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ADDRESSING TIME: THE POETRY OF LORD BYRON

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The poetry of Lord Byron

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the Memory of

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and

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Addressing Time: The Poetry of Lord Byron

I have been struck by the number of recent essays on the poet which are called Byron and X. This lecture could have been one of them—'Byron and Time' rather than 'Addressing Time'. I prefer the second title. The rest of the lecture will explain why.

'And', the logicians tell us, is inherently open and non-specifying. Anything may follow it. This must be so. Yet in practice, 'and' often confirms popular conformities of association—fish and chips, peace and justice, liberty, equality, and fraternity, law and order, Keats and Shelley (rather than the more helpful 'Byron and Shelley'). The conjunctive 'and' is all too frequently the dead hand of the 'at hand'.

In 2007, *Byron Studies* appeared in the Palgrave Advances series. It was well edited by Jane Stabler.[1] All twelve essays are entitled Byron and something or other. I can scarcely grumble about this since I have written several articles in the same form. There is nothing criminal about 'and'. But it is both informative and a little odd, that it is so omnipresent in recent literary studies and that it is usually the

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[1] *Byron studies*, ed. Jane Stabler (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

handmaid of the predictable. Jane Stabler's *Advances in Byron Studies* is intended to reveal where we are now in Byron studies. And it does so. Are we surprised, for instance, by the titles in this collection?[2]Conjunctions with gender or psycho-analytic criticism etc. are re-assuring much as the conjunctions of fashion accessories are, within their short time-spans, re-assuring. We become very rapidly used to the idea that this goes with that and we can dress or talk or think or mark essays or direct theses accordingly.

Lord Byron, especially from 1812-1816, knew and exhibited the fashion co-ordinates of his time to such an extent that they are still called 'Byronic'. But Byron, delighting in and yet appalled by, the ubiquitous 'at hand' conjunctions of costume, style, feeling, and thought, said that he had that within him 'that shall tire/ Torture and Time...,/ Something un-

[2] Byron/ and the choreography of queer desire/and the politics of editing/and digression/and history/and post-colonial criticism/and twentieth-century culture/and eco-criticism/and psychoanalytic criticism/and war/ and inter-textuality/and the shiftings of gender.

earthly, which they deem not of'.[3]This is the antithesis of the 'at-hand'. The words convince.

Byron confronts Time in those startling words from *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*; he will tire Time out. Time is one of the most common abstract words in his verse and yet if we look at the index to *Byron Studies* (representative in this) we will not find the word Time. We will find that Freud is the most referenced item, then sexuality, then gender, and fourth, Christianity. All these, except the last, are predictable connections as of today, not in the post post-modern tomorrow perhaps, nor yesterday where ´Byron and Time' might have been the subject of a respectable mid-twentieth-century thesis gathering dust on unvisited shelves.

Why then 'Addressing Time'? The simplest answer is that whether or no it is fashionable, Byron is certainly obsessed with Time (most poets are), and a large portion of his poetry is poetry of address. Address is governed by the single concentration of the word 'to' (facing, towards) rather than the multiple dispersals encouraged by the word 'and'. I want to concen-

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[3]*Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* IV,128-30. All quotations from Byron's poetry are taken from *Lord Byron: The Complete Poetical Works,* ed. J.J. McGann and B. Weller (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980–93, 7 vols).

trate on 'address' in Byron's poetry almost as much as addressing Time itself.

My intellectual cast of mind was formed by reading large amounts of St Thomas Aquinas at an early age. From him, I have picked up the habit of beginning an argument by first facing the most powerful objection to it and I will be Thomist in this fashion here. I will take as objector—Sir Drummond Bone—a worthy adversary in any book—in his splendid series of articles on *Beppo* published in 1988, 2000 and 2004.[4] He writes brilliantly about Byron's fondness for lists such as these:

> [With] fiddling, feasting, dancing, drinking,
> masquing,
> And other things which may be had for
> asking. (7-8)

[4] Drummond Bone '*Beppo*: The Liberation of Fiction', in *Byron and the Limits of Fiction*, ed. Bernard Beatty and Vincent Newey (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1988), pp. 97-125; 'Tourists and Lovers: *Beppo* and *Amours de Voyage*' *The Byron Journal*, 28 (2000), 13-28; Drummond Bone, '*Childe Harold* IV, *Don Juan* and *Beppo*', in *The Cambridge Companion to Byron*, ed. Drummond Bone (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 151-70.

> And there are songs and quavers, roaring,
> humming,
> Guitars, and every other sort of strumming.
> (15-16)

Sir Drummond argues that 'significance does not lie in this poem in the definite, the abstract or the general, but in the variable, the material, and the particular, and in the process of dealing with their fertile multiplicity'.[5] I agree with all this except the exclusion of the definite. It is partly right. Byron thinks that human beings cannot avoid inconsistency yet he attacks Southey, Wordsworth, and Coleridge precisely because they change their minds and it is wrong to suggest (if only momentarily) that Byron always prefers the indefinite to the definite. If this were the case then, indeed, he would only be the poet of 'and'. Bone wants Byron's poetry to dissolve categories, finalities, resolutions, absolutes, and spiritualities. In this broad sense, his sceptical and materialist emphases are those of Professor McGann or William St Clair. But there is a distinctiveness about his insight especially his comments on stanza 58:

[5] *Limits of Fiction* p. 122.

They went to the Ridotto;—'tis a hall
  Where people dance, and sup, and
    dance again;
Its proper name, perhaps, were a masqu'd
    ball,
  But that's of no importance to my strain;
'Tis (on a smaller scale) like our Vauxhall,
  Excepting that it can't be spoilt by rain:
The company is 'mix'd' (the phrase I quote is,
As much as saying, they're below your
    notice). (57-64)

Bone gives a brilliant analysis of these lines which emphasises the poem's self-awareness. It is this self-awareness, he argues, 'which helps us read the disruptions and quick turns of thought—well, scarcely thought—as the spaces of freedom rather than the emptinesses of "mere" conversation'.[6] A wonderfully clever idea but one with which I want to disagree.

Professor Bone wants to emphasise the expansive versatility of Byron's verse and Byron's ability to register but not hold onto whatever his fertile imagination and free flow of rapid consciousness throws into view. I could not agree more. The question is whether this is the main thing to say. It's true that this stanza de-

[6] *Limits of Fiction*, p. 111.

pends upon gliding between references: the Italian Ridotto, the English Vauxhall Gardens, English rain, mimicked snobbish conversation ('mix'd' company) but the focus remains on the Ridotto which is held in increasingly clear view (it's a hall where you dance and dine, people wear masks, it is quite like the English Vauxhall but much smaller, it doesn't much rain in Venice, and it is not only the highest social classes who go there). That is a lot of information for a stanza and, like Byron's description of a gondola as 'a coffin clapt in a canoe' (151), his eye is always on the object. Secondly, anyone who can write 'the company is 'mix'd' (a phrase my mother used to use in exactly the same way) and 'they're below your notice' has listened to lots of conversations and delights in them aesthetically rather than thinking of them as 'empty'. So, though agreeing with Sir Drummond, I prefer to emphasise Byron's ability to hold his and our attention to some purpose, to maintain address, rather than always dissipate attention onto the next thing. He can do both of course.

To make the point clearer, I will instance two consecutive digressive stanzas (46,47) in 'Beppo' that Sir Drummond didn't talk about and which don't really fit his account:

Eve of the land which still is Paradise!
  Italian beauty! didst thou not inspire
Raphael, who died in thy embrace, and vies
  With all we know of Heaven, or can desire,
In what he hath bequeath'd us?—in what
    guise,
  Though flashing from the fervour of the
    lyre,
Would *words* describe thy past and present
    glow,
While yet Canova can create below?

'England! with all thy faults, I love thee still,'
  I said at Calais, and have not forgot it;
I like to speak and lucubrate my fill;
  I like the government (but that is not it);
I like the freedom of the press and quill;
  I like the Habeas Corpus (when we've got
    it);
I like a parliamentary debate,
Particularly when 'tis not too late. (361-77)

These very different stanzas offer startlingly different modes of address —to Italian beauty: 'Didst thou not?' and to England: 'with all thy faults, I love thee still'. The poet is turned towards both.

The space between stanzas 46 and 47 allows a change of posture and direction (that is to

say, a change in the address) and a change of idiom (a change in the manner of address). But there is also a change of address in the post-code sense. The original meaning of 'address' is direction towards something or someone. But to be directed presupposes standing somewhere. Hence address is the foundation of having an address. In *Beppo* the poet's home address is ambiguous. He seems to be in Venice himself and dines on becaficas (43)but the poem is set 'in the days of yore' (10) and he refers to the Venetians as 'they', whereas he stresses his closeness to English ways: clothes that you can buy in Monmouth Street (5), walking to the Strand, going tonight to Mrs Boehm's masquerade (56) or 'our Vauxhall' (58) and his pleasure in ketchup and Harvey's sauce (63). He is at home in both addresses and can slip between the two. Thus he is faced towards Italy in stanza 46 but, in 47, his stance is suddenly from Italy and towards England. Within this turn towards Italy, and then from Italy to England, there are further turnings. Raphael, for instance, is embracing women both in fact and through the extension of art. In this, he finds Heaven, paradise, that is to say a realised rather than deferred or slight satisfaction. We do the same, for Raphael's pictures bequeath

us an image of our own desire. England, by contrast, is a cooler place, but it is loved and recognised not through a list of the randomised ('and') but through a careful selection ('or') – which continues in the next two stanzas—of typifying elements of English life—parliament, beer, coal-fires, rain, mob riots, sexual timidity. The phrase 'Habeas Corpus (when we've got it)' links the English reader, by a momentary address, across the space that separates nations , and authors and readers. It is this vast but definite space which Byron traverses and in doing so, carefully balances the different kinds of freedom and restraint that we find in Italy and in England. Address may take account of the multiple but always, and necessarily, unifies what it addresses. We always address something or someone as a whole. Of course, we may single out some particular aspect of the addressee but it is the person who is addressed and who responds.

All this suggests that, in *Beppo,* it is the posture of address that is crucial rather than Drummond Bone's emphasis on space and epistemological aesthetics. This is where the poem pitches its invitation to us. There are not indefinitely multiple worlds but only two worlds in *Beppo*—England and Italy—and the poem is

about their juxtaposition and interrelation in the sense that we are turned towards both and held in that posture for as long as the poem lasts. But even within the narrative, what is crucial is not the indeterminacies and inconsequentialities of Venetian life but the two definite worlds of men and women which are as separated as England and Italy, and are preoccupied by their address to one another. Beppo is the single-minded, resourceful male outsider who lives within his will and wits and will not settle to the subordinations of social life. He lives in the denial of 'to', he is without address, but, through his return, reveals his longing for it. Laura is the opposite. After Beppo's disappearance 'she thought it prudent to connect her/with a vice-husband, *chiefly to protect her*' (231-2) She needs both intimacy and society. She lives wholly within the world of 'to', of dress and address, but does so with betraying yet charming shallowness which the poem endorses but also notices. When Beppo returns, the two worlds look at one another and then?

And then is the whole point of the poem—Laura's, and its, masterly management of conclusion rather than inconclusion. Beppo is subordinated to Laura's world for that is how things are done in Italy. There is a crucial word

in the penultimate stanza that Byron slips in to mark the point: 'His wife received, the patriarch re-baptized him' (77). This is not Raphael's real, or our imagined, embrace of an Italian Eve, it is a wonderfully muted turning towards. Byron does not, after all, say that Beppo forgave his wife her apparent adultery and forgetfulness and accepted her, nor that, like Lambro, he remains within the posture of the vengeful returner, but rather that he quietly accepts his reception (she 'received' him) which occurs the other side of Laura's great conversational tirade in which there are no spaces of freedom at all:

> 'Beppo! that beard of yours becomes you not;
> It shall be shaved before you're a day older;
> Why do you wear it? Oh! I had forgot—
> Pray don't you think the weather here is colder?
> How do I look?You shan't stir from this spot
> In that queer dress, for fear that some beholder

> Should find you out, and make the story known.
> How short your hair is! Lord! how grey it's grown!' (737-44)

Is this the emptiness of mere conversation? Certainly this deft conversational voice in verse is Byron's poetic achievement but Byron attributes its marvellous control of apparent inconsequences to Laura. Hair—on the chin, and then on the head—form a miniature *inclusio* structure which frames the references to weather and to herself. The most important thing is simply her attention to him, her closeness to him established by her unremitting address which is also a display of her vitality and expertise in control. It is her moment and her poem. The poet says that he does not know what Beppo answers and then puts in a little narrative of Beppo's adventures entirely for our benefit not for Laura's. Her address does not admit of verbal reply; it promotes, seeks, and finds, simply his submissive but directed attention. He shan't stir from this spot until she lets him. The whole poem finds its comic rest in this turning of the two towards one another in which Laura exercises, and Beppo accepts, her authority. As a reward, she 'received' him. The wanderer accepts permanently a Venetian ad-

dress. As far as the poem goes, so does the poet.

Between stanzas 46 and 47 we change address and register of address from the elevation of 'Eve of the land which still is Paradise' (which could be in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage)* to the relaxed bonhomie of 'England! with all thy faults I love thee still!' These two levels—elevated and conversational—are the two most common forms of poetic address in Byron though he can mediate skilfully between them. *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* is full of such jumps, which we could also see as 'turns' or 'voltas' where, again, we first turn from, and then to, and this precipitates address. In Canto IV, for instance, we are invited at the beginning of fresh stanzas to 'Turn to the Mole which Hadrian rear'd on high' (1360) or 'turning to the Vatican, go see/Laocoon's torture dignifying pain' (1432-3). 'Beppo' is constituted by an initial turn to Venice which is contained with an address turned towards an English audience.

If this is right, then 'Beppo' is not primarily a space of pure freedom which is enjoyed for its own sake(though all art is that in a sense), rather 'Beppo' is a space which allows specific kinds of directing through different vocatives, different turnings to, different modes of ad-

dress. But all these directions balance and cohere. Beppo himself turns towards the Orient and then returns home. In a larger sense, the poem is about orientation. The poet is turned towards Italy but addresses England. The etymological origin of the word address is in 'directum', a directing, and hence the address that one brings to something when one is directed towards it. Thus whereas in Adeline we find

> That calm Patrician polish in the address,
> Which ne'er can pass the equinoctial line
> Of any thing which Nature would express.
> (XIII, 266-68)

Juan's address is quite different:

> By Nature soft, his whole address held off
> Suspicion. (XV, 105-06)

Byron is patrician and admires polish in verse but he is more like Juan than Adeline. The whole address of his poetry is addressed to the alert but non-suspicious reader. Like Laura, he assails us with words but his intention is to 'receive' us. That is why, famously, he criticised the 'onanism' of Keats's poetry which, in John Jones's wonderful phrase, only allows us 'end-stopped feel' (the feeling at the end of our fingers when we touch something rather than the

thing that we touch).[7] Keats deliberately prevents language from reaching an addressee and then enjoys the resultant suspension in what Jones calls a 'ghostly metasexual orgasm'.[8] The address of Byron's poetry, on the contrary, depends upon and is generated by its reception by an addressee.

The extraordinary freedom of movement in Byron's verse is real enough but I want to argue that this freedom is used for directed purposes. The rest of this essay will use the the four and a half occasions in Byron's poetry where he directly addresses Time to suggest some of these purposes. These examples are in a lyric, in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, in a play, and in *Don Juan*. They thus fairly represent what my subtitle promises—some account of the varied poetry of Lord Byron. They will also serve, I hope, as evidence that despite the range of his verse and subject-matter, Byron assumes, as for example Robert Burns does (Burns's stance is the antithesis of end-stopped feel), that poetry is primarily and primordially a mode of address.

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[7] John Jones *John Keats's Dream of Truth* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1969): 'end-stopped feel lies at the root of the trouble' (p. 11).
[8] Jones, p. 211.

My first exhibit—Byron's lyrical poem entitled 'To Time'—is a case in point. It has not been much examined by critics but, if you look it up on the internet, you will find that it is much discussed in blogs along the lines 'hey, just discovered this really cool poem which says something I have felt too'. On one occasion when I looked, it had already been sent publicly 156 times in this way within a month. The poem is read instantly, therefore, as one that is addressed to the reader and is received as such even though its named addressee is Time itself. I don't think that this is to be despised.

> Time! on whose arbitrary wing
>   The varying hours must flag or fly,
> Whose tardy winter, fleeting spring,
>   But drag or drive us on to die ---
> Hail thou! – who on my birth bestow'd
>   Those boons to all that know thee known;
> Yet better I sustain thy load,
>   For now I bear the weight alone.
> I would not one fond heart should share
>   The bitter moments thou hast given;
> And pardon thee---since thou could'st spare
>   All that I loved, to peace or Heaven.
> To them be joy or rest – on me
>   Thy future ills shall press in vain;

I nothing owe but years to thee,
  A debt already paid in pain.
Yet even that pain was some relief;
  It felt – but still forgot thy power:
The active agony of grief
  Retards, but never counts the hour.
In joy I've sigh'd to think thy flight
  Would soon subside from swift to slow –
Thy cloud could overcast the light,
  But could not add a night to Woe;
For then, however drear and dark,
  My soul was suited to thy sky;
One star alone shot forth a spark
  To prove thee – not Eternity.
That beam hath sunk – and now thou art
  A blank – a thing to count and curse
Through each dull tedious trifling part,
  Which all regret – yet all rehearse.
One scene even thou canst not deform –
  The limit of thy sloth or speed –
When future wanderers bear the storm
  Which we shall sleep too sound to heed;
And I can smile to think how weak
  Thine efforts shortly shall be shown,
When all the vengeance thou canst wreak
Must fall upon – a nameless stone!

Like many of Byron's Thyrza poems after the death of John Edleston, this has sometimes

been printed without stanzas, sometimes in 10 quatrains, and sometimes in 5 octaves. The death of the 'one star alone' must refer surely to the death of Edleston but this is not a Thyrza poem for two reasons. First, the 'thou' who is addressed in each stanza explicitly, is Time, not Edleston. Secondly, the 'them' in line 13 is a deliberate avoidance of saying either 'him' which could be tracked to Edleston or 'her' which would convert Edleston into a girl — which would put it within the Thyrza group. The addressee is Time and it is Time's relation to the speaker that is determinative.

Time can be addressed in various ways. To address is to set in proximate location. In *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* it is usually being, for the moment, in an address that generates appropriate address as, most spectacularly, he interrupts the Spanish canto with — 'O Thou, Parnassus! whom I now survey' (I, 612). Secondly, address usually envisages certain cohering characteristics. Here Time has wings, may seem swift or slow, bestows boons—here said sarcastically and meaning suffering. It (for it is more an It than a He or She here) has a cloudy sky which effaces light but cannot efface stars or eternity and thus, by implication, had no power in life or death over some lost loved per-

son. It deforms, and is vengeful, but it has no power over the dead which will shortly include the poet. The address here, then, has the modes of recognition, characterisation, complaint, and defiance. The art of the poem is in reminding us in multiple but cohering ways of the pain that beings in Time suffer—a pain that seems caused both by Time's indifference to us and its apparently zestful targeting of our joys—whilst at the same time comforting us by a stance of defiance. The very things that seem to confirm Time's control—the known death of someone we love and our own unknown time of death—are presented as defeating Time. The art of the poem is tributary to this routing. Suffering and mutability exist outside the poem but the repeated 'thou', 'thee', and 'thy' which address Time, sustain it as an interlocutor dependent upon the poet's art and susceptible of rhetorical defeat. It is an ancient, perhaps the most ancient, trick of poetry: Donne's 'Death, thou shalt die', Shakespeare's 'Love's not Time's Fool', Byron's 'There is that within me that shall tire Torture and Time'. If Time were not addressed here, merely talked about, it could not be vanquished. Time may defeat us but we can refute it. This little poem is a refutation of Time.

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Not so our second example— that great address to Time in the Coliseum stanzas of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*.

> Oh Time! the beautifier of the dead,
> Adorner of the ruin, comforter
> And only healer when the heart hath bled—
> Time! the corrector where our judgments err,
> The test of truth, love,—sole philosopher,
> For all beside are sophists, from thy thrift,
> Which never loses though it doth defer—
> Time, the avenger! unto thee I lift
> My hands, and eyes, and heart, and crave of thee a gift:
> Amidst this wreck, where thou hast made a shrine
> And temple more divinely desolate,
> Among thy mightier offerings here are mine,
> Ruins of years—though few, yet full of fate:—
> If thou hast ever seen me too elate,
> Hear me not; but if calmly I have borne
> Good, and reserved my pride against the hate
> Which shall not whelm me, let me not have worn
> This iron in my soul in vain – shall *they* not

mourn? (IV, 1162-79)

The manner and mode of address here is quite different. Byron's earlier lyric does not say 'O time on whose arbitrary wing' nor does it say 'time on thy arbitrary wing'. The absence of 'O', and the distancing inherent in 'whose', means that the lyric, though an address, has something of the nature of musing. Time is being reflected upon whilst being addressed. Some of those same reflections are present in this stanza too. Here, as there, Time is both implacable and an avenger. But whereas in the first poem this was a thought to be overcome by powers of address, in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* such a recognition become the titles and magnificent attributes of the addressee. If the ancient lyrical tradition of time's refutation stands behind the first poem, here the even more ancient posture of prayer is operative.

In prayer, as in address to an ancient king, the name, mighty attributes, and mighty deeds of the one addressed precede the uttering of a petition to him: 'beautifier, adorner, healer, comforter, avenger...crave of thee a gift'. Byron was even more familiar with Biblical forms of prayer than with Homeric ones. Manfred's address to the sun in III, ii is a good example: ‘Glorious Orb! the idol/ Of early nature... Thou

earliest minister of the Almighty... Sire of the Seasons! Monarch of the climes' etc etc (III, ii, 3-4, 11, 20). To list attributes and deeds is the same thing as to praise. The Sun can be located and looked at. Harder to do so with Time, but the poet locates Time in the wreck of the Colisseum which Time's alteration has turned into a shrine and temple to itself. To Time's ruin, the poet brings Time's ruin—himself.

Accordingly, there is much greater intensity of voice here. The lyric set up its artistry against the deformations of Time and finds a muted but real satisfaction in what in effect is a pyrrhic victory—Time won't always triumph over us because, when dead, we will be out of its power. In *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, however, and it is an effect upon which the poem depends, energy flows from the addressee, here Time. The sheer energy of Byron's poetry has often been noted and always referred to Byron himself as though it is an attribute like red hair but, as Ruskin more perceptively noted, it is Byron's attentiveness to something other than himself which sources that energy.[9] In prayer,

[9] *The Works of John Ruskin*, ed. E.T. Cook and A. Wedderburn (London: George Allen/Longmans, Green and Co, 1908), XXXIV, 333.

the posture of humility is always an aggrandisement since, however humbly, someone unimaginably greater is being addressed and is therefore listening to what is said. There must then be some reciprocity in the exchange which involves an enlargement of the one making the address. The most obvious case is the address to Ocean at the end of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*. Byron's prayer to Time, presupposes that Time will endorse the poet's self-opinion that he has not been too elate and that he has endured suffering well. He can confidently say 'Hear me not' if this is not so. Byron talks wonderfully well about the enlargement that the visitor to St Peter's feels when he turns to its interior. What is accomplished here is the entering of what has been addressed as a 'Thou' in the previous stanza: 'But thou, of temples old, or altars new/Standest alone' (IV, 1378-9). In Canto II of *Don Juan*, Byron writes of Haidee's relationship to Juan: 'It was such pleasure to behold him, such/ Enlargement of existence to partake Nature with him' (II, 1377-9). Addressing, beholding, the stance of 'to', enlarges existence and both deepens and raises our voice. *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* is an astonishing tour de force of a continually varied but almost con-

tinually raised and deepened voice. Nowhere more so than in the storm stanza in Canto III:

> Sky, mountains, river, winds, lakes, lightnings! ye!
> With night, and clouds, and thunder, and a soul
> To make these felt and feeling (897-99)

Now there is a list indeed but the 'and's of the second line do not dissolve the single concentration but are held together through that massive 'ye' within the mode of sustained address. The most intensely felt and fashioned lines of poetry are all forms of address. In his Colisseum address to Time, Byron does not seek to resist Time or muse about it but enlist its avenging agency so that it works for him and he, in a way becomes it. Energy flows from it.

This, more or less, is what, in the third example, Marino Faliero also seeks at the end of the play when, as he says: 'I speak to Time and to Eternity/Of which I grow a portion, not to man' (V, iii, 26-7). In fact after this initial declaration he does not directly address Time but he addresses 'Ye elements' and then 'Ye winds', 'ye blues waves' 'my native earth', 'ye skies' all as preparation for a denunciation of a repeated 'she' (Venice) in the form 'she shall', which only

in its conclusion turns into the spat out cursing address 'thou sea-Sodom'. The emphasis on the elements, winds, waves, earth and skies, is calculated. The play has been made up of speeches turned inwards or to other human interlocutors within closed walls with the exception of Lioni's long speech which addresses Venice at night through an open window. Lioni's speech sets the present scene in relation to an immemorial past. In the last scene of the play, we are shown the doge at a distance making a speech in the open which the distant watching crowd cannot hear. He speaks, as Lear does in the storm, helplessly and explicitly to the indifferent elements but, unlike Lear, purposefully and implicitly to Time. Where Lioni relates present Venice to the past (Egyptian pyramids IV, I, 84)as a form of aggrandisement, Marino relates the past (Sodom) to the future as diminishment and curse. As so often in Byron, the Scriptures underpin both idiom and meaning.

In the Book of Daniel, Daniel gives a detailed forecasting of subsequent history—the rise and fall of conquering ungodly empires. We have come to think of this as typically prophetic but it is not. The prophet (Amos, Isaiah, Jeremiah, John the Baptist) announces the immediate not

the distant act of God who either consoles or condemns. It is apocalypse which suggests a larger future which God superintends, as it were, from a distance. This future, unlike prophecy, is always written after the event and therefore can describe very accurately, as Daniel, Gray's Bard, and Byron's Marino do, all the history which lies between the time of setting and the time of writing but not after it. Byron knew the argument current in his time as to whether Daniel was written before or after the events that it describes. For this reason, Marino says that he speaks to Time and to Eternity (in this context he can elide the two which is a possibility that apocalypse originally brought about) but he does not address it. Rather his address is taken from its dramatic audience (who can't hear it anyway) and is relayed directly to us so that we can receive it as an address in fictional time which will be, and has been vindicated by real past and present Time. Like most apocalypse, it is written at a time of disaster—the Desecration or Destruction of the Temple in the Scriptures, in Byron's Venice here the end of a thousand-year old polis two decades earlier and its rule by foreigners (the Austrians). It derives its secret authority from this.

If, in *Don Juan*,

> the sad truth which hovers o'er my desk
> Turns what was once romantic to burlesque.
> (IV, 23-4)

it follows that this, the greatest of all Byron's poems, must ironise all forms of address except the conversational. The crucial case is the best known one: 'Hail Muse, *et cetera*' (III, 1). This phrase proves that Drummond Bone is partly right--'Hail Muse and other things' fits exactly his insight that Byron's ottava rima poetry opens up to indefinite lists. But he is partly wrong, for, however truncated and ironised, 'Hail Muse etc' remains an address. *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, by contrast, as we might expect, opens with an unironised address to the Muse ('O Thou! in Hellas deem'd of heav'nly birth') as well as a dedication to Lady Charlotte Harley. Canto II opens with an address to Athena and then an elegiac one to Edleston which is repeated to make a conclusion. Canto III, similarly, begins and ends with an address to Byron's daughter, Ada. Canto IV avoids initial address ('I stood in Venice, on the Bridge of Sighs') but is fulsomely dedicated to Hobhouse and presents a final sustained turn to Rome ('O Rome! my country! city of the soul!/The or-

phans of the heart must turn to thee' (IV, 694-5) and then to 'thou deep and dark blue ocean' as the conclusion of the whole poem (IV, 1603). *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* is operatic. The poet, like the singer of an aria, is not turned directly to his audience, but proffers the spectacle of constantly renewed address within his theatrical space, for the benefit of an imagined public audience in a public space. Extracts could be read at a Harrow Speech Day.

Don Juan is not like this at all of course. Juan moves through unaddressed cities and seas in a poem which begins with its perversely ironic dedication to Southey. Juan's farewell address to Spain, his home country, unlike Childe Harold's 'Good Night' which it is presumably burlesquing, is rapidly curtailed by his sea-sickness. His welcoming address to England as 'Freedom's chosen station' (XI, 69) is 'interrupted by a knife,/ With "Damn your eyes! your money or your life!"' (XI, 79-80). On the other hand, the poet here, unlike the opera singer, is directly turned towards the audience but the audience has dwindled into a single imagined reader with whom he rattles on 'exactly as I'd talk/With any body in a ride or walk' (XV, 151-2). The reader can thus be ad-

dressed directly in notional present tense. Here are some examples:

> Hast ever *had* the gout? I have not had it—
> But I may have, and you too, Reader, dread it.
> (XV, 575-76)

> Grim reader! did you ever see a ghost?
> No; but you have heard—I understand....
> (XV, 753-4)

> Oh, reader! If that thou canst read,---and know,
> 'Tis not enough to spell, or even to read,
> To constitute a reader; there must go
> Virtues of which both you and I have need.
> (XIII, 576-80)

This small-scale present intimacy ('both you and I') of the narrator outside the narrative is matched by the other repeated turning towards within the narrative, that of Juan who turns enthusiastically towards a succession of women. Juan, breathless, sitting next to Julia, or hidden, half-smothered, in her bed no more talks than when shoved into bed with Dudu or, apparently, he does with Haidee whose language he cannot speak and does not need to. The private address of love-making is the secret but acknowledged centre of the narrative and

supports its denial of public address whereas Harold flees from a surplus of love-making ('the dullness of satiety') in the opening stanzas of the poem and, apart from his 'Good Night', stands apart from its great pageant of address to the fleeting and the enduring. The narrator's sustained turn to the reader, and Juan's ever-renewed turn to woman, counters the poem's indirectness which is part of its irony.

Time, nevertheless, is addressed in *Don Juan*. Once only. How is it done? The poet is talking about Lady Adeline's age and digresses into women's special difficulty in acknowledging the advances and ravages of Time even though Adeline, at 21 and only six weeks older than Juan, does not yet need to, for

> she was far from that leap year, whose leap,
> In female dates, strikes Time all of a heap.
>
> This may be fixed at somewhere before thirty—
> Say seven-and-twenty; for I never knew
> The strictest in chronology and virtue
> Advance beyond, while they could pass for new. (XIV, 415-20)

This is satirised, but the posture of satire is not the fundamental one of this poet or poem. He sympathises with women and not with Time:

> Oh, Time! Why dost not pause? Thy
> scythe, so dirty
> With rust, should surely cease to hack
> and hew.
> Reset it; shave more smoothly, also
> slower,
> If but to keep thy credit as a mower.
> (XIV, 421-24)

The Time of 'Time on whose arbitrary wing' is addressed but not visualised. The shadow of an emblem ('Time's wings') is present but not obtruded. Here, however, we have the vivid literalisation of another emblem—Time's scythe. Byron has used the same emblem earlier when he presents Time as having a heart to pity the woes of Juan and Haidee:

> Even Time the pitiless in sorrow cleft
> With his rude scythe such gentle bosoms.
> (IV, 59-60)

In both cases, the object of attack is the scythe itself—rude in the sense of crude and violent—and blunt and dirty with rust. Why should Time's scythe be rusty, after all it is in constant

use? There may be a contrast with the carefully sharpened weaponry which kills thousands at the Siege of Ismail:

> The bayonet pierces and the sabre cleaves,
> And human lives are lavished every where.
> (VIII, 697-98)

The implication is that war needs sharp weapons, for victory depends upon them but Time can be less choosy since there is no defence against him . Similarly the horrors of war are intermittent whereas Time never pauses, though his varying hours may flag or fly; indeed in female years may seem to leap. There is never a pause in which his blade can be sharpened, reset, and oiled nor does he need to take careful aim as a soldier does. He hacks and hews without discrimination. By the standards of a human mower, he is a hasty blunderer with very little skill, very little grace, and shamefully ill-kept tools. This becomes the grounds of a mock-appeal to him which seems to combine a plea against Death itself (the figure of Time merges readily enough with that of the Grim Reaper) and to the action of Time in aging, especially in aging beautiful young women.

Time is asked therefore to shave smoothly, i.e. not rudely but with a razor's delicacy and finesse. Razors are used on human skin, scythes on grass. Razors cut hair but do not cut into flesh. Scythes cut down the growing plant. So the injunction is to differentiate between flesh and grass rather than confound the two. This depends upon the idea, which it also repudiates, that all flesh is grass.

In our earlier examples, Byron means what he says. When Byron asks Time to vindicate him in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, he wants his version of his history to become the accepted one and for those who deny it or who have caused him suffering to have a change of heart. The poem itself is a major part in this agency. Poet and time work together. *Childe Harold's Pilgrimag*e III must have had a huge effect on his daughter (later) and his wife (immediately). Similarly, in 'Time on whose arbitrary wing' when Byron tells Time that its triumph is incomplete since it has never triumphed over the implied dead friend and will not triumph over the poet once he is dead, he means it again. It is a possible consolatory thought, though a bitter one. But Byron does not mean his injunction to Time to be a slower and more delicate reaper except as the expression of a hope that

cannot be fulfilled. Women wish by subterfuge or lies to pretend that Time can pause. The poet stands with them in a like subterfuge. But Time will never differentiate between vegetable matter and human flesh. The only things that will give Time a run for his money are the resurrections of Juan's love-making out of apparent end-points and the vitality of mind and spirit in the narrator— a spectacle of consciousness addressed to the ever-possible reader which is transferred permanently to the text of the poem. Plus of course, Aurora Raby who is presented as proximate to the fallen world of time but apart from its ravages. She has 'an aspect beyond time' (XV, 356).

The earlier addresses to Time that I have discussed—the lyric 'Time on whose arbitrary wing', the invocation of Time in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, Marino's speech to time and to eternity, have all been central to the place of their occurring. But 'O Time! why dost not pause?' is an apostrophe within a digression. Sometimes apostrophes are treated as identical with an address but apostrophes, by definition, always represent a turning away from present time and place whereas Byron's addresses are usually a confirmation of present time and place. This

one, however, is a generalised turn away from a digression, itself quite unexpected in its tone, which is prompted by, but itself turns away from, Adeline's present situation. It is not central in any sense unless, as Paul Curtis has argued, (ingeniously but wrongly in my view) digression is the real hero of *Don Juan.*[10] For all that, it is still the case that it is the addressee, Time, which gives energy and peculiar frisson to the passage. What is best about it is, on the one hand, the undoubted bitterness in hack and hew— Byron was himself aging rapidly (he was 35) when he wrote the line—and, on the other, the absolute artistry with which this exposed acknowledgment of lack of control (Time can't be stopped) is woven into the contemptuously assured poise of voice in 'should surely cease' and 'if but to keep thy credit'. The reader has to be alert to bold but also extremely delicate discriminations and adjustments—as so often in the finest writing in the last cantos of *Don Juan.*

My last example is the shortest. Just one and a half lines in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* Canto I:

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[10] Paul Curtis 'byron and digression' in *Byron studies* pp.60-80.

> When Paphos fell by Time—accursed Time!
> The queen who conquers all must yield to thee—
> The Pleasures fled, but sought as warm a clime; (666-68)

Byron is alluding to Petrarch's *I Trionfi* where Venus (love) triumphs over Mars (War) and Eternity triumphs over Time. Here he says that even Love is conquered by Time, hence when the city of Paphos (dedicated to Venus) fell, Love's pleasures have to move to another city which is now Cadiz. Byron here shows us exactly what address is and what it can do very neatly. Time is voiced twice, once as an agent (Paphos fell by Time) objectively placed though of course in a metaphor—time has besieged the city of pleasure and conquered it like a soldier—but then instantly the voice changes. Time is suddenly addressed not with the praising titles of prayer but cursed ('When Paphos fell by Time—accursed Time!') yet the curse is explained in a voice more sadly elegiac than cursing but still in the mode of address ('The queen who conquers all must yield to thee'). The adjustments of voice within the line and across the line have to be very rapid and finely judged—an orator, a preacher, an actor, a conversationalist can do it and Byron, in his way,

is all of these, for all are practitioners of address

The example is a good one to end on for it shows the latency for address in all Byron's speech. The movement from the distancing 'by Time' to the immediate 'accursed Time', from 'Time' as 'it' to Time as 'thee', is shockingly abrupt. It can't really be called a movement or transition. Time as addressee suddenly is present in a turn, a volta, an interruption (Byron says 'interjection'), an arrival which fixes and intensifies a thought and feeling (no pleasure lasts) but is, for the moment, present as much in the new energy in which we participate as in the meaning which it expresses.

It is a commonplace that round about the time of Byron's birth a movement began in Germany and in England—much later in France—which sharply distinguished between poetry and rhetoric in a way that would have bewildered Pope, Dryden, Milton, Shakespeare, Spenser, Chaucer, Dante, and Homer. Poetry linked to conversation, similarly, was relegated to the status of light verse. Byron was aware of these new shibboleths and opposed them. He continued to write poetry of address. By the end of the nineteenth century and throughout the first half of the twentieth, despite Byron's

influence on T. S. Eliot and Auden, Byron's status as a poet had slumped almost entirely as a result. Since the 1960s we have lived in a different climate and Byron's reputation has soared again as others have fallen. It is not a matter of reputation or fashion as such but the rediscovery of how to read him. To read Byron is to be addressed by him and his words, to accept the posture of address, and to accept two fundamental but quite different alignments through this. One is to accept a real continuity between the habits of conversational speech and poetry ('Grim reader! did you ever see a ghost? No; but you have heard—I understand—be dumb!' XV, 753-54)—a connection obvious enough in Horace and Pope and Chaucer and Burns and Louis MacNeice but one which Romantic, Symbolist, and Modernist aesthetics sought to undermine and it is not easy to recover. The other is to accept that Byron's address is both to the most familiar things around us—he hates the idea of a separated and free-floating imagination—and yet his voice reaches into spaces beyond our customary ken—he often addresses the dead for example and his address to Time always has a death dimension in it. There is a strange authority in 'O Time, why dost thou pause?' Living in Time is the familiar

condition of all of us but I am not sure that we ever get used to it. We always face both immediate day to day doings in which, naturally as it seems, we immerse and yet behind our back we always hear Time's winged chariot hovering near in an enigmatic space bounded by death. This always frames our immediate sense of being alive. Byron's poetry is always strikingly loyal to this double awareness. I can't think of any poetry which is more so.

Of course, Sir Drummond Bone is quite right. Poetry plays in a free space and we must enjoy its dance but that is not how Byron defended it and Pope in the Bowles controversy. His poetry directs its trajectories across familiar and unfamiliar spaces to some moral as well as aesthetic purpose. It engages. Yes, poetry is a fountain or, as Byron says, a volcanic eruption which simply throws out its energies, and delights in their playfulness like the Biblical Sapientia but the greatest energies in Byron's verse derive from reciprocities of ordinary and extraordinary kinds between its own attentiveness and that which it attends to and addresses in the real but mysterious world in which—Byron agrees with Pope—human beings are the glory, jest, and riddle. Time, in particular—scythed,

winged, bungling, arbitrary, cursed, pitiless,conqueror, healer, avenger, adorner, beautifier, deformer, comforter, corrector, philosopher, incompetent mower, but always dialectical interlocutor, silent sparring partner, and addressee of Byron's poetry—is one of the great enablers of his astonishingly varied verse in which indeed there is something unearthly which will tire Torture and Time.