁷ No doubt Byron would have been in agreement with Lionel Trilling's conviction "that ideologies are masks assumed when a movement has despaired of having ideas and is turning to dogma to enforce its point of view."³⁸ Byron could not help feeling that, in religion, as in everything else sound reason was found to substantiate, "its utility must be apparent, to encourage people to adopt its precepts. . . ."³⁹ But in the final analysis, Byron suggested that one should ". . . speak not of men's creeds: they rest between/ Man and his Maker."⁴⁰

Byron refused to profess membership with any doctrinaire group, for he felt that the group would inevitably "seek to impose its ideas upon the individual through sheer force of numbers."⁴¹ It was apparent that any "form of religion which imposed outward control upon his passions would have been

³⁶Ibid., Canto XV, Verse 89, ll. 710-712.

³⁷Maurois, p. 145.

³⁸Thorpe, p. 155.

³⁹Blessington, p. 123.

⁴⁰Lord Byron, Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, Canto IV, Verse 95.

⁴¹Thorpe, p. 157.

repugnant to Byron. . . ."⁴² In Childe Harold's Pilgrimage Byron expressed his dislike of all organized religion. In Canto II he generalized against

Foul Superstition! howsoe'er disguised,
 Idol--Saint--Virgin--Prophet--Crescent--
 Cross--
 For whatsoever symbol thou art prized,
 Thou sacerdotal gain, but general loss!
 Who from true Worship's gold can separate
 thy dross?⁴³

In a collection of letters of 1807-1808, Byron wrote to Ensign Long:

Of Religion I know nothing, at least in its favour. We have fools in all sects and Imposter's in most; why should I believe mysteries no one understands, because written by some who chose to mistake madness for Inspiration, and style themselves Evangelicals? . . . This much I will venture to affirm, that all the virtuous and pious Deeds performed on Earth can never entitle a man to Everlasting happiness in a future State; nor on the other hand can such a Scene as a Seat of eternal punishment exist, it is incompatible with the benign attributes of a Deity to suppose so. . . . I have lived a Deist, what I shall die I know not. . . .⁴⁴

There was no doubt that Byron was a Deist, although a qualified one, for his God was different from the God of the Christian dogmatists. Byron did not believe in the Christian teaching of the Holy Trinity, rather he believed in "a self

⁴²Fairchild, p. 396.

⁴³Lord Byron, Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, Canto II, Verse xliv.

⁴⁴Fairchild, p. 400.

conscious Unitary Creator possessed of sovereign will."⁴⁵ He sensed a large gulf between the world and God. "It is characteristic of Deism to imply such a gulf, since Deism conceives of the First Cause as existing apart from the Creation and its processes."⁴⁶ Such a belief as held by Byron led to his feelings of insignificance within the vastness of the universe. Byron's God was a Being who was indifferent to the pitiful state of His own creation--man.⁴⁷ Annabella, after becoming Byron's wife, said,

No living being could be more overwhelmingly aware of a Divine Will, but it was a Will in which justice was tempered by no trace of pity. His religion was compact of fear, and was, consequently, rebellion. He believed that certain men were destined for Heaven, others for Hell, and that he was among the latter; and from this there sprang a natural fury against the Tyrant of the Universe. . . .⁴⁸

When Byron thought of a God whose pleasure was found in observing man's sufferings, he became furious. Byron once said to Dr. Kennedy, a devout Scotsman whom Byron met in Ithaca, that his difficulty was in reconciling the presence in the world of "dreadful and meaningless evils" with the "existence of a benevolent Creator."⁴⁹ He said that of all

⁴⁵Edward W. Marjarum, Byron as Skeptic and Believer (Princeton, 1938), p. 13.

⁴⁶Ibid.

⁴⁷Ernest Bernbaum, Guide Through the Romantic Movement (New York, 1942), pp. 198-199.

⁴⁸Maurois, p. 287.

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 507.

the bodily infirm he had met, the majority had had the infirmity since birth. "How had these offended their Creator to be thus subjected to misery? and why do they live and die in this wretched state, most of them without the Gospel being preached to them? and of what use are they in the world?"⁵⁰ At these times he wished that he did not believe in God, and as he said to his wife after an argument over religion: "The worst of it is I do believe!"⁵¹

As Byron told Dr. Kennedy: "I am now in a fairer way. I already believe in predestination, which I know you believe, and in the depravity of the human heart in general, and of my own in particular. . . . You cannot expect me to become a perfect Christian at once. . . . What would you have me to do?" To this statement, Dr. Kennedy replied, "Begin this very night to pray that God would pardon your sins." "That would be asking too much, my dear doctor," said Byron.⁵²

As Byron grew older, he admitted to a growing feeling for the Catholic Church. Byron expressed an enjoyment in having a mistress, Countess Guiccioli, who was a Catholic and a believer. Too, he had his hopes that his daughter Allegra would be reared a Catholic.⁵³ On a tangible level,

⁵⁰Ibid.

⁵¹Ibid., p. 287.

⁵²Ibid., p. 508.

⁵³Ibid., pp. 417-418.

the ritual performed by Catholics "offered the beautiful in religion, which Calvinism lacked, and seemed to satisfy a longing in his soul that beauty and goodness should go hand in hand."⁵⁴

It is by far the most elegant worship, hardly excepting the Greek mythology. What with incense, pictures, statues, altars, shrines, relics, and the real presence, confession, absolution,-- there is something sensible to grasp at. Besides, it leaves no possibility of doubt; for those who swallow their Deity, really and truly, in transubstantiation, can hardly find anything else otherwise than easy of digestion.⁵⁵

According to William J. Calvert, however, this feeling for the Catholic Church was no more than a "longing. Byron must have felt a speciousness in Catholicism, as he felt it in whatever else had promised to satisfy an idea."⁵⁶ That this "longing" was unfulfilled is evidenced by the total effect of Byron's works--an unsuccessful "union of the beautiful and the good."⁵⁷ Related to this opinion was another expressed by Mrs. Druray, wife of the head-master at Harrow. As she watched Byron limping painfully up the stony path of

⁵⁴Calvert, p. 7.

⁵⁵Fairchild, pp. 437-438.

⁵⁶Calvert, p. 7.

⁵⁷Ibid.

the graveyard, she said, "There goes Byron struggling up the hill like a ship in a storm without rudder or compass."⁵⁸

Although his religious philosophy appeared to be filled with confusion and doubt on a multiplicity of subjects, Byron made a supreme effort to answer the questionings of his own mind. It appeared that Byron looked into his own mind, however, when he wrote this verse on the fly-leaf of his Bible:

Within this sacred volume lies
The mystery of all mysteries.
Oh, happy he of human race
To whom our God hath given grace--
To read, to learn, to watch, to pray,
To lift the latch, to force the way!
But better he had ne'er been born,
Who reads to doubt, who reads to scorn.⁵⁹

Byron's ambivalent religious nature was again expressed and was adequately stated by Galt when he came to the conclusion that "his being was, indeed, shrouded in Mystery."⁶⁰

Byron could not discern his "ruling passion." It is equally hard for the reader of Byron's works to discover it. When the Archangel Michael appeared in The Vision of Judgment, "the first half of the stanza might have been written by a lesser Dante and the second by Voltaire:"⁶¹

⁵⁸Maurois, p. 47.

⁵⁹Albert Brecknock, Byron (London, 1926), p. 114.

⁶⁰Ibid., p. 149.

⁶¹Fairchild, p. 389.

And from the gate thrown open issued beaming
 A beautiful and mighty Thing of Light,
 Radiant with glory, like a banner streaming
 Victorious from some world-o'erthrowing fight:
 My poor comparisons must needs be teeming
 With earthly likenesses, for here the night
 Of clay obscures our best conceptions, saving
 Johanna Southcote, or Bob Southey raving.⁶²

The problem presents itself as to which side of the "chasm"
 the "real" Byron is to be found.

There is no reason to suppose that he is
 not equally sincere in each of his shifting
 moods; he has rightly been praised for the
 complete honesty with which he refuses to
 paint a more simplified picture of his na-
 ture and of the world than he is able to
 perceive. It may be said that there is
 genuine integrity in the frankness with
 which he reveals his disintegration.⁶³

⁶²Lord Byron, The Vision of Judgment, Verse 28.

⁶³Fairchild, p. 389.

CHAPTER II

BYRON'S PHILOSOPHY OF NATURE

Living as he did in the Romantic Age, it stood to reason that Byron would write a great deal about the subject of nature in his poetry. The prevailing tendency of the Romantic Period was to turn toward nature and away from civilization.

One may visualize the typical, hypothetical situation in the form of a triangle. At its apex, A, is the individual; at the left corner, B, is organized society and civilization; and at C is civilization's great opposite, nature. There was, within the life of the hypothetical individual, sporadic but strong pressure tending toward the reduction of the line AC to a single point.¹

There were several barriers in Byron which made it impossible for him to achieve such a fusion. Among these barriers was Byron's Calvinistic beliefs, which brought him to view nature as often destructive and rarely beneficial to man. "And his strong sense of the ridiculous, rendered doubly keen when the ridiculous appeared to touch upon himself, led him on . . . to satirize most aspects of the Return to Nature Movement and to turn away from it in both his life and poetry."²

¹Ernest J. Lovell, Jr., Byron: The Record of a Quest (Connecticut, 1966), p. 29.

²Ibid., p. 30.

During the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the poets of nature generally assumed "that the order of the universe was purposive, harmonious, and generally benevolent toward man."³ This belief was based on the idea that the universe was the result of planning done by a benevolent and intelligent Deity. Thus, the general concept of nature was a combination of scientific ideas centered around regular and universal laws and religious ideas centered around the idea of a loving Deity.

Byron was acquainted with the scientific facts of the existence of the "myriads of . . . worlds--stars--systems,"⁴ and he could accept the scientific basis of the assumption made by the poets of nature. However, Byron's early childhood religious teachings made it impossible for him to accept the popular assumption of a benevolent Creator.

. . . Byron's half belief and fear that he somehow bore the curse of Cain, his questionings of a benevolent providence, the general Hebraic tint of his conception of God, indeed, the whole of his life's many-sided rebellion--all these hindered him from giving his whole and unqualified faith to the idea of a universe characterized by any generous amount of benevolence toward man.⁵

³Ibid., p. 185.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid., p. 186.

Byron failed to establish any satisfactory relationship between himself and the natural world, and it appeared that he was aware of this failure.⁶ Thus, his "carnal communings with external nature"⁷ did not afford him any feelings of peace of mind. He felt that he was simply an atom in a greater whole that was composed of other worlds and systems. In addition to this feeling of insignificance, Byron felt that this solar system was capable of being destroyed by the Creator who made the laws by which the universe was governed. The fact was obvious that Byron's beliefs rested on a foundation of a Calvinistic God--"an Avenger, not a Father."⁸

Byron could not believe in a cosmos which was not hostile to himself. He could not conceive of an expansion of self in a cosmos which was indifferent to man, and for this reason he conceived of life "not in terms of confident assertion echoed back to man by nature, but in terms of despairing through defiant rebellion against fate."⁹

Byron generally agreed with the Deists of the previous century that God created the world and governed it by his own authorization. In 1807, Byron wrote, "I have lived a Deist,"¹⁰ and in 1811 that

⁶Ibid., p. 123.

⁷Ibid., p. 38.

⁸Ibid., p. 187.

⁹Hoxie N. Fairchild, Religious Trends in English Poetry (New York, 1961), p. 416.

¹⁰Lovell, p. 187.

As to miracles, I agree with Hume that it is more probable men should be deceived, than that things out of the course of Nature should happen. . . . I do not believe in any revealed religion . . . I throw myself on the mercy of the 'Great First Cause, least understood' . . . God would have made his will known without books . . . had it been his pleasure to ratify any peculiar mode of worship.¹¹

This general train of thought produced Byron's "The Prayer of Nature" in 1806. After praying the "Father of Light" to "Avert from me the sin of death," Byron continued:

No shrine I seek, to sects unknown;
 Oh, point to me the path of truth!
 Thy dread Omnipotence I own;
 Spare, yet amend, the faults of youth.

Let bigots rear a gloomy fane
 Let Superstition hail the pile,
 Let priests, to spread their sable reign,
 With tales of mystic rites beguile.

Shall man confine his Maker's sway
 To Gothic domes of mouldering stone?
 Thy temple is the face of day;
 Earth, Ocean, Heaven, thy boundless throne.

Shall man condemn his race to Hell,
 Unless they bend in pompous form?
 Tell us that all, for one who fell,
 Must perish in the mingling storm?

Father! no prophet's laws I seek,--
 Thy laws in Nature's works appear;--
 I own myself corrupt and weak,
 Yet will I pray, for thou wilt hear!¹²

¹¹Fairchild, p. 405.

¹²Ibid., p. 398.

The views expressed in "The Prayer of Nature" were not those expressed frequently in his early years, nor were they views that gave him much comfort.¹³ This poem mixed "vestiges of Christianity, destructive deism of the anti-priestcraft sort, and sentimental preromantic, more or less pantheistic deism."¹⁴ Byron's "philosophy of nature" did not appear in those places where a record of these beliefs might have been recorded. However, John Galt, in his book The Life of Lord Byron, discussed at length the accuracy with which Lord Byron wrote of the natural scenes in the places to which he had traveled.

Although the picturesque point of view does not exclude the possibility of looking upon the natural world as partaking of something of the divine because the creation of deity, yet evidence of the one do not appear in such generous amounts if the other attitude is habitual. The personified abstraction Nature, to be sure, occurs repeatedly in Byron's works before 1816, often as a vaguely considered plastic force, but these passages are so completely poetic and literary as to have almost no bearing upon his serious views.¹⁵

Thus, Byron's reactions to nature in his early years appeared to be in a literary sense only.

It was not habitual with him at this time to associate the religious emotion or any high and holy enthusiasm with a particular aspect of nature. From these small

¹³Lovell, p. 188.

¹⁴Fairchild, p. 398.

¹⁵Lovell, p. 189.

beginnings, however, was to flow a growing stream of deistic professions, though one is not always impressed with the degree of conviction they imply.¹⁶

Certain basic attitudes were characteristic of Byron's philosophy of nature before his meeting with Shelley in 1816. His most typical attitude could be summed up as a "variously expressed mixture of indifference, conventional deism, and the enthusiasm of the tourist in search of the picturesque."¹⁷ There did appear, however, to be some evidence that Byron felt that nature had more to offer him than he had discovered up to that time.

A strong force which turned him toward nature was his inability to live with other human beings. Byron wrote in June, 1810:

. . . I am very glad to be once more alone
 . . . because my nature leads me to solitude,
 and that every day adds to this disposition.
 If I chose, here are many men who would wish
 to join me--one wants me to go to Egypt,
 another to Asia, of which I have seen enough.
 The greater part of Greece is already my
 own, so that I shall only go over my old
 ground, and look upon my old seas and moun-
 tains, the only acquaintances I ever found
 improve upon me.¹⁸

Unfortunately, Wordsworth's "love of nature leading to love

¹⁶Ibid., pp. 189-190.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 118.

¹⁸Ibid.

of man" was meaningless to Byron.¹⁹ Dr. Marjarum observed that even in childhood Byron looked to nature to provide "him a ready means of escape from social intercourse with other persons."²⁰

Another strong force was seen in Byron's hope to escape from himself. "To forget himself, to lose sight of his own 'wretched identity,' this was his lifelong quest."²¹ Byron turned to nature in this quest, but he discovered that it was one that was almost impossible to fulfill. In the 1812 addition to the preface of the fourth edition of Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, Byron expressed the view that the beauties of nature had been wasted on one like Harold.²² Two passages in the poem suggest the idea in the preface.

Sweet was the scene, yet soon he thought to flee,
 More restless than the swallow in the skies;

 To horse! to horse! he quits, for ever quits . . .
 A scene of peace. . . .²³

For Harold bears with him a 'secret woe,'

. . . that weariness which springs
 From all I meet, or hear, or see;
 To me no pleasure Beauty brings.²⁴

¹⁹Fairchild, p. 414.

²⁰Edward W. Marjarum, Byron as Skeptic and Believer (Princeton, 1938), p. 52.

²¹Lovell, p. 130.

²²Ibid.

²³Lord Byron, Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, I, 27-28.

²⁴Ibid., I, ll. 849-851.

Another strong force which turned Byron toward nature was his seeking after a faith, for traditional Christianity called for skepticism on Byron's part. Such a search brought Byron to a "cold, rationalistic, and traditional form of deism."²⁵ Two passages, one written in 1813 and the other in 1815, appeared to have a feeling of "mystical" longing in them.

. . . my tongue can not impart
 My almost drunkenness of heart,
 When first this liberated eye
 Survey'd Earth, Ocean, Sun, and Sky,
 As if my spirit pierced them through,
 And all their inmost wonders knew!²⁶

. . . blue the sky
 Spreads like an ocean hung on high,
 Bespangled with those isles of-light,
 So wildly, spiritually bright;--
 Who ever gazed upon them shining
 And turn'd to earth without repining,
 Nor wish'd for wings to flee away,
 And mix with their eternal ray?²⁷

Byron had had no experience with Wordsworth, and the poetry held Byron's own personal feelings toward a "mystical union with nature."²⁸ Byron was now ready for the company of both William Wordsworth and Percy Shelley.

The critical months of Byron's stay in Switzerland in the summer of 1816, after his "exile" from England, had two profound results. First, Byron was not convinced, through his

²⁵Lovell, p. 119.

²⁶Lord Byron, The Bride of Abydos, II, 343-348.

²⁷Lord Byron, The Siege of Corinth, ll. 244-251.

²⁸Lovell, p. 119.

"Wordsworthian" communions with nature, that love was the "great principle" of the universe. Second, Byron's pantheistic and "mystical" passages were not the result of a deeply satisfying spiritual experience, but rather they were the product of a limited literary influence--the influence of Wordsworth and Shelley, men whose ideas were wholly foreign to his own.²⁹

Byron did not have the background of pleasant experiences with nature that Wordsworth had been fortunate enough to have. Professor Raymond Havens wrote of Wordsworth in this respect,

The happiest years of his life had been spent near the mountains and heaths; his most exalted experiences, his periods of deepest insight were clearly connected with them; separation from them had meant error, doubt, despair; and renewed association with them had led him back 'To those sweet counsels between head and heart/Whence grew that genuine knowledge, fraught with peace.'³⁰

Byron had few such associations with nature, for his younger years among the mountains of Scotland had been filled with violent disagreements with his mother as she continued to torture him with the fact that he was deformed. Even the months in Switzerland where Byron was exposed to the most beautiful scenes of nature were filled with thoughts of his broken marriage and his incest with Augusta. Thus, Byron had no

²⁹Ibid., p. 117.

³⁰Ibid., p. 38.

pleasant experiences with nature and for that reason could not find a foundation on which to formulate a creed.

Shelley, Wordsworth, and Rousseau were the men whom Byron depended upon to help him to achieve the "romantic experience" of becoming one with nature and losing his own personal identity. Byron recorded such a feeling in Canto III of Childe Harold's Pilgrimage:

I live not in myself, but I become
 Portion of that around me; and to me
 High mountains are a feeling, and the hum
 Of human cities torture: I can see
 Nothing to loathe in nature, save to be
 A link reluctant in a fleshly chain,
 Classed among creatures, when the soul can flee,
 And with the sky, the peak, the heaving plain
 Of ocean, or the stars, mingle, and not in vain.³¹

Are not the mountains, waves, and skies, a part
 Of me and of my soul, as I of them?
 Is not the love of these deep in my heart
 With a pure passion?³²

He felt a kind of spiritual rebirth "spurning the clay-cold bonds which round our being cling."³³ This "feeling infinite" is "A truth, which through our being then doth melt/And purifies from self. . . ."³⁴ Wordsworth, as recorded by Moore, once

Spoke of Byron's plagiarisms from him;
 the whole third canto of 'Childe Harold'
 founded on his style and sentiments. The
 feeling of natural objects which is there

³¹Lord Byron, Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, Canto III, Verse 72.

³²Ibid., Verse 75.

³³Ibid., Verse 73.

³⁴Ibid., Verse 90.

expressed, not caught by B. from nature herself, but from him (Wordsworth), and spoiled in the transmission.³⁵

"Byron's pantheism, which is borrowed and yet genuinely expressed, comes largely from Shelley and Wordsworth."³⁶ In "The Dream," written in July, 1816, Byron observed "that God alone was to be seen in Heaven."³⁷ More pantheistic views were to be seen in Childe Harold's Pilgrimage:

And dust is as it should be, shall I not
Feel all I see, less dazzling, but more warm?
The bodiless thought? the Spirit of each spot?
Of which, even now, I share at times the immortal lot?³⁸

However, the idea was growing in Byron's mind that the beauties of nature were lost upon such an individual as Childe Harold, and the idea was beginning to assume a personal application to Byron himself. The first half of the year 1816 revealed a succession of passages in which Byron confessed his inability to find in nature that feeling of pleasure that he believed was waiting to be discovered there. He realized that his cup of life "had been quaff'd too quickly,"

. . . and he found
The dregs were wormwood; but he fill'd again,
And from a purer fount, on holier ground,
And deem'd its spring perpetual--but in vain!
Still round him clung invisible a chain

³⁵Lovell, p. 125.

³⁶Richard A. Rice, ed., The Best of Byron (New York, 1942), p. 741.

³⁷Lord Byron, "The Dream," l. 125.

³⁸Lord Byron, Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, Canto III, Verse 74.

Which gall'd for ever, fettering though unseen,
 And heavy though it clank'd not . . .
 Entering with every step he took through many a
 scene.³⁹

If the "feeling infinite" that Byron possessed was the result of a successful union with nature and a resulting loss of individuality, then it might be said that Byron did achieve, at some time during his stay in Switzerland, the "quest which was his throughout all of his life: to throw off that humanity which plagued him and to achieve a self-oblivion free of both ennui and despair."⁴⁰ However, there are a great number of passages that reveal that he never achieved a satisfying union with nature.

"Byron longs to bridge the gap between the world reported by the senses and the world shaped by the aspiring imagination;"⁴¹ however, Byron's skepticism would not allow him to transform "what apparently is into what apparently is not."⁴²

Of its own beauty is the mind diseased,
 And fevers into false creation:--where,
 Where are the forms the sculptor's soul
 hath seized?--
 In him alone. Can Nature show so fair?⁴³

³⁹Ibid., Verse 9.

⁴⁰Lovell, p. 122.

⁴¹Fairchild, p. 416.

⁴²Ibid.

⁴³Lord Byron, Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, Canto IV, Verse 122.

Under Shelley's direction and influence, Byron could at times attempt to transfer to the physical world those imaginings of his own mind.

Our life is a false nature--'tis not in
The harmony of things,--this hard decree,
This uneradicable taint of sin,
This boundless upas, this all-blasting tree
Whose root is earth, whose leaves and branches be
The skies which rain their plagues on men like dew.⁴⁴

However, these attempts were not deeply influential on Byron, for once he was removed from the company of Shelley and Wordsworth, his attitude changed. Any allusion made to the attitudes that he had held in 1816 after that year were worded in such a similar manner as to overrule the belief that it was anything other than a recalling of his earlier works. The contrast could be made between two particular passages, one in Canto III and the other in Canto IV in Childe Harold's Pilgrimage.⁴⁵

. . . the soul can flee,
And with the sky, the peak, the heaving plain
Of ocean, or the stars, mingle, and not in vain.⁴⁶

I love not Man the less, but Nature more,
From these our interviews, in which I steal
From all I may be or have been before,
To mingle with the Universe. . . .⁴⁷

⁴⁴Ibid., Verse 76.

⁴⁵Lovell, p. 123. The italics are used by Lovell to stress the comparison.

⁴⁶Lord Byron, Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, Canto III, Verse 72.

⁴⁷Ibid., Canto IV, Verse 178.

Byron's own comments on the two poems substantiate the view that he was describing "neither actual psychic experience nor settled intellectual conviction." He said of Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, Canto IV: it is "'not a continuation of the Third. I have parted company with Shelley and Wordsworth.'"⁴⁸ The conclusion would be made that any post-1816 passages were the result of the literary influence that Wordsworth and Shelley had on Byron and were not the result of a deeply felt personal belief in the "Wordsworthian" themes.

Perhaps the best example of this progression in Byron's ever-changing attitudes toward nature was in his Manfred. In this poem Byron, through Manfred, wished to worship nature, losing himself in its vastness. However, he discovered that the elements of nature were not benevolent to him; therefore, he confessed that nature was unable to bring him the peace of mind that he sought. In the conclusion to the first act, Manfred cries, "Mother Earth . . . I cannot love ye."

Immediately after Byron left Switzerland, a great change came over him. Once he was out of the company of Shelley, who had been deeply indoctrinated by his reading of Wordsworth, Byron had no stimulus to direct him toward poetic pantheism. In the Swiss Journal to Augusta in 1816, Byron recorded a significant statement which shed a great deal of light upon his resulting attitudes toward nature.

⁴⁸Lovell, p. 125.

I am a lover of Nature and an admirer of Beauty. I can bear fatigue and welcome privation, and have seen some of the noblest views in the world. But in all this--the recollections of bitterness, and more especially of recent and more home desolation, which must accompany me through life, have preyed upon me here; and neither the music of the Shepherd, the crashing of the Avalanche, nor the torrent, the mountain, the Glacier, the Forest, nor the Cloud, have for one moment lightened the weight upon my heart, nor enabled me to lose my own wretched identity in the majesty, and the power, and the Glory, around, above, and beneath me.⁴⁹

Hoxie N. Fairchild held the opinion that Byron resented the "gesture of reverence" that the romantic poet had to make toward nature in order to deal most successfully with it. He enjoyed talking of "mingling" with the universe; however, he is "too egotistic to derive much real satisfaction from mingling with anything."⁵⁰ Byron was set against conforming to romantic standards, and for this reason he was not a successful pantheist.

In addition to being a non-conformist, Byron was no metaphysician, He had an ambivalent reaction to Shelley's pantheism, but when his own turn came to speak out about his own beliefs, he said that his doctrine was "methodist, calvinist, augustinian."⁵¹ "In the light of all this it is impossible to regard the pantheistic expressions produced in

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 134.

⁵⁰Fairchild, p. 414.

⁵¹André Maurois, Byron (New York, 1964), p. 342.

the summer of 1816 as anything other than purely 'literary' effusions"--⁵² the product of Wordsworth's, Shelley's, and Rousseau's influence on this highly sensitive poet. It is doubtful that the effect that these months in Switzerland had on Byron was of an enduring nature.

Byron appeared to successfully combine and maintain two different points of view on the nature of the universe. He assumed that the universe, or matter, was pervaded with the divine spirit; this was the popular pantheistic view. The deistic view of the universe conceived of a creator outside his creation--a creator who took it upon himself to govern or regulate those scientific laws which he set in motion at the time of creation.⁵³

Both of these strains of thought were expressed in Childe Harold, Canto III where Byron proclaimed that there is "not a beam nor air nor leaf. . . . but hath a part of being."⁵⁴ He was at that moment in the act of worshipping Nature; however, he turned directly to the subject of the early Persians and their deistic worship in nature. They build their altars on the mountain tops, "there to seek the Spirit."⁵⁵ The contrast was made between the places of worship that were made with

⁵²Lovell, p. 127.

⁵³Ibid., p. 190.

⁵⁴Lord Byron, Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, Canto III, Verse 89.

⁵⁵Ibid., Verse 91.

human hands and the "unwall'd" temples. It appeared that Byron was attempting to compare two ways of worshipping a deity who exists apart from his works.⁵⁶ The "pantheism left him as it had found him, a deist."⁵⁷

Deism was the only solution that Byron had to the problem of his inability to accept the Calvinistic beliefs of mind and matter and the Catholic feelings of his later years. When professing to be anything at all, Byron professed to being a deist. One day, while riding in the forest near Ravenna with Pietro Gamba, Byron remarked, "How, raising our eyes to heaven, or directing them to earth, can we doubt of the existence of God?"⁵⁸

The Countess of Blessington recorded that Byron had once remarked,

A fine day, a moonlight night, or any other fine object in the phenomena of nature, excites strong feelings of religion in all elevated minds, and an outpouring of the spirit of the Creator, that, call it what we may, is the essence of innate love and gratitude to the Divinity.⁵⁹

⁵⁶Lovell, pp. 190-191.

⁵⁷Samuel C. Chew, Byron in England (New York, 1924), p. 132.

⁵⁸Lovell, p. 192.

⁵⁹Countess of Blessington, A Journal of Conversations with Lord Byron (Boston, 1859), p. 124.

Lawrence E. Nelson also recorded a significant statement made by Byron. "When I look at the marvels of creation, I bow before the majesty of Heaven."⁶⁰

The continual appearance of a natural phenomenon in Byron's poetry charted Byron's changes in attitude toward nature. In his early poems the ocean was uncompromisingly masculine; as his poetic abilities became more mature, his vision of the sea expanded to accommodate his vast area of beliefs. It was a record of his faith and of his fear. In Canto IV of Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, Byron expressed this attitude toward God in the famous "Roll on, thou deep and dark blue Ocean," in which he stressed the insignificance of man as contrasted to the immensity and the power of the ocean. The suggestion followed that the ocean was the mirror of its creator, a rather startling contrast to the suggestion of the ocean's cruelty.

Thou glorious mirror, where the Almighty's form
Glasses itself . . .
The image of Eternity--the throne
Of the invisible. . . .⁶²

Here Byron stated the age-old paradox of man's loving, and yet fearing, God.

⁶⁰Lawrence E. Nelson, Our Roving Bible (New York, 1945), p. 153.

⁶¹Bernard Blackstone, "Guilt and Retribution in Byron's Sea Poems," as cited in Paul West, ed., Byron (New Jersey, 1963), p. 31.

⁶²Lord Byron, Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, Canto IV, Verse 183.

Remarkably, Byron was able to forget the teachings of Wordsworth and Shelley almost as suddenly as they had parted. The source of his ability appeared to be his continual searching for fact and actuality--a strong defense against the beliefs of mysticism of his age.

Yet there are things whose strong reality
 Outshines our fairy-land. . . .
 . . . for waking Reason deems
 Such over-weening phantasies unsound,
 And other voices speak and other sights surround.⁶³

From 1821 until 1824, a strain of scepticism came to be recognized in Byron's poetry more clearly than it had before. In Don Juan, Byron alluded to Socrates' saying that "our only knowledge was 'to know that nothing could be known.'"⁶⁴ He also alluded to Newton and his picking up shells on the shore of the great ocean of truth. It was true that Byron did not appear to have made up his mind on any one thing; however, he had his views, "irreconcilable though they may have been. Nor was sceptical suspension of belief one of them."⁶⁵

Byron was filled with self-contradictory views. In Heaven and Earth, Japhet, who was usually orthodox, strikes out at the Almighty for his injustice to man by causing the Flood.

⁶³Ibid., Verse 6 and 7.

⁶⁴Lord Byron, Don Juan, Canto VII, Verse 5.

⁶⁵Lovell, p. 208.

. . . some emerging world,
 Reeking and dank from out the slime, whose ooze
 Shall slumber o'er the wreck of this until
 The salt morass subside into a sphere
 Beneath the sun. . . .⁶⁶

As late as Canto IX of Don Juan, Byron was expressing a similar idea to that of Cuvier--the theory of worlds past and future, "with its corollaries of destruction and a subsequent inferior creation."⁶⁷ "Even worlds miscarry, when too oft they pup,/And every new creation hath decreased/In size, from overworking the material."⁶⁸ Such a view appeared to be only one of several that he took up at different points in his life.

This idea of a Creator periodically destroying and then creating new worlds brought about the feeling that the creation itself was harmful to man. The teachings of Wordsworth had no doubt been left far behind by this point. Wordsworth "ignored sudden, cataclysmic changes, such as floods, fires, and earthquakes . . . and dwelt upon the permanence, moderation, and regularity of nature."⁶⁹ On the other hand, Byron made numerous references to a hostile world of nature. Byron spoke of "comets, droughts, excessively cold winter, and

⁶⁶Lord Byron, Heaven and Earth, iii, 305-309.

⁶⁷Lovell, p. 213.

⁶⁸Lord Byron, Don Juan, Canto IX, Verse 39, ll. 309-311.

⁶⁹Lovell, p. 216.

earthquakes along with wars and sickness. . . ."70 " . . . is all this, because Nature is niggard or savage? or Mankind ungrateful?"71

An order in nature he accepted from first to last. The question he could never answer with any lasting satisfaction to himself, however, was this: what is the exact status of the enduring natural order? He successfully made the jump, on the strength of faith alone, from the conviction of the existence of such an order to the conviction of some greater reality behind it. The idea of a Creator was always a more 'natural' supposition to him than that of a fortuitous concourse of atoms. Nature was never self-explanatory for Byron. But he never found the necessary faith to believe, consistently, that the natural order was essentially benevolent to man; and if not, what is then to be said of its Creator? This is the fundamental question which Byron finally stumbled over, and his failure to answer it was a failure in faith.⁷²

Thus, for Byron, Nature never offered a satisfying solution to his questionings nor did it offer him a "consistently satisfying object of devotion: she spelt affirmation or negation according to his mood."⁷³

⁷⁰Ibid.

⁷¹Ibid.

⁷²Ibid., p. 226.

⁷³Fairchild, p. 439.

CHAPTER III

BYRON'S VIEWS ON PREDESTINATION, SIN AND PUNISHMENT

Rather than allowing himself to harbor any ideas of Utopia, or an ideal society where man may find his true self, Byron held to strong orthodox conceptions of predestination, sin, and divine punishment.¹ Byron made this fact quite evident when he expressed his views through Bonnivard, the patriot of The Prisoner of Chillon.

Oh, God! it is a fearful thing
To see the human soul take wing
In any shape, in any mood:
I've seen it rushing forth in blood,
I've seen it on the breaking ocean
Strive with a swoln convulsive motion,
I've seen the sick and ghastly bed
Of Sin delirious with its dread.²

Byron's sense of his own sin and his childhood beliefs in Calvinism brought about his feelings that he was predestined to be bad and therefore to be punished. As a young boy in the care of Mary Gray, Byron was told that all the Byrons had been damned for their criminal acts down through the years. As a result, Byron felt that he was a lost soul who was among those predestined by God to lead a life of misery for his sins and those of his predecessors. Thus, a conflict arose which

¹Henry M. Battenhouse, English Romantic Writers (New York, 1958), p. 147.

²Lord Byron, The Prisoner of Chillon, ll. 176-183.

resulted in a disintegration of Byron's personality. This disintegration was caused by "the conflict between his hatred of all restraint and the Calvinistic sense of doom which had been impressed on his mind in childhood. The romantic belief in human goodness and power was constantly thwarted by the Calvinistic insistence upon human corruption."³

Byron was never famous for his ability to make decisions. Shelley complained on several occasions that Byron could not seem to make up his mind on any subject nor claim the virtue of having a decisive character.⁴

I seem to have two states of existence, one purely contemplative, during which the crimes, faults, and follies of mankind are laid open to my view (my own forming a prominent object in the picture), and the other active, when I play my part in the drama of life, as if compelled by some power over which I have no control, though the consciousness of doing wrong remains.⁵

It appears to me, just from my own reflections and experiences, that I am influenced in a way which is incomprehensible, and am led to do things which I never intended . . . I have . . . contented myself with believing that there is a predestination of events, and that the predestination depends upon the will of God.⁶

³Hoxie Neale Fairchild, Religious Trends in English Poetry (New York, 1961), p. 394.

⁴William J. Calvert, Byron: Romantic Paradox (New York, 1962), p. 11.

⁵Countess of Blessington, A Journal of Conversations with Lord Byron (Boston, 1859), p. 135.

⁶Calvert, p. 12 (from J. Kennedy's Conversations on Religion with Lord Byron and Others, p. 189).

Like Sylla, I have always believed that all things depend upon Fortune, and nothing upon ourselves.⁷

It is significant to note that these reflections are made by Byron in his later years--years characterized by disillusionment and self-distrust. Those who met Byron in those days felt that his personality was one of "utter will-lessness, or at least of a vagueness and vacillation of intention and a skepticism of results."⁸ Byron appeared to be aware of the fact that he allowed himself to drift along in a type of "fatalistic lethargy," reacting only when the situation demanded it. However, rather than correcting this defect, he accepted it and "shifted the responsibility to a theory of life-fatalism, or, to speak more accurately, as linked with his childhood religion, predestination."⁹

Calvinism appeared to Byron to be a cruel religion--a religion which created a morbid sense of sin, denied to man the full happiness of a spiritually healthy life, and made suffering an inevitable state.¹⁰ Revolted by this fatalistic childhood religion, Byron resented all forms of rule or confinement. As a result, Byron led a very unconventional life. However, Byron continued to believe in the

⁷Rowland E. Prothero, ed., The Works of Lord Byron: Letters and Journals, V (London, 1901), p. 451.

⁸Calvert, p. 12.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 8.

Calvinistic doctrine of original sin. He believed that man was doomed to eternal punishment for his sins and those of his predecessors. ". . . we have/Souls to save, since Eve's slip and Adam's fall/Which tumbled all mankind into the grave. . . ."¹¹

Upon contemplation of eternal punishment, Byron would turn his thoughts to a possibility of a life after death. It was believed that Byron held fairly conventional ideas about hell. Lady Byron mentioned that on the night of their wedding Byron jumped out of bed, shouting that he had just experienced a dream in which he believed himself to be in hell. He remarked how real the flames had seemed as they had lapped around his body.¹²

On the whole subject of Hell, as Dr. Marjarum pointed out, Byron is naturally a little uneasy.¹³ However, in the Ravenna Diary he spurned the doctrine of eternal punishment as a bullying threat which was inconsistent with the belief in a loving God.¹⁴ The theme of sin and punishment can be found consistently in a great number of Byron's works, particularly in the dramas and in Childe Harold's Pilgrimage.

¹¹Lord Byron, Don Juan, Canto IX, Verse 19, ll. 146-148.

¹²Leslie A. Marchand, Byron: A Biography, 3 Vols. (New York, 1957), II, p. 510.

¹³Edward W. Marjarum, Byron as Skeptic and Believer (Princeton, 1938), p. 36.

¹⁴Fairchild, p. 435.

Byron's dealings with this theme revolved primarily around the individual's revolt against these doctrines.

More than his romances, Byron's plays presented the theme of the trapped man.¹⁵ "Byron always associated self-realization with guilt: to link oneself with the universe was an act of reverence; to strive towards a full sense of one's identity was apostasy."¹⁶ Byron believed that self-assertion was the harbinger of self-destruction. He felt that if a man repudiated what was forced upon him, then he had to take the consequences, whether or not he had been treated fairly. Byron's belief in "the futility of the human will in everyday affairs" led him to dwell upon the theme of the trapped man.¹⁷

The poetry produced by Byron stood as a revelation of this man's character.¹⁸ Without using this particular instance as something similar to police-court evidence, an example could possibly be made of Manfred and his possible incest with Astarte, his sister. Many critics suggest that this situation in Manfred was an expression of the supposed incest that he had had with Augusta Leigh. Whatever his intention in including this suggestion of possible incest as the cause

¹⁵Paul West, "The Plays" as cited in Paul West, ed., Byron (New Jersey, 1963), p. 50.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 52.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 53.

¹⁸John Drinkwater, The Pilgrim of Eternity (New York, 1925), p. 66.

of Manfred's guilt, it might be asserted, Byron took a similar view of his actions with his own sister. If the accounts are to be believed, Byron once said, "By that God who made me for my own misery, and not much for the good of others, she was not to blame, one thousandth part in comparison."¹⁹ It appeared, according to Maurois, that Byron's guilt was a pleasurable one, for it appeared that incest, being the violation of one of the most ancient of human laws, stood as a symbol of defiance against the sense of sin that hung over him.

For in Byron's mind, the tenets of original sin were deeply imbedded.

Manfred was but a defiance of the doctrine, a not very convincing defiance. Cain was an exposition of its minor premises . . . The two dramas, together with Heaven and Earth, may be considered as giving Satan's side of the high argument in Heaven which resulted in the fall of man and as protesting against the punishment of man for acts committed through no fault of his own will. . . .²⁰

There appear to be many contradictions within Byron, which appear in several works, concerning this fate or ruling principle in a man's life. In "Darkness," Byron dealt with the theme of an extinguished sun, a desolate earth which had no light or warmth, stars which "did wander

¹⁹André Maurois, Byron (New York, 1964), p. 219.

²⁰Calvert, p. 7.

darkling in the eternal space," and the resultant destruction of humanity.²¹ In this powerful poem, there was no mention of a deity.

However, in this same month in 1816, "Prometheus" appeared, and in this poem Byron dwelled upon his own concept of God as seen in the character of Zeus. Because there are numerous allusions made to the Promethean story in Byron's poetry, authorities would believe that this statement could be substantiated. In "Prometheus," the picture of an unmerciful God was apparent.

And the inexorable Heaven,
And the deaf tyranny of Fate,
The ruling principle of Hate,
Which for its pleasure doth create
The things it may annihilate.²²

In the dramatic poem Manfred was found Byron's major attempt to deal with a philosophical theme.²³ Manfred hoped to free himself from sin, yet he was only allowed to live and to brood on death. He was not allowed to forget his sin; he was denied oblivion. Manfred was punished in this way because he would not accept any thing or being as his master, but rather be remained faithful to the strength of his own mind to make his own decisions. "Divine destiny and the sovereign

²¹Ernest J. Lovell, Jr., Byron: The Record of a Quest (Connecticut, 1966), p. 125.

²²Lord Byron, "Prometheus," ll. 18-22.

²³Battenhouse, p. 148.

will of man confront the poet with an irreconcilable dilemma. The road to divine reconciliation is closed to Manfred who calls himself his own judge."²⁴

The central idea on which Manfred was based was primarily the questioning of authority and continuous, yet unavailing, revolt.²⁵ Manfred was not a Prometheus; he did not suffer for men in order to make their existence easier. Manfred was, however, Promethean in that he was

a symbol and a sign
To Mortals of their fate and force;
Like him Man is in part divine,
A troubled stream from a pure source.²⁶

In addition, Manfred possessed the Promethean pride which made it possible for him to "make his tortures 'tributory to his will'" and make death a victory.²⁷

Manfred made a continuous quest after knowledge; he believed strongly enough in the power of his own mind to believe that he could comprehend all the mysteries of the universe. Because Arimanes and his crew were representative of the boundaries of the world in which Manfred's spirit was imprisoned, Manfred attempted to get outside of the world and embrace the entire universe. In order to effectively accomplish this task, he realized that knowledge must be gained. He disliked working with abstractions for which no

²⁴Ibid., p. 149.

²⁵Samuel C. Chew, Jr., The Dramas of Lord Byron (Baltimore, 1915), p. 75.

²⁶Lord Byron, "Prometheus," ll. 45-48.

²⁷Chew, p. 75.

concrete evidence could be found. Therefore, when Manfred sought the cause of death, he did so by a study of its effects, not through abstract speculation.²⁸

Manfred refused to join with the spirits of evil, for a pact with an outside being was against the principles of his character. He was only in favor of a free mind, one over which no other being would have control or have the power or the authority to suggest or impose beliefs. Although his quest ended in failure, Manfred did not abandon his right to know the answers to the questions that he sought. "The Manfred-idea is that knowledge brings trouble and unhappiness."²⁹

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.³⁰

However, Manfred did not subside into conformity nor did he lose his enthusiasm or his burning curiosity through his failure.

Byron, through Manfred, battled the doctrinaire attitude found in this work. This attitude was characterized by those, specifically the Chamois-hunter and the Abbot of Saint Maurice, who believed in the "acceptance of truth as revealed by authority."³¹ The Chamois-hunter encouraged Manfred to seek

²⁸Ibid., p. 79

²⁹Ibid., p. 81.

³⁰Lord Byron, Manfred, I, ll. 9-12.

³¹Chew, p. 81.

aid from the holy men and to do penance. The Abbot encouraged Manfred to accept the dogma of the Church rather than continue to search after absolute truth. On his first visit to Manfred, the Abbot informed him as to the purpose of his mission:

Abbot: I come to save, and not destroy:
I would not pry into thy secret soul;
But if these things be sooth, there still is
time
For penitence and pity: reconcile thee
With the true church, and through the church
to heaven.

Manfred: I hear thee. This is my reply: whate'er
I may have been, or am, doth rest between
Heaven and myself. I shall not choose a
mortal
To be my mediator. Have I sinn'd
Against your ordinances? prove and punish!

Abbot: My son! I did not speak of punishment,
But penitence and pardon;--with thyself
The choice of such remains--and for the last,
Our institutions and our strong belief
Have given me power to smooth the path from
sin
To higher hope and better thoughts; the first
I leave to heaven,--'Vengeance is mine alone!'
So saith the Lord, and with all humbleness
His servant echoes back the awful word.³²

Byron disliked this dependence in dogma as expressed by both of these characters--the Chamois-hunter and the Abbot.

Manfred: Old man! there is no power in holy men,
Nor charm in prayer, nor purifying form
Of penitence, nor outward look, nor fast,
Nor agony--nor, greater than all these,
The innate tortures of that deep despair,
Which is remorse without the fear of hell,
But all in all sufficient to itself
Would make a hell of heaven--can exorcise
From out the unbounded spirit the quick
sense
Of its own sins, wrongs, sufferance, and
revenge
Upon itself; there is no future pang

³²Lord Byron, Manfred, III, i, 47-66.

Can deal that justice on the self-condemn'd
He deals on his own soul.³³

Manfred was definitely anti-fatalistic.³⁴ In it there were doctrines centered about the "principle of conscience, the Categorical Imperative, the affirmation that 'Man's Conscience is the Oracle of God.' It is a declaration of moral and spiritual responsibility."³⁵

In Manfred, Byron placed no doubt that man was master of those outside forces that attempted to snare him into the nets of shallow and limited doctrines. As Manfred was dying, he said to the spirits who were swarming above him,

Thou didst not tempt me, and thou couldst not
tempt me;
I have not been thy dupe, nor am thy prey--
But was my own destroyer, and will be
My own hereafter.--Back, ye baffled
fiends!--
The hand of death is on me--but not yours!³⁶

Thus, Byron saw a triumph of the mind over matter, of soul over body, and therefore left a message of encouragement and hope. The struggle appeared often in Byron's poetry, but particularly in Manfred, where "the sense of the clod of clay which clogs the soul," was evident; however, "the final victory is felt to remain with the forces of good."³⁷

³³Ibid., 67-77.

³⁴Chew, p. 83.

³⁵Ibid., p. 84

³⁶Lord Byron, Manfred, III, iv, 137-143.

³⁷Chew, p. 84.

"The dark night of the soul of Byron hovers over Manfred, foreshadowing its fuller expression in the drama Cain."³⁸ The problem of Cain had troubled him since his childhood, and because of his beliefs in justice, Byron felt a certain amount of pity for Cain.

Why had God allowed Cain to slay his brother?
Why did God sometimes allow George Byron his
desire for cruelty and piety? He thought of
red hellfire. His imagination was keen.³⁹

From his childhood, Byron had been faced with the questions in his own mind about the First Predestinate, "the man damned by God before the crime."⁴⁰ Before he began to write the drama, Byron knew that his theme was the hopeless defiance of man against God.⁴¹ Byron made a quest for truth, yet he, through Cain, would rather that the truth come to him. In the event that all the unanswerable questions should come to him, he would not worship the God that his family worshipped. Cain could see no reason for gratitude to this God nor could he see any reason for contrition. "Why should he be subject to the curse of death merely because his parents have erred?"⁴² Cain said to Adah, after returning from his trip with Lucifer,

³⁸Battenhouse, p. 149.

³⁹Maurois, p. 31.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 447.

⁴¹Fairchild, p. 429.

⁴²Ibid.

Cain: but now I feel
 My littleness again. Well said the spirit,
 That I was nothing!

Adah: Wherefore said he so?
 Jehovah said not that.

No: he contents him
 With making us the nothing which we are;
 And after flattering dust with glimpses of
 Eden and Immortality, resolves
 It back to dust again--for what?

Adah: Thou knowest--
 Even for our parents' error.

Cain: What is that
 To us? they sinned, then let them die!⁴³

When Adah begged him to find happiness in submission to God, Cain answered, "I will have nought to do with happiness/ Which humbles me and mine."⁴⁴ Cain argued that Adam was created by the will of God; therefore, why must Cain inherit Adam's sin and be predestined to be punished for that crime? He would endure the punishment for this crime, but he would deny the guilt.⁴⁵ The contradiction appeared, however, when the murder had been committed, and Cain cried out:

My brother, awake! . . .
 Abel! I pray thee, mock me not! . . .
 Oh, God! Oh, God!
 My brother!--no:
 He will not answer to that name; for brethen
 Smite not each other.⁴⁶

It appeared that Byron was making this cry as a result of his own circumstances. He believed that he, like Cain, had been branded and condemned to wander over the earth.

⁴³Lord Byron, Cain, Act III, scene i, ll. 65-76.

⁴⁴Ibid., Act I, scene i, ll. 465-466.

⁴⁵Battenhouse, p. 156.

⁴⁶Lord Byron, Cain, Act III, scene i.

He too had slain a younger brother--the earlier Byron. But was he responsible for that? That which he was, he was; he had not made himself; he could not have acted otherwise. And in the face of an unjust God he cried aloud: 'Why hast thou done this thing to me?'⁴⁷

Cain, like Manfred, was the antithesis of the doctrinaire attitude of mind.⁴⁸ Cain refused to be forced into feelings of faith even before Lucifer visited him. When he asked questions of Adam and the rest, they only answered, "Twas his will and he is good." Cain could only answer, "How know I that?" Adam and Abel typify the doctrinaire attitude of the Abbot in Manfred with their passive acceptance of dogma. Cain set himself against them by asserting his right to make use of the power of his own mind to reason and to decide.⁴⁹ Both Cain and Lucifer are

Souls who dare use their immortality--
Souls who dare look the Omnipotent tyrant in
His everlasting face, and tell him that
His evil is not good!⁵⁰

Cain refused to bow before Lucifer, however, just as he had always refused to bow before God, but Lucifer answered, ". . . Ne'er the less, /Thou are my worshipper; not worshipping / Him makes thee mine the same."⁵¹ Here Byron made "a complete

⁴⁷Maurois, p. 449

⁴⁸Chew, pp. 132-133.

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 133.

⁵⁰Lord Byron, Cain, I, i. 137-140.

⁵¹Ibid., ll. 301-303.

break with Christianity" by indentifying Lucifer with knowledge rather than with evil.⁵²

Cain felt that his brother's submissiveness as seen in his

. . . burnt offerings, which he daily brings
With a meek brow, whose base humility
Shows more of fear than worship--as a bribe
To the Creator.⁵³

was too hard to bear. However, the stalemate at which Byron arrived appeared to be as Lucifer had said; his mind was "made/To sway,"⁵⁴ and God had put a check upon his ambitions. Byron's pride found it difficult to believe in an outside limiting agent, yet his realization of his own limitations forced him to believe in it. Here appeared the personal tragedy of Lord Byron, and Lucifer offered the only solution:⁵⁵

Think and endure--and form an inner world
In your own bosom--where the outward fails;
So shall you nearer by the spiritual
Nature, and war triumphant with your own.⁵⁶

Sir Walter Scott made this comment on Cain:

The great key to the Mystery is, perhaps, the imperfection of our own faculties, which see and feel strongly the partial evils which press upon us, but know too little of the general system of the universe, to be aware

⁵²Marjarum, p. 35.

⁵³Lord Byron, Cain, III, i, 100-103.

⁵⁴Ibid., I, i, 215-216.

⁵⁵Fairchild, p. 432.

⁵⁶Lord Byron, Cain, II, ii, 668-671.

how the existence of these is to be reconciled with the benevolence of the great Creator.⁵⁷

Once Cain was published and had been read by the public, there were scores of denunciations against Byron from the pulpits of churches to the reviewers who were professed churchmen. Byron did not admit that it was the work of an atheist, as his denouncers proclaimed, but the work of a heretic.⁵⁸ Because Byron was attacked most viciously from the point of view of religious orthodoxy, he made the statement that he wrote Cain only against the orthodoxy as proclaimed by priests--a group that he linked with soldiers as composing the "most dangerous order of mankind."⁵⁹ Byron came to realize that his basic beliefs about humankind were well-grounded:

As long as I wrote the exaggerated nonsense which has corrupted the public taste they applauded me to the very echo; and now that I have composed within these three or four years some things which I 'should not willingly let die,' the whole herd snort and grumble, and return to wallow in their mire.⁶⁰

A study similar to the one undertaken in Byron's Cain as the unfinished second Mystery, Heaven and Earth.⁶¹ This fragment was a study of the various degrees of spiritual

⁵⁷Battenhouse, p. 155.

⁵⁸Maurois, p. 450.

⁵⁹Chew, p. 132.

⁶⁰Harold Nicolson, Byron: The Last Journey, April 1823-April 1824 (London, 1924), p. 43.

⁶¹Chew, p. 134.

discontent and a resultant rebellion against the circumstances surrounding our mortal lives.⁶² Shadows of Cain appeared in Heaven and Earth as Noah, like Adam before him, personified the doctrinaire attitude which centered about the passivity of the intellect. Noah was self-confident and strong in faith; however, he was entirely without sympathy. At the opposite point of the spectrum was Aholibamah, the true descendant of Cain, who was the most memorable character in the mystery. She was proud and resolute, defiant and unwavering. All of Byron's scepticism and defiance that he intended for this work to convey are combined into Aholibamah. She accepted the love of an angel, not timidly but with confidence that such was her right. Her defiance of God was not to be misunderstood. One passage was particularly revealing: in doubting the prophecy of the deluge, Aholibamah asked, "Who shall shake these solid mountains, this firm earth?" Japhet replied, "He whose one word produced them." Aholibamah instantly replied, "Who heard that word?"⁶³ Here was the repetition of the doubt of Lucifer as to whether God had really made man.⁶⁴

Byron quite obviously sympathized with Aholibamah, and the entire poem makes no concession to orthodox piety. In fact, the portrayal of the human-angelic love-affairs

⁶²Ibid., p. 141.

⁶³Lord Byron, Heaven and Earth, I, iii, 719-721.

⁶⁴Chew, p. 142.

produced, in Byron's public, feelings that bordered upon disgust. Such feelings were triggered in one particular situation where Noah scolded Samiasa for carrying on a love affair with Aholibamah. Samiasa answered:

Was not man made in high Jehovah's image?
Did God not love what he had made? And what
Do we but imitate and emulate
His love unto created love?⁶⁵

In Heaven and Earth, Byron left no room for doubt. "The characters are either marked out for special favor by God, or doomed to destruction, or angels who have stood in His presence."⁶⁶ However, there was a considerable amount of scepticism present.

Byron wisely left the poem a fragment. To have completed it, he would have found himself "on the horns of the dilemma."⁶⁷ Byron probably realized that in destruction of the lovers, he would only be offering a long anti-climax to the first part of the story. On the other hand, if the lovers were allowed to go and "wing their way from star to star," the entire problem with which he had been grappling would go unsolved--the sinning ones would be unpunished.⁶⁸ Byron's professed conclusion seemed appropriate:

⁶⁵Lord Byron, Heaven and Earth, I, iii, 743-746.

⁶⁶Chew, p. 142.

⁶⁷Ibid.

⁶⁸Ibid.

. . . the created world is best allowed to be what it is, that angels and men alike cease their unholy striving, that heavenly Spirits content themselves with their immortality, and that earthly mortals, after life's pain, accept the boon of a natural pain.⁶⁹

Byron made many allusions to his thoughts on predestination, sin, and punishment in Childe Harold's Pilgrimage. The first two cantos portrayed Childe Harold as a fated child, destined never to be happy. Byron, too, believed that he was predestined for misery and unhappiness. He was always questioning and doubting many religious beliefs. His skepticism was strong in Canto II, the first nine stanzas, where he questioned the multiplicity of religions in the world.

In Canto III, Byron continued to question and to speculate on numerous questions, particularly upon life itself.

And thus I am absorb'd, and this is life:
I look upon the peopled desert past,
As on a place of agony and strife,
Where, for some sin, to sorrow I was cast,
To act and suffer, but remount at last
With a fresh pinion; which I feel to spring,
Though young, yet waxing vigorous as the blast
which it would cope with, on delighted wing,
Spurning the clay-cold bonds which round our
being cling.⁷⁰

Byron continued to believe in predestination and the punishment that was inherited by those who were not among the chosen.

⁶⁹Battenhouse, p. 156.

⁷⁰Lord Byron, Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, III, Verse 73.

All suffering doth destroy, or is destroy'd
 Even by the sufferer; and, in each event,
 Ends:--Some, with hope replenish'd and rebuoy'd
 Return to whence they came--with like intent,
 And weave their web again; some, bow'd and bent,
 Wax grey and ghastly, withering ere their time,
 And perish with the reed on which they leant;
 Some seek devotion, toil, war, good or crime,
 According as their souls were form'd to sink
 or climb.⁷¹

Byron realized that "Our life is a false nature--'tis not in/
 The harmony of things."⁷²

Byron did not accept the doctrine of man's redemption from sin through Christ. He believed that it was "Circumstance, that unspiritual God and Miscreator" that helped evils along with a "crutch-like rod."⁷³ Above all, Byron felt that the "uneradicable taint of Sin" from the "all-blasting tree" caused "disease, death, bondage" for men. He felt that man's only refuge was in his "right of thought." Byron came to the conclusion that from the time of man's birth "the Faculty divine" was imprisoned in darkness to prevent the possibility of the Truth breaking through.⁷⁴

In Don Juan, a "human" poem in which Byron claimed to tell "the truth about man and society,"⁷⁵ he included the theme of the Fall. As seen in Don Juan, the Fall was a progressive one.

⁷¹Ibid., IV, Verse 22.

⁷²Ibid., Verse 126, ll. 1-2.

⁷³Ibid., IV, Verse 125.

⁷⁴Ibid., Verses 126-127.

⁷⁵Helen Gardner, "Don Juan" as cited in West, p. 118.

There is a Miltonic pity too in Don Juan: the pity that wrings our hearts at the episodes in Eden, that wrong even Satan's heart. Throughout Byron's poem we are conscious, behind the satire and the farce, of a double tenderness, a tenderness for the hero and for his victims.⁷⁶

Byron knew himself quite well. In his Epistle to Augusta he wrote:

Mine were my faults, and mine be their reward.
My whole life was a contest, since the day,
That gave me being, gave me that which marr'd
The gift,--a fate, or will, that walked astray;
And I at times have found the struggle hard,
And thought of shaking off my bonds of clay:
But now I fain would for a time survive,
If but to see what next can well arrive.⁷⁷

In Manfred, Byron seemed to loathe mankind and long for oblivion; through Childe Harold he expressed outrage against the injustices of life; and in Cain he questioned the just providence of God. "But his search ended there. He pictured a world in sin and without any certain knowledge or hope of escape. Divine justice was real to him."⁷⁸

⁷⁶Blackstone, p. 36.

⁷⁷Lord Byron, Epistle to Augusta, ll. 25-32.

⁷⁸Battenhouse, p. 162.

CHAPTER IV

BYRON'S VIEWS ON DEATH AND IMMORTALITY

Byron believed that the prevailing Romantic ideals of his times should not be confused with Christian doctrines. He continued to believe in the classical and orthodox beliefs "that man lives in two worlds--those of Nature and of Spirit--and that, being essentially a creature of soul, he is a 'pilgrim of eternity.'"¹

Byron could conceive of the death of the physical body; however, he could not conceive of the death of the mind. Because the mind was an intangible substance to Byron, then it could not be damaged or annihilated. "Can every element our elements mar? / And air--earth--water--fire live--and we dead? / We, whose minds comprehend all things?"²

The mind perhaps could escape death, but the physical body was doomed to it. Byron realized that death was looked upon as being a close relative to sleep--a pleasurable sensation. Byron could not explain the fear with which men looked upon this phenomenon; however, he stated the problem

¹Henry M. Battenhouse, English Romantic Writers (New York, 1958), p. 162.

²Lord Byron, Don Juan, Canto V, Verse 39, ll. 309-311.

in Don Juan:

A sleep without dreams, after a rough day
 Of toil, is what we covet most; and yet
 How clay shrinks back from more quiescent clay!
 The very Suicide that pays his debt
 At once without instalments (an old way
 Of paying debts, which creditors regret)
 Lets out impatiently his rushing breath,
 Less from disgust of life than dread of death.³

Byron did have a "disgust" for the physical life, and at the death of Allegra, he could only admit that she was the most fortunate of them all for being allowed to die at a young age. Countess Guiccioli said that the morning after the death of Byron's child, she found him sitting quietly, tranquilized, with an "air of religious resignation on his features." "She is more fortunate than we are," he said, "besides, her position in the world would scarcely have allowed her to be happy. It is God's will--let us mention it no more."⁴ On her tombstone, Byron ordered this scripture to be inscribed: "I shall go to her, but she shall not return to me" (2nd Samuel, xii, 23).⁵

On the other hand, at the death of Matthews and Edleston, Byron lashed out at Hodgson as his extremely religious friend attempted to comfort him with offers of the Christian remedy for grief and sadness. Byron could only retort:

³Ibid., Canto XIV, Verse 4.

⁴André Maurois, Byron (New York, 1964), p. 466.

⁵Ibid., p. 467.

The basis of your religion is injustice;
 the Son of God, the pure, the immaculate,
 the innocent, is sacrificed for the Guilty.⁶

Byron granted that Christ's death pointed him out as being a hero to the people; however, he could not conceive of this act as removing the guilt from other men. "You degrade the Creator, in the first place, by making Him a begetter of children; and in the next place you convert Him into a Tyrant over an immaculate and injured Being."⁷

Not only could Byron not conceive of man's losing his sin, or his destiny to meet death; he could not believe that God was good when He allowed His own Son to die and experience an earthly death. Byron had his own conceptions of death, and they appeared in his works on numerous occasions. In his drama Cain, Byron voiced his beliefs through his protagonist. In speaking to Lucifer, Cain said,

Spirit! I

Know nought of death, save as a dreadful thing
 Of which I have heard my parents speak, as of
 A hideous heritage I owe to them
 No less than life; a heritage not happy,
 If I may judge, till now. But, spirit! if
 It be as thou hast said (and I within
 Feel the prophetic torture of its truth),
 Here let me die: for to give birth to those
 Who can but suffer many years, and die,
 Methinks is merely propagating death,
 And multiplying murder.⁸

⁶Hoxie Neale Fairchild, Religious Trends in English Poetry (New York, 1961), p. 405.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Lord Byron, Cain, Act II, Scene i, ll. 60-71.

What is death? I fear,
I feel, it is a dreadful thing; but what,
I cannot compass: 'tis denounced against us,
Both them who sinned and sinned not, as an ill--⁹

And because there was little distinction made between Lucifer and Cain as personalities, even Lucifer had this to say: "The Maker--call him/Which name thou wilt: he makes but to destroy."¹⁰

Death was also a major factor in Byron's Manfred. In fact, it was believed that Byron chose this phenomenon upon which to center Manfred's inquiry primarily because it was a mystery in itself. It was an unknown; therefore, Manfred found that his inquiry was fruitless. He attempted to reach beyond the boundaries of human knowledge and human frailties, but he found it impossible to find the answers for which he sought. After his discovery of his own imperfectibility to find the answers, he admitted that even Science was "But an exchange of ignorance for that/Which is another kind of ignorance."¹¹

Even as Manfred was dying, he told the Abbot that he was fighting not against death, but against the Abbot's own legions who were working to enslave his mind.¹² Manfred felt that he had won the battle; he had avoided the enslavement of the

⁹Ibid., Act I, Scene i, ll. 281-284.

¹⁰Ibid., 263-264.

¹¹Lord Byron, Manfred, Act II, Scene iv, ll. 432-433.

¹²Ibid., ll. 141.

mind and had escaped the spirits. "The hand of death is on me--but not yours!"¹³ Even as the Abbot feared for Manfred's lot as he faced death, he heard Manfred speak as if from beyond death itself:

Manfred: Tis over--my dull eyes can fix thee not;
But all things swim around me, and the earth
Heaves as it were beneath me. Fare thee well!
Give me thy hand.

Abbot: Cold--cold--even to the heart--

But yet one prayer--Alas! how fare it with thee?

Manfred: Old man! 'tis not so difficult to die.¹⁴

A similar attitude toward death was apparent in Byron's Heaven and Earth. "Blessed are the dead/Who die in the Lord!"¹⁵ was said by a mortal. He continued in the same light that whatever God decreed was best. "He gave me life--he taketh but/The breath which is his own."¹⁶ The mortal felt that to protest or even to make the slightest cry of protest was unspeakably insignificant.

Time--space--eternity--life--death--

The vast known and immeasurable unknown.

He made, and can unmake;

And shall I, for a little gasp of breath,
Blaspheme and groan?

No; let me die, as I have lived, in faith,
Nor quiver, though the universe may quake!¹⁷

¹³Ibid., ll. 141.

¹⁴Ibid., ll. 146-151.

¹⁵Lord Byron, Heaven and Earth, Act I, Scene iii, ll. 1148-1149.

¹⁶Ibid., ll. 1153-1154.

¹⁷Ibid., ll. 1163-1169.

Byron once said that the deathbed was not a matter of religion but rather a matter of the nerves.¹⁸ Numerous biographers of Byron's unconventional life indicated the fact that Byron had a strange sentiment about graveyards. "He was troubled by the idea of death; terrified in childhood by so many accounts of Hell, he preferred to picture the dead as entering on a dreamless sleep in just such tranquil corners as this one"¹⁹ (the graveyard at Harrow).

As Byron considered the possibilities of human immortality, he felt that he could not commit himself to confess whether immortality was a certainty or not, for it was one of those undemonstrable possibilities which he could not accept without proof. In Canto V of Don Juan, Byron saw the Italian commandant of the troops killed in front of his palace at Ravenna. As Byron gazed at the dead man, a multiplicity of thoughts and questions raced through his mind.

To try if I could wrench aught out of death
Which should confirm, or shake, or make a faith;

But it was all a mystery. Here we are,
And there we go:--but where?²⁰

An entry in the Ravenna Diary confirmed his inability to make a definite decision as to man's lot after death.

According to the Christian dispensation, no
one can know whether he is sure of salvation. . .
Now, therefore, whatever the certainty of faith

¹⁸W. A. Bettany, The Confessions of Lord Byron (London, 1905), p. 89.

¹⁹Maurois, p. 47.

²⁰Lord Byron, Don Juan, Canto V, Verse 38-39, ll. 303-306.

in the facts may be, the certainty of the individual as to his happiness or misery is no greater than it was under Jupiter.²¹

Byron could only conclude at this point that the immortality of the soul was certainly a grand idea. "Everybody clings to it--the stupidest, and dullest, and wickedest of human bipeds is still persuaded that he is immortal."²² However, even all this certainty on the part of others did not influence Byron to believe it for a fact; it must be proven. He could not feel but that people were inclined to believe in those things that they would like to have for their own.

All are inclined to believe what they covet, from a lottery-ticket up to a passport to Paradise--in which, from the description, I see nothing very tempting. My restlessness tells me I have something 'within that passeth show'. It is for Him, who made it, to prolong that spark of celestial fire which illuminates, yet burns, this frail tenement; but I see no such horror in a 'dreamless sleep', and I have no conception of any existence which duration would not render tiresome. How else 'fell the angels', even according to your creed? They were immortal, heavenly, and happy, as their apostate Abdiel is now by his treachery. Time must decide; and eternity won't be the less agreeable or more horrible because one did not expect it. In the mean time, I am grateful for some good, and tolerably patient under certain evils. . . .²³

Byron continued to speculate on what might lie beyond the point of death. In the years around 1813 and 1814, Byron

²¹Fairchild, p. 437.

²²Ibid.

²³G. Wilson Knight, Byron's Dramatic Prose (University of Nottingham, 1953), p. 28. Quoted from Detached Thoughts.

looked upon these possibilities with some scepticism and much distrust. However, in 1821, Byron wrote:

Of the Immortality of the Soul, it appears to me that there can be little doubt, if we attend for a moment to the action of Mind. It is in perpetual activity. I used to doubt of it, but reflection has taught me better. It acts also so very independent of body: in dreams for instance incoherently and madly, I grant you; but still it is Mind, and much more Mind than when we are awake. Now, that this should not act separately, as well as jointly, who can pronounce?

How far our future life will be individual, or, rather, how far it will at all resemble our present existence, is another question; but that Mind is eternal, seems as probable as that the body is not so. Of course, I have ventured upon the question without recurring to Revelation, which however, is at least as rational a solution of it as any other.²⁴

This question was asked, but again was not answered, in much the same manner in Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, Canto III:

And when, at length, the mind shall be all free
From what it hates in this degraded form,
Reft of its carnal life, save what shall be
Existent happier in the fly and worm,--
When elements to elements conform,
And dust is as it should be, shall I not
Feel all I see, less dazzling, but more warm?
The bodiless thought? the Spirit of each spot?
Of which, even now, I share at times the
immortal lot?²⁵

It is significant to note that both Cain and Manfred emphatically affirmed the immortality of the soul and its

²⁴Ibid., pp. 29-30.

²⁵Lord Byron, Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, Canto III, Verse 74.

existence in another world after death.²⁶ In Canto IV of Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, Byron visited St. Peter's Cathedral. He declared that no better place could be found

wherein appear enshrined
Thy hopes of Immortality--and thou
Shalt one day, if found worthy, so defined
See thy God face to face, as thou dost now
His Holy of Holies--not be blasted by his brow.²⁷

It appeared that Byron felt that surely the soul was destined for something better than this "prison of clay."²⁸

I can see
Nothing to loathe in nature, save to be
A link reluctant in a fleshly chain . . .²⁹

. . . and this is life:
I look upon the peopled desert past,
As on a place of agony and strife,
Where, for some sin, to sorrow I was cast,
To act and suffer, but remount at last
With a fresh pinion; which I feel to spring,
Though young, yet waxing vigorous as the blast
Which it would cope with on delighted wing,
Spurning the clay-cold bonds which round our
being cling.³⁰

He could not help but feel that the defect in men's lives are the direct result of the bondage in which man is held by this physical body. The Countess of Blessington once noted of Byron's beliefs:

²⁶Samuel C. Chew, Jr., The Dramas of Lord Byron (Baltimore, 1915), p. 132.

²⁷Lord Byron, Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, Canto IV, Verse 155, ll. 1392-1395.

²⁸Countess of Blessington, A Journal of Conversations with Lord Byron (Boston, 1859), p. 124.

²⁹Lord Byron, Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, Canto III, Verse 72, ll. 683-685.

³⁰Ibid., Verse 73.

They who accuse Byron of being an unbeliever are wrong; he is skeptical, but not unbelieving; and it appears not unlikely to me that a time may come when his wavering faith in many of the tenets of religion may be as firmly fixed as is now his conviction of the immortality of the soul--a conviction that he declares every fine and noble impulse of his nature renders more decided.³¹

Byron's friend Shelley argued on the indestructibility of matter in his poem Adonais. Byron appeared to anticipate this questioning by Shelley in one particular passage from Don Juan. In Adonais, Shelley wrote:

Nought we know, dies. Shall that alone which knows
Be as a sword consumed before the sheath
By sightless lightning?³²

Byron appeared to attempt to make answer to this statement by Shelley:

Can every element our elements mar?
And air--earth--water--fire life--and we dead?
We, whose minds comprehend all things?³³

Byron did not find an answer to this question; however, he continued to speculate about "this unriddled wonder,/The world, which at the worst's a glorious blunder--"³⁴ and though "'tis very puzzling on the brink/Of what is called eternity, to stare,/And know no more of what is here, than there."³⁵ No

³¹Blessington, p. 124.

³²Shelley, Adonais, Verse 20, ll. 77-79.

³³Lord Byron, Don Juan, Canto V, Verse 35, ll. 309-312.

³⁴Ibid., Canto XI, Verse 3, ll. 24-25.

³⁵Ibid., Canto X, Verse 20, ll. 158-160.

matter now puzzling the question, at least Byron did not retreat into an "apathy of indifference."³⁶

Byron did not seem to believe that he himself would find personal immortality. In 1813, he wrote that this feeling might possibly have arisen out of his boyhood sense of inferiority and his feeling of insignificance within the vastness of the universe. He felt insignificant before God and the beauties of heaven in addition to being disgusted with the Calvinistic Scotch school, where he "was cudgelled to Church for the first ten years of my life."³⁷ Byron said that these experiences caused a "disease of the mind" which he referred to as the doubt of his personal immortality.³⁸

In Byron's views, as he asked the reader to bear in mind in the Preface to Cain, he believed that vengeance and retribution did not necessarily have to be postponed until an afterlife or immortality; rather he believed that both came in this life on earth. Byron also asked that the reader bear in mind that "there is no allusion to a future state in any of the books of Moses, nor indeed in the Old Testament."³⁹

³⁶Clarence D. Thorpe, ed., The Major English Romantic Poets (Carbondale, 1957), p. 160.

³⁷Ernest J. Lovell, Jr., Byron: The Record of a Quest (Connecticut, 1966), p. 203.

³⁸Ibid.

³⁹Paul West, "The Plays," as cited in Paul West, ed., Byron (New Jersey, 1963), p. 51.

However, in Act II of Cain, Cain approached Lucifer with the question of what type of a being he was who could bridge both nature and immortality.

Lucifer: I seem that which I am;
 And therefore do I ask of thee, if thou
 Wouldst be immortal?
 Cain: Thou hast said, I must be
 Immortal in despite of me. I knew not
 This until lately--but since it must be,
 Let me, or happy or unhappy, learn
 To anticipate my immortality.⁴⁰

As Lucifer and Cain began their journey, Lucifer questioned Cain as to the type of things that he wished to see. "Wouldst thou behold things mortal or immortal?" Cain asked of Lucifer, "Why, what are things?" Lucifer answered, "Both partly."⁴¹ Byron's attitude toward the question of immortality appeared to include the dual nature of all living things--a nature which embraced both those aspects which would be extinguished at the time of a physical death and those aspects which would continue to exist.

Byron's Manfred professed a belief in immortality when he was speaking to Astarte. He spoke out against his inability to achieve oblivion and his inability to bring death upon himself.

. . . hitherto all hateful things conspire
 To bind me in existence--in a life
 Which makes me shrink from immortality
 A future like the past.⁴²

⁴⁰Lord Byron, Cain, Act II, scene i, ll. 87-94.

⁴¹Ibid., ll. 136-138.

⁴²Lord Byron, Manfred, Act II, scene iii, ll. 128-131.

When the Abbot came to see Manfred before his death, he beseeched him to repent and reconcile himself with the church in an attempt to save himself from the spirits that surrounded him. Yet Manfred would not consent to follow the advice of the Abbot; rather he continued to see the weaknesses of "its proffered strength beside the power of the individual mind."⁴³

Manfred: Old man! there is no power in holy men,
Nor charm in prayer, nor purifying form
Of penitence, nor outward look, nor fast,
Nor agony--nor, greater than all these,
The innate tortures of that deep despair,
Which is remorse without the fear of hell,
But all in all sufficient to itself
Would make a hell of heaven--⁴⁴

The Abbot could only reply:

Alas! lost mortal! what with guests like these
Hast thou to do? I tremble for thy sake:
Why doth he gaze on thee, and thou on him?
Ah! he unveils his aspect: on his brow
The thunder-scars are graven: from his eye
Glares forth the immortality of hell--⁴⁵

Aholibamah in Heaven and Earth did not doubt her own immortality. In speaking to Samiasa, she confessed that she would suffer "immortal sorrow" for him. She realized his immortality, yet she felt equal to him.

There is a ray
In me, which, though forbidden yet to shine,
I feel was lighted at thy God's and thine.
It may be hidden long: Death and decay
Our mother Eve bequeathed us--but my heart

⁴³Edward W. Marjarum, Byron As Sceptic and Believer . (Princeton, 1938), p. 31.

⁴⁴Lord Byron, Manfred, Act III, scene i, ll. 66-73.

⁴⁵Ibid., Act III, scene iv, ll. 73-78.

Defies it: though this life must pass away
 Is that a cause for thee and me to part?
 Thou art immortal--so am I: I feel--
 I feel my immortality o'ersweep
 All pains, all tears, all fears, and peal,
 Like the eternal thunders of the deep,
 Into my ears this truth--'Thou liv'st for ever!'
 But if it be in joy
 I know not, nor would know;
 That secret rests with the Almighty giver
 Who folds in clouds the founts of bliss and woe.⁴⁶

Byron died of a fever at Missolonghi in Greece in 1824. Apparently, Byron realized that his life was not good and wished that he could find a way to redeem himself for his errors. On his thirty-sixth birthday, he wrote:⁴⁷

My days are in the yellow leaf;
 The flowers and fruit of love are gone;
 The worm, the canker, and the grief
 Are mine alone!
 If thou regrett'st thy youth, why live?
 The land of honorable death
 Is here:--up to the field, and give
 Away thy breath!
 Seek--less often sought than found--
 A grave, for thee the best;
 Then look around, and choose thy ground,
 And take thy rest.

Once before in Greece, Byron had almost died. In Patras he had malaria, and this illness allowed him the opportunity to judge how thin the cords were which bound him to life. He said,

'I looked to death as a relief from pain,
 without a wish for an after life, but a
 confidence that the God who punishes in

⁴⁶Lord Byron, Heaven and Earth, I, i, 101-118.

⁴⁷Battenhouse, p. 160.

this existence had left that last asylum
for the weary.' And he added in Greek:
'He whom the gods love dies young.'⁴⁸

An identical belief was stated in Don Juan and enlarged upon
as Byron pondered the possibility of an early death.

'Whom the gods love die young' was said of yore,
And many deaths do they escape by this:
The death of friends, and that which slays even
more--
The death of friendship, love, youth, all that is,
Except mere breath; and since the silent shore
Awaits at last even those who longest miss
The old archer's shafts, perhaps the early grave
Which men weep over may be meant to save.⁴⁹

When Byron was dying, Dr. Millingen remarked that he did
not make any mention of religion. He recounted that at one
time he heard Byron say, "Shall I sue for mercy?" But then
after a long pause, Byron simply stated: "Come, come, no weak-
ness! Let's be a man to the last."⁵⁰ Byron's self-sufficiency
was strong; any weakness of this nature at death would have
been "a mere affectation of submissiveness."⁵¹

It appeared that Byron welcomed death. "Too brave to
flee from life, but too weary to be afraid at the end, he
kept death ever in his thoughts. . . ."⁵² At his death,
Byron remarked:

⁴⁸Maurois, p. 142.

⁴⁹Lord Byron, Don Juan, Canto IV, Verse 12.

⁵⁰Fairchild, p. 450.

⁵¹Ibid.

⁵²Maurois, p. 384.

You have no conception of the unaccountable thoughts which come into my mind when the fever attacks me. I fancy myself a Jew, a Mohomedan, and a Christian of every profession of faith. Eternity and space are before me; but on this subject, thank God, I am happy and at ease.⁵³

Byron never decided on one attitude to take about life. He realized that he must never be happy or sad, for he was merely a part of a world which both humiliated and exhilarated him.⁵⁴ It appeared that Byron had no opinion upon existence whatsoever.

Why I came here? I know not. Where I shall go? It is useless to enquire [sic]. In the midst of myriads of the living and the dead worlds--stars--systems--infinity--why should I be anxious about an atom?⁵⁵

Byron only confessed that he was but a sensation; he was neither the thought nor the thinker.⁵⁶

Betwixt two worlds life hovers like a star,
 'Twixt night and morn, upon the horizon's verge:
 How little do we know that which we are!
 How less what we may be! The eternal surge
 Of time and tide rolls on, and bears afar
 Of bubbles: as the old burst, new emerge,
 Lash'd from the foam of ages; while the graves
 Of empires heave but like some passing waves.⁵⁷

⁵³Ibid., p. 533.

⁵⁴West, p. 14, Introduction.

⁵⁵Maurois, p. 260.

⁵⁶Richard A. Rice, ed., The Best of Byron (New York, 1942), p. 27.

⁵⁷Lord Byron, Don Juan, Canto XV, Verse 99, ll. 785-792.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Byron, as both a man and a poet, was an enigma. His paradoxical nature appeared within a complex personality--the end result of the complex age in which he lived and the complex, even contradictory sources, from which he formulated and compiled his aims and beliefs.

Byron admitted that he had a dual personality, complete with all its inherent contradictions.¹ He commented on an examination of his head by a phrenologist:

. . .a discoverer of faculties and dispositions from the heads. . . .He says all mine are strongly marked, but very antithetical, for every thing developed in or on this same scull [sic] of mine has its opposite in great force, so that, to believe him, my² good and evil are at perpetual war. . . .

These contradictions brought with them a definite lack of consistency in his thoughts and actions. Yet Byron did not envision this characteristic as a weakness. "But if a writer should be quite consistent,/How could he possibly show things

¹Edward W. Marjarum, Byron As Skeptic and Believer (Princeton, 1938), Introduction.

²R. E. Prothero, ed., Letters and Journals of Lord Byron, Volume II (London), p. 366.

existent?"³ Byron appeared to be sincere in his thinking; he concerned himself with all areas of doubt and belief. He attempted to embrace all possibilities of a religious nature by not allowing himself to confine any particular ideas in small, neat packages or to eliminate any possibilities from his questionings. There is no evidence that Bryon formulated and maintained, through an orderly development of ideas, a consistent religious philosophy in his poetry.

From early childhood, Byron had felt that a curse had been placed upon the Byron family. He felt that the members of this family were predestined to pay for the sins of their predecessors--an outcome of his Calvinistic training in the doctrine of original sin. He believed that the guilt of his forebearers was to be found in his own blood, and as a result, the inherent sins and punishments were present.

Too much of the forefather whom thou vauntest
Has come down in that haughty blood.⁴

As a result, Byron attributed his misfortunes to the Nemesis which persecuted the Byron family.

It is not that I may not have incurr'd
For my ancestral faults or mine the wound

³Lord Byron, Don Juan, Canto XV, Verse 87, 11, 695-696.

⁴Lord Byron, Heaven and Earth, Act I, scene iii, 11. 663-664.

I bleed withal, and, had it been conferr'd,⁵
With a just weapon, it had flow'd unbound.⁵

The Byronic sense of guilt appeared often in Byron's poetry, for he seemed to find a sense of relief in broadcasting his feelings.

So now all things are d--d'd one feels at ease,
As after reading Athanasius' curse,
Which doth your true believer so much please:
I doubt if any now could make it worse
O'er his worst enemy when at his knees,
'T is so sententious, positive, and terse,
And decorates the book of Common Prayer,⁶
As doth a rainbow the just clearing air.

Undoubtedly, Byron's deep sense of guilt peculiar to his own existence was testimony of his disbelief in the atonement. Byron felt that the crucifixion of Christ was not "a timeless and universal act of expiation."⁷ A definite point of view on Byron's part as concerned the atonement was established in a conversation between Adah and Cain:

Adah: How know we that some such atonement one day
May not redeem our race?

Cain: By sacrificing
The harmless for the guilty? what atonement
Were there?⁸

⁵Lord Byron, Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, Canto IV, Verse 133, ll. 1189-1192.

⁶Lord Byron, Don Juan, Canto VI, Verse 23.

⁷Marjarum, p. 11.

⁸Lord Byron, Cain, Act III, scene i, ll. 85-88.

Byron did believe in the existence of a divine will. In Cain and in Heaven and Earth, he concerned himself with the existence of this will and the characteristics peculiar to it.

. . . all
Rests upon thee; and good and evil seem
To have no power themselves, save in they will.⁹

Unequal is the strife
Between our strength and the Eternal Might!¹⁰

From childhood Byron had believed in the Calvinistic doctrine of predestination. It is an apparent paradox that Byron could at once be a strong believer in the individual will and also be a determinist.¹¹ Byron was confronted with the dogma of original sin; yet he did not desire to believe in these ideas. Therefore, he attempted to fight it with the individual mind:

The mind which immortal makes itself
Requital for its good or evil thoughts,
Is its own origin of ill and end,
And its own time and place.¹²

Yet such a doctrine could not be ignored--a doctrine which appeared to be substantiated through Byron's own experiences. It did not appear that Byron ever discovered a solution to

⁹Ibid., Act III, scene i, ll. 273-275.

¹⁰Lord Byron, Heaven and Earth, Act I, scene iii, ll. 1038-1039.

¹¹Marjarum, p. 8.

¹²Lord Byron, Manfred, Act III, scene iv, ll. 389-392.

the conflicts that he felt between the doctrines of predestination and free-will. On the one hand, Byron implied a liberty of choice in his Byronic heroes, for example, Manfred and Childe Harold. On the other hand, they both accepted the authority and strength of a supreme power.¹³

This belief in a supreme power never allowed Byron to believe in a systematic monism. Except when he was under the influence of Shelley, Byron was never a true pantheist. He found it impossible to continue in a steadfast belief in the unity of all being; he remained a dualist. "He always treated mind and matter, soul and body, spirit and clay, as though they were mutually exclusive concepts."¹⁴

Byron, in the final period of his writing, attempted, unsuccessfully, to pinpoint the beliefs that he had about the soul and death. All of his deductions, however, stemmed largely from the belief that he held in the "continuity of existence." Byron believed that matter would never be destroyed, for it was continually disintegrating and then re-creating itself.¹⁵

Think not
The earth, which is thine outward cov'ring, is

¹³Marjarum, p. 9.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 63.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 61.

Existence--it will cease, and thou wilt be
No less than thou art now.¹⁶

Byron was so certain of his beliefs in the imperishability of matter that he felt perhaps a future immortality was being implied. However, he held this belief to be only a supposition since he recognized the fact that the mind could not attain such knowledge. He remained consistently certain of the fact, however, that the mind could not die; only the physical body could be destroyed. As a result, he emphatically stated that his mind was to remain predisposed to the thoughts of a dualist.¹⁷

As an outgrowth of his individual nature, Byron could not accept any one particular orthodox creed. His first complete avowal of "natural" religion as opposed to "revealed" religion appeared in Prayer of Nature. It appeared that could Byron have accepted any particular system of religious beliefs he would have done so, for his questioning mind was a promoter of indecision and subsequent unrest for the poet. He never developed a systematic philosophy of religion which would answer all of his questionings, not even during the period when pantheism appeared most strongly in his work.¹⁸

¹⁶Lord Byron, Cain, Act I, scene i, ll. 116-120.

¹⁷Marjarum, p. 65.

¹⁸Ibid., pp. 30-32.

As noted in Chapter One, Byron confessed to being a deist. He visualized a vast gulf between God and the world and confessed to a belief in the insignificance of man before this Supreme Ruler.

. . .and thou
 Shalt one day, if found worthy, so defined,
 See thy God face to face as thou dost now
 His Holy of Holies, nor be blasted by his brow.¹⁹

Yet Byron could not resolve his belief in the insignificance of man with a belief in the benevolence of God. He retained a fear of the Almighty and his strength. One element in Byron's religious philosophy remained constant in all of his poetry--a belief in a Deity.

How, raising our eyes to heaven, or directing them to the earth, can we doubt of the existence of God? --or how, turning them to what is within us, can we doubt that there is something within us more noble and more durable than the clay of which we are formed? Those who do not hear, or are unwilling to listen to those feelings, must necessarily be of a vile nature.²⁰

Unfortunately, with all his fervor and enthusiasm for discovering the answers to the eternal questions, Byron was not able to comfort himself by formulating a set of beliefs which would establish a firm religious foundation on which he could rest. Nor was he able to do so for his public.

¹⁹Lord Byron, Cain, Act I, scene i, ll. 147-151.

²⁰Marjarum, p. 63.

He excites, but he does not notably enlarge, our experience; and yet, what a splendid excitement it is. While we are with him we know admiration, delight, exultation even in a faculty so rich and ardent, everything indeed but the glory of the tabernacle. That too we see sometimes far off, but it is for rare moments only. Spiritual revelation, then, it was not Byron's destiny to make.²¹

In conclusion, Byron is to be commended; "though he could steal no fire from Heaven, he was not content to gather leeches."²² Byron formulated no systematic religious philosophy. (His questioning mind gave him no peace, and "he was inconsistent to the last."²³)

²¹ John Drinkwater, The Pilgrim of Eternity (New York, 1925), p. 165.

²² Marjarum, Conclusion.

²³ Ibid.

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