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History and Play in Lord Byron's Dramas

Historie a hra v dramatech lorda Byrona

DISERTAČNÍ PRÁCE

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V Praze dne

Miroslava Horová

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A NOTE ON PRIMARY TEXTS

Marino Faliero is quoted from *Lord Byron: The Complete Poetical Works,* ed. Jerome J. McGann and Barry Weller, 7 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980-93), volume IV.

All remaining dramas are quoted from volume VI of the same edition.

Act, scene and line references follow quotations in the main text.

Abbreviations

CPW Lord Byron, *The Complete Poetical Works*, ed. Jerome J. McGann and Barry Weller, 7 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980-93)

BLJ Lord Byron, *Byron's Letters and Journals*, ed. Leslie A. Marchand, 13 vols (London: John Murray, 1973-94)

CHP *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, Lord Byron, *The Complete Poetical Works*, ed. Jerome J. McGann and Barry Weller, 7 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981) Volume II.

DJ *Don Juan*, Lord Byron, *The Complete Poetical Works*, ed. Jerome J. McGann and Barry Weller, 7 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986) Volume V.

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Byron, History and Play

And what I write I cast upon the stream
To swim or sink. I have had at least my dream. (*DJ* XIV, xi)

And such a straw, borne on by human breath,
Is poesy, according as the mind glows;
…
And mine's a bubble, not blown up for praise,
But just to play with, as an infant plays. (*DJ* XIV, viii)

Recent years have seen a renewed and steadily increasing interest in Byron's engagement with, treatment of and conceptualization of history. Calling for a comprehensive appraisal of Byron's intense and sustained 'historicism', Caroline Franklin notes in her essay on 'Byron and history' that even the 'most cursory glance at Byron's *oeuvre* demonstrates the centrality of history to virtually everything he wrote'.[1] Byron, she says, 'adapts genres which stage the otherness of the past as some sort of performance, often bringing the poet's and the reader's present juxtaposition with it', and uses 'double entendres and parallels with the present, which include the viewing of the writing and performance of [literary works] as of historical significance'.[2] Indeed, Byron's self-professed 'grand passion' from 'the moment [he] could read' was '*history*',[3] and he was boasting of knowing it all from 'Herodotus down to Gibbon' as early as 1808.[4] Byron's preoccupation with historical 'truth' is 'a truth universally acknowledged' these days, manifest as it is in all his writing, and discussed copiously in his correspondence – one example among many is his letter to Murray of 11 September 1820, where he writes, referring to *Marino Faliero*: 'I want to be as near the truth – as the Drama can be'.[5] This deliberate striving towards 'the truth' of history, however, is a highly creative process on Byron's part and involves what Franklin describes as Byron's

[1] Caroline Franklin, 'Byron and history', in Jane Stabler (ed.), *Palgrave Advances in Byron Studies* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p.85 [pp. 81-105].

[2] Franklin, 'Byron and history', p.86.

[3] *Detached Thoughts*, *BLJ* VIII, p.108.

[4] Letter to R.Ch. Dallas of 21 January 1808, *BLJ* I, p.148.

[5] *BLJ* VII, p.175.

persistent 'engaging with, fictionalizing and critiquing [of] histories.'[6] History, then, for Byron, is a complicated business, combining facts, accuracy and 'literary construct[s]', as he comes to 'a growing recognition that words do not simply reflect the "truth" of history, but are themselves required to actively shape history'.[7] Indeed, Byron 'opens up' a 'perspective on how authority is legitimized in time through the writing of history.'[8] For Byron, history, as 'subject matter, material, place [and] subjectivity, is vital, rather than moribund'[9] *now* – for, but also in, the present. His dramas also betray his convictions about – and canny portrayal of – the 'theatricality' of history.[10]

*

The history of the critical appraisal of Byron's dramas until the end of the 1980s is perplexing. As late as 1988, Corbett sums up the preceding summa of criticism on the dramas as nearly universally deprecatory, taking for granted and building on the critical 'cant' of Byron's contemporaries, which was handed down all the way to the second half of the last century. Corbett notes that, as a result, the dramas have been 'misunderstood', 'understudied' and 'misrepresented',[11] and stages a necessary vindication of them,[12]

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6 Franklin, 'Byron and history', p.86. Franklin's call to scholars for a study of Byron as a 'historicist' poet was answered last year by Carla Pomarè's historiographically focused study of Byron's historical dramas and dramatic monologues entitled *Byron and the Discourses of History* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013). Pomarè, 'call[s] attention to various examples of the interplay between Byron's writings and historiographical texts, considered not only as a source of historical information he cherished so much, but also as models from which he drew textual practices that were to become trademarks of his production, that is the massive use of footnotes and paratextual matter that is one of the focuses of [her] approach.' p.2.

7 Nat Leach, 'Historical Bodies in a "Mental Theatre": Byron's Ethics of History', in *Studies in Romanticism* 46.1 (Spring 2007), p.9 [pp. 3-19].

8 Pomarè, *Byron and the Discourses of History*, p.87.

9 Stephen Cheeke, *Byron and Place: History, Translation, Nostalgia* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p.9.

10 Leach, 'Historical Bodies in a "Mental Theatre": Byron's Ethics of History', p.5. As Watkins remarks, 'in his dramas [Byron] plunged beneath surface considerations, such as episode and spectacle, in an attempt to develop a coherent imaginative portrayal of these principles and thereby to extend the definition of historical truth.' 'The Dramas of Lord Byron', in *A Materialist Critique of English Romantic Drama*, p.143. Here Watkins circles around the defining feature of Byron's style in general and oversimplifies and simultaneously underestimates the 'episode and spectacle' aspect of the dramas. But he is right in stressing Byron's attempt to convey a wider, more complex concept of historical truth in his dramas.

11 Corbett, *Byron and Tragedy* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1988), p.1.

12 Though there are notable exceptions to the rule – see Jerome McGann's discussion of the dramas in *Fiery Dust*: *Byron's Poetic Development* (Chicago and London: Chicago University Press, 1968), pp.205-273, for instance, or Anne Barton's comprehensive article '"A Light to Lesson Ages": Byron's Political Plays', in John D. Jump (ed.), *Byron: A Symposium* (London: Macmillan, 1975), pp.138-162.

heralding a slow change of tide – but it was as late as the 1990s before a steady and varied critical interest in Byron's dramas was kindled. More recently, in the last few years, we have also seen the interest in Byron's dramas coincide with a growing interest in Byron's sojourn in and engagement with Italy.

As Alan Richardson notes, 'Byron wrote eight dramatic works, more than any major poet since Dryden.' The renewed interest in, and deeper appreciation of, these dramas, however, does not rule out simplifications of them. A fan of the 'metaphysical dramas', Richardson readily slams the historical dramas as 'verbally rich but static and somewhat pedantic tragedies that rather justify [Byron's] poor reputation as a playwright'.[13] Yet Richard Lansdown's seminal study approached the works from the opposite spectrum a few years later, and went a long way towards vindicating the historical dramas.[14] Then another major 1990s study of Romantic drama, this time by Daniel Watkins, enhanced our understanding of Byron's dramas further by noting the author's vital interest in the dramatic work of Vittorio Alfieri, which engendered the composition of *Marino Faliero*, and Byron's 'identifying himself with the prestigious tradition of opposition literature in which Alfieri stands'.[15]

The link to Alfieri opens up formal and well as political ways into Byron's dramas, and Byron's determined preoccupation with dramatic form at the beginning of his neo-classical project is famous:

> the public is not aware that my dramatic simplicity is *studiously* Greek – and must continue so – no reform ever succeeded at first. I admire the old English dramatists, but this is quite another field – and has nothing to do with theirs - I want to make a *regular* English drama – no matter

[13] Alan Richardson, *A Mental Theatre: Poetic Drama and Consciousness in the Romantic Age* (Pennsylvania: Penn State University Press, 1988), p.43.

[14] For a summary of critical material on Byron's dramas prior to 1992, see Richard Lansdown, *Byron's Historical Dramas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), p.2. For an overview of the critical responses of Byron's contemporaries, see Corbett, *Byron and Tragedy*, pp. 1-17. A representative summa of famous critical responses spanning across the nineteenth century up to 1910 is available in Andrew Rutherford (ed.), *Lord Byron: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge, 1970).

[15] Daniel P. Watkins, 'The Dramas of Lord Byron', in *A Materialist Critique of English Romantic Drama* (Gainesville, FL: University of Florida Press, 1993), p.143. For a brief analysis of Byron's involvement and strong sense of personal affinity with Alfieri, see e.g. C.P. Brand, 'Italian Drama', in *Italy and the English Romantics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1957, repr. 2011), pp.120-2. As Watkins observes, Byron '[i]n fact … eventually surpassed Alfieri's rather limited juxtaposition of tyrant and hero – which Byron believed often reduced art to 'political dialogues' [*BLJ* VII, p. 150] – and created a more subtle and sophisticated political poetics'. *A Materialist Critique of English Romantic Drama*, p.143.

whether for the stage or not – which is not my object – but a mental theatre.[16]

Yet Alfieri's neo-classicism is not Byron's only model for his dramas. Byron 'continually experimented with poetic ideas and methods rather than resting with a fixed and clearly defined form. He moved easily from historical drama to metaphysical drama' just as he did 'from energetic satire to sentimental narrative'[17] – indeed, crucially, according to Watkins, 'Byron's view of drama provides the clearest guide to his poetics' generally.[18] In fact, it is the 'perfectly poised paradox'[19] that is characteristic of Byron's writing, but constitutive of his dramas in particular, that we shall approach in our study. But we will also be concerned with the larger development of Byron's 1820-22 dramatic project. Studies dedicated to only the 'metaphysical' or the 'historical' dramas from this period necessarily leave out crucial elements of the evolution of Byron's dramatic art. Equally, studies focusing on one particular genre, such as Corbett's, are tuned into a set of criteria that inevitably neglects other aspects of the works. Our study will approach Byron's 1820-22 dramas as a sustained dramatic project, inaugurated with *Marino Faliero* and ending with *The Deformed Transformed*. We will concentrate on the project's vibrant dynamics of theme and discourse. Above all, however, we will focus on the play of, and with, history that marks, indeed in many ways defines, that project *as* a project.

As to the traditionally alleged marginality and haphazard eccentricity of Byron's engagement with drama, the increasingly hectic timeline of his dramatic project speaks for itself. After *Manfred*, the last act of which Byron finished in Rome (12 May 1817), and which therefore does not form part of the sustained dramatic experimentation Byron began three years later, in Ravenna in 1820, the chronology of Byron's composition of dramas is as follows. Byron begins *Marino Faliero* in April 1820[20] and finishes it in August.[21] In January 1821 he 'drafts an outline of *Sardanapalus* and writes the opening lines the next

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[16] Letter to Murray of 23 August 1821, *BLJ* VIII, p. 187. As McGann notes, the 'separation of the drama from the theatre is an index of Romanticism itself.' 'Lord Byron's Twin Opposites of Truth', in *Towards a Literature of Knowledge* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), n.3, p.39.

[17] Watkins, *A Materialist Critique of English Romantic Drama*, p.143.

[18] Watkins, *A Materialist Critique of English Romantic Drama*, p.142. See also F.M. Doherty, 'Byron and the Sense of the Dramatic', in B. Beatty and V. Newey (eds), *Byron and the Limits of Fiction* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1988), pp.226-241.

[19] Corbett, *Byron and Tragedy*, p.1.

[20] Letter to Murray of 9 April 1820: 'begun a tragedy on the subject of Marino Faliero'.

[21] Published by Murray in April 1821.

day',[22] finishing the drama in May. In June 1821, he begins work on *The Two Foscari* which he completes in just over a month, in July 1821.[23] Two days after sending the manuscript of *The Two Foscari* and returning the final proofs of *Sardanapalus* to Murray, he begins work on *Cain*, which he finishes in September 1821. Then, in October, in just fourteen days, he writes *Heaven and Earth*, sending it to Murray in December.[24] Just before Christmas, Byron takes up *Werner* and finishes it in exactly a month on 20 January 1822, and in January and February 1822 he writes the beginning of *The Deformed Transformed*, which he never finishes, though this last fragmentary drama was finally published by John Hunt in *The Liberal* in February 1824.

Byron was a magpie when it comes to plotlines – which is hardly unusual considering the precedent of Shakespeare, even though the Bard is not the dramatist Byron would allegedly wish to follow. But he also has particular preferences and guiding principles as to his dramatic subject matter:

> I hate things *all fiction* and therefore the *Merchant* and *Othello* have no great associations for me. … There should always be some foundation of fact for the most airy fabric, and pure invention is but the talent of a liar.[25]

'Fact' is something of a moveable feast for Byron, but the desire for 'some foundation' to build his dramas on is important. Where *Manfred* grandly launches into an essentially Byronic fictional world (while drawing on an enormous variety of other texts along the way), the dramas that constitute Byron's 1820-22 dramatic project begin with histories and stories that are not Byron's own. Byron's two Venetian history plays, *Sardanapalus*, *Werner*, *The Deformed Transformed* all represent historical events, though *Werner* takes its plot from Harriet Lee's *Kruitzner, or the German's Tale* (and *The Deformed Transformed* is a meta-historical tour de force), and *Cain* and *Heaven and Earth* act out, even if they also take issue with, well-known versions of human history from Scripture and assorted Apocrypha. In each

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[22] 'As he tells Moore on 5 July, it is his "third tragedy in 12 months"'. Norman Page, *Byron: A Chronology* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1988) p.69.

[23] Byron begins writing on 12 June and sends the MS to Murray on 14 July 1821.

[24] Murray's reservations to publish it mark a rift between the poet and his exclusive publisher to this date. Murray's conservatism (following the public outrage upon his publication of *Cain*) makes Byron change his publishing tactics and take the subsequent cantos of *Don Juan* to Hunt and then to other publishers to produce much cheaper editions that are a huge sale success. *Heaven and Earth* is eventually published by Hunt in the second issue of *The Liberal* in January 1823.

[25] Byron to Murray, 2 April 1817, *BLJ* V, p. 203.

case, however, Byron plays with historical 'fact', the Old Testament or his founding fictional text in ways that produce a kind of drama that becomes an arena for dialectical battle. Indeed, we might say that Byron creates a characteristic 'chaos of dialectical paradox'[26] in these dramas, but dialectic is only part of their larger design. Their 'swift movements from the land of the real to the land of the unreal and back again' are, more than simply dialectic, the 'to-and-fro movement' which Gadamer emphasizes as crucial to and constitutive of play: a 'to-and-fro movement' that 'is not tied to any goal that would bring it to an end', and which sees 'play [a]s the occurrence of the movement as such'.[27] This essential fluidity is very often misunderstood, even by Byronists – ranging through inept irresolution, lack of authorial commitment, arch narrative flippancy, and indiscriminate vagueness resulting from the author's lack of direction, the accusations thrown at Byron's texts in general and the dramas in particular miss what is most original about them, as here: Philip Davis reads Byron as lost in 'swift movements [between actuality and fiction] and back again, till at times he hardly knew one from the other or doubted the difference.'[28] Reasonable as this may sound as a description of one of the impressions that Byron's works might leave their readers with, it does not recognise that this dizziness is an authorial strategy, not intellectual negligence. Indeed, while this in-yer-face nonchalance, perhaps the most controversial trademark of Byron's style and technique, is widely misinterpreted in this way, when contemplated from the vantage point of play theory, the distinction between 'the land of the real and the land of the unreal' this misreading of Byron rests on simply does not hold – and this is precisely the point Byron's dramas are very deliberately making. The genius of Byron's 1820-22 dramas lies in their creating and charting this blurred territory between fact and fiction, which ostensibly boasts the facts yet incorporates them indivisibly into fiction, showing that the so-called 'land of the real' and 'the land of the unreal' are really versions of the same thing: history is a written record, a version or interpretation of the past, not a

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[26] Philip Davis, ''I leave the thing a problem, like all things': Trying to Catch up with Byron', in B. Beatty and V. Newey (eds), *Byron and the Limits of Fiction* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1988), p.259 [pp.242-284].

[27] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. W. Glen Doepel, 2nd revised edition by J. Weinsheimer and D.G. Marshall (New York and London: Continuum, 2011), p. 104. Similarly Wolfgang Iser: 'there is a continual oscillation between denotation and figuration, and between accommodation and assimilation. This oscillation, or to-and-fro movement, is basic to play, and it permits the coexistence of the mutually exclusive. It also turns the texts into a generative matrix for the production of something new.' 'The Play of the Text', in *Prospecting: From Reader Response to Literary Anthropology* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), p.255.

[28] Davis, ''I leave the thing a problem, like all things': Trying to Catch up with Byron', p.259.

catalogue of incontestable facts.[29] History is as fictional as it is factual. And, for Byron, this essential indeterminacy must also extend to the language in which history has its very being – while he is always in control of his rhetoric he is, at the same time, always pointing out the free-wheeling multiplicity of meaning innate to language – and the ostentatious oscillation of meaning that runs through the language of Byron's dramas implies a deep association with the principle of play, an association we will see confirmed again and again in the dramas we will be looking at. It is not only Sardanapalus who leaves the thing 'a problem' (V.i.447)[30] – Byron himself is always at pains to do precisely this in as many ways as he can. In his 1820-22 dramas, perhaps the greatest problem he 'leaves' us with is the very nature of history as both the 'land of the real' and 'the land of the unreal'.

Yet this indeterminacy remains perhaps the most widely misunderstood facet of Byron's style and general approach to poetry – a wisely playful lack of a system. As Byron famously put it himself: 'when a man talks of system, his case is hopeless.'[31] Indeed, as he puts it in *Don Juan*'s satirical feat of 'systemophagy': 'one system eats another up / And this much as old Saturn ate his progeny' – 'But system doth reverse the Titan's breakfast, / And eats her parents' (*DJ* XIV, i-ii). Byron is well aware of the arbitrariness of values and temporariness of all systems, and so he would rather resort to satire than invest in the redeeming power of Romantic metaphysics. Not even at his high-Romantic peak, in *Manfred*, does he endorse a transcendental remedy, but, on the contrary, heralds the limits and inadequacies of all dependencies on metaphysical transcendence. In the end, even the Miltonic echo of the mind in its glorious autonomy and autonomous ethics, is eventually, in *Cain*, taken apart to reveal the adverse side of blind intellectual pursuit and its foundering potential. As we shall see, there is a decidedly 'bleak pessimism'[32] in Byron's dramas. Yet for many readers it seems that 'Byron can only try to suggest order and disorder at the same

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29 As shown by Hayden White's classic study *Metahistory* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979) and collected essays in *Tropics of Discourse* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), where he reveals the structures of historical and fictional writing to be similar. The 'tropes' of discourse 'prefigure the perceptual field' to facilitate sense (*Metahistory*, p.30). The historian, like the author of fiction, deliberately opts for a 'trope' to frame his rendition of the 'facts' into a coherent narrative.

30 In the context of Byron's entire oeuvre, Sardanapalus' grave act of self-immolation and his lofty, solemn address to posterity gains levity through the inter-textual echo of the narrator of *Don Juan* who 'leave[s] the thing a problem, like all things' (*DJ* XVII, xiii). As Davis observes, ''the thing' is typical of Byron's only sketchily ordered language – it is precisely vague, perspicuously opaque, a language at once casually at ease in its own terms yet baffled by the referents of its own meaning. For so often in Byron, the centre of clarity in the language is acutely conscious of itself as not the centre of control as to the meaning of things.' 'I Leave the Thing a Problem, Like All Things', p.274.

31 Letter to Thomas Moore of 1 June 1818, *BLJ* VI, pp. 46-7.

32 Corbett, *Byron and Tragedy*, p.1.

time.'[33] Again, Davis, alongside a host of other critics, misunderstands the implications of Byron's poetic technique – clearly signalling towards the realm of play, Byron's is a playful 'to-and-fro' dynamic that does not simply 'suggest' order and disorder, but constitutes itself out of both. Hinting at the open system of Byron's 'trying to suggest order and disorder at the same time', Davis in fact appears more attentive to the essential ludic nature of Byron's work than most, yet he remains only on the cusp of properly grasping this as a clear indication of Byron's deeply rooted affiliation to play, which is manifest in all aspects of his writing.[34]

It is this affiliation, then, that makes Byron's engagement with history in his 'historical' dramas so rich and complex. Although he calls his Venetian tragedies 'strictly historical', his authorial playfulness makes them a much more interesting combination of historical fact and fiction. For instance, Byron decides (and states so in his preface to the drama), for the sake of keeping to the classical unities of time and action, to have Marino Faliero be presented with the coup, so that it is effectively not of his own making, while historically Faliero was its instigator. This substantially changes matters regarding the issue of Faliero's revolutionary zeal or historical culpability (depending on the political viewpoint of the reader) – making him an honorary guest player in someone else's game, rather than the mastermind of the coup. The neo-classical frame of the drama – the continental, classical form through which Byron seeks to 'reform the English stage'[35] – thus becomes complicit in a playful unleashing of creativity that clashes with, and complicates, the 'strictly historical' project Byron simultaneously vows to adhere to. More importantly, though, this significant act of rewriting on Byron's part points towards precisely the principle of play as we shall come to explore it. As this thesis will argue, play defines Byron's take on history in the dramas he wrote between 1820 and 1822. *Marino Faliero*, for instance, plays the vow to historical truth against the originality of its dramatic composition, starting with the motives of the protagonists. Faliero, for one, has been 'historically' rendered as a stock old jealous man, yet Byron decides not to base his doge on this trait as part of a strategy of

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[33] Davis, ''I leave the thing a problem, like all things': Trying to Catch up with Byron', p.274.

[34] The ludic quality of Byron's poetry in terms of tone was well captured by James Soderholm's article 'Byron's Ludic Lyrics', in *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* 34.4 (Autumn 1994), pp.739-751, and, more recently, David Gabelman's 'Bubbles, Butterflies and Bores: Play and Boredom in *Don Juan*', in *The Byron Journal* 38.2 (2010), pp.145-156. Soderholm praises the 'open-ended', 'antic and antithetical' disposition of Byron's poetry, 'powerfully revising Romantic sentiment and sincerity' (pp.749,750).

[35] Paraphrasing Byron's *Hours of Idleness*, where he beckons Sheridan to write '[o]ne classic drama, and reform the stage' (585).

revealing and playing with the fictionality of all representations of history – offering an alternative rendering of the 'known facts' that supplements, as it were, the official histories with a vindication of the protagonist damned by those official histories as traitor – or as an Epicurean sloth-ridden king in the case of Sardanapalus.[36] Historical facts always come down to us through interpretations, and while Byron's dramas seek to counter and critique official 'history', which 'can only take things in the gross' (*DJ* VIII, iii), his own representations of historical 'truth' are overtly personal, interested – Byronic – simultaneously factual and fictional. Byron's is not an earnest attempt to 'correct' history's mistakes by establishing the 'truth', but a playful personal reflection on 'the fluidity of the historical universe of his time', interrogating 'the facts' but also the work of 'positivist approaches to history',[37] revealing but also exemplifying the unavoidable bias of 'History's purchased page' (*DJ* III, xlviii).

So Carla Pomarè, in her recent study of Byron, is absolutely right to argue that the historical documents that Byron supplies in his appendices and notes to his dramas –'his paratexts' in Pomarè's terminology – 'ultimately question' not only 'the stability of historical discourse' but also the 'self-sufficient nature' of Byron's own dramas.[38] Pomarè here helps us to no longer see Byron's dramas as part of a puzzle of meaning dependent on the supplement of the historical appendices. Rather than complementing the ultimate 'truth' of the drama, Byron's appendices, by showing the contingency of the historical record, effectively render the dramas as texts 'not permit[ting] any comparison with reality as the secret measure of verisimilitude'. Those texts are, instead, 'raised above all such comparisons – and hence also above the question of whether it is all real – because a superior truth speaks from [them].'[39] To put this another way, Byron's dramatic strategy is what Gadamer terms 'the joy of knowledge' – Byron's 'transformation' of history into dramatic 'structure' is a 'transformation into the true'.[40] Yet the 'true' here is not some sort of higher historical, psychological, moral or philosophical 'truth' – the 'superior truth' of Byron's

[36] As Philip Shaw observes, Byron 'disrupts the smug luminescence of historical totality', so that 'the suppressed past may be allowed to speak.' 'Lord Byron's War with Posterity', in *Waterloo and the Romantic Imagination* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), p.181.

[37] Pomarè, *Byron and the Discourses of History*, pp.4-5. For a detailed list of Byron's reading of historical sources, see Pomarè, 'Byron in the Historical Department', in *Byron and the Discourses of History*, pp. 9-12.

[38] Pomarè, *Byron and the Discourses of History*, p.99.

[39] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p.112.

[40] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p.112.

dramas is the 'indissoluble ambiguity' of 'artistic play'.[41] This 'indissoluble ambiguity' is the paradox at the heart of Byron's writing, and the theory of play proves unprecedentedly congenial to Byron for this reason more than any other, able to help us trace the intricacy of his work in all its glory. Throughout his 1820-22 dramatic project, Byron, crucially, plays with history in order to get as close as possible to the truth of history – and this essentially ludic technique, along with its implications and subversive potential, is the focus of our study.

It will begin with *Marino Faliero*, the aims of which are summarized by Byron in a letter to Murray as follows: 'My object has been to dramatise, like the Greeks (a modest phrase), striking passages of history, as they did of history and mythology. You will find all this very unlike Shakespeare'.[42] In his all-important preface to *Marino Faliero*, he concludes: 'Whether I have succeeded or not in the tragedy, I have at least transferred into our language a historical fact worthy of commemoration.'[43] From this tragedy, we will follow Byron's dramatization and commemoration of 'striking passages' of European, Middle-Eastern and biblical history, by means of their transference into new, highly literary texts, through to *The Deformed Transformed*, Byron's last dramatic experiment, in which

> [t]he tragic and the ironic give way to a new value, that of humour. For if irony is the co-extensiveness of being with the individual, or of the I with representation, humour is the co-extensiveness of sense with nonsense; humour is the art of surfaces and doubles, of nomad singularities, and of an always displaced aleatory point.[44]

As we move through these plays, we will be watching, in Deleuze's terms, the trademark 'co-extensiveness' of Byron's shift from the tragic and ironic, fully explored in *Childe Harold*, the Venetian dramas and *Sardanapalus*, to the explosiveness of 'vivacious versatility' (*DJ* XIII, xcvii) we find in both *Don Juan* and the equally charged, subversive spiel of *The Deformed Transformed*. We will see how Byron's drama 'calls attention to a hidden constellation of forces' through which history 'proceeds [...] to gather up the odd

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[41] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 454.

[42] Letter to Murray of July 14 1821, *BLJ* VIII, p.151.

[43] Preface to *Marino Faliero*, *CPW* IV, p.303.

[44] Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, trans. Mark Lester and Charles Stivale, ed. Constantin V. Boundas, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), p.141.

and the disparate'[45] – how, to put this another way, in the Byronic universe, history and play are indivisibly intertwined.

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The study of Byron's dramas that follows is divided into five chapters. These five chapters trace the steadily discernible development of Byron's extended dramatic experimentation – starting from the neo-classical historical dramas, via his experimental recasting of the biblical mystery plays, and of tragedy as such, to the culmination of Byron's experiment with drama in his last unfinished dramatic piece. The sequence of our study gleans from Byron's dramatic oeuvre the tentative but progressive movement towards what we will call 'free play', tracing its ultimate liberation from the constraints of the 'instrumental', motivated 'play' of both literary genre and history, which each seek to limit ludic potential and contain 'free play' within strict ordering frameworks. The limits imposed by the 'instrumental play' of genre and history are, as we shall see, gradually and increasingly tested and finally transcended in Byron's last three dramas to allow for an unprecedented experimental unleashing of 'free play', which manifests itself in a range of formal, discursive and thematic transgressions.

Two points should be made clear at this stage. One, this study begins with *Marino Faliero*, thus omitting the first and perhaps the most famous and widely influential of Byron's dramas, *Manfred*. This omission is necessary in order to sustain the tight focus of this study, namely Byron's treatment and exploration of play, history and the telling of history in the dramatic experimentation he sustained from 1820 to 1822.[46] The second point is closely related to the first. This study discusses Byron's two biblical dramas, which are not concerned with history *per se*. This is justifiable for a number of reasons, however, the chief of which is, firstly, that Byron's dramatic treatment of the Bible is analogous, if not entirely identical, to his treatment of historical sources because, secondly, Byron's approach to historical sources blurs their difference from other kinds of texts, including the Bible and fiction. Historical and biblical texts are here both perceived as accounts of humanity's past that exert authority – but do not represent 'truth' – through various rhetorical and

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[45] J.J. McGann, 'Literature and the Critique of History', in *The Beauty of Inflections* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), p.269.

[46] Needless to say, *Manfred* represents, the focus of history aside, a play-text along different lines of analysis, and will provide the meat for future study.

interpretative strategies and through their historical reception and reinterpretation. In both cases, Byron goes on to push against and experiment with these authoritative, 'authorized' readings of the past in various ways, revealing in his wake the bias and partiality – as well as the striking literariness – of both kinds of traditionally authoritative texts.

That said, one of the aims of this study is to demonstrate the extent to which, read together, the seven dramas discussed in this study, written in a nigh-continuous stint of just two years, manifestly represent a fascinating, and in some ways self-contained, universe of thematic and conceptual cross-pollination and progressive experimental development. These dramas clearly mark Byron as a major figure of early nineteenth-century English drama, as Corbett has previously argued in his comprehensive 1988 study *Byron and Tragedy*.[47] Each stands up, despite previous critical neglect, as a highly original work in its own right. But together, as this study seeks to show, they represent a sustained and profound meditation on history, literature, the theatricality of both, and the fundamental role of play in all of these things. Our focus on play, with the help of Iser's methodology of play, will also uncover a number of other previously overlooked or misinterpreted facets of these works, and thereby, I hope, go some way to explaining why Byron (but relatively few people at the time or since) rated them so highly.

The first two chapters address Byron's neo-classical triptych of historical dramas. Chapter One, 'Venice Replayed: *Marino Faliero* and *The Two Foscari*', shows what we will define as the 'instrumental play' – the motivated game-playing – of the Venetian historical record opposing the competing counter-currents at play in historical events themselves as these unfold. Literary genre (tragedy) also comes under scrutiny here, and will repeatedly do so in Byron's other dramas, as another way of telling history that brings with it its own 'instrumental play' which, like all other ways of telling history, works to contain and order the 'free play' of the forces that drive the events of history forward. The counter-currents that work against both official history and literary genre are foregrounded by Byron's alternative rendition of the official histories of both Faliero and the father and son Foscari, as this rendition works to expose and subvert the limitations imposed on the play of those counter-currents by received historical tradition. Byron wields dramatic and historical irony

[47] 'Each of those dramatic works has a serious intellectual content, shows considerable formal accomplishment and has a decided innovatory tendency.' Summing up the stage history of 'four of these works' and the unique nineteenth-century success of *Werner*, Corbett argues that all these 'circumstances suggest that Byron, if not a major dramatist, should rank in critical opinion with other important dramatists: with Webster, or Marlowe, or Dryden himself.' *Byron and Tragedy*, xi.

in *Marino Faliero* to problematize official Venetian history, and challenges it further by his unflinching critique of corrupt state power in *The Two Foscari*, bearing witness as he does so to the literariness of history and the historicity of literature, as well as the ironic ways in which history itself subverts the incontestability of established historical 'fact'. In *Marino Faliero*, Byron represents Venetian history as ultimately carnivalesque, combining this very Venetian phenomenon with his own, textual carnivalizing techniques to present us with a world made up of – but also determined to contain within strict limits – inversions, subversions and masks. In *The Two Foscari*, the representation of Venice is darker and grotesque, rather than carnivalesque, as la Serenissima is revealed to be under the direction of a single corrupt puppeteer, rendering the city a grotesque puppet theatre in which the subversive forces at play within historical events are held in check by a tragic, will-driven scheme of revenge. Byron's Venetian dramas see the contradictory, contingent and subversive forces at play in the moment-by-moment unfolding of history as increasingly contained and frustrated by a Venetian state first understood in terms of its own *carnivale*, and then in the terms of what we might call the Romantic grotesque.

The themes of carnival and the grotesque are also a crucial element of Byron's other neo-classical historical tragedy, *Sardanapalus*, further developing Byron's critique of the power structures of the state and their containment of the multiple, contradictory and conflictual forces at play within historical events. In Chapter Two, '*Sardanapalus*: Playing Against History', we shall analyse Byron's intricate critique of heroism, which suggests heroism is the 'instrumental' mechanism by which all political systems throughout human history channel, and so control, the 'free play' of the forces that drive history from within, linking the drama to the thematic universe of *Don Juan*, as well as anticipating Byron's satire of heroism in *The Deformed Transformed*. Heroism is undermined as corrupt, facilitating the oppression it purports to fight, and Byron's Assyrian drama suggests that its critique of the state's grotesque workings has implications for history at large – that this is a case study, not a one-off. Byron dramatizes the clash between the code of empire and Sardanapalus' pacifist carnival rule, playing with and against the strategies of history-making. Equally, as in the Venetian dramas, the play of historical contingency and contradiction in *Sardanapalus* is ultimately held in check by the 'instrumental play' of tragedy, though the historical image of the eponymous king is simultaneously challenged by Byron's rendition of his story. Together, Byron's three 'strictly' historical dramas convey

the author's ideas about the nature of history, the representation of history, and the forces at play, but also held back, therein.

Chapter Three, '*Cain* and *Heaven and Earth*: Playing the Bible', transports us from Byron's engagement with 'actual' history to his treatment of biblical 'history'. As in Byron's historical dramas, the play of subversive historical forces is ultimately limited by 'instrumental play' in *Cain*. Byron also experiments with dramatic form here – in *Cain*, 'instrumental', motivated game-playing pushes biblical narrative into tragedy. In Byron's second biblical piece, *Heaven and Earth*, however, we will see, for the very first time in our study, an element of pure 'free play' escaping the limits imposed upon it by the instrumental game-playing of both genre and doctrine. Making use of the naturalist theories of Cuvier that were famous in his time, and of the agonistic rhetoric of defiance made famous by the Byronic Hero, Byron supplements and complicates the discursive universe of the Book of Genesis, letting 'free play' spill out beyond the limits set for it by Scripture. Whereas in *Cain* Byron dramatizes Lucifer's trickery as systematically seeking to render all existence an endless battle between himself and God, but remaining for the most part within the doctrinal limits set by Scripture, *Heaven and Earth* dramatizes the destruction of the Deluge, but, crucially, playfully breaks free of both its biblical source and tragedy, marking a turning point in Byron's dramatic project that sees 'free play' win itself a degree of freedom. Byron's second biblical drama also alludes to, but ultimately also transcends, the apocryphal *Book of Enoch*. Despite its experimental potential and the unleashing of a strand of 'free play', the drama retains some orthodox elements, but Byron's canny portrayal of Japhet, the son of Noah predestined to salvation, stages the ultimate violence of the Deluge, interrogating the justice of divine decree, and with it Christian doctrine as such. Read together, Byron's biblical dramas are staggeringly – and playfully – poised between orthodoxy and unorthodoxy.

Chapter Four, entitled '*Werner*: Playing with Tragedy', sees another decisive step forward in the development of Byron's dramas. From the unity-observing historical tragedies testing the substance of historical fact, through the biblical dramas where Byron plays with dramatic form and Scripture in various ways, *Werner* marks the point at which Byron comes to focus particularly on, and fundamentally undermine, the limits imposed on the playful forces that drive history per se by tragic renditions of historical conflict – playfully sidestepping tragedy's element of moral justice. But in *Werner* we also see Byron's interest in history decisively turn to the question of all-out war. *Werner* presents history,

exemplified by the Thirty Years' War, as defined by violent conflict. Simultaneously, Byron comes to see this violent conflict as itself a form of play, and one which is potentially freer than the peace achieved by the games of state power. Yet *Werner* also blurs the distinction between war and peace, suggesting that both are defined by the same play of impulses. *Werner* ultimately bears witness to the elemental free-for-all suggested by the concept of *polemos*, and moves towards an understanding of all history as based on this.

Finally, in Chapter Five, '*The Deformed Transformed* and the Bloody Circus of History', whose title speaks for itself, we shall discuss the ways in which Byron's last, unfinished dramatic piece sees history as a play of forces decidedly less 'instrumentally', and decidedly less restrained by instrumentality, than in any of the previous dramas in our study, and so represents the culmination of Byron's 1820-22 dramatic project and its scrutiny of the workings of history and its representation. Here the evil puppeteer of the Romantic grotesque reappears in the guise of the Stranger, a mischievous cosmic power, whose implacable commentary reveals history to be a self-perpetuating cycle of violence, as well as hinting at the larger forces of the ever-changing cosmos, whose sole law is that of perpetual, meaningless change. On the textual and discursive level of Byron's last drama, the largely random, but always violent, play of history ultimately destabilizes, subverts – indeed outstrips – all ideals and values, as well as the literary genres used to preserve, assert and impose these. In the end, Byron's dramatic project of 1820-22 sees history as the pure, directionless, motiveless, and unrelentingly violent play of forces that have no meaning or purpose beyond their own perpetuation, and begins to construct a dramatic form that might represent, without limiting, this history 'in the raw'.

Having summarized the implications arising from our study of Byron's later dramas, pointing out the significant ways in which they relate to the rest of Byron's oeuvre (not least his most famous works, *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* and *Don Juan*) we will, I hope, have established the centrality of those dramas to Byron's thinking about history. Before we embark on the study proper, however, we need to specify what we mean by 'play' in Byron's dramas. So far we have only touched on this issue. We now need to lay out the theoretical basis, and methodology, of the approach we will be bringing to it.

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A Note on Methodology

This study's use of the term 'play' is based on the typology of play formulated by Roger Caillois in *Man, Play and Games*[48] and adapted for use in literary studies by Wolfgang Iser. Caillois identified four basic categories of play: *alea* (chance), *agon* (competition, struggle), *mimicry* (the play of masks) and *ilinx* (vertigo, destabilisation of the mind).[49] These can in turn form various combinations and alignments, or stand in contrast to one another, creating a complex and fluid dynamics of conflicting forces, paradoxes and power paradigms. In Caillois' framework, the four basic categories of *agon*, *alea*, *mimicry* and *ilinx* are locked in a fluid continuum of play ranging from *ludus* (the orderly sphere of play subject to clearly defined rules and regulations) to *paidia* (the extreme opposite of *ludus*, a domain of free play where primeval energies abound, unconstrained by rules). On this anthropological spectrum, *ludus* and *paidia* correspond to Iser's concepts of 'regulative' and 'aleatory' rules, or 'instrumental play' and 'free play'.[50] In *The Fictive and the Imaginary*, Iser identifies play in literature as the dynamic 'contraflow of free and instrumental play',[51] where instrumental 'play strives for a result and free play breaks up any result achieved'.[52] 'Instrumental play' functions as 'a recuperation of what free play disperses'.[53]

For Iser, the four categories of play become 'strategies of play' – they 'generally mix' in literature and thus represent 'the constitutive elements of a text game'.[54] He defines the

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[48] Caillois, *Les jeux et les hommes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1958); first published in English by the Free Press in New York in 1961.

[49] Caillois's categories are culture-based and game-oriented and represent 'attitudes' which 'incorporate anthropological dispositions'. Wolfgang Iser, *The Fictive and the Imaginary* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), p.259. As Iser notes, 'the mixture of Greek and Latin terms may be jarring, but the expressions have become standard terms in game theory since Caillois.' *Prospecting*, p.255.

[50] Iser, *Prospecting*, p.257.

[51] Iser, *The Fictive and the Imaginary*, p.247.

[52] Iser, *Prospecting*, p.257.

[53] Iser, *The Fictive and the Imaginary*, xviii.

[54] Iser, *The Fictive and the Imaginary*, p.263.

four strategies of play as follows: *agon* 'is undoubtedly one of the basic games'[55] – it 'has to be played towards a result'[56] and marks 'a fight or a contest'.[57] *Alea* 'is a pattern of play based on change and the unforeseeable'[58] – when given the upper hand, it aims to 'intensify difference' and 'reduces all play to mere chance'.[59] *Mimicry* 'aims to make difference disappear' and signifies 'illusion' as well as 'transmogrification' and 'imitation'.[60] The fourth and last of Iser's play strategies – *ilinx* – marks his most notable literary recasting of Caillois' vertigo-inducing play activity, investing this subversive play strategy with 'an anarchic tendency', identifying it with 'the Fool figure' and 'carnivalization'; its potential rests in subverting given structures, and it represents 'free play at its most expansive'.[61]

While Iser's typology of play presented in *Prospecting* and developed in *The Fictive and the Imaginary* draws on Caillois' classic 1958 treatise on play, Caillois himself draws on his predecessor, Johan Huizinga, and his pioneering 1938 study *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture*.[62] But the theory of play is a vast discipline, whose roots reach back to the cradle of Western culture and the philosophy of ancient Greece.[63] From Heraclitus and Plato the philosophy of play branched out across the ages, in various foci, resurfacing in Byron's own time in Schiller's utopian aesthetic state governed by the *Spieltrieb*,[64] to then reappear in the chance-affirming, anti-authoritative and relativistic

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55 Though, as Iser points out, 'not the be-all and end-all that Huizinga …considere[d] it to be.' *The Fictive and the Imaginary*, p.260.

56 Iser, *The Fictive and the Imaginary*, p.260.

57 Iser, *Prospecting*, p.256.

58 Iser, *Prospecting*, p.256.

59 Iser, *The Fictive and the Imaginary*, p.261.

60 Iser, *The Fictive and the Imaginary*, p.262.

61 Iser, *The Fictive and the Imaginary*, p.262.

62 The treatise was first published in German in Switzerland in 1944, the first English edition appeared five years later, in 1949 (published by Routledge and Kegan Paul); the edition we shall be citing was reprinted by Paladin in 1970, with a foreword by George Steiner.

63 For a brief introductory review of the theory of play, see Sura P. Rath, 'Game, Play, Literature: An Introduction', in *The South Central Review* 3.4 (Winter 1986), pp.1-4.

64 Friedrich Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man in a Series of Letters*, trans. and ed. E.M. Wilkinson and L.A. Willoughby (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985). The play drive, Schiller's *Spieltrieb*, is crucial to any creative process and lies at the heart of aesthetics. In Schiller's theory of the ideal of an aesthetic state, where the strife towards a being-in-aesthetics will facilitate a harmonious, enlightened and efficient existence, the play-drive induces a perpetual creative educational dynamic that will prove a civilizing force worthy of its name – civilizing in terms of perfecting its citizenry, which again consists of a democratic spectrum of professions and occupations, not an ivory tower of a learned few. The intertwined force-fields of ethics and aesthetics reach their climactic equilibrium in Schiller's vision of an ideal aesthetic state. As Schiller asserts, 'man only plays when he is in the fullest sense of the word a human being, and he is only fully a human being when he plays.' 'Fifteenth Letter', p.107.

philosophy of Nietzsche, in Gadamer's aesthetic theory,[65] in post-structuralism's preoccupation with the innate play of language and the contingency of structures, as explored, for instance, by Derrida,[66] and in the dice-throw and 'ideal game'[67] of Deleuze.[68] Recent years have seen renewed interest in the theory of play, manifest, for instance, in the 2009 special issue of *New Literary History* devoted to play.[69] While this study will consult many of these seminal play theorists, its core, however, is primarily structured by Iser's quartet of play strategies.

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[65] As Gadamer observes, when 'we speak of play in reference to the experience of art, this means neither the orientation nor even the state of mind of the creator or of those enjoying the work of art, nor the freedom of a subjectivity engaged in play, but the mode of being of the work of art itself.' Crucial to play is also 'the spontaneous tendency to repetition' and 'self-renewal which affects its form'. The 'medial sense of play' is the 'model for art. Thus Friedrich Schlegel writes, "All the sacred games of art are only remote imitations of the infinite play of the world, the eternally self-creating work of art"'. Gadamer emphasizes that 'all playing is a being-played'. *Truth and Method*, pp. 102, 105 and 106.

[66] Beginning with Derrida's seminal critique of structuralism 'Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of Human Sciences', given at a conference at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore in 1966, published in *Writing and Difference* a year later. Play, for Derrida, 'is the disruption of presence' and it means playing 'without security,' essentially 'groundless', while traditionally, play had been suppressed by 'signifiers' relating to 'the transcendental signified' in the form of arché, God or transcendental reason, for instance, revealing structurality to be essentially repetition. Derrida's approach to play heralds the absence of the center: the 'sign which replaces the center, which supplements it, taking the center's place in its absence – this sign is added, it occurs as a surplus, as a supplement.' 'Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of Human Sciences', in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978), pp. 280, 292, 293 and 289 [pp.278-93].

[67] Deleuze, 'The Tenth Series: Ideal Game': 'only thought finds it possible *to affirm all chance and to make chance into an object of affirmation.* If one tries to play this game other than in thought, nothing happens; and if one tries to produce a result other than the work of art, nothing is produced. This game is reserved then for thought and art. In it there is nothing but victories for those who know how to play, that is, how to affirm and ramify chance, instead of dividing it *in order to* dominate it, *in order to* wager, *in order to* win. This game, which can only exist in thought and which has no other result than the work of art, is also that by which thought and art are real and disturbing reality, morality and the economy of the world.' *Logic of Sense*, p.71. Deleuze's seminal study *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006) is also a case in point for our study.

[68] Both Huizinga and Caillois' approaches to play are anchored first and foremost in anthropology and cultural studies. This strand of play theory, beginning with Jacques Ehrmann's 1968 overview and critique of both Huizinga and Caillois in the special issue of *Yale French Studies* 40 (1968) entitled *Game, Play, Literature*, was later summarized in Robert Anchor's lucidly comprehensive contribution 'History and Play: Huizinga and his Critics', in *History and Theory* 17.1 (February 1978), p.63-93, where he pinpoints the problems of Huizinga's and Caillois' theory of play (i.e. the insistence a given reality, which play stays out of the bounds of, occupying an autonomous space uncorrupted by 'reality' – as Anchor rightly points out, this obscured 'the fact that the problem of reality and the problem of play are one and the same', [p.90]), usefully summing up Ehrmann's points in a wider critical perspective. See also Adorno's brief critique of play in Schiller and Huizinga, 'Paralipomena', in *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. and ed. R. Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis, MN: Minnesota University Press, 1997), pp.317-19. Recently, this strand of play theory produced works such as Brian Sutton-Smith's *The Ambiguity of Play* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), oriented at anthropology, cognitive psychology and cultural studies.

[69] *NLH* 40.1 (Winter 2009). See also Aleida Assmann's article 'No Importance in Being Earnest? Literary Theory as Play Theory', in H. Grabes (ed.), *Yearbook of Research in English and American Literature* 13 (1997), pp. 175-184.

Indeed, it is a great pity, to my mind, that Iser's framework of play strategies has not been used more widely by literary scholars.[70] The most recent addition to the library on the theory of play, the 2013 collection of essays entitled *The Philosophy of Play* published by Routledge, contains not a single note on Iser's work on play in literature.[71] It is therefore something of a privilege for this study to recover Iser's highly lucid methodological framework for literary play, and to show how it can prove extremely useful for the analysis of literary texts in general and for the study of Byron in particular – a poet whose trademark playfulness pervades his entire method and style but whose playfulness is often taken for little more than authorial negligence or a lack of intellectual rigour. Set against the fireworks of wit that is *Don Juan*, Byron's dramas have also been read as rather serious, stern and static, even if, at their best, they are sometimes seen as petri dishes for experimenting with themes and ideas that Byron would then feed into his satirical *magnum opus*.[72] This study, using Iser's methodology of play to elucidate the heretofore undiscovered dynamics of Byron's dramas, sets out to rectify these long-ingrained misapprehensions. By doing so, it also hopes to make a case for the wider employment of Iser's methodology of play in literary studies.

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[70] A blatant example is Joseph J. Feeney's book on *The Playfulness of Gerard Manley Hopkins* (Aldeshot: Ashgate, 2008), which goes back to Huizinga and Caillois to posit its own theory of 'literary play' without ever mentioning Iser at all. The two recent book-length studies perusing the theory of play adapted by Iser are either in the area of literary theory (e.g. Paul B. Armstrong, *Play and the Politics of Reading: The Social Uses of Modernist Form* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005)) or experimental literature: Kimberley Bohman-Kalaja: *Reading Games: An Aesthetics of Play in O'Brien, Beckett and Perec* (Chicago, IL: Dalkey Archive Press, 2007).

[71] Emily Ryall, Wendy Russell and Malcolm Maclean (eds), *The Philosophy of Play* (London and New York: Routledge, 2013).

[72] As Carla Pomarè observes: '[s]ignificantly enough, Byron interrupted the composition of *[Don Juan*] in mid-1821 (after writing the first five cantos) to resume it again only in early 1822, when his experiments with drama were over. … [Critics have seen] in the plays, and particularly in the historical trilogy … a laboratory where Byron experimented with themes and modes of writing which would become typical of the longer poem. Indeed, the historical tragedies, with their heavy reliance on documentary material, might be seen as providing Byron with a working model for the development of *Don Juan*'. *Byron and the Discourses of History*, pp.98-9.

CHAPTER 1

Venice Replayed

Marino Faliero and *The Two Foscari*

This chapter sees free play, as we have defined it in the introduction, held within the confines of both genre – tragedy – and written history – here the official historical accounts of Marino Faliero and the Foscari. While the confines of official Venetian history are pushed against by Byron's canny use of dramatic and historical irony in *Marino Faliero*, and challenged in his portrayal of the grotesque state power in *The Two Foscari*, these dramas remain 'historical tragedies'[1] – true to both dramatic convention and the historical record. However, these two dramas, fundamentally concerned with the nature of tragedy and history as modes of transmitting events, and especially their ability to limit the play of *mimicry*, *ilinx*, *agon* and *alea* within those events, show both to rely on the very strategies of play they contain *for* that containment. For Byron, written history and genre are opposed to the free play of 'History', yet characterized by the set games of 'instrumental' play. Byron's dramas show the historical record and literary genre ultimately working to limit the play in the events they confront, but it is with their ironic deployment of the very forces of play they contain that Byron's Venetian dramas are most deeply concerned. On multiple levels, play defines both historical record and literary genre for Byron in these dramas, and in ways that are deeply problematic for a dramatic project that seeks to break free from the limitations of both history and literature. In *Marino Faliero*, the prevalent strategies of play are *mimicry* and *ilinx*, the two components of carnival. Necessarily combined with *agon*, they drive the rebellion. *Alea* – the force of fate and hence of tragedy – works against these, and ultimately Faliero's coup fails. Tragedy fulfils itself. The coup also fails in accordance with the historical annals. History and tragedy conspire against and defeat the play of mimicry, *ilinx* and *agon* – by deploying these same play strategies. In *The Two Foscari*, the events are contained by the chief puppet master, Loredano, as he writes and respectively closes the

[1] As we have specified in the introduction, though Byron attends studiously to his history books and prides himself on the fact, making sure his diligent historical research for the dramas is well advertised both in the preface and in the notes and appendices, the historical tragedies, and *Marino Faliero* in particular, are not 'strictly historical', as in order to keep to the unities of time and action, Byron decides to make the rebellion a fait accompli when it is presented to the doge (while historically, the doge was the instigator of the coup).

history of the two trapped Foscari. Venice here becomes a grotesque puppet theatre where the puppeteer rules all. *Alea* and *ilinx* are both subdued and wielded by the evil puppeteer, who himself takes on the role of fate (*alea*) in traditional tragedy, taming *ilinx*, the carnival element of topsyturvydom, through a grotesque execution of the tragic economy of revenge. The play is thus signalling towards the theatre of the absurd, as well as towards a Kafkaesque universe of the inscrutable forces of the law – but, once again, history and genre tame the chaos of free play with their own deployment of play strategies. Byron's Venetian diptych presents a journey through a particular local history that moves from the carnivalesque to the grotesque – a trend which is also the driving force of Byron's third neo-classical historical tragedy, *Sardanapalus* – with profound implications for our understanding of Byron's ideas about the nature of, and the forces ruling, history.

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Byron's two Venetian plays mark the beginning of his writing a new kind of drama in Italy[2] and represent the stylistically pure core of his neo-classical dramatic project. As stated in the preface to *Marino Faliero*, Byron's aim in writing these plays was nothing short of reforming the English stage. Dubious though this typically arrogant gesture may seem, it points towards a deeper involvement and engagement with the dramatic form and its alternative history on the continent – to an attempt to experiment with dramatic forms and traditions native to Italy and with continental theatrical traditions more generally.[3] Equally, these plays are Byron's first on historical subjects, and it is the singularity of these two histories of the Venetian dukedom, that of Marino Faliero and that of the two Foscari, that excites and intrigues Byron, and inspires his studious efforts to dramatize them. Together with *Sardanapalus,* the Venetian plays represent a sustained attempt to explore the possibilities of an alternative dramatic style that brings together tragedy and the historical record as modes of writing down history in the broadest sense – what happened. Most importantly, in these 'historical tragedies' Byron seeks to script the erasures of official history, to reinstate and dramatize the possible histories that might have led to the events incompletely, or even misleadingly, recorded in the official annals. These dramas, then,

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[2] Byron rewrote the third act of *Manfred* in Italy, in Rome in April-May 1817. See Peter Cochran, '"A Higher and More Extended Comprehension": Byron's Three Weeks in Rome', *Keats-Shelley Review* 15 (2001): pp.49-63; he started working on *Marino Faliero* in April 1820.

[3] Murray to Byron, 27 March 1821: Murray writes that Gifford enthusiastically remarked on the 'unrivalled purity of the Blank Verse of this tragedy', meaning *Marino Faliero*. The MS of the letter is cited in Jane Stabler, *Byron, Poetics and History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p.95.

construct a dramatic form that offers an arena for the play of competing historical traces, of competing historical voices, for challenges to historical erasures, for rewritings of history, even within the bounds of 'fact' handed down by historical sources. Yet the dramas also stay bound to, and by, the tragic conventions and historical events they bring together. It is in this dynamic paradox that the dramas have their most 'dramatic' life.

Historical ventriloquism, as a means of discussing, or justifying, the wrongs, and re-writing the erasures of history is hardly a literary strategy discovered by Byron, but it is one of his favourite historical modes:

> In Sicily in 1249, Pietro della Vigna, Frederick II's chancellor, fell into disfavour, was blinded and thrown into prison where he committed suicide – his poignant vindication appears in Canto VIII of the *Inferno* written around 1310 where imprisonment, torture and justice are of course some of the principal themes.[4]

It nevertheless remains a fact that the annals of history are written by the victors and tend to marginalize, downright ignore or actively seek to destroy the stories of the vanquished. Byron's method of writing history is to imagine himself into the background of the *grand récit* and present a personalized, often synchronic, polyvalent picture of events. To put this another way, his aim is to write the unwritten. Reaching for histories that lie beyond History, his not so 'strictly historical' Venetian tragedies also reach for genres of writing that lie beyond the literary.[5] A variety of marginalia – graffiti (Steno's ribald jest defacing Faliero's ducal throne, and the scribbles Jacopo Foscari finds on his prison wall) and personal books of accounts (Loredano's fateful tablets in *The Two Foscari*) frame and fuel Byron's dramatic plots. These marginal genres of recording, and accounting for, history bear testimony to histories erased from the grand narrative of the *Serenissima*, and in these two dramas Byron is imagining himself into the unwritten story of the losers and reasserting their contribution to history by writing the unwritten background behind the two most singular events in the history of the Venetian republic which culminated in unprecedented constitutional crises – the rebellion and subsequent decapitation of one doge and the deposition of another. Yet he simultaneously remains tied to, and by, the historical record. Byron makes space within the literary for non-literary genres, and space within the historical for the non-historical – by

4 David Rothman and Norval Morris (eds), *The Oxford History of the Prison: The Practice of Punishment in Western Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 39.

5 *BLJ* VII, p. 168.

centring his historical Venetian dramas not just on the margins of history, but also on the margins of historical and literary writing. But in these two dramas, these spaces remain contained within the larger orders of tragedy and history, never, in the end, overwhelming these.

The implications of these reassertions of History's erasures, the dramatic use of these marginal genres, and the overall extent to which Venetian history is being uncovered, challenged or played within the dramas – the play of the written against the unwritten, and vice versa, and of the transgressions of the marginal against the partial conventions and biased conclusions of official historical records – relate directly to the effect these particular historical erasures have on the dramas' rendering of the ethics (or lack thereof) of the official Venetian annals. But I am also interested in the ways in which such erasures from the record figure in Byron's attitude towards, and treatment of, historiography and history in general. What does history mean for Byron, and what roles does 'play' have in it?

In a symptomatically Byronic manner, combining in a fluid perspective the past histories and – in prophetic mode – the contemporary present of a particular historical spot, the play element in the Venetian dramas revolves around the carnivalization of History. As we shall see, this carnivalization occurs on a number of levels – thematic, dramatic, discursive. While *Marino Faliero* depicts the infamous story of the Venetian rebel-doge as a sinister carnival performance played out against the background of the traditional Venetian *carnivale*, in *The Two Foscari*, Byron presents us with an alarming portrait of history as the grotesque fulfilment of a personal vendetta – a puppet show conducted by one of the Venetian *eminences grises* based on the malevolent economy of revenge. In both instances, strategies of play define both the action and the outcome of the drama. History and drama are, for Byron, fundamentally concerned with play.

This, of course, has not been the view of the many previous studies of Byron's Venetian dramas, which on the one hand reveal the depth of Byron's fascination and engagement with the particular details of Venetian history, and on the other show the increasing cynicism of his portrayal of the unforgiving scrutiny of the shameless machinery and biased politics of state power. Besides obviously depicting and playing on the convoluted intricacies of mediaeval and early Renaissance Venetian politics, these dramas also clearly resonate with the contemporary scene of politics – British and continental – of

Byron's time,[6] as has been demonstrated by a plethora of critical responses to *Marino Faliero* and *The Two Foscari*, ranging from Malcolm Kelsall's influential *Byron's Politics*[7] to the 2011 edition of essays *Byron and the Politics of Freedom and Terror*,[8] which add additional extra-textual levels to the meanings, and their various possible constructions, of the dramas. However, while this particular strand of the New Historicist critical approach, contextualizing the contemporary history of the works' production and its various political implications, has proved productive and elucidating in various ways, it has, in my opinion, somewhat marginalized the energetic intricacies and intra-textual resonances of the dramatic texts themselves, as well as of their understanding of history-writing and tragedy as modes of engaging with history *per se*, rather than particular histories.[9] I suggest that we can begin to bring these more fully into view by focusing primarily, if not exclusively, on the dynamic interaction of the four categories of play – *agon* ,*alea*, mimicry and *ilinx* – with which this thesis is concerned, as these assert themselves in Byron's 'historical' Venetian 'tragedies'.

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6 The interconnectedness of Venice and regency England for Byron in a political sense is pointed out, for instance, at the beginning of the fourth canto of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*: 'Albion … in the fall / Of Venice, think of thine despite thy watery wall' (*CHP* IV, xvii). As A.A. Schmidt remarks, 'The plays' social and political elements call to mind contemporary Italian and British politics, while the psychological elements explore the individual's role in determining historical action'. 'Crimes and Punishments: The Myth of Venice', in *Byron and the Rhetoric of Italian Nationalism* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p.99.

7 See Kelsall, 'Venice Preserved', in R. Gleckner and B. Beatty (eds), *The Plays of Lord Byron*, pp.33-67. Other notable essays include Caroline Franklin ''My Hope Was To Bring Forth Heroes': *The Two Foscari* and the Fostering of Masculine Virtu' in R. Gleckner and B. Beatty (eds), *The Plays of Lord Byron*, pp.163-180; Alan Rawes, '*Marino Faliero*: Escaping the Aristocratic', in B. Beatty, T. Howe and Ch. Robinson (eds), *Liberty and Poetic Licence: New Essays on Byron* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2008), pp.88-102.

8 Matthew J. A. Green and Piya Pal-Lapinski (eds), *Byron and the Politics of Freedom and Terror* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011) – this volume marks a strong renewed interest in Byron's dramas in general, and contains the following studies relevant for this chapter: Jane Stabler's '"Awake to Terror": The Impact of Italy on Byron's Depiction of Freedom's Battles', pp.64-83 and Joshua D. Gonsalves's reading of the Venetian plays in light of the French Revolution 'Byron's Venetian Masque of the French Revolution: Sovereignty, Terror, and the Geopolitics of *Marino Faliero* and *The Two Foscari*', pp. 47-63; and to a lesser extent Ian Dennis's '"Like the Sheeted Fire From Heaven": Transcendence and Resentment in *Marino Faliero*', pp.118-135.

9 Carla Pomarè's book-length study *Byron and the Discourses of History* is a welcome exception in this respect. As Pomarè notes, the Venetian dramas are 'built around a missing piece of historical information which, though crucial for the evaluation of the events described, can only be recovered in the historical Appendices that were an integral part of the first editions of the two tragedies.' Pomarè discusses these 'competing versions of the history that is being dramatized', with Byron 'ultimately question[ing] the stability and self-sufficient nature of both drama and historical discourse.' *Byron and the Discourses of History*, p.7.

The Carnival of History: *Marino Faliero, Doge of Venice*

The story of Marino Faliero, as scripted by Byron, is played out against the backdrop of the Venetian Carnival. Michel Steno's bawdy graffiti scribbled on the ducal throne is a dramatic incendiary device that sets in motion the intricate turns of events, also carnivalizing as the drama presents them: in this instance, the graffiti literally carnivalizes the ducal throne, being a drunken carnival-night jest. The offence to the ducal office and his very person that Faliero feels is 'the last drop that makes the cup run o'er – and [his] was full already' (V.i.244-45),[10] and the doge consequently carnivalizes his office by siding with the *arsenalotti* insurgents against the patrician ruling class that he himself belongs to. History's carnivalization of events comes full circle outside the scope of the drama, when Steno, in a historical *coup de théâtre*, becomes doge seven doges down the line after Faliero. Steno was twenty-four years of age at the time of Faliero's execution in 1355, and sixty-nine when he donned the *corno ducale* in 1400.

Byron masks the wording of Steno's scribble – the stenograph or shorthand for the entire frame of the drama[11] – leaving it out of his Venetian replay for its want of originality,[12] emptying the graffiti of its actual meaning, preserving it only to play the role of prompt for what is to come, and transferring the focus of the tragedy from jealousy (and similar petty pseudo-motives handed down by the insufficiently informed popular historians whom Byron criticises in his preface to the drama) to the more elevated 'historical truth.'[13] But we are

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[10] *Marino Faliero* is quoted from *Lord Byron: The Complete Poetical Works,* ed. Jerome J. McGann and Barry Weller (Oxford: Clarendon, 1980-93), volume IV. Act, scene and line references follow quotations in the main text.

[11] See Jerome Christensen, '*Marino Faliero* and the Fault of Byron's Satire,' *Studies in Romanticism*, 24.3 (Fall 1985), pp.313-33.

[12] Byron notes in his all-important preface to the drama: 'before I had sufficiently examined the historical records, I was disposed to have it turn on a jealousy in Faliero. But perceiving no foundation for it in historical truth, and aware that jealousy is an exhausted passion in the drama, I have given it a more historical form.' *CPW IV*, p.303. However, Byron does include the wording of the insult in the appendices to *Marino Faliero*, so as to supply 'the facts' of historical record that he is aiming to be true to. As he concludes in his preface: 'For the real facts, I refer to the extracts given in the Appendix in Italian, with a translation.' *CPW* IV, p.306.

[13] In the preface, Byron writes: 'I know no justification, at any distance of time, for calumniating an historical character: surely truth belongs to the dead, and to the unfortunate.' Byron goes on to advertise his dedication to the study of historical material for the purposes of this drama, having spent 'four years' 'meditat[ing] this work:' 'Whether I have succeeded or not in the tragedy, I have at least transferred into our language a historical fact worthy of commemoration.' Preface to *Marino Faliero*, *CPW* IV, p. 304.

concerned with Byron's multiple carnivalizations of Faliero's story in *Marino Faliero*, which can be traced in a series of masks, masquerades and role-playings, and in the inversions and subversions of these.

*

Doge: I am the lowest, most enslaved;
Although dress'd out to head a pageant, as
The Greeks of yore made drunk their slaves to form
A pastime for their children. (III.ii.161-64)

To his infinite dismay, Doge Faliero finds that he serves ultimately only as a perpetual carnival king, 'a pageant' (I.ii.271): the ducal office is presented to us from all directions as a hollow mask, the doge a mere 'puppet' and 'plaything' at the mercy and disposal of the ruling patrician councillors.[14] Byron's Faliero describes his being made a toy of the state at the moment 'they' made him Doge as follows:

Doge: even in their oath of false allegiance!
Even in that very hour and vow, they abjured
Their friend and made a sovereign, as boys make
Playthings, to do their pleasure – and be broken! (III.ii.373-376)

With the ducal cap an 'idle, gilded, degraded toy' (I.ii.263) and the 'people' 'nothing in the state, and in / The city worse than nothing – mere machines / To serve the nobles' most patrician pleasure', (I.ii.298-303) in Calendaro's penetrating words, the 'Doge is a mere puppet, who can scarce / Obtain right for himself' (II.ii.32-33). As the drama unfolds, the rhetoric, mostly Faliero's own – and, as such, deliberately made repetitive[15] – gains bitter momentum, emphasizing over and over the carnivalesque dupery of the ducal office, conjuring again and again its empty carnival mask:

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[14] Cf. Celeste Langan: 'Byron's Faliero is represented as a quasi-sovereign, with a juridical title but no power to act.' For a detailed reading of Byron's Venetian texts and letters in relation to capitalism, see Celeste Langan, 'Venice', in James Chandler and Kevin Gilmartin (eds), *Romantic Metropolis: The Urban Scene of British Culture 1780-1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p.277.

[15] See Byron's straightforward, pragmatic defence of the repetitive nature of Faliero's speeches in a letter to Murray of 8 October 1820: 'The Doge *repeats*; *true* – but it is from engrossing passion – or because he sees *different* persons – and is always obliged to recur to the matter uppermost in his mind.' *BLJ* VII, p.195. Faliero's repetitive diction – sometimes repeating verbatim at various stages – enhances both the claustrophobic atmosphere of the drama at the level of language and the carnivalesque nature of the proceedings.

Doge: A thing of robes and trinkets, dizen'd out
To sit in state as for a sovereign's picture;
A popular scourge, a ready sentence-signer,
A stickler for the Senate and 'the Forty,'
A sceptic of all measures which had not
The sanction of 'the Ten,' a council-fawner,
A tool, a fool, a puppet. (III.ii.188-94)

Faliero's dismayed repetitions, however, increasingly involve self-denigrating qualifications. Here describing himself, once again, as a puppet, he becomes an effeminate non-entity, 'a thing of robes and trinkets', passively, two-dimensionally surreal in his garish pomp, 'dizen'd out to sit in state as for a sovereign's picture'. Yet the idea of innocent, powerless passivity soon gives way to an unsettling catalogue of this puppet's acts in the hands of its puppet-masters, with the puppet now no longer innocent in its passivity but actively participating in the oppression dictated by the ruling patrician power structure – 'a stickler for the Senate and 'the Forty'', 'a council-fawner'. Finally, in a climax of self-disdain that pinpoints the sinister aspects of his carnival, counterfeit office, he is 'a tool, a fool, a puppet.'

The masquerade of the Venetian power structure comes across in minute detail throughout the drama. The representative of the patricians, Lioni, serves as an impressive mouthpiece for Byronic nostalgia, recalling the lyrical voice of the beautifully idealized, pathos-ridden 'Ode to Venice' composed a few years earlier and anticipating the nostalgic broodings of Jacopo Foscari in Byron's next Venetian drama. However, the opening scene of the fourth act sees Lioni enter to the following educative stage directions: 'Lioni laying aside his mask and cloak which the Venetian Nobles wore in public.'[16] Again we see the state of Venice function on the basis of a masquerade. And the first part of Lioni's striking nocturnal soliloquy reveals that he too is well aware of the falseness of Venetian high society, living in a haunted, spectral *chiaroscuro*, a surreal carnival of living death:

Lioni: Where the tall torches' glare, and silver lamps'
More pallid gleam along the tapestried walls,
Spread over the reluctant gloom which haunts
Those vast and dimly-latticed galleries
A dazzling mass of artificial light,
Which show'd all things, but nothing as they were.

[16] Byron is, as ever, keen to fill his work with as many 'facts' as possible, resisting the art that is '*all* fiction;' 'pure invention' was in his eyes 'but the talent of a liar.' Byron's letter to Murray of 2 April 1817, *BLJ* V, p. 203.

There Age essaying to recall the past,
After striving for the hues of youth
At the sad labour of the toilet, and
Full many a glance at the too faithful mirror,
Prank'd forth in all pride of ornament,
Forgot itself, and trusting to the falsehood
Of the indulgent beams, which show, yet hide,
Believed itself forgotten, and was fool'd.
[…]
There Youth […] wasted
Its hours of rest in dreaming this was pleasure,
And so shall waste them till the sunrise streams
On sallow cheeks and sunken eyes, which should not
Have worn this aspect for yet many a year. (IV.i.29-50)

The adjectives in Lioni's soliloquy, echoing the haunted, unforgiving chimes of Johnsonian satire, convey the counterfeit nature of the Venetian elite, its empty, fallen, sad spectacle. Of course Lioni's critique of the state of Venice only engages with the sphere of high society and its somewhat faded revels; it is an elegant Augustan critique rather than a searing satire on social inequality. Lioni belongs to, represents and only refers to the world of his peers, never touching upon any misgivings related to the stability or vulnerability of the power structure of the state. His Venice is false and spectral, with its make-up flaking. It is also never in existential jeopardy, perpetually and determinedly performing its own unawareness of the peril of civil unrest – despite the kind of premonition we see in Lioni's sense of something not being quite right and his not having enjoyed the night's revels as much as he normally would. Lioni's soliloquy then slides into a smooth lyrical detour on the nocturnal sublimity of Venice, sustaining for a hundred lines or so a comforting, staggeringly beautiful vision of serenity. This poetic interlude is a masterstroke on Byron's part, functioning at once as both a welcome respite from Faliero's rather cumbersome revolutionary rhetoric and didactic criticism of the state, and a graceful reflection of these critiques, conjuring the image of a Venice that is worth preserving, if for no other than aesthetic reasons.[17] This, naturally, presents a number of ethical problems, not least by inviting a temporary revaluation of the righteousness and justification of Faliero's somewhat precipitous rebellion.[18] And this is

[17] As Lansdown remarks, 'Lioni evokes his idea of Venice' as an 'enchanted land- and sea-scape' which 'is of a timelessness quite distinct from the urgently 'historicist' plans and predictions of the conspirators.' *Byron's Historical Dramas,* p.133.

[18] This, as other dramatically somewhat problematic elements in the play, is explained by Byron in the Preface as a necessary measure to keep to the dramatic unities, true to the neo-classicist model he has so resolutely opted for.

partly the point of Lioni's performance. Nevertheless, this lyrical interlude, replete with its troubling implications, along with Lioni's opening critique, is, like the picture of the state of Venice painted by the rebels and Faliero, a portrait of a debased epicurean spectacle of surfaces, a discursive phantasm masking the reality of the lagoon republic. The whole masquerade is at once Gothic and carnivalesque.

If Lioni's phantasmic image of Venice is powerfully lyrical, that of the rebels and Faliero himself is a grotesque re-imaging of the thinly masked, troubling, carnivalized Venetian hierarchy. The 'swoln patricians' (I.ii.278) are described as a parade of vile monstrosities: an 'o'ergrown aristocratic Hydra' (I.ii.421), the 'hundred-handed senate' (I.ii.269), likened to the grotesque[19] body of a 'viper,' 'a swoln serpent' (III.ii.32) comprised of tyrants 'bloat'd' with 'strength' (II.ii.51), the 'never-gorged Leviathan'[20] (III.ii.445):

Calendaro: they form but links
Of one long chain; one mass, one breath, one body;
They eat, and drink, and live, and breed together,
Revel, and lie, oppress, and kill in concert, –
So let them die as one! (III.ii.33-37)

This is a revolutionary discourse very similar to that of French revolutionary pamphlets replete with social resentment such as the Abbé Sieyes' *What is the Third Estate* (1789), where the aristocrats are compared to 'a malignant humor' that needs to be 'neutralized',[21] and Faliero's coup is presented as the necessary cure, 'cleans[ing] the commonwealth with fire' (IV.ii.75), rinsing the 'proud city' of its oppressive 'patrician pestilence'. Yet all returns to carnival in Faliero's fiery nocturnal broodings on the cusp of the event, the old doge 'disguised and solus' at the opening of the third act:

Doge: I am before the hour, the hour whose voice,
Pealing into the arch of night, might strike

[19] This grotesque 'bodily element' of the Venetian power structure is not 'deeply positive', ultimately liberating and denoting regeneration, as Bakhtin has it in his definition of medieval and Renaissance 'grotesque realism' in *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Hélène Iswolsky (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1984), p.19. As he explains, '[t]he world of Romantic grotesque is to a certain extent a terrifying world, alien to man' p.38. 'The images of Romantic grotesque usually express fear of the world, and seek to inspire their reader with this fear' p.39.

[20] This, as Schmidt aptly remarks, 'rhetorically connect[s] the *Serenissima* with the nation associated with Thomas Hobbes' work: England.' *Byron and the Rhetoric of Italian Nationalism*, p.102.

[21] W. H. Sewell, *A Rhetoric of Bourgeois Revolution: the Abbé Sieyes* and What is the Third Estate? (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1994) pp. 62-63. As Joshua Gonsalves remarks: '[Faliero] plans to kill every aristocrat in a French-styled oligocide.' 'Byron's Venetian Masque of the French Revolution', p.53.

These palaces with ominous tottering,
And rock their marbles to the corner-stone
[…]
Yes, proud city!
Thou must be cleansed of the black blood which makes thee
A lazar-house of tyranny: the task
Is forced upon me. I have sought it not;
And therefore I was punish'd, seeing this
Patrician pestilence spread on and on,
Until at length it smote me in my slumbers,
And I am tainted, and must wash away
The plague spots in the healing wave. (III.i.1-15)

Physically disguised, Faliero also dons the revolutionary rhetoric of the *arsenalotti* that he is yet to meet, and here, more than ever before, Faliero's role-playing takes on a diction that is archetypically seditious.[22] The noble rhetoric of the venerable octogenarian doge fades into oblivion here to be replaced by revolutionary rancour – and Faliero's self-carnivalization is complete.

Doge: To overthrow this monster of a state,
This mockery of a government, this spectre
Which must be exorcised with blood – and then
We will renew the times of truth and justice,
Condensing in a fair, free commonwealth
Not rash equality but equal rights,
Proportion'd like the columns to the temple,
Giving and taking strength reciprocal
And making firm the whole with grace and beauty,
So that no part could be removed without
Infringement of the general symmetry. (III.ii.165-75)

This Palladian metaphor of a fair, proportionally distributed power structure of state the coup hopes to establish, makes Faliero the mouthpiece of neo-classicist ideals. This idealistic image of a new state where 'no part could be removed without / Infringement of the general symmetry' recalls the Aristotelian rule of the unity of action, and thus supplements Byron's self-professed quest for neo-classical purity of form.[23] Braced for the planned coup with the Palladian ideal of state renovation through ideal hierarchy in mind, there is now only one

[22] As Schmidt observes, 'the *arsenalotti* served as a unifying symbol of the republic [.] … Ironically, this symbol of unity becomes one of disunity; the revolution against the republic comes from the bulwark of the republic.' *Byron and the Rhetoric of Italian Nationalism*, p.116.

[23] For a political reading of this passage see Schmidt, *Byron and the Rhetoric of Italian Nationalism*, pp.118-119.

way ahead for Faliero's performance: 'To overthrow this monster of a state, / This mockery of a government, this spectre / Which must be exorcised with blood'.[24]

The doge is on the brink of the coup here, and his speech belies a strong sense of being on the verge of the unknown, featuring strong elements of vertigo or *ilinx*, the carnivalizing impulse that unsettles and subverts all given structures. Lioni also depicts Venice's powerfully disempowering charms as a veering spectacle of pleasure that produces vertigo: 'the delusion of the dizzy scene', 'its false and true enchantments – art and nature – / Which swam before my giddy eyes that drank / The sight of beauty' (IV.i.62-5). In Iser's description, *ilinx* is

> a game of subversion whose 'vertiginous' element consists in carnivalization. [...] There is clearly an anarchic tendency in *ilinx*, and this not only liberates what has been suppressed; it also reintegrates what has been excluded. Thus it allows the absent to play against the present, and in everything that is present it opens a difference that makes whatever has been excluded fight back against the representative claims of what excluded it. Whatever is present is as if mirrored from its reverse side.[25]

We have seen how this carnivalesque mirroring is well represented in the two perspectives on the rotten state of Venice dealt out by the two aristocratic players representing the opposing sides of the drama's conflict. This mirroring is significant for a number of reasons – far from being a mere effusion of ephemeral lyricisms, Lioni's nocturnal upon the eve of the planned coup represents – dramatically, ethically and historically – a genuine philosophical reflection on the state of Venice, and cannot be dismissed as a mere digression on Byron's part. Its silky sublimity is not simply a deceptive mirage, but a presentation of Venice 'as if mirrored from its reverse side', an image reflected outwards of the inward-looking interior of Venice's real centre of power, which we only otherwise see from the outside. In generic terms, then, it is a carnivalizing, on Byron's part, of the sombre style and rhetoric of the Venetian state; a touch of discursive heteroglossia simultaneously performing at several levels. Ironically, Lioni's lyrical soliloquy, seemingly so conservative and

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[24] For a speech-act take on Faliero's rhetoric, see Michael Simpson, here describing the masking of the Venetian state: 'Casting the status quo in Venice as an 'empty mockery' or 'spectre,' this speech aspires to replace those ethereal but oppressive phenomena.' 'Ancestral Voices Prophesying What? The Moving Text in Byron's *Marino Faliero* and *Sardanapalus*', *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 38.3/4 (Fall/Winter 1996), p.304 [pp.302-320].

[25] Iser, *The Fictive and the Imaginary*, p.262.

reactionary, in fact adds an anarchic, vertiginous interlude to the drama's relentless carnivalization of Venetian politics.

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The doomed coup itself, as presented in Byron's drama, rather than being the logical consequence of clearly set-out causes or part of a planned action aimed at a specific outcome, is presented as merely a dice-throw, effectively a *coup de dés*: 'I have set my little left / Of life upon this cast; the die was thrown / When I first listen'd to your treason' (III.i.54-6), says Faliero. The doge deliberately engages in the momentous lottery of fate, a game of *alea* played in order to escape the games of *mimicry* dictated by the patrician rulers of Venice. As Jane Stabler notes, 'the Doge recurrently links his fortune with the roll of the dice.'[26] But in his game of *alea*, Faliero is staking everything on a contest that is forbidden: his throwing of the dice is an attempt to exchange his disempowered puppet status, played by others but powerless itself, for an active assertion of *agon* worthy of a once-warrior-hero: 'I stake my fame (and I had fame) – my breath – / (The least of all, for its last hours are nigh) / My heart, my hope, my soul, upon this cast!' (III.ii.204-06); he is 'a Prince who fain would be a citizen / Or nothing' (III.ii.208-09). And chance, itself a key element of the play's carnivalization of Venetian history, is here directly linked to Venice's endless role-playing – part of, rather than opposed to, Venice's carnivalization of itself. 'The die is cast. Where is the place of meeting?' asks the Doge, to which Bertuccio replies: 'At midnight I will be alone and mask'd' (I.ii.564-65). Faliero, as we have seen, joins Bertuccio in a disguise of his own. But the description of Faliero as 'alone and mask'd' also summarizes his experience of ducal office in a nutshell. Indeed, he spends almost the entire drama 'mask'd' in either the despised ducal role or his newly-adopted guise of fearless revolutionary. And he plays these parts in a masquerade that is not of his making and beyond his control. The dice he throws are loaded, and he is doomed to lose his stake from the outset.

Doge: It is in vain to war with Fortune.[27]
The glory hath departed from our house.

[26] Stabler, *Byron, Poetics and History*, p.123. Stabler links the poetics of risk to the biographical context, Byron at the time living the 'mixed scenario of financial and sexual uncertainty with the accompanying dynamics of risk and return.'

[27] See *Heaven and Earth* for the sense of being bound within the laws of a higher order; for instance: 'How vain to war with what Thy God commands' (I.iii.793), spoken by the archangel and God's messenger Raphael in the scene of the angels' rebellion.

Ber.: Who would have deem'd it? –
Ah! One moment sooner!

Doge: That moment would have changed the face of ages;
This gives us to eternity – we'll meet it
As men whose triumph is not in success,
But who can make their own minds all in all,
Equal to every fortune. (IV.ii.272-9)

The agonistic bravado of Faliero's speech, his claim to be 'equal to every fortune', sets the mood for a historical downfall and for the unfolding of a tragedy worthy of being recorded in the annals for all time. The aleatory element is highlighted in the 'one moment sooner', so that the planned 'chang[ing of] the face of ages' has only just escaped Faliero's grasp – the result of a lottery that turns the wheel of fortune towards failure much like a roulette wheel. Bertram's frustration betrays the hazardous essence of the entire enterprise, subject, as all things in Byron's universe, to the whim of ever-elusive fortune. So far, the drama's conception of the forces of fate, which are at play beyond the reach of human control, has been quite classical.[28] Only immediately prior to his execution on the Giants' Staircase, in the penultimate scene, when he is divested of his ducal cap and office, do we get to see – and more significantly, hear – the *real* Marino Faliero. Or do we? Faliero's final speech is a swelling torrent of unforgiving prophetic curses. But it begins rather stoically, and personally, as follows:

Doge: So now the Doge is nothing, and at last
I am again Marino Faliero:
[…]
With how much more contentment I resign
That shining mockery, the ducal bauble,
Than I received the fatal ornament. (V.iii.1-6)

Upon shedding the hated mask of the doge, Faliero feels restored to his proper self, unmasked at last. However, this state of 'unmaskedness' does not last very long, as a

[28] The *rota fortunae* was an overused topos already in the time of Tacitus. He lists in his *Dialogus de oratoribus*: "Nolo inridere 'rotam Fortunae' et 'ius verrinum' et illud tertio quoque sensu in omnibus orationibus pro sententia positum 'esse videatur.' nam et haec invitus rettuli et plura omisi, quae tamen sola mirantur atque exprimunt ii, qui se antiquos oratores vocitant." (Phrases like "Fortune's wheel" and "Verrine soup," I do not care to ridicule, or that stock ending of every third clause in all Cicero's speeches, "it would seem to be," brought in as the close of a period. I have mentioned them with reluctance, omitting several, although they are the sole peculiarities admired and imitated by those who call themselves orators of the old school.) *A Dialogue on Oratory*, trans. A. J. Church and W. J. Brodribb (New York: Random House, 1942) 23:1.

http://www.forumromanum.org/literature/tacitus/dialogus_e.html#23 (retrieved 10 December 2012).

prophetic *raptus* swiftly kicks in and obscures Faliero once again, this time with a heated haze of vicious rhetoric, an elaborate and – for Byron's contemporary readers – historically true calumny hurled at the once-serene Republic, combining the righteous wrath of Old Testament prophets with a particularly acerbic fantasy – for Faliero's listeners – of retribution. Chance, the play of *agon*, masquerade and role-playing then issue in a nightmare vision of Venice's carnivalized state extended far into the future. Venice, deprived of all her prized assets, will live on as a cursed carnival, emptied of its vital essence of pleasure, and only kept alive by 'the habitude' of depravity and vice:

Doge: Vice without splendour, sin without relief
Even from the gloss of love to smooth it o'er.
But in its stead, coarse lusts of habitude,
Prurient yet passionless, cold studied lewdness,
Depraving nature's frailty to an art. (V.iii.85-89)

Recalling, 'as if mirrored from its reverse side,' the Gothic carnival of Lioni's soliloquy, this accursed carnival of the future reveals a deadly masquerade of perfunctory sin: Faliero's future Venice has lost its famous flair, doomed to revolve 'passionless' in vicious circles of 'cold studied lewdness', artificial and estranged from its defining nature in everything but its now quite hollow, debased carnival mask. The carnival is debilitated in all but its iterability. Concerning a place so intimately interwoven with the idea, the strategies and the practice of carnival, Faliero's grand finale of Tantalus-like '[s]miles without mirth, and pastimes without pleasure' (V.iii.91) stabs Venice in the very core. Indeed, the image of this 'prurient but passionless' carnival strongly resonates with Byron's impression of contemporary Venetian casinos included in the appendices to *Marino Faliero*:

> It was a strange sight to see persons of either sex masked, or grave in their magisterial robes, round a table, invoking chance, and giving way at one instant to the agonies of despair, at the next to the illusion of hope, and that without uttering a single word.[29]

Faliero's prophecy thus reveals on the one hand the Venice of Byron's time, but, more worryingly, also evokes the empty marketing mask of today's touristy Venice, a future Venice that Byron to a large extent helped – albeit unwittingly – to establish. But the drama's intricate carnivalization of Venice works on other levels too.

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[29] *CPW* IV, pp. 541-42.

On one level, Faliero's misalliance across the spectrum of the Venetian social order marks his coup not as a personal vendetta but as a carnival event – the plan is a spectacular attempt to overthrow that order. Faliero's problem does not only lie in the fact that as doge, he only wears the mask of power – his duties purely ornamental, his real power non-existent. Here he is indeed a piece moved about freely by the real rulers of the republic, the patrician council. And as doge, Faliero is expected to merely play at *mimicry*, to stick to his preordained mask and perform public duties accordingly, a decorative embodiment of the political game of pomp and circumstance. Faliero's fundamental problem is that in attempting to grasp real power he is in fact only trying to play a different game, more worthy of a man of his talent and history, perhaps, but still a game – a game that would offer Faliero a different role. Yet he cannot dictate the games Venice plays or the roles it assigns him, and as Venice contained him within its definition of the role of Doge, so it contains him in its own carnivalized version of the rebel. His *agon* can only be performed through lengthy speeches, addressed at the external conflict he is engaged in but also replete with representations of the internal conflicts of self-pity. In the finale of the drama, Faliero is allowed grandeur and bravery, but not through action – only through a sustained agonistic feat of defiant rhetoric. Faliero's attempt to wage war on the established order of the republic is, in the end, limited by that order to a polemic – a grand rhetorical performance pitted against but finally absorbed into the ignoble performance of the Forty. The grand finale of Faliero's polemic performance – his oration given only to his patrician compatriots-turned-foes – is at once a curse and a prophecy, replaying another favourite performative genre of Byron's, developed to perfection in the dramatic monologues of 'The Prophecy of Dante' and 'The Lament of Tasso'. But in Faliero's case, even more than those of Byron's Dante and Tasso, the rhetorical strategy of prophetic curse is locked in, and reduced to, an agonistic polemic of performance and game-playing:

> Doge: Our trial! will they keep their mockery up
> Even to the last minute?
> […]
> T'is but a game of mutual homicides,
> Who have cast lots for the first death, and they
> Have won with false dice. (IV.ii.286-291)

Faliero insists on the ongoing carnival nature of the Venetian state and its workings, its continuing 'mockery' of justice even in its dealing with an event outside the experience of the Republic's history up to this point. Faliero himself then proceeds to dismiss the entire

historical event of the coup and its unfortunate outcome, reading it as ‘a game of mutual homicides’ – the patricians ‘have cast lots for the first death’ and ‘won with false dice’. The whole thing was not an impartial turn of Fortune, but a corrupt game. The Venetian state, inevitably, wins because it fixed the game from the outset.[30] And so Faliero’s aborted coup ends like a true carnival, reinstituting the power structures that it sought to subvert – with the disobedient carnival king, the doge, decapitated and the jester’s cap, the *corno ducale*, passed on to some compliant player chosen in an election staged by the patricians drawing lots.[31] The lottery of Venice, like Borges’ lottery in Babylon,[32] is free to go on interminably in the background, with Faliero’s rebellion simply an episode of it. ‘The play character’ of Venice’s ‘legal proceedings [...] faithfully observed by Goethe in his description of a sitting of a Venetian court in the Doge’s palace’,[33] is their defining characteristic. Ironically, by seeking to escape it, Faliero is, in the end, assimilated into the game, playing his assigned part to the full. In the overall scheme of things, as Tony Tanner remarks, the doge is ‘most actually passive when seemingly most active’.[34]

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While certainly a game of masks and role-playing, carnival is also defined by *ilinx* or vertigo, wherein the given order *is* subverted and things are, temporarily, suspended in topsyturvydom. And both of these elements are key to Byron’s dramatic and thematic carnivalization of Venice. *Ilinx* is ancient Greek for ‘whirlpool’, and aptly describes the

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[30] This links the drama to its Venetian ‘sequel’, *The Two Foscari*.

[31] See Christensen: ‘The king who betrays the state saves it.’ Christensen reads Faliero’s death as ‘sacrificial,’ bringing ‘the game of mutual homicides’ ‘to an end.’ ‘*Marino Faliero* and the Fault of Byron’s Satire,’ p.324.

[32] Byron’s patricians can be likened to the mysterious ‘Company’ of Borges’ short story: ‘The Company, with god-like modesty, shuns all publicity. Its agents, of course, are secret.’ J.L. Borges, ‘The Lottery in Babylon’, in *Fictions*, trans. Andrew Hurley (London: Penguin Classics, 2000) p.57. ‘Chance governs the lives of all men in Babylon, but who controls Chance? The Company does.’ Alexander Coleman, ‘The Playful Atoms of Jorge Luis Borges’, in G. Guiness and A. Hurley (eds), *Auctor Ludens: Essays on Play in Literature* (Philadelphia and Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1986) p. 87.

[33] Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, p.99. Goethe records this in his *Italian Journey* on 3 October 1786. The entry about the Doge’s palace episode begins thus: ‘Heute dagegen sah ich eine andere Komödie, die mich mehr gefreut hat. Im herzoglichen Palast hörte ich eine Rechtssache öffentlich verhandeln.’ (Today, however, I saw another comedy that pleased me more. In the ducal palace, I heard a public legal proceedings.) See J.W. Goethe, *Italienische Reise*, ed. Herbert von Einem (München: C.H. Beck, 1981, repr. 2007), pp. 75-7, and J.W. Goethe, *Italian Journey*, trans. W.H. Auden and E. Mayer (London: Penguin Classics, 1967, repr. 1992), pp.84-6.

[34] Tony Tanner, *Venice Desired* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), p.60.

carnivalesque blur which seeks to 'momentarily destroy the stability of perception and inflict a kind of voluptuous panic upon an otherwise lucid mind'[35] – this vertigo is created during the carnival through the unleashed freedom of human interaction across social strata, as well as the lifting of other normal restrictions. In Byron's drama, Venice is reeling on the outside (the drama unfolds at the very close of the carnival season) as well as the inside (with the precipitated coup and its denouement). However, this vortex of unsettling energies is held in check by Byron's neo-classicist dramatic structure and long, rhetorically sculpted speeches. This formal antithesis of the carnival mayhem which fuels the plot makes *Marino Faliero* a feat of rather delicately balanced forces. But it is also a reflection of Venice's own delicate balancing of the contradictory forces of its own carnivalized essence.

The underlying, dimly-veiled structure of Venetian justice slowly comes into focus as a *mimicry* of justice. It is a *mimicry*, however, that not only allows, and contributes to, Venice's carnivalesque society but also works effectively to contain its chaotic energies. Justice in Venice is masked, but the roles played by its representatives are often suggested by the characters' names. The Chief of the Ten is called Benintende, 'well meaning' – not one who does well, but one whose actions, good or bad, *mean* well. The patrician palace guards serving as a quasi-secret police force are called nothing as straightforward as the Night Watch, but 'Signori della notte', or Signors of the Night, their masked name matching the custom of only half-revealing their face to the detained. The traitor figure responsible for the un-masking and defeat of the coup is the gentle character 'Bertram the Bergamask' (IV.ii.295) – and while obviously referring to his place of origin, Bergamo, this anglicized version of his name also evokes the notion of the 'mask', here the *propria persona* (in the original Greek sense of the word, a mask) of the traitor. And, crucially, Bertram's betrayal of Faliero is based on his sentimental loyalty to Lioni, an attachment forged in childhood play. Lioni, in turn, evokes the 'lionized' Venice of the drama,[36] highlighting the fame and serenity of the republic, with the lion of St Mark at its helm, a subtle vindication of the city in purely aesthetic terms. This linguistic game of names naturally plays itself out rather finely alongside – complementing, or supplementing, but of course ultimately serving – the

[35] Roger Caillois, *Man, Play and Games*, trans. Meyer Barash (New York: Free Press, 1961; repr. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001), p.23.

[36] Cf. Lansdown, *Byron's Historical Dramas*, p. 132.

masked and masking operations of the Venetian state.[37] We see these at work most clearly in the state's handling of Faliero's execution, which determinedly sets itself against Faliero's suggestion that the Venetian state 'record the facts' of his rebellion so that 'the contemplator might approve, / Or at the least learn from whence the crimes arose.' 'When the beholder knows a Doge conspired,' says Faliero, 'Let him be told the cause – it is your history' (V.i.508-12).

Faliero here offers his immediate and future situation as a historical *exemplum* – a case to be used for didactic purposes by posterity, a recording of 'the facts.' But what of the 'contemplator' and the 'beholder'? Does the 'beholder' refer us to the ending of the drama, where Faliero's execution is seen from two diametrically different perspectives, or is Faliero pointing further into the future and anticipating the future 'beholders' of his story, visitors to the *Sala del maggior consiglio*, where the black-veiled portrait will hang, highlighting the story of 'a Doge [who] conspired?' The patricians may indeed know 'the facts', but *Marino Faliero* ends not with these men but with the comments of the spectators on the fringe of Venetian society, who discuss, guess at and interpret these matters of state from which, however, they are excluded: as Benintende tells Faliero, 'the people are without / Beyond the compass of the human voice' (V.iii.24-25). The most significant moment of this doge's story, his final oration before his execution on the *Scala dei giganti*, is therefore denied the society it addresses: Faliero's rhetoric is reduced to a dumb-show *in medias res* as far as contemporary citizens of Venice, shut outside the gates of the ducal palace, are concerned. And we witness this containment of Faliero knowing that a larger masking of Faliero has been given to posterity, culminating in the black veil casting an eternal shadow of shame over Faliero's memory in the hall of ducal portraits. We are made privy, in other words, and in a way the Venetian citizens by definition cannot be, to the balancing of contradictory forces that safeguard Venice's carnivalized world. Faliero's final speech is masked for both the *popolani* – the commoners – locked out and eagerly peering through the closed gates – and for posterity – which will see nothing more of Faliero than his absence from the line of ducal portraits.

Byron stages this censoring or masking of the historical fact and fate of Faliero as a manifestation of, but also a prerequisite for, the workings of the Venetian state. It means that Faliero's story can now be passed on to posterity in the disguise given to it by the patrician

[37] Indeed, as Daniel Watkins observes, the patricians 'subdue the Venetian citizens with a hollow rhetoric that serves as an outward show of sincerity, dignity, and humility.' 'Violence, Class Consciousness, and Ideology in Byron's History Plays', *English Literary History* 48.4 (Winter 1981), p.801 [pp.799-816].

council, devoid of all motives other than that of a vilified would-be autocrat conspiring to jeopardize the most serene of republics. The 'facts' Faliero is at pains to expose can also be masked by the official *grand récit* of the Serenissima: the official Venice records state that Faliero 'died with a confession of guilt and an apology.'[38] Also, crucially, 'trial records of the *Quarantia Criminale* for 1355-1367 have disappeared.'[39] No other immediate accounts of the history remain: to Murray Byron writes asking him to get the 'motives' of Faliero's story 'transcribed' and sent to him, since he 'can not find so good an account of that business [in Venice]': 'I have searched all the libraries – but the policy of the old Aristocracy made their writers silent on [Faliero's] motives which were a private grievance against one of the Patricians.'[40] The carnival world of Venice expels what threatens to subvert and carnivalize it out of existence, re-establishing balance. The carnival of Venice disrupts, but also reinstates, social order. Byron's conceptualization of the masquerade of Venetian power does not end here, however, with the inevitable historical denouement enacted and the curtain drawn. It builds up towards two more carnivalizations of Faliero over and above the carnival strategies of masking that the Venetian state put in place to contain his history.

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Adapting Bakhtinian notions of carnivalization to the representation of Venetian history that Byron offers in *Marino Faliero* brings the following elements to light: the treatment of 'the facts' by official histories, some preserved, some erased, some rewritten, but also the heterogeneous features of history itself, in the widest sense of the word. In *Marino Faliero*, this historical heterogeneity is generated by the clever heteroglossia of the drama's ending, where Faliero's last oration on the staircase is followed by the same scene from a different perspective, that of the *popolani* peering through the closed gates of the ducal palace. This change of dramatic perspective in the last scene is vital for a number of reasons, perhaps the most important of which is its carnivalesque 'recursive structure'[41] – a momentary act of re-

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[38] Tanner, *Venice Desired*, p.61.

[39] Schmidt, *Byron and the Rhetoric of Italian Nationalism*, p.109.

[40] Letter to Murray of 25 February 1817, *BLJ* V, p.174.

[41] As Brian McHale notes, literary carnivalization is characterized not just by 'stylistic heteroglossia' but also a 'recursive structure': 'Where the official genres are typically unitary, both genetically and ontologically, projecting a single fictional world, carnivalized literature interrupts the text's ontological 'horizon' with a multiplicity of inserted genres – letters, essays, theatrical dialogues [etc]. Carnivalized literature, in other

winding to portray the same event without the crucial element of Faliero's speech, presented in a different genre and viewed by a different audience. Watching a barely visible dumb show, the only thing that the spectators understand is the physical fact of the execution and so the only thing recorded here is 'the hoary head' rolling down the Giants' Staircase – a clever piece of historical irony on Byron's part, showing how ineptly and in how intricately biased ways 'history' is (mis)remembered and (mis)recorded. Somewhat similar to Horatio's 'recording' of Hamlet's story as a series 'of carnal, bloody, unnatural acts, / Of accidental judgements, casual slaughters',[42] Faliero's enumeration of the 'facts' of his own story does not result in a complete or lucid picture of it, but in a seriously distorted picture – and not only the distortion of Venetian officialdom. The *popolani* project yet another mask onto Faliero. As one citizen puts it: 'He was a kind man to the commons ever,' and one who, according to another citizen, 'would have freed us' (V.iv.21-22).[43] Neither of these things is entirely accurate – or, at least demonstrable. Faliero's reproof – 'were it not better to record the facts?' – is ineffectual not just in the face of Venice's official masquerade, but also in the face of history's own endlessly carnivalizing propensity to distort, re-play, re-mask and re-perform itself.

Byron is well aware of the vast dramatic irony of Faliero's fate and its historical representation, and this brings us to his second historical carnivalization of Faliero that subverts the Venetian power structure's erasures and maskings.[44] Though sentenced to *damnatio memoriae*, defaced for eternity in the *Sala del Maggior Consiglio* as a faceless traitor covered by a black veil, that same black veil immediately commands attention as the most intriguing portrait of the whole ducal gallery, though portrait there be none. The punitive act of erasure through masking works against its intended meaning, commanding attention and inspiring interest; in a final demonstration of history's carnivalization of 'the facts,' rather than condemning Faliero's memory to oblivion, its mask keeps it alive:[45]

> There is still, in the Doge's Palace, the black veil painted over Faliero's picture, and the staircase whereon he was first crowned Doge, and

words, is characterized by stylistic heteroglossia and recursive structure.' Brian McHale *Postmodernist Fiction* (London: Methuen, 1987), p. 172.

[42] *Hamlet* V.ii.386-87.

[43] Cf. Lansdown: 'the first citizen becomes the first historian of Marino Faliero's death, and not a well-informed one at that.' *Byron's Historical Dramas*, p. 138.

[44] Benintende to Faliero: 'Thy name is razed from out [our] records' (V.i.486).

[45] 'The paradox teaches that suppression is more significant and reveals the tenor of an essential metaphor: tyrannical repression is a self-destructive paradox.' Thomas L. Ashton, '*Marino Faliero*: Byron's 'Poetry of Politics'', *Studies in Romanticism* 13.1 (Winter 1974), p. 7 [pp.1-13].

> subsequently decapitated. This was the thing that most struck my imagination in Venice – more than the Rialto, which I visited for the sake of Shylock; and more, too, than Schiller's 'Armenian,' a novel that took a great hold of me when a boy.[46]

Byron knows full well that this is not the case with all of history's erasures – Faliero's case is a special one, and therefore worthy of particular study, as Byron points out in his preface. But who knows what other facts, and faces, lie hidden behind the official historical record? Byron is as intrigued by this question as he is by the Faliero that lies behind the black veil. In a typically Byronic rendering, the simultaneity of multiple histories is kept alive throughout the drama, and this is echoed in Faliero's own prophetic outburst in one of his final speeches during the course of the trial:

> Benintende: The place wherein as Doge though shouldst be painted,
> With thine illustrious predecessors, is
> To be left vacant, with a death-black veil
> Flung over these dim words engraved beneath,-
> "This place is of Marino Faliero,
> Decapitated for his crimes."
> Doge: "His crimes!"
> But let it be so; – it will be in vain.
> The veil which blackens o'er this blighted name,
> And hides, or seems to hide, these lineaments,
> Shall draw more gazers than the thousand portraits
> Which glitter round it in their pictured trappings. (V.i.495-505)

The doge's bitter words echo his much earlier self-deprecating speech, where he compares his ducal office to a pointless pose of 'sitting as if for a portrait', trapped in a two-dimensional mask of counterfeit pomp and circumstance, and here Faliero throws the 'death-black veil' straight back at the chief of the Ten, the 'well-meaning' Benintende, pointing to the catalogue of doges 'trapped' in their 'pictures' in the same fashion that he has been for the duration of his ducal office. In the drama's perhaps ultimate historical irony, Faliero's final mask – the symbolic sentence of *damnatio memoriae* – liberates him from the patricians' control rather than condemning him to it. Control over the mask's meaning and

[46] Letter to John Murray of 2 April 1817, *BLJ* V, p.203. See also the preface to *Marino Faliero*: 'The black veil which is painted over the place of Marino Faliero amongst the doges, and the Giants' Staircase where he was crowned, and discrowned, and decapitated, struck forcibly upon my imagination, as did his fiery character and strange story', *CPW* IV, p. 303.

effect is taken out of his judges' hands and becomes instead a powerful means of historical reckoning.

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Faliero's veil and the prophecy of its future role in subverting and entirely trumping its intended purpose is Byron's final touch to his drama's representation of the endless game of carnivalization that defines, and to this day, perhaps more than ever before, characterises Venice, the city whose business, as the drama has shown, has always been that of masks. The 'death-black' veil is the final detail of the historical masquerade that is, in the end, the doge's story – tangible and untouchable, the veil reveals rather than covers, and incites rather than proscribes, a perfect accessory to, or instrument of, a historical play of masks, still courting wide audiences of 'beholders', and perhaps turning some of them, like it once did Byron, into canny 'contemplators'. More realistically, though, the singular presence of the veiled portrait in the *Sala del maggior consiglio* blends into the easeful but empty consuming gaze of the tourist Leviathan that sails in and out of Venice and the ducal palace every day, and leaves with only the fading trace of blurred photographic memories. Bought and sold like the rest of Venice, Faliero's veiled portrait is not ultimately excluded from, but an inherent part of, the degraded future of the 'dizen'd out' 'pageant' Venice that Byron anticipated and his Faliero prophesied.

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Venetian Puppetry - *The Two Foscari*

Among the most persistent motifs of the grotesque we find human bodies reduced to puppets.

Wolfgang Kayser, *The Grotesque in Art and Literature*[47]

If in *Marino Faliero* a slanderous graffiti serves as the excuse for setting in motion the events that lead to the tragic downfall of the protagonist – his historical infamy paradoxically making him the most famous doge in the history of the Venetian republic – with Byron essentially dramatizing an act of erasure and censorship that seeks to get Venetian history 'back on track', in *The Two Foscari*, he is also concerned with the writing – indeed re-writing – of history.[48] Here bank books and genealogies are documents that play a key role. These are the instruments of the grey eminence of Venetian history, the patrician rule. The drama begins with Loredano writing in his tablets, specifying the motive for his personal vendetta against the father and son Foscari, and it ends with Loredano once more writing in his tablets, recording that the debt he imagines the doge owes him has been settled. Loredano is, as it were, *writing* the history of both hapless Foscari while they are still alive, *in medias res*.

Barbarigo: … Is it true
That you have written in your books of commerce
(The wealthy practice of our highest nobles),
"Doge Foscari – my debtor for the deaths of
Marco and Pietro Loredano,
My sire and uncle"?
Loredano: It is written thus.
Barbarigo: And will you leave it unerased?
Loredano: Till balanced. (I.i.48-51)

[47] Wolfgang Kayser, *The Grotesque in Art and Literature*, trans. Ulrich Weisstein (New York and Toronto: McGraw-Hill, 1966), p.183.

[48] As Pomarè observes, 'Byron's play does allude to an original crime, but in such concise and elliptical terms that one is obliged to refer to the Appendix to have a clear view of the events'. *Byron and the Discourses of History*, p. 86. Again, it is not Byron's obscuring of history by putting 'the facts' in the margins, relegating them to the outside of his dramatic text – it is a canny strategy at once interrogating and juxtaposing the positions held by these 'historical' sources, and placing his rendition of the 'facts' first to avoid the likely prejudice of pre-informed readership, warping the story back to a presupposed frame of the historical sources. 'By declining to satisfy the curiosity of the public in full within the body of the tragedy and by continually referring the reader to texts other than his own dramatic version of the story, Byron calls attention to the way in which history gets written and passed on.' He 'opens up the perspective on how authority is legitimized in time through the writing of history.' p.87.

By the end of the drama, Loredano has intriguingly managed to make the official legal records comply with the private conjectures of his bank books – indeed, he truly is a man of the written word: once the debt is written in his bank books, he does not stray from his punitive path until both Jacopo and Francis Foscari are dead. The drama ends thus:

> Barbarigo (*turning to Loredano who is writing upon his tablets*): What art thou writing,
> With such an earnest brow, upon Thy tablets?
>
> Loredano (pointing to the Doge's body): That *he* has paid me!
>
> Chief of the Ten: What debt did he owe you?
>
> Loredano: A long and just one; Nature's debt and *mine*.
> (Curtain falls.)
> (V.i.367-370)

This sinister frame of the drama – represented by Loredano's writing, and thereby controlling, the lives of the hapless father and son Foscari – has crucial ethical implications that introduce into Byron's 'historical tragedy' elements of the grotesque. If we read *The Two Foscari* as a revenge tragedy, this might not seem so very unusual, and the drama's events are still very much held within the confines of both the tragic and the historic. But tragedy is here given a discernible element of something that does not strictly belong to the purely tragic so much as the uncanny world of the grotesque, and which, compared to *Marino Faliero*, presents the carnivalized history of the *Serenissima* in a more disturbing light. It is not some grisly details of torture that push things towards the grotesque – these are, on the contrary, confined to the off-stage. The terror of the grotesque here is purely structural – as in Wolfgang Kayser's definition, the grotesque is indeed 'a structure'[49]: the grotesque structure of Byron's tragedy, *The Two Foscari*, has the drama's action controlled by the will of Loredano, the master puppeteer of both Foscari's fates.

This grotesque intensification of the tragic is reflected in the strategies of play involved – *alea* and *ilinx* are both subdued and wielded exclusively by the evil puppeteer. Loredano effectively takes on the force of fate or God (*alea*) of traditional tragedy and tames *ilinx*, the carnival element of topsyturvydom, through the cold execution of the economy of revenge.

[49] Kayser, *The Grotesque in Art and Literature*, p. 184.

Venice is still a state of masks as in the sinister world of *Marino Faliero*, where the doge is nothing but a toy in the hands of a corrupt state machine, but in *The Two Foscari*, this has been perfected to produce an absolute impenetrability of state power and an absolute subjection of the doge's personality – the *persona* no longer simply masks but now absorbs the person who holds the office. *Agon* is an active force in the hands of the ruthless Loredano, but relates only passively to the two Foscari – twisted into their agonistic suffering while always staunchly loyal to Venice. This is staged as a vast and torturous irony by Byron, since the young Jacopo is tried for treason and the old doge powerlessly presides over his only son's torture – all under the unseen control of Loredano. And then there is Jacopo's wife, Marina, rhetorically asserting her own version of *agon*, albeit only in words, against the relentless throttle-hold the drama has on its eponymous protagonists. But this transference of substantial rhetorical power from the doge to a female character, and hence outside of the frame of patriarchal contest, only shifts the balance of the drama to further accentuate the trapped, powerless state of the two Foscari. While Faliero makes his own moves and fails, and Foscari is moved about with no power to wield whatsoever, Marina's bravery and cutting critique is, of course, powerless against the patriarchal setup of the Republic – as Jane Stabler remarks: '[i]t is the suffocation of Marina's protest and the claustrophobia of a closed [and we might add, grotesque] structure that means her voice will never be heard in which Byron locates the terror of the Venetian plays.'[50]

Even the few moments of lyric relief offered by the drama, and the elements of play they might potentially set free, are corrupted by, and sucked into, and held in check by its grotesquely tragic structure. In the midst of this intensely claustrophobic and inhuman universe, Byron does add, as in the stern world of *Marino Faliero*, some lyric relief to alleviate the atmosphere of suffering. If in *Marino Faliero*, Lioni's nocturnal soliloquy combines an intense lyric admiration for the ocean city's incomparable beauty with a critique of the debased carnivalesque nature of Venetian high society, Jacopo Foscari's equivalent is a day-time ode to the 'sea-born city'[51] – an intensely Byronic, swimmer's ode to Venice, a recollection of the happy carefree days of childhood revelling in 'the billows', movingly echoing the sheer 'love' of the sea and the 'joy / Of youthful sports' in the final

[50] Stabler, '"Awake to Terror": The Impact of Italy on Byron's Depiction of Freedom's Battles', p.80. Henceforth '"Awake to Terror"'.

[51] *Beppo*, x.; Jacopo's lyric lines: I.i.94-122.

ocean stanza at the end of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*.[52] Unlike Lioni's, however, this lyric intermezzo foregrounds *ilinx* – the strategy of play which has the power to subvert all given structures – in a positive manner. In a clever Byronic twist, Jacopo's childhood reminiscences conjure up a world of pure joyous carnival – Jacopo recalls being 'masked as a young gondolier', where the 'gay competitors' raced to the audience of 'crowding beauties, / Plebeian as patrician.' (I.i.97-101). As an instance of *ilinx*, this passage momentarily threatens to burst free of the grotesque confines of the neo-classical dramatic frame, as well as presenting a Venice outside the dreadful deadlock of corrupt power, a Venice worth preserving. However, even this instance of *ilinx* is inexorably drawn back into the drama's grotesque revenge tragedy, as Jacopo's Venice is transformed into nothing more than a Venice worth dying for. In the Venice of *The Two Foscari*, *ilinx* is ruthlessly locked down by the will of Loredano.

*

In the world of tragedy, the aleatory forces of fate, or the will of a deity, rule the game. In Byron's rendition of the story of the two Foscari, as we have seen, this central organizing role is played by a wanton puppeteer whose actions are known only to the audience and his associate patrician Barbarigo. Both the hapless Foscari are ruthlessly played until the very end. As Kayser remarks: '[a]mong the most persistent motifs of the grotesque we find human bodies reduced to puppets, marionettes and automata, and their faces frozen into masks'[53], and the tragic Doge Foscari has been 'frozen' into such a 'mask', presiding 'with Roman fortitude' (I.i.24) over the tortures of 'his last and only son' (I.i.26): '*Feels he,* think you?' / 'He shows it not.' (I.i.27) While *Marino Faliero* is still essentially describing a game, albeit not exactly fair, where both sides have at least had their go, in *The Two Foscari*, there is no such arrangement – power rests entirely in the hands of the unscrupulous patrician puppeteer Loredano and the doge Foscari is utterly powerless against his schemes and the punitive machinery of the state that Loredano so skilfully manipulates. The doge Foscari is a

[52] 'And I have loved thee, Ocean…' *CHP* IV, clxxxiv. Jacopo's loving lyric also recalls Byron's similar sentiments in the Venetian stanzas at the beginning of the fourth canto of *Childe Harold* (xviii): 'I loved her from my boyhood; she to me / Was the fairy city of the heart, / Rising like water-columns from the sea, / Of joy the sojourn, and of wealth the mart'.

[53] Kayser, *The Grotesque in Art and Literature*, p.183.

powerless spectator presiding mute over the repeated torture sessions of his only living son.[54] If Faliero felt like a puppet sitting in state, executing the will of the patrician council in whose hands the power of the state really lay, then Francis Foscari's ducal ordeal is infinitely worse – having no cue for rebellion or indeed any chance to act in any way whatsoever, the elderly doge is and remains the victim of the corrupt powers that be, a man and a father assimilated by his office and its prescribed role. This results in the 'unheroic and intensely political'[55] universe of Byron's second Venetian tragedy.

We can already see how Loredano's control of play in Venice itself employs the strategies of play it opposes: masks, the costumes of *mimicry*, are imposed on all. When the ducal mask is taken from Foscari in a rushed quasi-legal proceedings[56] that represent the penultimate act of repression executed by the state machinery (trumped only by the final act of the *Dieci*'s insistence on masking the inglorious act of deposition by a state-ordained pomp of glorious public obsequy), there is not even the possibility of any great oration, since there is no heroic surge of agonistic polemic waiting to rise and charge, however powerlessly, against the wrongs perpetrated by the self-serving patrician council. Foscari has become his mask. The only voice speaking up against this masked tyranny is again Marina's, disempowered from the outset by Venice's patriarchal system. The deposition of Francis Foscari is delivered as a 'last decree, / Definitive and absolute' (V.i.164-5) of the Ten – a sudden power override which cancels the doge's (also state-ordained) holy oath to remain in office till his death – and marks a 'state of exception' whereby the existing laws are lifted and 'force' facilitates the 'law' to suit the current situation – the council of Ten acts as the sole 'executive power', wielding the now essentially law-less 'force of law'.[57] Ironically, the doge's downfall is ultimately brought about by his absolute trust in the justice of Venetian law – his allegiance to the 'law he found [but] did not make' (II.i.395), and, we might add, the law he failed to realize had been manipulated by a power hostile to him personally. His stoical belief in the impartiality of Fortune, in the blind working of *alea*, is

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[54] As Jane Stabler remarks: '*The Two Foscari* makes use of off-stage torture to great dramatic effect and, written in the midst of the Austrian suppression of the Italian uprising, this is also Byron's most explicit protest against state-sanctioned terror.' '"Awake to Terror"', p.79.

[55] Lansdown, *Byron's Historical Dramas*, p.185.

[56] This recalls the proceedings of Faliero's trial and execution deliberately hidden from the public, eventually revealing the version amenable to the patrician council's aims and stratagems.

[57] Giorgio Agamben, *State of Exception*, trans. Kevin Attell (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2005), p.38.

his second big mistake – as Faliero has pointed out in Byron's previous drama, the lottery of fate in Venice is corrupted by the ruling patricians, and, in this case, behind them Loredano, whose power takes Venice over completely in Byron's second drama. Foscari believes 'all … advantages' are Fortune's 'accidents' (II.i.340-1) and, crucially, that 'nothing rests / Upon our will' (II.i.359). Foscari dies with the ambiguous remark that Loredano is 'true' (V.i.298) – this opaque utterance can be read either as Foscari's final recognition of having been played, or his realization that he has been poisoned,[58] or else bearing witness to the exact opposite, i.e. Foscari's continuing ignorance of all these power machinations and the grotesque state of affairs in Venice. On the one hand, Byron's text is conducive to the conclusion that the doge is a character whose human instincts have been suppressed for so long that the mask of his office has supplanted the man inside. On the other hand, Francis Foscari's unshakeable stoicism perhaps stands out as heroic in the heightened context of the drama – and so marks his own, contorted strategy of *agon*, resisting as best he can, if pointlessly, given his sworn allegiance to the republic of Venice. But since his duty to the state is 'paramount to every duty' (IV.i.116), his agonism is thus channelled by the state he serves into the unimaginable agony of presiding over his only son's torture.[59] The doge's one striking insight, marking his impassive attitude as something rather more philosophical than an automated acceptance of a puppet, is his dictum 'when we think we lead, we are most led' (II.i.361). This wise but sad insight describes the difference between Faliero and Foscari in a nutshell – the bravado of the former versus the reserved acceptance of the latter. These are the two perspectives of Byron's two Venetian dramas – one following the carnivalesque rebellion against the carnivalized power structure from the outside, the other showing the shameless workings of that grotesquely carnivalizing power structure from the inside.

In this claustrophobic world, the only active agonistic counter-player to Loredano's machinations and the doge's studied passivity prescribed by his belief in the justice of Venetian laws is doge Foscari's daughter-in-law, Marina. Byron gives her the voice of trans-historical polemic, and she takes over the role of the critic and prophet that Faliero played in the previous Venetian drama. Marina's searing critique boldly and repeatedly takes issue

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[58] As Martyn Corbett concludes in his study of the drama. See *Byron and Tragedy*, p. 140.

[59] Lansdown reads this, like Marina in the play, as a sign of Foscari's 'inhumanity …stand[ing] in relation to a state and a political culture that is inhumanity incarnate.' *Byron's Historical Dramas*, p.190. Stabler remarks: 'Bound to the historical tragedy is the question of the spectator's aesthetic distance. Foscari has to assume the position of detached observer as his own son is put on the rack.' '"Awake to Terror"', p.80.

with the inhumane, automated power structure of the Venetian state, with an agonistic bravado surpassing even that of Faliero, as its pointed catalogue of recriminations is directed not at an allied audience or spoken in soliloquy, but thrown at the doge and the rotten state he represents in the presence of the antagonist and chief master of fates, Loredano:

> Marina: … Keep
> Those maxims for your mass of scared mechanics,
> … your dumb citizens,
> Your mask'd nobility, your sbirri, and
> Your spies, your galley an your other slaves,
> To whom your midnight carryings off and drownings,
> Your dungeons next the palace roofs, or under,
> The water's level; your mysterious meetings,
> And unknown dooms, and sudden executions,
> Your "Bridge of Sighs," your strangling chamber, and
> Your torturing instruments, have made ye seem
> The beings of another and worse world! (II.i.299-313)

Marina's critique here and elsewhere represents a rhetorically potent, if politically powerless, agonistic confrontation of the ruthless machinery of the state. This catalogue of the state's criminal acts and masked operations recalls in much more clear and terrifying images the carnivalesque power wielded by the 'mask'd nobility' over the 'dumb citizens' consistently evoked throughout Byron's first Venetian drama. Here, however, Marina's catalogue of vice culminates in a grotesque transformation of the carnivalesque Venetian state in which Venice seems to be ruled by 'beings of another and worse world', a grotesque Other wielding unlimited power and channelling it solely into oppressive measures. As Bakhtin remarks:

> The theme of the marionette plays an important part in Romanticism. This theme is of course also found in folk culture, but in Romanticism, the accent is placed on the puppet as the victim of alien inhuman force, which rules over men by turning them into marionettes.[60]

Marina's speech may agonistically confront the grotesque 'alien inhuman force' of the Venetian state, but cannot challenge this force precisely because it turns its citizens and especially its doge 'into puppets, marionettes and automata'.[61] 'There is an insect-like

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[60] Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, p.40.

[61] This view of the state is exemplified, *inter alia*, in its treatment of Marina's children, and as such bears witness to the officious inhumanity of state bureaucracy. See for instance Celeste Langan: 'Such a (capitalist) state instrumentalizes all places, including the household. … The Venetian government summarily appropriates the feminine labour of reproduction, claiming that children are mere assets of the

automatism in both the Foscari […] which is inhuman, mechanical',[62] and, as Lansdown notes, '[n]either man can abandon either the palace […] or the political status quo.'[63] The puppets cannot break free of the constraints of the puppet theatre – the ducal palace and the prison on each side.[64] They are held in place by Byron's relentless adherence to the unity of space, even as the dramatic tension builds up, and the father and son Foscari are 'force[d] … inch by inch towards the doorway they cannot cross.'[65] The 'alien inhuman force' of bureaucratic violence moves the powerless 'plebeian as patrician', issuing 'decrees' which serve only its own needs, grotesquely corrupting the democratic power invested in it by the republican myth of Venice. The protagonists' downfall is not the result of hamartia, but of the state of Venice itself, 'a character, with whose nature the other characters must reckon',[66] but which is hidden behind a veil 'of Orwellian state secrecy'.[67] As we shall see, however, this bureaucratically corrupt state of affairs is not the ultimate nadir of Byron's grotesquery of Venetian power.

Agon, *alea* and *ilinx*, then, are each tightly contained by the Venetian state in Byron's second representation of it – held in check, in the first instance by a usurpation of *alea*. But we have also been discussing the grotesque deployment of masks, and here we see the second strategy of play being used to contain play: the carnivalesque *mimicry* of the state – the 'mask and mime and mystery and more'[68] – so strongly present in Byron's first Venetian drama. However, in *The Two Foscari*, while the Venetian power structure is still very much masked, Byron has pushed the carnivalesque masque of Venetian politics into the grotesque, shifting the perspective to reveal the sinister interior of this power structure by rendering Loredano's shameless puppeteering in real time, by showing the 'two Foscari inhabit a world

state ("They are the state's!"). And the sacrifice of the Doge's son, registered as a debit, is [ironically] balanced by an increase in territory: "My reign has doubl'd realms; / And, in reward, the gratitude of Venice / Has left, or is about to leave, me single."' Langan, 'Venice', p.271.

62 Bernard Blackstone, *Byron: A Survey* (London: Longman, 1975), p.238, cited in Lansdown, *Byron's Historical Dramas*, p.197.

63 Lansdown, *Byron's Historical Dramas*, p.197.

64 In *The Two Foscari*, Byron most economically dramatizes the view of Venice at the beginning of canto IV of *Childe Harold*: 'I stood in Venice on the Bridge of Sighs, / A palace and a prison on each hand'.

65 Lansdown, p.198. For a detailed study of the neo-classical unities, especially that of space, and the masterful execution of claustrophobia in the drama see Lansdown's chapter dedicated to *The Two Foscari* in *Byron's Historical Dramas*, pp.171-202.

66 Lansdown, *Byron's Historical Dramas*, p.185.

67 Lansdown, *Byron's Historical Dramas*, p.188.

68 *Beppo*, x.

bereft of justice, but literally swaddled in law',[69] and by demonstrating at every turn the passive grotesquery of the automated power structure – for example, in the robotic diction of the Chief of the Ten, and the masked practices of the *Dieci* themselves, through whom the 'tyrann[y] […] secrecy, coercion and black ops at the heart of [Venetian] rule'[70] work themselves out: 'We / cannot comply with your request,' they answer Marina when she asks to privately deal with Foscari's remains, insisting instead that 'His relics / Shall we exposed with wonted pomp and follow'd / Unto their home by the new Doge, not clad / As *Doge*, but simply as a senator' (V.i.348-352).

Juxtaposing Byron's two Venetian dramas, we can clearly discern that Venice's power structure has evolved from the corrupt setup which triggered Faliero's untimely rebellion into something much darker, more convoluted and less openly structured, the power of the state having seeped quietly into the hands of biased individuals and the secret police – the atmosphere, the motives and the tragic loops the two Foscari are forced to go through are truly Kafkaesque. In *The Two Foscari*, set about a century after *Marino Faliero*, The Council of Ten – the ominous *Dieci* – are legally decimating the Republic.[71] Their oligarchic power structure is virtually omnipotent – they represent the state, and in Byron's drama 'the State is the Law and the Law is the State'[72]. This is not the full extent of the corruption portrayed in Byron's drama, however. With this shady power structure in place, it takes only one man with a plan and enough will-power to execute it to harness the already corrupt power Venetian power structure to serve his private goals and individual will. It is at this point that the play inherent in the Venetian state, and in particular the mimicry through which it contains that play, is subordinated to the tragic economy of revenge through the appropriation, by one man, of the role, and power, of *alea*. We leave the world of carnival here, as the strategies of *mimicry* and *alea* are made to serve instead the repressive ends not just of the Venetian state but also of both tragedy and the private biases and motivations of written history.

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[69] Lansdown, *Byron's Historical Dramas*, p.196.

[70] Gonsalves, 'Byron's Venetian Masque of the French Revolution', p.54. Jane Stabler reads the implications of the following lines of Marina's outrage in relation to the repressions 'used by the Austrians to control Italy.' 'Marina's vain efforts to articulate the nature of the tyranny that enfolds her family play out, at some level, Byron's feelings of helplessness as he watched Italy lose the struggle for freedom and self-determination once again and sink back under a tyrannical oppressor.' '"Awake to Terror"', p.80.

[71] As Schmidt concludes, '[t]his body became the key power in the Venetian republic, the power against which the protagonists in both Byron's plays battle.' *Byron and the Rhetoric of Italian Nationalism*, p.106.

[72] Lansdown, *Byron's Historical Dramas*, p.197.

Loredano re-writes the law to serve his private patriarchal vendetta – he is 'ineffably – legitimately vile', we might say, paraphrasing Byron's searing critique of Castlereagh.[73] Any sense of the objectivity of official historical documents, such as legal texts in this case, is directly undermined – Loredano blatantly admits that if the law does not allow him to execute his vicious plan, he will make the law so that it will:[74]

> Barbarigo: But if this deposition should take place
> By our united influence in the council,
> It must be done with all [due] deference …
> Loredano: As much of ceremony as you will
> So that the thing be done. …
> Barbarigo: What if he will not?
> Loredano: We'll elect another,
> And make him null.
> Barbarigo: But will the laws uphold us?
> Loredano: What laws? – 'The Ten' are laws; and if they were not
> I will be legislator in this business. (IV.i.27-39)

Barbarigo's suggestions clearly betray the masked tactics of Venetian power – plotting an act which they know is objectionable, his diplomatic strategy is that it 'be done with all [due] deference.' However, Loredano is now beyond such trifling mimicry, self-assuredly insisting that such tactics are superfluous. If the doge does not comply, they 'will elect another [puppet] / and make [Foscari] null.' Loredano's appropriation of the force of *alea* here seems able to dispense with *mimicry*. In another clever twist of Byron's, the 'ten bald-heads' of the Dieci who are said to hold Venice 'in bondage' (III.i.244) are revealed to be only another set of puppets in the hands of the master-mover Loredano, who is prepared to ruthlessly 'legislate' according to his own personal aims. As Barbarigo observes: '[t]hey speak [his] language, watch [his] nod, approve / [His] plans, and do [his] work.' (V.i.142-3). Venice is now a grotesque puppet show, serving a single indomitable will. The subversive, revivifying, carnivalizing potential of play is now supressed, as, in

> Romantic form the mask is torn away from the oneness of the folk carnival concept. … [T]he mask hides something, keeps a secret, deceives. … The Romantic mask loses almost entirely its regenerating and renewing

[73] *Don Juan*, 'Dedication', xiii.

[74] As Malcolm Kelsall remarks: 'If the state is the slave of a tyrant (or tyrants) who use its constitution, its courts and their power as 'legislators' to foster their own aims (as Loredano does), then 'justice' is merely the expression of the usurping self-interest of those able to manipulate power for their own ends.' 'Venice Preserved', p.63.

element and acquires a somber hue. A terrible vacuum, a nothingness lurks behind it.[75]

This 'terrible vacuum' or 'nothingness' 'lurk[ing] behind' the mask of a 'republican', 'just' Venetian state renders Byron's second Venetian drama a full-blown Romantic negation of traditional carnival – while Faliero's coup (allying him across the social spectrum to the *arsenalotti* and thus making it a 'folk' event) was a carnival attempt to 'regenerate and renew' Venice, in *The Two Foscari*, all social, indeed all familial, bonds are rendered inoperative – as Jacopo aptly puts is, 'nothing can sympathize with Foscari / not even a Foscari' (I.i.172-3).[76] There is no communion but in suffering, and that only comes at the very end when the doge is deposed and finally recognizes the full tragedy of his situation – his allegiance to the state and his office having translated itself into the 'null' that Loredano prescribed to him. The only force that stands in opposition to Loredano's will is Marina's love for Jacopo and her agonistic rhetoric raging against the injustice and shady tactics 'of the unknown / Who govern' while her husband is sentenced to 'the unknown and unnumber'd / Judged and destroyed in silence' (I.i.168-170). The total corruption of Venice renders this entirely ineffective. The only community active in the drama remains the inexorable automated power structure which bureaucratically proceeds with its decrees and reports, controlling all and, what is even worse, susceptible to manipulation, as Byron has shown, by the vengeful motives of just one master-mover who fills that 'terrible vacuum' behind the mask with his own agenda.

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Yet, as history itself has the carnivalizing power to subvert the state's suppression of the carnivalizing strategies of play in *Marino Faliero*, generating a plebeian myth of Faliero and making a focal point of his historical erasure, so in *The Two Foscari*, Byron suggests ways in which history might break free from even the total strangle-hold of Venice achieved here by a single will bent on vengeance. With the Venetian power structures controlling the official records revealed as undeniably biased, Byron's drama presents us with alternative versions of this episode of Venetian history – of the possible motives driving historical

[75] Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, p.40.

[76] Stephen Cheeke reads the drama as follows: '[B]oth Foscari and his son seem to suffer from pathological states of devotion to Venice – the one in manic desire for the city as a place, the other in an excessive zeal for the notion of an ideal city-state. The destructive nature of their devotion is mirrored in their own patriarchal relationship, and in the patriarchal legacy of Venice as heir to Rome.' *Byron and Place: History, Translation, Nostalgia*, p.174.

events and of the vanquished and suppressed. The traces of these alternative versions of events are to be found, Byron suggests, not just beyond the limits of official history but also beyond the limits of literary genre – here in odd instances of marginalia. Loredano's private books of accounts and the graffiti on the prison wall of the dungeon are each revelatory in their own right, and tell parts of a hitherto untold story, one of a shady victor, the other of an unredeemed loser.

> Jacopo Foscari: … What letters are these which (approaching the wall)
> Are scrawl'd along the inexorable wall?
> Will the gleam let me trace them? Ah! The names
> Of my sad predecessors in this place,
> The dates of their despair, the brief words of
> A grief too great for many. This stone page
> Holds like an epitaph their history;
> And the poor captive's tale is graven on
> His dungeon barrier, like the lover's record
> Upon the bark of some tall tree, which bears
> His own and his beloved's name. Alas!
> I recognize some names familiar to me,
> And blighted like to mine, which I will add,
> Fittest for such a chronicle as this,
> Which only can be read, as writ, by wretches!
> (He engraves his name) (III.i.15-27)

Hobhouse's addition to Byron's note to the Venetian stanzas opening the last canto of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* bears witness to the striking dramatic effect of these historical testimonies 'scratched upon the walls' by 'the inmates of the dungeons', leaving 'traces of their repentance, or of their despair, which are still visible'.[77] This stony 'chronicle' of 'blighted' 'names' bears witness to the catalogue of suffering and possible injustice taking place off the official stage of Venetian history – 'this stone page' is the 'epitaph' of forgotten fates and erased histories.

> Jacopo Foscari: My name; Look, t'is there - recorded next
> The name of him who preceeded me,
> If dungeon dates say true.
>
> Marina: And what of him?
>
> Jacopo Foscari: …*What of him?*

[77] *CPW* II, p. 218. According to Jane Stabler, '[t]he dialogue between verse and prose in *Childe Harold* IV draws attention to the gulf between the aesthetic surface and submerged historical horror.' '"Awake to Terror"', p.78.

Thou askest. – And what of me? may soon be ask'd,
With the like answer – doubt and dreadful surmise –
Unless thou tell'st my tale. (III.i.68-76)

Like the black veil obscuring Marino Faliero's portrait, these scratched chronicles generate '[d]oubt and dreadful surmise'. Punishment seeks to suppress, but simultaneously announces that suppression, ironically inviting the kind of subversive doubt and conjecture it seeks to stifle. And for Byron 'doubt and dreadful surmise' become strategies for the reading and writing of history in his Venetian plays: strategies for subverting official history and for retrieving the histories of those who have been erased or omitted from the annals. The names of reputed traitors to the state on the dark prison wall offer the only alternative history of Venice available, and such archives are, of course, ironically, normally only accessible to equally afflicted fellow convicts. They are closed archives, spatially displaced and ideologically erased from the official glory of the most serene of republics. But here literature has a role. It can, at the very least, point out the existence of both '[a] palace and a prison on each hand' (*CHP* IV, i). It can stir up 'doubt and surmise'. It can imaginatively explore what history erases, which is, as we have seen, a fundamental aspect of Byron's two dramatizations of Venetian history.

Nevertheless, the relentless apartheid of official history and alternative versions of history is further symbolized in Byron's drama by the fact that Jacopo Foscari is refused his request for history books to read in prison:

Jacopo Foscari: …And I shall be alone – no men, no books –
Those lying likenesses of lying men.
I ask'd for even those outlines of their kind
Which they term annals, history, what you will,
Which men bequeath as portraits, and they were
Refused me, - so these walls have been my study,
More faithful pictures of Venetian story,
With all their blank, or dismal stains, than is
The Hall not far from hence, which bears on high
Hundreds of doges, and their deeds and dates. (III.i.112-120)

Byron's searing critique, of the Venetian state in particular, but also of state power *per se*, of authority's perpetual, oppressive over-ruling and rewriting of history, comes across most blatantly in Jacopo's prison contemplations. Unable to write his own history, he is, moreover, refused the request for those of others. These 'annals, history, what you will / Which men bequeath as portraits' are kept apart from those evicted from their official pages. Jacopo therefore studies the 'more faithful pictures of Venetian story' – and, like Faliero's

erased portrait, these prison walls 'with their blank, or dismal stains' represent the 'faithful' 'story' of Venice; these blanks and erasures, crucially, gain the status of historical truth here. In Byron's Venetian dramas, these alternative histories are fitted into the frame of the official historical annals, yielding what Byron has called his only object in creating these dramas – 'historical truth'. Paraphrasing Malcolm Kelsall, Byron's Venetian plays represent the process of 'learning about things as they are' and, as such, they are a lesson 'in disenchantment'.[78] In these dramas, Venice is a game played out through the strategies of play we have identified – a game held in balance by those strategies, pitted one against the other, to the point at which the whole game becomes a grotesque travesty of play, though this is all hidden from view by official histories. Yet, actual history has its own ironic games to play. If the Venetian carnival of power has become thoroughly grotesque in *The Two Foscari*, and Byron's second Venetian drama shows the extent to which the corruption of the state of Venice has progressed in the near-century since Faliero's fall, a still darker rendition of the history of 'the fairy city of the heart' (*CHP* IV, xviii), then, crucially, the dramas read as a diptych strongly resonate with 'a Byronic recognition that republican sovereignty is doomed to the slaughterhouse of history'.[79]

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The darkened image Byron's dramatic diptych offers of the Venetian Republic in its Golden Age stands in sharp contrast to his account of the same in the 'Ode on Venice', written only a few years earlier, in 1818, where Golden Age Venice as was 'a boast, a marvel, and a show' (*CHP* IV, xviii):

> Glory and Empire! once upon these towers
> With Freedom--godlike Triad!
> …
> She was the voyager's worship; even her crimes
> Were of the softer order--born of Love,
> She drank no blood, nor fatten'd on the dead … (III.101-11)

As the Venetian dramas make clear, however, such an archetypally laudatory image of Venice is built on silences, erasures and the ideological, Foucauldian re-writings of history, where reality is rewritten according to the power structures of the elite. However, the overall effect of Byron's two Venetian plays is ambiguous. On the one hand, the staging of

[78] Kelsall, 'Venice Preserved', p.66.

[79] Gonsalves, 'Byron's Venetian Masque of the French Revolution', p.55.

alternative histories seeks to vindicate the tragic protagonists and reveal the oppressively self-serving oligarchical power of the patrician council. On the other hand, through Byron's mastery, we are transported to the Golden Age of the Republic, and there are unmistakable instances of sheer admiration for 'the fairy city of the heart' present in both these dramas, despite their sustained claustrophobic atmosphere: recall, for instance, Lioni's chiaroscuro meditation over the *canal grande* in *Marino Faliero*, or Jacopo's tragic worship and moving childhood memories of his mother-city in *The Two Foscari*. It is as if Byron places the ideal concept of the Golden Age of *La Serenissima* itself *sous rature* – under erasure. And this is the point. What one history erases, another asserts, and no single history can entirely obliterate what it obscures. The status of Venice as the most serene of republics is simultaneously questioned and recognized by both its written and unwritten histories.

Outside the immediate scope of Venetian history, Byron's dramatic diptych bears witness to and analyses in depth wider problems of both history-making and historiography, shifting its ultimate focus to the inescapably biased nature of the fixed lottery of official history, where the victors' perspective prescribes the ethics of the official annals. As Anne Barton aptly concludes,

> Byron's Faliero is … stingingly conscious … of the fact that history will judge him not according to the honesty of his dealings or the justice of his cause, but simply on the amoral basis of failure or success. The calumnies of time 'never spare the fame of him who fails, / But try the Caesar, or the Catiline, / By the true touchstone of desert – success' (I.ii.594-6).[80]

Barton clearly demarcates the crucial lines of Byron's critique here – 'history' judges 'simply on the amoral basis of failure or success' – basically a lottery, but one which is, as Byron's Venetian dramas show, fixed by the victors, who write and rewrite history to suit their own ends and justify their own actions. As Byron has it elsewhere: 'Had Bonaparte won at Waterloo, / It had been firmness; now 'tis pertinacity: / Must the event decide between the two?' (*DJ* XIV.90). In a similar vein, Richard Cronin adds: 'In the end what interests [Byron] is the riddle of it all. How can one decide what is right and then choose sides if it is only in the act of choosing sides that the rights and wrongs of the matter become fixed?'[81] The problem of this essential indeterminacy of historical matters marks yet another

[80] Anne Barton '"A Light to Lesson Ages"', p.150.

[81] Richard Cronin, 'Asleep in Italy: Byron and Shelley in 1819', in *In Search of the Pure Commonwealth: the Politics of Romantic Poetry* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), p.172.

level on which Byron's texts evoke and resonate with the principle of play. Byron's Venetian dramas, and indeed his historical dramatic works in general, problematize the game of history and historiography, teasing out the ultimate ethical questions that the partiality of all its players poses to posterity.

CHAPTER 2

Sardanapalus

Playing against History

In *Marino Faliero* and *The Two Foscari*, we saw strategies of play that might promise historical change being opposed and contained by the overwhelming deployment of those same strategies by the powers that be. In *Sardanapalus*, we see something similar, though here history's dynamic containment of play with play is extended far beyond the carnivalizing world of patriarchal Venice. It is also linked to the kind of heroism that might at first appear to offer a challenge to the power structures that resist and contain change, in a critique of heroism that suggests it is a systemic feature, and flaw, of all political systems throughout human history – a critique achieved through Byron's intricate use of the strategy of play which represents heroism, *agon*. This is a crucial development which also reverberates in the later dramatic works, and indeed across Byron's entire oeuvre, most strikingly perhaps in the Ismail cantos of *Don Juan*.[1] Heroism itself is seen as flawed, corrupt and complicit in the oppression it so often claims to oppose. Like Byron's Venetian dramas, *Sardanapalus* also develops the themes of carnival and the grotesque in relation to the power structures of the state. Indeed, in Byron's Assyrian drama, we are taken back to the very 'first / Of empires' (V.i.444-5), suggesting that the drama's critique of the state's grotesque workings has implications for history *per se*, rather than simply a specific instance of it. In *Sardanapalus*, we once again see the protagonist wield the strategies of *mimicry* and *ilinx* against the political state he opposes, only to have, as in *Marino Faliero*, these strategies turned against him in ways that cannot be overcome. On the other side of the drama's conflict, the antagonists (the high priest Beleses and his soldierly puppet Arbaces) wield *agon* combined with *alea* to achieve their goal – the overthrow of the protagonist and the downfall of the political ideology he represents – and we shall see how their coup is the inverted image of Faliero's, and why. Byron's Assyrian drama is principally interested, then, in the clash between the agonistic code of empire and Sardanapalus' pacifist carnival rule, which seeks to win a place in the annals of history. Pitching epic values against epicurean

[1] As Alan Richardson observes: 'the play anticipates the critique of war developed in Byron's portrayal of the siege of Ismail in *Don Juan* VII-VIII.' 'Byron and the theatre', in Drummond Bone (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Byron* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p.143.

ones, Byron determinedly dissects the very idea of heroism and analyses the challenge Sardanapalus' peaceful carnival rule presents to his own time as well as to posterity. As Sardanapalus' story demonstrates, it is through the workings of *alea* – once again the most powerful force in the drama, the mechanism of the lottery of fate and the vehicle of tragedy, represented here by the inscrutable forces of nature and myth (the prophecy of the fateful flood, which in turn foreshadows another strong Byronic theme, that of predestination[2]) – that, as in the Venetian plays, historical events are finally locked in tragedy.[3]

Sardanapalus, written immediately after *Marino Faliero*, is chronologically the second of Byron's three unity-observing dramas, and concludes our discussion of what we may call Byron's neo-classical dramatic project.[4] Written in Ravenna between January and May 1821, *Sardanapalus* has been mostly read as a commentary on, or a semi-autobiographical distillation of, both the contemporary political situation in Italy (its composition coinciding with the failed uprising of the Carbonari, with whom Byron was closely associated during his residence in Ravenna[5]) and the conundrums of Regency

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2 As Beleses, the traitor priest and instigator of the coup explicates: 'Thou may'st resolve whate'er thou wilt, the stars / Have written otherwise' (II.i.346-7).

3 As Lansdown sums it up: 'When the Euphrates – the ultimate *deus ex machina* – floods, Sardanapalus and his palace are finally doomed.' *Byron's Historical Dramas*, p.168.

4 *Ravenna Journal* (kept 4 January – 27 February 1821) entry for 13 January 1821: 'Sketched the outline and the Drams. Pers. for an intended tragedy of Sardanapalus, which I have for some time meditated. Took the names from Diodorus Siculus, (I know the history of Sardanapalus and have known it since I was twelve years old), and read over a passage in the ninth vol. octavo of Mitford's Greece, where he rather vindicates the memory of this last of the Assyrians. ... [Teresa] quarreled with me, because I said that love was *not the loftiest* theme for true tragedy; and, having the advantage of her native language, and natural female eloquence, she overcame my fewer arguments. I believe she was right. I must put more love into 'Sardanapalus' than I intended.' *BLJ* VIII, p.26. In a letter to Murray of May 25 1821: 'I have completed four acts. ... I have made Sardanapalus *brave* (though voluptuous, as history represents him) and also as *amiable* as my poor powers could render him, - so it could neither be truth nor satire of any living monarch. ... I have strictly preserved all the unities hitherto, and mean to continue them in the fifth, if possible.' *BLJ* VIII, pp.126-7. As Pomarè notes, 'Byron meant to have included, as a note to his new play, *Sardanapalus*, the translation of the relevant passages from Diodorus Siculus's *Bibliotecae historicae*, containing the account of the fall of the last Assyrian king. Murray printed neither Diodorus's quote nor the dedication to Goethe that Byron had penned (and which would eventually find its way into the later tragedy, *Werner*).' *Byron and the Discourses of History*, p.51.

5 See Lansdown, for instance: 'In both [the *Ravenna Journal* and *Sardanapalus*] we see a kind of joyless, immolatory surrender to the forces of revolution opposed to an inertia of a very different kind: a Saturnine absorption in the superincumbent physicality of life.' *Byron's Historical Dramas*, p.144. Jerome McGann famously and consistently since his first study of the drama in *Fiery Dust*, reads *Sardanapalus* biographically, building up a New Historicist strand of Byron criticism rehabilitating the biographical approach. For *Sardanapalus*, see his 'Hero With a Thousand Faces: The Rhetoric of Byronism', *Studies in Romanticism* 31.3 (Fall 1992), pp. 295-313, where he reads Zarina, the estranged wife of Sardanapalus, as a 'coded' Lady Byron. McGann reads the drama as a 'masquerade' of Byron's life. For a general overview of McGann's biographical approach see 'Lord Byron's Twin Opposites of Truth', in *Towards a Literature of Knowledge* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989) or 'The Book of Byron and the Book of the World', in *The Beauty of Inflections: Literary Investigations in Historical Method and Theory* (Oxford: Clarendon

politics back in England.[6] Problematizing the political and social ramifications of imperialism and *laissez-faire* liberalism, the drama has often been read by New Historicist readers as exemplifying the failure of patriarchal regimes to sustain their own ideals. Other critical responses to Byron's *Sardanapalus* have tended to focus on the issue of gender and its performance,[7] seeing the drama as challenging traditional concepts of both masculinity and femininity. However, we shall approach the drama by focusing on its representation of the dynamics and ethics of heroism. Driven by impending political crisis, Sardanapalus' famously late transformation from hippie pacifist into armoured monarch is in effect only a transformation into an ineffectual pose – the adoption of the martial, heroic pose that Sardanapalus was meant to don all along to satisfy the dictating tradition of the empire; a personal failure for him, and too late to stem the tide of events. As such, Sardanapalus' act of heroic transformation critically reflects on the politics of both heroism and empire.[8] More generally, the burning 'light / To lesson ages' (V.i.440-1) that comes across very strongly in Byron's tragedy seems to be the notion that big historical moments, traditionally presented by the *grand récit* of history as the cradles of heroic action, can only produce transformations of inadequacy into other kinds of inadequacy, heroic though they might be – 'bloody and most bootless', these big historical moments are prone to 'prove how fools may have their

Press, 1988). Other biographical renditions of the play include Martyn Corbett: Byron's 'particular self-projection'. *Byron and Tragedy*, p.10; Frederick Burwick talks about multistability: 'Byron's *Sardanapalus* … is a play entangled in illusion that seems to invite an autobiographical as well as political reading.' Sardanapalus is 'like George IV in his retreat to Brighton,' and the play is read through the Queen Caroline scandal and Byron's personal life. 'Illusion and Romantic Drama', in Gerald Gillespie (ed.) *Romantic Drama* (Amsterdam/Philadephia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1994), pp.73 and 76 [pp.59-80].

6 See Lansdown *Byron's Historical Dramas*, pp.140-170; for a materialist reading of the play, the individual Sardanapalus versus society, see Daniel Watkins, *A Materialist Critique of English Romantic Drama*, pp.163-166; interestingly for the purposes of our study, Marilyn Butler reads 'Byron's Nineveh as a richly imagined Otherworld, which is the familiar world – London – turned upside down – and satirically reproduced.' This is essentially a carnivalized reading of the drama. 'John Bull's Other Kingdom: Byron's Intellectual Comedy', *Studies in Romanticism* 31.3 (Spring 1992), p.284 [pp. 281-294].

7 Most notably Susan Wolfson's seminal article ''A Problem Few Dare Imitate': *Sardanapalus* and 'Effeminate Character'', in Robert Gleckner and Bernard Beatty (eds), *The Plays of Lord Byron: Critical Essays*, pp.201-232, which analyses the dynamics of gender, taking as a starting point Hazlitt's essay on the 'Effeminate Character'; other influential critical responses include Jerome Christensen's 'Byron's *Sardanapalus* and the Triumph of Liberalism', *Studies in Romanticism* 31.3 (Fall 1992), pp. 333-360; more recently, Andrew Stauffer's illuminating '*Sardanapalus*, Spectacle and the Empire State' about the wider implications of the 19th century American staging of the drama, in Matthew J. A. Green and Piya Pal-Lapinski (eds.), *Byron and the Politics of Freedom and Terror*, pp. 33-63.

8 In *The Deformed Transformed*, Byron further ironizes the very idea that anybody, transformed or otherwise, can be heroized by politics. Everybody is by definition deformed – we are shown that this is and always has been the way of the world. Byron truly wants a hero there – and, as in *Don Juan*, the vacancy is filled by the commentator figure, the anti-heroic and de-heroizing 'everlasting Sneerer', the supernatural Stranger.

fortune too / Won half by blunder, half by treachery!'[9] But, equally, as we have seen before and shall see again, in Byron's dramas (and indeed across his entire oeuvre), history is a monstrous catalogue of ceaseless violence and upheaval. In *Sardanapalus*, Byron ruthlessly argues that to become a hero is to make a pact in blood, a Faustian deal with history, which requires heroism in order to perpetuate itself.

The world of Byron's Assyrian drama is, then, a fundamentally agonistic one, and Nietzsche's theory of 'the will to power' helps us to elucidate this world. The essential problem the drama presents is manifest in the battle between the king's polemics of peace and the established tradition of heroism – in the mighty clash of these two disparate ethical systems. Sardanapalus is deliberately not playing the empire game required of him by virtue of his office as the king of Assyria, which respects only the agonistic rules of perpetual contest, conquest and the reaping of glory, because he simply finds the entire power-struggle enterprise hateful and unethical. In this enterprise, as Nietzsche puts it,

> every specific body strives to become master over all space and to extend its force (– its will to power) and to thrust back all that resists its extension. But it continually encounters similar efforts on the parts of other bodies and ends by coming into an arrangement (union) with those of them that are sufficiently related to it: thus they conspire together for power. And the process goes on.[10]

This state of affairs – the perpetual commotion of the struggle for power – goes on interminably because the 'arrangements' or 'unions' forged in the process ultimately become unstable, as the motives of the 'bodies' involved eventually drive them once more against one another. In Iser's terms, it is the world of *agon*. It is the world that Sardanapalus holds in contempt and stands in opposition to. However, as Byron's drama shows, it is not possible to overcome or abolish power struggles by simply opting out of them, by refusing to engage. Passivity does not represent a solution to the struggle – indeed, in the end, it is only one more contribution to it. Like Byron, 'the projection of an end to this struggle Nietzsche views as merely a dream of those for whom this world of becoming ought to be

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[9] *The Age of Bronze* V, 223-5. 'Oh bloody and most bootless Waterloo! / Which proves how fools may have their fortune too / Won half by blunder, half by treachery!'

[10] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, ed. Walter Kaufmann, trans. W. Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage Books, 1967), p. 636.

other than it is.'[11] 'For Nietzsche and Heraclitus'[12] – and we can add Byron here – 'there is no place outside this struggle'.[13] In Byronic terms, the struggle for power *is* human history. Sardanapalus' tragic flaw is his belief in the 'dream' of 'an end to this struggle'.

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Byron's Sardanapalus is a historical anomaly – at the helm of the first and longest-ruling empire, he is determinedly unheroic: he is adamant in his refusal to engage in the empire game that he is expected to play. His tragic flaw, sloth and woeful impracticality aside, is, as we have said, his naïve belief that he is being able to transform the empire from an age-old agonistic game of thrones into a realm of peace simply by passively opting out of the game.

A hero is, by definition, a man 'of superhuman strength, courage or ability, favoured by the gods', a man 'of renown supposed to be deified on account of great and noble deeds.'[14] Crucially, Byron's Sardanapalus imagines himself to be the opposite of this – his strategy is, in classical terms, a revelling in *placida quies* – a calm repose – the very antithesis of heroic effort in classical heroic *topoi*, where rest and sleep connote death.

The heroic game of thrones that is the game of empires and, more generally, history itself, is nicely summarized in the lines of Arbaces, the 'warlike puppet' of the 'master-mover' traitor priest, Beleses (V.i.462). Sardanapalus' description of the two instigators of the coup is decidedly grotesque[15] in its evocation of the puppet soldier Arbaces, who is a 'mere tool / A kind of human sword in a fiend's hand' (V.i.460-1), and his master-mover Beleses, this time recalling the grotesque puppet show directed by Loredano in *The Two Foscari*. The priest Beleses is a player for the highest stakes, his ability to foretell the future giving him an unfair advantage – he is a game fixer, in a way, comparable to the patricians of Venice fixing the lottery of fate for the two Foscari. He combines *alea* with *agon* to better

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[11] Christoph Cox, *Nietzsche: Naturalism and Interpretation* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999), p.201.

[12] As we shall see in the chapter devoted to Byron's penultimate drama, *Werner*.

[13] Cox, *Nietzsche: Naturalism and Interpretation*, p.202.

[14] *OED*, accessed 18.2.2011.
http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/86297?isAdvanced=false&result=1&rskey=P6gLnf&#eid140294508.

[15] Bearing in mind Kayser's note that '[a]mong the most persistent motifs of the grotesque we find human bodies reduced to puppets.' *The Grotesque in Art and Literature*, p. 183.

manipulate the *agon*-based 'human sword', the 'mere soldier' Arbaces: 'Thou hast seen my life at stake – and gaily played for: / But here is more upon the die – a kingdom' (II.i.138-9). For Beleses, then, this coup is a *coup de dés* worth a kingdom – a game of dice for ultimate power – and the pair of them represent the 'union' of combined 'will[s] to power' which Nietzsche sees forming during all struggles for power.

Arbaces represents the adverse side of soldierly courage in the drama by lacking loyalty, and so stands as a foil to Salemenes, Sardanapalus' brother-in-law, whose heroism remains untainted by any such failing. Byron's drama does not stop at this mutual heroic reflection across the sides of good and evil, however, but goes on to problematize heroism as such. It is Sardanapalus, in fact, that presents a problem for both heroes, but especially for the heroic game of dice played by Arbaces:

> Arbaces:
> … This woman's warfare
> Degrades the very conqueror. To have pluck'd
> A bold and bloody despot from his throne,
> And grappled with him, clashing steel with steel,
> That were heroic or to win or fall;
> But to upraise my sword against this silkworm,
> And hear him whine… (II.ii.82-88)

Arbaces is worried about his stakes in history, as fighting an un-heroic king is more shaming than glorious. In the eyes of his foes and allies alike, Sardanapalus is a 'man-queen' (I.i.43), a 'she-king' (II.i.49), a 'king of concubines' (II.i.59). As an effeminate eccentric, he is simply regarded as abject[16] and unfit for the sacred throne of Assyria. Sardanapalus' deliberate neglect of his imperial duties in the pursuit of a vision of peace (and personal satisfaction) thus directly facilitates violent conflict while offering both sides of that conflict one common denominator – the desire for agonistic martial rule to return. The king's effeminacy and unorthodox rule cause confusion and inevitably 'provoke a revolt because they corrupt the conservative foundation of masculine culture.'[17] The general sentiment is unanimous – the abject element at the helm of the empire must be uprooted. For the king's enemies, this translates as a carte blanche for a coup – even though the act of killing the king is felt as demeaning, as we have seen in Arbaces' frustrated diction, because Sardanapalus

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[16] As Julia Kristeva suggests, in abjection we behold "the breaking down of a world that has erased its borders;" the abject "does not respect borders, positions, rules." Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983) p.4.

[17] Susan Wolfson, "*Sardanapalus* and Effeminate Character", p.210.

is perceived as 'the effeminate thing that governs' (II.i.96). No glory is to be gained by slaying such an unnatural creature. The agonistic code prescribes heroic rules even for a coup – and the deposition of a 'silkworm' does not count as the deed of a hero.

As portrayed in Byron's drama, Sardanapalus' peaceful reign presents a major, unprecedented problem – history is at an impasse. The Assyrian annals are 'full of blood', but the empire is now running on empty, because the war show has stopped. Sardanapalus refuses to conform to the titanic model of heroic rule Byron criticises in *The Age of Bronze*: 'whose game was empires / and whose stakes were thrones / Whose table earth – whose dice were human bones'.[18] No more heroic history is being written, in the required blood, because of Sardanapalus' pacifist persuasion:

> Sardanapalus: 'Tis true I have not shed
> Blood as I might have done, in oceans, till
> My name became the synonyme of death –
> A terror and a trophy.
> I feel no penitence; my life is love:
> If I must shed blood, it shall be by force. (I.ii.402-407)

Yet, as Coleridge suggests, ancestral voices are forever prophesying war. Indeed they call out for it. They tease and tempt the present into acts of heroism with the bait of glory.[19] To win glory is to enter history, and everyone but Sardanapalus is playing the heroism game. Indeed, everyone, including Myrrha, his Greek lover, seems determined that Sardanapalus should play too:

> Myrrha: Look to the annals of thine Empire's founders.
> Sardanapalus: They are so blotted o'er with blood, I cannot.
> But what wouldst have? the Empire has been founded.
> I cannot go on multiplying empires.
> Myrrha: Preserve thine own.
> Sardanapalus: At least, I will enjoy it.
> Come, Myrrha, let us go on to the Euphrates:
> The hour invites, the galley is prepared,
> And the pavilion, decked for our return,
> In fit adornment for the evening banquet,
> Shall blaze with beauty and with light, until

[18] *The Age of Bronze* III, 50-4, on Napoleon: 'whose game was empires / and whose stakes were thrones / Whose table earth – whose dice were human bones' 'Behold yon grand result in yon lone isle, / And, as thy nature urges, weep or smile.'

[19] As Simon Bainbridge observes, 'Byron identifies the ideological force of glory, not only in the role it plays in driving soldiers into battle but in bolstering the established order.' He 'reinforces his unriddling of glory's dream through his highly sceptical treatment of the heroic'. *British Poetry and the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars: Visions of Conflict* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p.197.

It seems unto the stars which are above us
Itself an opposite star; and we will sit
Crowned with fresh flowers like –

Myrrha: Victims.

Sardanapalus: No, like sovereigns,
The Shepherd Kings of patriarchal times,
Who knew no brighter gems than summer wreaths,
And none but tearless triumphs. (I.ii.547-562)

Against Myrrha's various attempts to prod Sardanapalus into heroic action, to engage with history, Sardanapalus' wish to be like the 'shepherd kings' of old, knowing no gems but flowers is essentially a wish to altogether step out of history and its agonistic rules of empire-building and retreat back into the mythical realm which supposedly preceded the historical annals, recalling Salemenes' complaint in his opening soliloquy: 'I will not see … thirteen hundred years / Of Empire end like a Shepherd's tale' (I.i.5-8). In generic literary terms, Sardanapalus refuses to enter the frame of traditional epic and dallies in the alternative of a timeless, mythical pastoral idyll. In a sentimental conversation with Myrrha, we see him dream of a reclusion away from all pomp and circumstance of state, in a 'cottage in the Caucasus' (I.ii.452).

Sardanapalus' carpe-diem strategy of overcoming the rules of empire by engaging in no activity but perpetual feasting has other, more pressing connotations for the purposes of our study, however. Sardanapalus' diction is replete with carnival imagery. His introductory polemic with Salemenes sees him praise Bacchus (god of Bacchanalia, the ancient Roman precedent of the *carnivals* of medieval and later Europe[20]), deified, as Sardanapalus boldly asserts, by his ingenious 'lasting monument', wine, and immortalized in the ritual of wine-drinking as opposed to his 'conquest of India' – this glory in conquest makes him only 'a sort of a semi-glorious human monster' (I.ii.181) in Sardanapalus' eyes:

Sard: … thou thinkest him a hero
That he shed blood by oceans; and no god,
Because he turned fruit to an enchantment. (I.ii.186-8)

The stakes are set not only for Sardanapalus' claim to be, like Bacchus, a carnival king, but also his own deification as such – Sardanapalus is a second Bacchus, to be celebrated for

[20] Byron has anachronistically opted for the Roman name of the ancient, mystical Greek deity Dionysus. This shifts the semantic valence towards a more 'modern' sense of carnival, as opposed to the mystical Dionysian rituals featuring sacrifice and sex – towards revelry and theatricality as opposed to ritual madness and ecstasy.

presiding over rituals of pleasure, subversion and *ilinx* rather than martial glory. And here Sardanapalus carnivalizes his 'country's creed' (I.ii.185), which equals blasphemy, as Salemenes promptly reminds him.[21] Sardanapalus' pacifist persuasion and epicurean take on life and religion is an alien element in both tragedy and Assyrian history – his resistance to heroism takes its chances to resonate with its only possible audience – the reader/spectator.

Byron aptly juxtaposes the two opposing interpretations of the king, and pits them against one another in an agonistic combat of diametrically opposite worldviews – Sardanapalus' own vision of lasting peace ruled by a carnival king, and the abject image that this in turn inspires in his subjects and enemies – that of a travesty ruled over by an unmanly non-king who must be deposed so that traditional order can be re-established, since a carnival is not and cannot be a perennial state of affairs. Sardanapalus' carefree, idealistic disengagement from conflict – a philosophy of 'live and let live' – is immediately translated by his detractors into careless ignominy.

The critical tipping point of this situation, and the king's dismay once he learns of the impending coup, is summarized in the following:

> Sard: The ungrateful, ungracious slaves! They murmur
> Because I have not shed their blood, nor led them
> To dry into the desert's dust by myriads,
> Or whiten with their bones the banks of Ganges;
> Nor decimated them with savage laws,
> Nor sweated them to build up pyramids,
> Or Babylonian walls. (I.ii.226-232)
>
> …
>
> Sard: If then they hate me, 'tis because I hate not;
> If they rebel, 'tis because I oppress not.
> Oh, men! Ye must be rules with scythes, not sceptres,
> And mow'd down like the grass, else all we reap
> Is rank abundance, and a rotten harvest
> Of discontents infecting the fair soil,
> Making a desert of fertility. (I.ii.412-18)

[21] The king's sense of sympathy and identification with Bacchus is also crucial for the denouement of Byron's drama, where Sardanapalus' death can be read as sacrificial – indeed, there are similarities between the last of the Olympian gods and the last Assyrian king, for which we have to tap into the mysteries of the Dionysian cult: the sacrificial nature of the offering (symbolized in the natural cycle of the grapevine and wine production) and, crucially, the Dionysian cult as the cradle of Greek theatre.

Byron's carnival king finds his carnival to be precisely that – a carnival – a temporary suspension of the social order it seeks to subvert. Once Sardanapalus is informed of the treason, he casts indignant abuse at his ungrateful subjects who, instead of celebrating peace and reaping its fruit, 'eat[ing], drink[ing] and lov[ing]' (I.ii.252) as their king commands, fester in 'rank abundance', producing only 'a rotten harvest of discontents infecting the fair soil'; a little earlier he imagines 'the rank tongues / Of this vile herd, grown insolent with feeding' (I.ii.340-1), recalling Marino Faliero's righteous outcries vilifying the grotesque body of the Venetian republic. While in a traditional empire based on agonistic principles the subjects 'never changed their chains but for their armour', under the carnival rule of Sardanapalus, in a feat of seemingly irrepressible historical irony, now 'they have peace and pastime, and the licence' not simply to 'revel' but also to 'rail' (I.ii.335-7). Sardanapalus has 'sated [Assyria] with peace and joys' (V.i.495) and the result is an uprising. Ironically, again, while Faliero carnivalized his state by virtue of his agonistic rebellion against the prescribed ducal role – an empty 'pageant' – Sardanapalus carnivalizes the sacred throne of Assyria by doing the exact opposite – by opting out of the agonistic struggle, refusing to engage even in 'the show of war' (I.ii.533) and assuming instead a pacifist existence which makes him 'a pageant power' (I.i.76).[22] This pacifist existence is, however, not ascetic. Instead it pits play against war, mistakenly assuming there is an absolute distinction between these things, and that the one offers an alternative to the other. And therein, among other things, lies the core of Byron's clever and bold critique – Sardanapalus, a voluptuous, epicurean peacemaker, provokes conflict. This 'king of peace, who holds a world in jubilee' (III.i.28) praises Bacchus and the 'sweet[ness]' of 'uncertainty' (II.i.263). But he is a Dionysian character in history, not myth – bringing us once more back to Nietzsche. To withdraw from the game of power is, and can only be, to make a move in that game to which others will inevitably, and agonistically, respond. And, of course, Sardanapalus' carnival is agonistically pitched at the world of agonistic conflict and conquest from the outset. As McGann remarks, Sardanapalus 'uses his regal office not to perpetuate the traditional ideas about empire and kingship but to break them down.'[23] It is, indeed, a bid for power, though

[22] As Andrew Elfenbein observes: 'If successfully manipulated, violence can repress popular passions and earn respect for the government … For Myrrha, masculinity may be a charade, but one necessary for peace.' 'Byron: gender and sexuality', in Drummond Bone (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Byron*, p.63.

[23] McGann, *Fiery Dust*, p.239.

for an ideal rather than an individual: McGann goes on to say that Sardanapalus offers 'a new kind of kingly life which all men can live.'

This, of course, is not how Sardanapalus understands his actions. Sardanapalus assumes his legacy will be the ideology of his epicurean inscription (and, crucially, his one historical legacy in writing): 'Eat, drink, and love – the rest's not worth a phillip' (I.ii.252).[24] Byron's king vehemently stands by 'the truth of that brief record' – according to him, 'those few lines contain the history / Of all things human' (I.ii.247-8). To the modern reader, and indeed to Byron, this one historical monument to Sardanapalus does not merely attest to the king's self-indulgent epicureanism. It is, on the one hand, also a testimony to Sardanaplaus' canny, Ozymandian sense of the historical irony that sees epic monuments that 'have forgotten / Their very record', and are likely to be misinterpreted by posterity.[25] On the other hand, Sardanapalus' ideology is a peaceful philosophy of almost gospel-like carpe diem – similar to Matthew 6:34: 'Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.'[26]

As such, Sardanapalus' pacifism is a contradiction – an agonistic opposition to *agon*, a rhetorical call to arms against arms, a glorious attempt to end glory, a monument to end all monuments. He is particularly unforgiving in his mockery of the traditional monuments of glory:

Sard: Oh thou wouldst have me doubtless set up edicts –
"Obey the king – contribute to his treasure –
Recruit his phalanx – spill your blood at bidding –
Fall down and worship, or get up and toil."
Or thus – "Sardanapalus on this spot
Slew fifty thousand of his enemies.
These are their sepulchres, and this his trophy!"
I leave such things to conquerors; enough
For me, if I can make my subjects feel

[24] Interestingly for the focus of our study, Byron's note on this archaeological 'fact' renders Sardanapalus' legacy even more ludic: 'the monument representing Sardanapalus was found there, warranted by an inscription in Assyrian characters, of course in the old Assyrian language, which the Greeks, whether well or ill, interpreted thus: 'Sardanapalus, son of Anacyndaraxes, in one day founded Anchialus and Tarsus. Eat, drink, play; all other human joys are not worth a fillip.'' *CPW* VI, p.615.

[25] 'So much for monuments that have forgotten / Their very record', says Sardanapalus. 'Egypt / Hath piled in her brick mountains, o'er dead kings, / or *kine* – for none know whether those proud piles / be for their monarch, or their ox-God Apis' (V.i.482-7).

[26] *King James Bible*, retrieved 29 January 2011. http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+6:34&version=KJV

> The weight of human misery less, and glide
> Ungroaning to the tomb; (I.i.255-66)

Byron's Sardanapalus, much like Byron himself, disdains the traditional tropes of heroism and systematically takes apart the accepted 'cant': 'to me war is no glory – conquest no / Renown' (IV.i.505). Indeed, as McGann argues, if Sardanapalus has a fault it is that he is too good for a world that loves war, glory, and the exercise of power. Like the Byron of *Don Juan*, Sardanapalus mercilessly exposes the folly of such ideas, and counters with his own political philosophy.'[27] If Sardanapalus' alternative to the power struggle proves to be no alternative to that struggle after all, it nevertheless offers a powerful critique of it. But McGann also reads Sardanapalus, the 'king of peace', as a messianic figure:[28] '*Sardanapalus* is a tragedy not because the king loses his throne and the Assyrian empire seals its doom, but because in the defeat of Sardanapalus is imaged the permanent loss of earthly paradise;'[29] '[l]ike the Christ of our Western mythology, he speaks a prophecy that contradicts the traditions and institutions which have raised him to his office.'[30] This reading is too idealizing – Byron's *Sardanapalus* clearly ironizes the notion that any 'earthly paradise' is available to a world governed by *agon* – yet McGann's points here align to some extent with our argument about Sardanapalus' carnival strategy against the hegemony of History and its agonistic code of 'Glory's gewgaws' (*CHP* IV, cix): Sardanapalus' unique way of history-making is an epicurean carnival of peace that at least seeks to contest, and redeem history from, the heroic dictate of war that makes up the vast volumes of history. He has, we might say, his own messianic impulses, insisting that 'I loathe all war, and warriors; / I live in peace and pleasure: what can man / Do more?' (I.ii.529-31). But Byron's drama also shows how Sardanapalus' playful political strategy might at least carnivalize the literary mode in which he was born to write his history, and in which history's victors write their own histories, as Sardanapalus' story briefly turns epic narrative into a kind of bacchanalian

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27 McGann, *Fiery Dust*, p.233.

28 Cf. Frederick Burwick: 'It is with this sense of a moral lesson to posterity that Sardanapalus welcomes the flames. …He cannot dispel the curse of Nineveh's murderous progenitors, but his martyrdom will echo through history as the moral counterpart and corrective to their record of cruelty and slaughter.' 'Illusion and Romantic Drama', p.76.

29 McGann, *Fiery Dust*, p.236

30 McGann, *Fiery Dust*, p.239.

pastoral. In Hayden White's terms, the king *has* managed to write his own 'emplotment'[31], even imagining that his unique mark in the 'bloody' annals of history will be a 'green spot':

> Sard: … mine inoffensive rule
> An era of sweet peace 'midst bloody annals,
> A green spot amidst desert centuries,
> On which the future could turn back and smile,
> And cultivate, or sigh when it could not
> Recall Sardanapalus' golden reign. (IV.i.512-7)

Sardanapalus envisions his legacy of a 'golden reign' as a bucolic idyll – a 'green' oasis 'amidst desert centuries'. And to this extent, he does hand down an alternative legacy, though it is only a literary and imaginative one, to which the future will 'turn back and smile' – and this legacy is certainly not one of the awe and terror a 'heroic' king needs must inspire. However, while the dream of more than this lingers, as he suggests that his 'green spot' might offer the future something to 'cultivate', a 'king of feasts, and flowers, and wine, and revel, / And love, and mirth, was never king of glory' (I.ii.542-3), as Myrrha points out – and in the ruthless economy of history's power struggles, the 'substance of sweet peace' has to be bought with 'the show of war' (I.ii.532-3). Sardanapalus' alternative to the history of *agon* can never be more than literary and imaginative.

Indeed, the doomed nature of this emperor's attempt to change the history of empires can also be seen in a range of carnivalizations of the tragic genre itself. It would be *nihil novi sub sole* if a tragedy contained humour in scenes of comic relief featuring minor stock characters such as the doorkeeper in *Macbeth* or the inn keeper Idenstein in Byron's later drama *Werner*, but it is certainly innovative to create a semi-comical tragic protagonist. Byron refers to Sardanapalus as 'almost a comic character' in a letter to Murray,[32] and the heightened scene in which Sardanapalus prepares for battle, puts on his armour and asks for a mirror is nothing if not comical – both history and tragedy here 'seem to be repeatedly betrayed into comedy, unable to resist turning into it.'[33] More precisely, Byron carnivalizes

[31] Emplotment 'is the way by which a sequence of events fashioned into a story is gradually revealed to be a story of a particular kind' - 'tragedy', 'romance', 'comedy', 'satire' or indeed the epic. Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973), p.7.

[32] Letter to Murray of 22 July 1821, *BLJ* VIII, p.155.

[33] Butler, 'John Bull's Other Kingdom: Byron's Intellectual Comedy', p. 286.

the tragic genre by including the heteroglossia of a comedy bordering on farce, while naturally commenting on historical events as he does so. While in *Marino Faliero* Byron introduced the heteroglossia of a dual perspective of the final execution scene, and the run of dramas that begin with *Marino Faliero* are an indisputably serious venture, yet already in the second of these dramas we can see evidence of the fact that Byron's involvement with the dramatic genre coincided with his (nigh continuous) composition of *Don Juan*, as we witness an increasingly more pronounced introduction of the subversive potential of comedy into an essentially tragic text. The comic elements of *Sardanapalus* also have wider connotations for the study of Byron's dramas more generally. As Marilyn Butler remarks:

> In his political dramas set in Venice, Byron has difficulty distancing himself from traditional tragic norms, Shakespearean and neo-classical, if indeed he attempts this manoeuver at all. But in *Sardanapalus* he breaks with a domesticated, naturalized classicism, and seems to signal an important development in his work by dedicating his work to Goethe: for Goethe, like Shelley, writes as an ironist, and a cultural comparativist, an outsider looking in on the world he creates.[34]

Butler's commentary pinpoints the beginning of a change in Byron's conceptualization of drama. The second Venetian play, *The Two Foscari*, Byron's next after *Sardanapalus*, pulls away from this move towards detached irony, but the experimental approach Butler highlights here is increasingly valid for what follows after that – first *Cain*, then *Werner*, another tragedy dedicated to Goethe, the second, unfinished mystery play *Heaven and Earth* and finally the fragment of *The Deformed Transformed*, where Byron perfects the perspective of 'an ironist' and 'an outsider looking in on the world'. Indeed, as Alan Richardson observes, the 'vacillations between hedonism and responsibility, blood-wrath and pacifism, sincerity and satire, gravity and pettishness lend a comic energy to the tragedy entirely lacking in the Venetian plays',[35] and we might say, looking across the dramatic oeuvre in its entirety, mark a crucial point of convergence between the dramas and the masterpiece of *Don Juan*, whose fluid energy is the most conspicuous manifestation of Byron's natural affiliation to, emphasis on and deft exploration of the principle of play. However, *Sardanapalus* comes close to similar convergence with *Don Juan* because of its uniquely comic potential, with the 'role-playings, costume changes, and sudden shifts of behaviour exemplified by its central character, … its high degree of theatricality … play[ing]

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[34] Butler, 'John Bull's Other Kingdom: Byron's Intellectual Comedy', p. 284.

[35] Richardson, 'Byron and the theatre', p.142.

off the structural constraints demanded by its neo-classical 'unities' of place and time'[36] only the most obvious examples of the play strategies involved in this work, which intricately intermingle on multiple levels to ironically comment on, subvert and complicate Sardanapalus' aspirations to 'lesson ages'.

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Sardanapalus' obstinate line of 'doing it his way' is a paradoxical attempt at making history by trying to stand outside it, a feat of intricate irony on Byron's part – Sardanapalus' distinctive imperial mode is to simply not play the empire game, his bid to enter history is based on his refusal to enter the violent Faustian deal demanded by History – on his refusal to spill blood. Indeed, Byron's canny critique of heroism is partly achieved through Sardanapalus' retorts to the beckoning of Salemenes, his traditionally minded brother-in-law, who claims Sardanapalus has given his people 'more peace than is glorious' (I.ii.106). Sardanapalus engages Salemenes in a dialogue, revealing the paltry nature of heroism and glory:

> Sard: …thou wouldst have me go
> Forth as a conqueror.
> Salemenes: Wherefore not?
> Semiramis – a woman only – led
> These our Assyrians to the solar shores
> Of Ganges.
> Sard: 'Tis most true. And how return'd?
> Sal: Why, like a man – a hero; …
> Sard: And how many
> Left she behind in India to the vultures?
> Sal: Our annals say not.
> Sard: Then I will say for them - …
> [She] with twenty guards
> Have fled to Bactria, leaving to the ravens,
> And wolves, and men – the fiercer of the three,
> Her myriads of fond subjects. Is *this* glory?
> Then let me live in ignominy ever. (I.ii.121-139)

In another clever paradox in Byron's drama, the rhetoric of Sardanapalus' persistent resistance to heroism is itself heroic. This in itself generates conflict, but has further implications too: as Salemenes remarks, the people do not in fact reap the benefits of

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[36] Richardson, 'Byron and the theatre', pp.142-3.

Sardanapalus' peaceful reign – while the king engages in peaceful dalliance, 'the satraps' 'uncontroll'd' (I.ii.581) rise to power to tyrannize the populace, invoking again the ubiquity of Nietzsche's power struggle.

Of course, Sardanapalus himself repeatedly reduces the epic pageant of history to nothing but 'bloody annals', especially when talking about the violent, war-mongering monsters that are his forefathers – Baal, the bloodthirsty deity of the mythical era, Nimrod, the hunter-founder of the Empire, and Semiramis, the 'wild grandam' of Assyrian history, an aggressive female ruler. He 'wishes to disclaim th[is] heritage of sanguinary conquest.'[37] While he is resting after the first skirmishes of the coup, however, he has a nightmare vision of his genealogy featuring his dreaded violent ancestors – the horror of this vision is 'exorbitant', 'ejected beyond the scope of the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable.[38] And the nightmare of ancestral abjection which haunts Sardanapalus adds a significantly grotesque twist to the drama's carnivalization of history – the carnival king that he is, he dreams of a ghastly banquet where the beverage of choice is nothing short of grim chalices 'bubbling o'er with blood' (IV.i.111). His dream[39] is a grotesque rendition of his own dreaded 'heroic' genealogy, in the setting of a macabre feast, but this untimely communion with death also symbolizes the grotesque twist of Sardanapalus' own carnival existence – the 'king of feasts' (I.ii.542) now has to face his hated forefathers, the 'kings [and queen] of glory' at a bloody banquet, and in this clash of allegiances, his vehemently upheld difference is dissolved – the present's endless mimicry of the sanguinary past assimilates Sardanapalus in its 'dusky gore' (IV.i.31).

In Wolfgang Kayser's definition,

> The grotesque is a structure. Its nature could be summed up in a phrase that has repeatedly suggested itself to us: THE GROTESQUE IS THE ESTRANGED WORLD. … Suddenness and surprise are essential elements of the grotesque. In literature the grotesque appears in a scene or animated tableau. … a 'pregnant moment', or at least … a situation that

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[37] Richardson, 'Byron and the theatre', p.143.

[38] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*: *An Essay on Abjection*, p.1.

[39] Lansdown, p.161, n.30 'Sardanapalus' dream is truly neurotic – classically so, in fact.' Frederick Burwick analyses the dream as follows: 'The dream forces him out of his hedonistic self-indulgence into heroic action,' taking heroism at face value, like many critics, as the obvious right choice. 'His naïve belief in goodness and pervading peace is destroyed. He must confront the grim truth of greed and war.' His dream is not a 'delusion, but discomforting truth. The dream is not an escape but a confrontation.' 'The dream exposes the evil legacy which, as Sardanapalus knows, haunts his kingship. He has inherited a bloody throne.' 'Illusion and Romantic Drama', pp.74 and 75. The game of thrones is the game of empires, however, and Byron's Assyria stands for all ancient empires but also, significantly, for all hegemonic systems of power.

> is filled with ominous tension. … We are strongly affected and terrified because it is our world which ceases to be reliable, and we feel that we would be unable to live in this changed world. The grotesque instils fear of life rather than death. Structurally, it presupposes that the categories which apply to our world view become inapplicable.[40]

This 'grotesque structure' of an 'estranged world' asserts itself to the full in the terrifying 'tableau' of Sardanapalus' vivid nightmare – this is indeed the 'pregnant moment' which prefigures his inevitable death but also helps to explain its startling violent gesture – a gesture which seeks to finally set Sardanapalus apart from his hated 'war-mongering' heroic ancestry against the grotesque prospect of living on through history as one of them – against the 'fear' of a 'life' in history as simply one of the emperors of Assyria, the fear that he, come what may – by the sacred right of birth – will end up in the hall of his forefathers, 'With Baal, Nimrod, and Semiramis / Sole in Assyria, or with them elsewhere' (I.ii.625-6). Sardanapalus' death by conflagration is his final go at winning his own place in history, seeking to recreate himself as more than a coda to the thirteen-centuries-long annals of the Assyrian empire.[41] Instead of a 'green spot' of peace amidst 'bloody annals', Sardanapalus is now planning a very different kind of legacy: 'Our annals draw perchance unto their close; / But at the least, whate'er their past, their end / Shall be like their beginning – memorable' (IV.i.295-7).

Sardanapalus' dream, emphasizing the unsettling, provocative play of dream and reality crucial for the grotesque, unleashes the subversive element of *ilinx* on Sardanapalus himself. Sardanapalus' dream merges 'elsewhere' and the 'here' to troubling, vertiginous effect. Beginning with the startling, stoic, giant founder of the royal Assyrian line, Nimrod 'the hunter' resembling the stone guest, Il Commodore, of *Don Giovanni* in sternness, size and fatality, the dream swiftly turns into an even ghastlier dimension: the vampiric, rampantly obscene hag Semiramis, his 'grandam', the 'ghastly beldame [...] dripping with dusky gore' (IV.i.31) who leers at him and 'burn[s] [his] lips with her noisome kisses' (IV.i.150). In prospect, then, is a bloody incestuous union of Semiramis and Sardanapalus, subversive of everything Sardanapalus stands for. Indeed, such a union represents a rite of

[40] Kayser, *The Grotesque in Art and Literature*, pp. 184-5. Original emphasis.

[41] As Andrew Stauffer remarks: 'In Sardanapalus' final gamble … the records of Assyria are burned to stoke the fires of memorable spectacle.' '*Sardanapalus*, Spectacle and the Empire State', p.36.

passage into history, symbolizing as it does the inseparable fusion of heroism and carnage – the 'mild twins' 'gore and glory' – that is human history.[42]

Significantly, as the grotesque 'presupposes that the categories which apply to our world view become inapplicable', this scene marks the grotesque annihilation of Sardanapalus' ideals – wanting to be remembered as a keeper of the peace, he is now cast back into his goriest nightmares, as he begins to recognize that he has, all along, been taking part in the agonistic game he has heroically opposed his entire life – and the effect of this recognition is that of *ilinx*, potently dizzying. As Susan Wolfson remarks, 'neither the feminine nor the erotic have succeeded in providing an escape from violence',[43] quite the contrary. If we read Sardanapalus' effeminacy and intense eroticism as a passive, escapist – or masking – strategy aimed at avoiding the gory agonistic dictates of empire, then his nightmare vision shows him the ultimate limit of this strategy, and reveals the inefficacy of it all.

What, then, is Sardanapalus' 'light to lesson ages'? Sardanapalus is essentially seeking to buy a stairway not to heaven,[44] but, crucially, to history. He sees his final act as equating him with the ruling principles of the universe in the heliocentric religion, while claiming to become not a mere 'beacon in the horizon for a day' (V.i.439) but also 'a light to lesson ages' is basically an act of historical apotheosis; once again, Sardanapalus wishes to be, or believes himself entitled to be, a special case:

> Sardanapalus: … Time shall quench full many
> A people's records, and a hero's acts;
> Sweep empire after empire, like this first
> Of empires, into nothing; but even then
> Shall spare this deed of mine, and hold it up
> A problem few dare imitate, and none
> Despise… (V.i.442-448)

The flood of Time shall drown countless records and 'many a hero's act', but the fiery pyre of Sardanapalus shall, one way or another, survive. Why? Because, in the end, it is a 'problem', a puzzle. This is, essentially, a claim to lasting indeterminacy, and as such suggests a further, perhaps deeper involvement in the principle of play than we have yet seen in this drama, an involvement achieved through an unexpected discursive channel –

[42] *The Deformed Transformed*, II.ii.12. As Watkins notes, 'Sardanapalus is reluctant to commit himself … to their programme of violence.' *A Materialist Critique of English Romantic Drama*, p. 165.

[43] Wolfson, "*Sardanapalus* and Effeminate Character", p. 220.

[44] For that is granted to him by virtue of his elevated birth, as we have seen earlier.

Sardanapalus' proleptic claim to bequeath unto posterity 'a problem few dare imitate' represents in essence one of the discursive ur-cruxes of philosophical play – as Huizinga remarks:

> the word 'problem' itself (problēma) – literally 'what is thrown before you' – points to the challenge as the origin of philosophic judgement. We can say with certainty that the philosopher … always appeared as a typical champion … as [philosophy is] polemical and agonistic.[45]

'Polemical and agonistic', Sardanapalus' self-destruction, as a 'problem few dare imitate', is his last heroic gesture, but one which is – crucially – true to his sustained, adamantly heroic forswearing of what we might call the 'practical heroism' of warfare – in his description of his last act, the king affirms the agonism of his life-long philosophical playing against the prescribed game of empires – manifest throughout the drama in his 'polemical and agonistic' heroically pacifist discourse.[46] Sardanapalus' bold final statement is quintessentially Byronic – it is effortlessly, synchronically sure of itself while built on a historical paradox. Like Manfred's ''tis not so difficult to die', it is a fundamentally opaque utterance. It is also part delusion, in the belief that ages *can* be lessoned – judging by Diodorus' account in his universal history, the *Bibliothēkē*, history has very much dared to 'despise' the problem of Sardanapalus, portraying him as a man of little value who 'outdid all his predecessors in luxury and sluggishness', 'practiced sexual indulgence of both kinds without restraint' and 'not only did he end his own life in a disgraceful manner, but he caused the total destruction of the Assyrian Empire, which had endured longer than any other known to history.'[47] But Byron's drama is thus, yet again, a vindication of an (in)famous historical character that rests on the possibility of an alternative, though simultaneously fact-based, interpretation of 'official' history, though this time the 'facts' are played with more freely. Byron has Sardanapalus engaging with and agonistically playing against history, which, though a lost cause in his own time, ultimately becomes a 'problem to lesson ages'.[48] For

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45 Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, p.138.

46 As Elfenbein observes, '*Sardanapalus* has a[n] … overtly polemical point, conventional masculinity is death.' 'Byron: gender and sexuality', p.64.

47 Diodorus Siculus, *The Bibliotheke*, 2.23, http://www.aakkl.helsinki.fi/melammu/database/gen_html/a0000776.php (retrieved 6 May 2011).

48 Carlyle's treatise on *Heroes, Hero Worship and the Heroic in History* (Lincoln, NB: University of Nebraska Press, 1966) goes to investigate, inter alia, the intellectual possibilities of heroism, recasting the warrior hero as a thinker. 'In the true Literary Man there is thus ever, acknowledged or not by the world, a sacredness: he is the light of the world; the world's priest; - guiding it, like a sacred Pillar of Fire, in its dark pilgrimage through the waste of Time.' p.157. His historical legacy a pair of cities, an epicurean

Byron, history's potential for the subversion, ironization and carnivalization of 'the facts' is endless.

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The moral of Byron's Assyrian drama with regard to history, as we have come to expect, is rather bleak. We see the forces of history assert their uncompromising dynamics. According to Nietzsche, as summarized by Foucault in 'Nietzsche, Genealogy and History',

> [t]he forces operating in history are not controlled by destiny or regulative mechanisms, but respond to haphazard conflicts. They do no manifest the successive forms of a primordial intention and their attraction is not that of a conclusion, for they always appear through the singular randomness of events. … the world of effective history knows only one kingdom, without providence or final cause, where there is only the 'iron hand of necessity shaking the dice-box of chance'.[49]

Sardanapalus' passive disengagement from the public sphere and his refusal to provide a show of power creates a vacuum that demands to be filled. Sardanapalus' insistence on peace, by wilfully stopping the empire machine and suspending its agonistic mechanisms, is in the end precisely what makes these mechanisms reassert themselves with all the more vigour and brutality, to overwhelm him and swiftly fill the vacuum of peace. The notion of peace promises stability, security and calm, but history is upheaval and change.

Viewed in this way, the drama thus adds a final twist to the sustained, if cynical, meditation on the nature of heroism that we have outlined so far – its inescapability. History requires heroism. Reading between the lines, we might even say that in order to continue to create chaos, history *requires*, in fact produces, the heroically pacifist Sardanapalus in order to revitalize the conflict chaos feeds off. As in Foucault's reading of Nietzsche, *wirkliche Historie* – real History – is here 'an endlessly repeated play of dominations'.[50] History does not 'gradually progress from combat to combat' towards something other than combat. History simply proceeds from 'domination to domination.'[51] History perpetually alternates

inscription and an era of peace, Sardanapalus, as Byron has come to portray him, can qualify as such a 'Pillar of Fire'.

[49] Michel Foucault, 'Nietzsche, Genealogy, History', in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, ed. D. F. Bouchard (Ithaka: Cornell University Press, 1977), pp. 154-5, citing aphorism 130 from Nietzsche's *Daybreak*, [pp. 139-165].

[50] Foucault, 'Nietzsche, Genealogy, History', p.150.

[51] Foucault, 'Nietzsche, Genealogy, History', p.151.

the dominators and the dominated, and to do this needs, in the end, the strong to become weak and the weak to become strong *ad infinitum*.

Yet for the twentieth and twenty-first century there is another reading of Sardanapalus' final act available. Here, by placing his stakes in the game of history he is genuinely contending – ultimately – with the Nietzschean conundrum of 'real history', and doing so by appealing to an alternative concept of time and history as such:

> Against the empty, continuous, quantified, infinite time of vulgar historicism must be set the full, broken, indivisible and perfect time of concrete human experience; instead of the chronological time of pseudo-history, the cairological time of authentic history; in place of the total social process of a dialectic lost in time, the interruption and immediacy of dialectic at a standstill.[52]

In his final speech, we might argue, Sardanapalus is reaching for *cairós* – 'time neither objective nor removed from our control', but rather 'the abrupt and sudden conjunction where decision grasps opportunity and life is fulfilled in the moment.'[53] From this perspective, his 'problem few dare imitate, and none / Despise' represents an instance of the 'interruption and immediacy of dialectic at a standstill' – a 'full, broken, indivisible, perfect' aporetic moment which, precisely by piercing the fabric of 'the chronological time of pseudo-history' stands as 'a light to lesson ages'. In fact, we might see Sardanapalus' entire carpe-diem strategy and his misunderstood pacifist polemic as summarized in his final act, where he is staking everything on neither 'continuous time nor eternity, but history',[54] understood cairologically. More importantly, however, if the 'problem' presented by Sardanapalus at his death creates a 'moment of abrupt interruption' in its 'perfect time of concrete human experience' that subverts the hegemony of linear, chronological time, then by so doing, perhaps, *Sardanapalus* ultimately does open a way out of the historical conundrum of conflictual becoming represented by the Nietzschean scheme.

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[52] Giorgio Agamben, *Infancy and History*, trans. Liz Herron (London: Verso, 1993), p.148.

[53] Agamben, *Infancy and History*, p.101. 'Infinite, quantified time is thus at once delimited and made present: within itself the cairos distils different times ('omnium temporum in unum collatio') and within it the sage is master of himself and at his ease, like a god in eternity.' 'This is the 'final hand' dealt every time to life, which radically removes man from the servitude to quantified time ('qui cotidie vitae suae summam manum imposuit, non indiget tempore'). p.102.

[54] Agamben, *Infancy and History*, p.104.

CHAPTER 3

Cain and *Heaven and Earth*

Playing the Bible

We have now left the domains of historical drama – this chapter is dedicated to Byron's biblical 'mysteries'. However, this naturally does not preclude critical responses to these biblical dramas which resonate along the same New Historicist lines as in the case of Byron's 'historical tragedies'.[1] Biblical precedent, for Byron, works in analogous – though not identical – ways to historical precedent, not least in its use as 'official' history. And we shall trace various strategies of play pushing against, but ultimately harnessed by, the confines of the Bible in *Cain*, as we saw those strategies of play pushing against, but limited by, the confines of tragedy in Byron's earlier dramas. In *Heaven and Earth*, we will also see, for the very first time in Byron's dramas, those strategies of play bursting out of the inherited limits imposed upon them.

In essence, Byron's take on biblical subjects is not fundamentally different from his approach to historical ones. In both cases, there is a written text of some assumed authority to follow, push against and/or break free from. While in his first biblical drama Byron supplements Scripture with naturalist theories in Lucifer's educational apostasy, his dramatization of the Book of Genesis in *Heaven and Earth* is even more playful and transcends its predecessor both in its daring employment of polemic and in what in many ways becomes a Romantic recasting of both the biblical account of the Flood and the apocryphal rendering of the same in *The Book of Enoch*.[2]

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[1] E.g. Terence Allan Hoagwood: 'To read Cain in the context of revolutionary politics is to expand in significant ways our understanding of the "patriarchal subordination" which is, as Manning has said, inscribed in the characters of Adam and Abel and in the small society as a whole.' 'The politics of Regency England and post-Napoleonic Europe' are a part of the drama's valence of interest. In *Byron's Dialectic: Skepticism and the Critique of Culture* (London: Associated University Presses, 1993), p.100.

[2] The first translation of the Bodleian/Ethiopic MS was published in 1821 by Richard Laurence, Professor of Hebrew at Oxford, later Archbishop of Cashel. It is entitled *The Book of Enoch, the prophet: an apocryphal production, supposed to have been lost for ages; but discovered at the close of the last century in Abyssinia; now first translated from an Ethiopic MS in the Bodleian Library* (Oxford: Collingwood, 1821).

Furthermore, for Byron, the dynamic governing both historical and biblical 'history' is one of play. In *Cain*, Byron dramatizes the introduction of *agon* into the world. Interestingly, Byron's Cain is endowed with an acute and singular sense of *agon* from the very start, which sets him apart from his devout, resigned, passive family. Byron's Lucifer, on the other hand, naturally subversive, is the bearer of light in the form of a flurry of *ilinx* or vertigo. He brings *ilinx* into the world of men in two essential ways: one, he rhetorically subverts the notion of God's omnipotence, and, two, he seeks to subvert God's dominion over his creation by taking Cain on a trip across 'the Abyss of Space' in order to systematically encourage, provoke and channel Cain's inherent sense of *agon*, which eventually results in the finale we all expect from the beginning – the second Fall and (which we suspect is equally intriguing for Byron) Cain's exile.[3] Lucifer lures Cain with the vertiginous idea of knowledge – the 'knowledge' he presents Cain with on their trip through time and space is a dizzying spectacle of cosmic development through time, from which Cain emerges deeply entangled in existential despair and an acute sense of his own littleness and insignificance.[4] Indeed, Lucifer's employment of *ilinx* seeks to systematically translate all of existence into an endless game of *agon*, a contest between him and God, with God winning only for the time being. This never-ending chess match is set, as Lucifer shows us, against the background of immeasurable cycles of creation and destruction which metaphorically build on Cuvier's catastrophist theory of the earth.[5] The 'temptation' of Cain is merely Lucifer's opening move in this perpetual game of chess. Lucifer's rhetoric, then, bears witness to both this fervent agonism and his naturally subversive nature, inverting every known attribute of God into its negation or opposite. But Lucifer's critique of God

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[3] As Stephen Cheeke observes: 'Cain mourns for Eden as a lost homeland … As exile in his inherited condition, something that as always already happened to Cain, it is absolute and irrevocable, and so is experienced as an /acute malady exacerbated by the fact that he lives within sight of the 'inhibited walls''. *Byron and Place*, p.174.

[4] Christine Kenyon Jones draws attention to a significant trait, namely 'Byron's deliberate and consistent de-centring of humankind in the universe, which is of one piece with his widespread satirical and other use of non-human creatures—spirits, devils, angels, animals—to present a view which is alternative to that of humankind'. ''When this world shall be former'- Catastrophism as Imaginative Theory for the Younger Romantics', *Romanticism on the Net* 24 (November 2001), http://www.erudit.org/revue/ron/2001/v/n24/006000ar.html. As Kenyon Jones observes, 'Byron produces an ironical critique not only of the specific controversy about the complementarity between Cuvier's theories and the Mosaic writings, but also of the way in which both the geologists and the theologians were creating huge 'systems' of scientific theory or belief in this area out of the flimsiest of material.' (ibid.)

[5] See Byron's note about Cuvier at the end of the preface to the drama: *CPW* VI, p. 229. Cuvier's two major treatises (*Recherches sur les ossements des quadrupeds* of 1812 and *Discours sur les revolutions de la surface du globe* of 1813) were published in English in Robert Kerr's translation in 1813 as *Essay on the Theory of the Earth* and rapidly reached wide popularity.

also bears the mark of the Romantic grotesque – one example of many here is the idea that God creates for a pastime because he is lonely and bored, Lucifer thus translating the traditional benevolent Maker into a wanton puppeteer.

In this manner, Byron has his Socratic Lucifer rhetorically subvert the Bible through a textual carnivalization facilitated not through laughter, but by a subversive counter-narrative steeped in the naturalist theories popular in Byron's time[6] – a heteroglossia playing against the dogmatic interpretations of reality supplied by the devout characters and the traditional implications of the biblical narrative. Even the archangel himself comes across as a robotic entity, speaking like God's remote-controlled device, or drone, delivering God's unequivocal judgement, more than a character *per se*. Nevertheless, when Lucifer's mission is accomplished, Cain is cast out (joined by his sister-wife Adah and their son Enoch and unnamed infant daughter) and order among the remaining three members of Adam's tribe is restored. Only outside the scope of *Cain* are Adam and Eve blessed with another son Seth, 'the last offspring of old Adam's dotage' (*Heaven and Earth*, I.iii.392), who becomes the forefather of Noah and, because of the purge of the Flood, all subsequent mankind.

While *Cain* dramatizes the inception, through its 'othering', of the whole Cainite clan, Byron's second biblical drama, *Heaven and Earth*, dramatizes the destruction of the Cainites in the Deluge, and another beginning of life on earth featuring the chosen only, unified under God's decree. Yet the message that Byron's second biblical drama puts across does not conform to biblical precedent to the extent that *Cain* does, despite its powerfully subversive elements. *Heaven and Earth* marks a decisive turning point in Byron's dramatic project – it is in this drama that the play strategy of *ilinx* is, for the first time, unleashed to roam free – in a moment which stages a crisis in their allegiance to God, the enamoured angels flee the doomed Earth in order to save their Cainite lovers, thereby bursting the confines of both the Bible and the apocryphal supplement to the Genesis narrative, *The Book of Enoch*, which

[6] Keats (the *Hyperion* fragments), Shelley (*Prometheus Unbound*) and Byron were all influenced by catastrophism. As Jane Stabler notes, 'we find in both *Cain* and *Prometheus Unbound* … a confident mythological treatment of new scientific ideas.' Jane Stabler, *Burke to Byron, Barbauld to Baillie: 1790-1830* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), p.217. For a detailed overview of their poetic use of catastrophist theory see Christine Kenyon Jones, ''When this world shall be former'- Catastrophism as Imaginative Theory for the Younger Romantics', in *Romanticism on the Net* 24 (November 2001). For an in-depth discussion of the traces of Cuvier in Byron see Ralph O'Connor, 'Mammoths and Maggots: Byron and the Geology of Cuvier', *Romanticism* 5.1 (1999), pp.26-42. For the reverse direction of cross-pollination between naturalist discourse and Romantic poetry – i.e. the discourse of Romantic poetry in turn engendering scientific discourse – see Ralph O'Connor: 'Byron's Afterlife and the Emancipation of Geology', in B. Beatty, T. Howe and Ch. Robinson (eds), *Liberty and Poetic Licence: New Essays on Byron* (Liverpool University Press, 2008), pp.147-164.

Byron most probably also drew on for his drama. *Heaven and Earth* thus daringly stages liberation through erotic love. Indeed, this enterprising 'Oratorio on a sacred subject', 'choral and mystical',[7] proved to be too radical for Murray, Byron's publisher up to this date – the drama was finally published, some fifteen months later, by John Hunt in the second issue of *The Liberal* in 1823. This drama has its orthodox elements, nevertheless. The orthodox strain here is found in the predestined, exclusive salvation of Noah and his family. Even here, however, the drama pits rhetoric against orthodoxy, in the figure of Japhet – Noah's third son and the father of European civilization according to biblical myth – here, a powerless, brooding hero,[8] trapped in and contemplating the drama of predestination and destruction. Through the misgivings of Japhet, Byron problematizes the story of the Deluge itself, adding a powerless voice of powerful nostalgia, ultimately complementing, from the other side of the seditious spectrum, the potent critique of the ethics of God's decree voiced by Aholibamah, the inveterate Cainite rebel. Byron's second biblical drama thus directly 'undermines the notion of biblical justice, and … treats the episode [of the Deluge] as a third Fall after Adam's and Cain's.'[9] *Heaven and Earth* is, for all of these reasons, a fine balancing act between orthodoxy and unorthodoxy, featuring some overtly irreligious ideas – breaking the limits not just of biblical precedent but also directly challenging Christian doctrine.

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For obvious reasons, Byron's two 'mysteries', and *Cain* especially, were the source of intense controversy at the time of their publication. The principal reason was, of course, what the contemporary moral outlook regarded as their apostatic potential.[10] However, as Byron was at pains to prove, and eventually infuriated enough to point out: 'There was never *such cant* – Abel & Adah &c are as pious as possible – but would they have me make Lucifer and Cain talk like two prebendaries – looking for a step higher in the Church?'[11] Byron's key defence of the mysteries was as follows:

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7 Letter to Kinnaird of 14 December 1821, *BLJ* IX, p.81.

8 Corbett reads Japhet as Thorslev's 'Hero of Sensibility' and sees Byron develop it further in Werner and Arnold, having experimented with the concept earlier in Jacopo Foscari. *Byron and Tragedy*, p.176.

9 Wolf Z. Hirst, 'Byron's Revisionary Struggle with The Bible', in W.Z. Hirst (ed.), *Byron, The Bible and Religion* (London and Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1991), p.91.

10 For a discussion of the contemporary critical debate, see for instance Hoagwood, *Byron's Dialectic: Skepticism and the Critique of Culture*, pp.101-104.

11 Letter to Kinnaird of 15 November 1821, *BLJ* IX, p.60.

> I am no enemy to religion, but the contrary. As a proof, I am educating my natural daughter a strict Catholic in a convent of Romagna; for I think people can never have enough of religion, if they are to have any. I incline, myself, very much to the Catholic doctrines; but if I am to write a drama, I must make my characters speak as I conceive them likely to argue.[12]

Byron was adamant to preserve the drama as he drafted it, with the noteworthy dedication to Sir Walter Scott, who thought very highly of the drama: 'I do not know that his Muse has ever taken so lofty a flight amid her former soarings. He has certainly matched Milton on his own ground'.[13] Scott, in fact, rather appropriately describes an inter-textual 'match' of *agon* between Milton and Byron here, and the result puts Byron on a par with the classic, which is a fine assessment indeed. Despite this noteworthy support from a fellow literary celebrity, however, Byron was still anxious about by any hero – and especially any anti-hero – he had created, including Cain. In a letter to Moore Byron writes: 'like all imaginative men, I, of course, embody myself with the character while I draw it, but not a moment after the pen is from off the paper.'[14] Indeed, an entire book could be (and quite a few have been) written about Byron's perpetual masking of himself, and his masking strategies, on the one hand creating and on the other hand countering this blurring of fiction and 'fact' of his life. But this was not his biggest cause of anxiety when it came to either Cain or *Cain*, though it powerfully informs the drama's composition and Byron's response to its reception. While Byron deliberately 'avoided introducing the Deity' to sidestep a public uproar of moralizing 'cant',[15] the public furor which followed the publication of *Cain* is famous, and eventually led to the disintegration of one of the most productive and lucrative author-publisher partnerships of its day, that of Byron and Murray. Murray gave in when it came to publishing *Cain*, but after the controversy it caused he refused to publish Byron's second mystery play, and this marked the end of their business liaison. In Byron's view, however, the issue at stake was not primarily to do with religion. As Byron put it, according to Medwin:

> It [*Heaven and Earth*] was offered to Murray; but he is the most timid of God's booksellers, and starts at the title. He has taken a dislike to that three-syllabled word Mystery, and says, I know not why, that it is

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[12] Letter to Moore of 4 March 1822, *BLJ* IX, p.118. Byron also describes *Heaven and Earth*, 'the new Mystery', as 'less speculative than 'Cain' and very pious; besides it is chiefly lyrical.'

[13] Scott's letter to Murray of 4 December 1821, cited in *CPW* VI, p. 648.

[14] Letter to Moore of 4 March 1822, *BLJ* IX, pp. 118-19.

[15] Letter to Murray of 8 February 1822, *BLJ* IX, p.103. Byron goes on to say in his defence that '[t]he Old mysteries introduced [God] liberally enough'.

> another ‘Cain’. I suppose he does not like my making one of Cain’s daughters talk the same language as her father’s father, and has a prejudice against the family. I could not make her so unnatural as to speak ill of her grandfather. I was forced to make her aristocratical, proud of her descent from the eldest born.[16]

For our purposes, this passage is crucial for a number of reasons. Byron suggests that Murray found the ‘language’ of ‘Cain’, replicated (and considerably intensified) in ‘one of Cain’s daughters’, *politically* unacceptable, rather than religiously so. Byron’s defence is telling: he ‘was forced to make her aristocratical’ and ‘proud of her descent’ – that is, he was ‘forced’ to make her a distinct variation of the Byronic hero – a tainted but proud, heroically defiant aristocratic figure.[17] Aholibamah is, alongside Marina Foscari, perhaps the fiercest of all Byron’s heroines,[18] and this intense intermingling of the ‘aristocratic’ into his reading of biblical texts establishes an inter-textual link back to the historical dramas. Indeed, there are numerous examples of this cross-pollination in *Marino Faliero*, for instance, where the old doge recalls the ‘mere instinct of the first-born Cain / Which ever lurks somewhere in human hearts / Though circumstances may keep it in abeyance’ (IV.ii.56-58). Old Testament imagery also recurs in Faliero’s sense of being trapped and used like a sacrifice: ‘You singled me out like a victim to / Stand crown’d, but bound and helpless, at the altar / Where you alone could administer’ (V.i.206-8). Faliero’s final speech features a further uncanny echo of the later biblical drama – addressing ‘Time’ and ‘Eternity’, Faliero, in Manfred-fashion, denies and defies his enemies: ‘Thou, my native earth, / Which I have bled for, and thou foreign earth, / Which drank this willing blood from many a wound! / Ye stones, in which my gore will not sink but / Reek up to Heaven!’ (V.iii.33-7). This grotesque image resonates strongly with that of *Cain* where ‘the earth … open’d late her mouth / To drink [Abel]’s blood from [Cain’s] rash hand’ (III.i.472-3). In a

[16] Thomas Medwin, *Journal of the Conversations of Lord Byron: Noted During a Residence with His Lordship at Pisa, in the Years 1821 and 1822* (London: Henry Colburn, 1824), p.104. Byron challenges Murray’s reluctance to publish the drama thus: ‘Murray says that whoever prints it will have it pirated, as ‘Cain’ has been,– that a Court of justice will not sanction it as a literary property. On what plea? There is nothing objectionable in it, that I am aware of. You have read it; what do you think? If ‘Cain’ be immoral (which I deny), will not the Chancellor’s refusal to protect, and the cheapness of a piratical edition, give it a wider circulation among the lower classes? Will they not buy it and read it for the very reason that it is considered improper, and try to discover an evil tendency where it was least meant? May not impiety be extracted by garbling the Bible? I defy the common people to understand such mysteries as the loves of the Angels,– at least they are mysteries to me.’ (ibid.)

[17] Martyn Corbett reads the biblical dramas as a Byronic staging of the ‘alienated members of an elite’, thus linking the mysteries to the Venetian dramas. *Byron and Tragedy*, p.143.

[18] As Caroline Franklin notes, ‘Aholibamah is proud, free-thinking, rebellious.’ *Byron’s Heroines* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), p.256.

torrent of sanguinary images, Faliero thus fashions himself as both Abel and Cain – the former in the disturbing series of sacrificial images, and, most biblically, the 'gore' 'reek[ing] up to Heaven', and the latter in anticipating the defiant rhetoric of Cain. To put this the other way around, Byron's biblical dramas, in many ways, take up where *Marino Faliero* left off – showing 'aristocratical' characters pitching denial and defiance against the system that has made them what they are, that has defined what they are by 'descent', and is unjustly tyrannizing them precisely for this, and facing their oppressor with unrelenting – but proud, indeed 'superior' – *agon*. In this sense, Byron's biblical dramas, in the poet's own view, carry a radical, but essentially aristocratic, political agenda. For Byron, it was this that proved too much for the middle-class Murray.

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‘I Feel at War’[19]

Cain and the Birth of *Agon*

Cain opens with a prayer and the word ‘God’. In a scene of devout offering at sunrise, Cain stands aside as a brooding, dissatisfied figure, alien to his small familial community. Byron described his protagonist as ‘a proud man’ who brings about catastrophe because of ‘his internal irritation’, ‘from the rage and fury against the inadequacy of his state to his conceptions’.[20] Cain’s inherent agonism is discernible from his very first lines – he quibbles with his family, insisting he does not have ‘aught to thank [God] for’ (I.i.27), and irritatingly questioning the order of things according to God’s decree: ‘wherefore pluck’d ye not the tree of life? / Ye might have then defied him’ (I.i.34). Cain’s is an agonistic polemic, which is alien to his surroundings, and which his father Adam immediately translates into ‘blasphem[y]’ (I.i.35). Cain is ‘dissatisfied and curious’ (I.i.403), and feels he is burdened, unfairly, with a ‘hideous heritage’ (II.i.63). Cain logically argues that the ‘snake spoke truth: it was the tree of knowledge; / It was the tree of life: – knowledge is good, / And life is good; and how can both be evil?’ (I.i.36-8). Eve retorts with the telling ‘My boy! thou speakest as I spoke in sin’ (I.i.39-40). What transpires from this exchange, then, is that any logical or inquisitive thinking outside the narrow margins prescribed by God’s decree means apostasy and blasphemy – there is no place for Cain’s agonistic *ratio* here, he is already internally exiled and estranged from God.[21] As a result of this, as Hoagwood observes, for Cain at least, ‘[q]uestions beget questions in the dialogical form that is normative in *Cain*; fixed and authoritarian ideologies manifest themselves as unreasoned dogmatism.’ Those characters that retain a commitment to those ideologies, Hoagwood goes on to say, do so ‘only by shutting their eyes to the contradictions that riddle their experience.’[22] What is required of Cain is that he be ‘cheerful and resigned’ (I.i.51), like the rest of Cain’s family – be simply ‘content[ed] … with what *is*’ (I.i.45). In Lucifer’s words, Cain is, like the rest of ‘the race

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[19] Cain’s line, II.ii.126.

[20] Letter to Murray of 3 September 1821, *BLJ* IX pp. 53-4.

[21] As David Eggenschweiler notes, Byron ‘gave Cain a style that, since the Renaissance, had been associated with sceptics and free-thinkers.’ ‘Byron’s *Cain* and the Antimythological Myth’, in Robert Gleckner and Bernard Beatty (eds) *The Plays of Lord Byron: Critical Essays*, p.238 [pp.233-51].

[22] Hoagwood, *Byron’s Dialectic: Skepticism and the Critique of Culture*, pp.101-2.

of Adam', required only to '[e]at, drink, toil, tremble, laugh, weep, sleep and die' (II.ii.415, 416).

As a result, Cain feels trapped, powerless in a setup of inherited sin and punishment, devoid of agency. His first soliloquy is symptomatic in this respect:

> Cain: And this is
> Life! – Toil! And wherefore should I toil? – because
> My father could not keep his place in Eden.
> What had I done in this? I was unborn.
> I sought not to be born.
> …
> They have but
> One answer to all questions, 't'was his will,
> And *he* is good.' How do I know that? Because
> He is too all-powerful, must all-good, too, follow? (I.i.64-77)[23]

Here Cain is agonizing over the embargo on *ratio* imposed on the world by the will of God – the dogmatic 'one answer to all questions' irritates him. His '[h]ow do I know that?' is directed against the facile theodicy revered by the rest of his family. More pressingly still, Cain feels trapped by the sheer impossibility of having a rational discussion, an intelligent debate about the state of affairs – his fateful propensity to quibble and to interrogate, as Byron portrays it, is born of a natural desire to ask questions in order to learn, which is repeatedly frustrated by the dogmatic intellectual stasis of the rest of his family. Byron portrays Cain as the first intellectual, then – he is, as Eve fearfully exclaims, the 'fruit of our forbidden tree' (I.i.30), and his thirst for knowledge is his fateful inheritance. In this sense, Cain is the avatar of all thinking men, and this is why Byron chose to stage this story rather than the story of Adam and Eve – it 'is more fundamental to understanding the human condition'.[24] Cain 'feel[s] the weight / … of constant thought' (I.i.175). Yet nobody understands or shares '[t]he mind which overwhelms [him]' (I.i.189); he is entirely solitary in his suffering.[25]

While Byron's Cain is powerless and reduced to vain, agonistic philosophical quibbling with the justice of God's works, and busy assuming a cynical attitude to life, his

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[23] Original emphasis. Eggenschweiler analyses the comic potential of *Cain* as a domestic drama and reads the soliloquy as 'a parody of the Socratic method.' 'Byron's *Cain* and the Antimythological Myth', p.238.

[24] Paul A. Cantor, 'The Metaphysical Rebel', in *Creature and Creator: Myth-making and English Romanticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p.135.

[25] This links him to Japhet and his solitary musings in *Heaven and Earth*.

Lucifer is, though a self-professed 'Master of spirits' (I.i.99), in a rather similar situation when we first meet him – he is reduced to an agonistic disdain devoid of action. Despite this impasse, or perhaps because of it, Byron has Lucifer corrupt Cain, and, in a biblical echo of the Faustian pact, his trump card to lure Cain with is 'knowledge'. Lucifer manipulates Cain with powerful subversive rhetoric which resonates with Cain's inherent sense of *agon*. But Lucifer tempts Cain with a rhetorical show not only of *agon* but also of *ilinx* – as Corbett notes, the knowledge he offers consists of rather 'inconsistent and meretricious sophistries, meant to confuse rather than enlighten.'[26] Indeed, as Byron explained in a letter to Murray, Lucifer's 'aim' is precisely 'to *depress* [Cain] still further in his own estimation than he was before – by showing him infinite things – & his own abasement – till he falls into the frame of mind – that leads to the Catastrophe'.[27]

The knowledge Lucifer offers Cain is apocryphal in the literal meaning of the word: 'hidden knowledge' (from Greek *apókruphos*, 'hidden'): 'I speak to thee of what thou know'st not' (I.i.245). But knowledge here serves *ilinx*: Lucifer, as we have said, introduces *ilinx* into the drama – and so, effectively, into the world of man as such. And his assertions of *ilinx* work in various ways. He begins by inverting the dicta about God into their inglorious opposites: in this inverted, subversive *Weltanchauung*, God is 'the Omnipotent tyrant' (I.i.138), 'the Destroyer' (I.i.266) and, crucially, 'the conqueror' (I.i.561) – 'he who fells' (II.ii.79). Lucifer's rendering of the known Biblical 'facts' works on a simple method of inversion here – in Hayden White's terms, we can read Lucifer's alternative 'narrative' as simply a different 'emplotment' of the 'events' described in the Book of Genesis: while the 'official narrative' of the Bible interprets everything eschatologically as a *felix culpa*, Lucifer – and Cain, increasingly under Lucifer's sway – interprets the same through the oppositional frame of an agonistic story of 'contest' – and indeed, this 'self-fulfilling' narrative then facilitates the making of 'Cain' as we all know him – the first murderer. If, for Lucifer, knowledge serves *ilinx*, *ilinx* ultimately serves *agon*.

Lucifer mocks the notion of the *felix culpa* and other eschatological Biblical narrative overrides repeatedly, inverting their dogmatic purpose and thereby unleashing the subversive potential of an alternative rendition of the 'facts':

Lucifer: Yes; happy! When unfolded

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[26] Corbett, *Byron and Tragedy*, p.152.

[27] Letter to Murray of 3 November 1821, *BLJ* IX, p.54. Original emphasis.

> Through agonies unspeakable, and clogg'd
> With agonies eternal, to innumerable
> Yet unborn myriads of unconscious atoms,
> All to be animated for [death] only! (II.ii.39-43)

But the next step of Lucifer's critique throws God further into a grotesque light: 'he'd *have* us so / That he may torture' (I.i.143-4). Lucifer describes God as 'no happier than / We in our conflict' (I.i.145-6). According to Lucifer, God 'sit[s] on his vast and solitary throne, / Creating worlds, to make eternity / Less burthensome to his immense existence / And unparticipated solitude!' (I.i.149-151). God is 'sullen, sole Eternity' (I.i.239), bringing to mind Keats's critique of Wordsworth as the creator of 'egotistical sublime'.[28] God is so 'restless in his wretchedness' that he '[m]ust still create and re-create' (I.i.162-3)[29] – the mystery of Creation is thus degraded to an obsessive act rather than upheld as a miraculous phenomenon. This idea of creation as a compulsive activity, or even pastime, for a lonely and *ennuyé* deity chimes strongly with Lucifer's later critique of God's arbitrary destruction of the past worlds. While so far the Book of Genesis has advanced only as far as the first fall of Man, describing God as the Creator, Byron's Lucifer presents God himself wielding *ilinx* to effect 'a most crushing and inexorable / Destruction' (II.ii.80):

> Lucifer: [a] disorder of the elements,
> Which struck a world to chaos, as a chaos
> Subsiding has struck out a world: such things,
> Though rare in time, are frequent in eternity. (II.ii.81-5)

Indeed, in Lucifer's rendition we glimpse a ruling element of chance in the universe – 'as a chaos subsiding has struck out a world' – and this lack of a specific creative agency in Lucifer's account points towards an aleatory universe ruled by chance rather than a deity, and echoes the catastrophist image of 'all the worlds before, which have been hurled / First out of and then back again to Chaos / The Superstratum which will overlay us' in *Don Juan* (IX, xxxvii).[30]

As a result of Lucifer's deployment of *ilinx*, subversively recasting God's creation as a pointless cycle of life and death, Cain is acutely aware of the vertiginous responsibility of

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[28] Keats's letter to Richard Woodhouse of 27 October 1818, in Jeffrey N. Cox (ed.), *Keats's Poetry and Prose* (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2009), p.295.

[29] This stanza, as Peter Cochran points out, 'was cut from the first edition, and only restored after Byron's death.' http://petercochran.files.wordpress.com/2009/03/heaven_and_earth.pdf

[30] This marks Byron's affiliation with the Heraclitean thought of strife as the basic generative principle of the universe. We shall discuss Heraclitean connotations in more detail in the next chapter dedicated to *Werner*.

his having to be 'sire' to 'multitudes, millions, myriads, which may be / To inherit agonies accumulated / By ages!' (I.i.448-50). Indeed, Cain is shattered under the weight of nihilist[31] impulses at the thought of 'the prophetic torture' (II.i.67) of death – and the world is once again framed as grotesque, life existing merely 'propagating death, / And multiplying murder' (II.i.70-1). After this, crucially, Cain calls God 'the Other' (II.i.72) – marking a liminal point in the development of his allegiances, as he slips into a full-fledged mimicry of Lucifer's rebellious *agon*, all the time inching closer to the inevitable, vast dramatic irony of his prescribed fate.

Yet even Cain's sense of vertigo when faced with the projected future of infinite generations is surpassed by the vertiginous experience of the 'Abyss of Space', Byron's masterstroke – a cosmic magical mystery tour which spans the entire first scene of the second act. This other dimension has its own rules – fluid, synchronic, powerfully Byronic in its nonchalant appropriation of space and time. As Lucifer explains, 'in that hour' Cain shall 'see things of many days' (I.i.528), 'the history / Of past, and present and of future worlds' (II.i.24-5). The powerful, vertiginous splendour of this cosmic extempore can be gleaned from the following list of dynamic qualifiers that Cain uses to describe his singular experience – everything is in a formidable, dizzying flux of *alea* and *ilinx*: 'unimaginable', 'multiplying', 'still-increasing', 'interminable', 'unbounded', 'aerial', 'endless', 'intoxicated', 'innumerable' (II.i.99-119). The effect of the starry escapade on Cain's sense of faith – not unshakeably bound in monotheistic dogma to begin with – is immediate: 'intoxicated with eternity' (II.i.109), he addresses the stars: 'Oh God! Oh Gods! or whatsoe'er ye are! / How beautiful ye are! / Your works, or accidents, or whatsoe'er / They may be! Let me die as atoms die / (If that they die)' (II.i.110-4). Here, Cain's language grapples with, and betrays, his perception of the ruling element of the universe, glimpsed here *in medias res*, as the cosmic play of chance, manifest in the unknown and unknowable creative power of 'God' or 'Gods'. His repeated 'whatsoe'er' and 'accidents' are on the one hand a sign of the inadequacy of language to describe such lofty sights, but, on the other hand, simultaneously highlight his sense of the vacuous inadequacy of all earthly existence.[32] Exhilarating at first, the cosmic *mise-en-abyme* Lucifer presents to Cain is

[31] As Daniel M. McVeigh notes, 'Byron … knew before Nietzsche what nihilism was, and its spectre haunted him', ''In Caines Cynne': Byron and the Mark of Cain', in Robert Gleckner and Bernard Beatty (eds) *The Plays of Lord Byron: Critical Essays*, p.285 [pp.273-290]. McVeigh reads Cain as an 'ironic hero'. (ibid.)

[32] As Cantor notes, 'Byron is one of the first poets to convey a sense of the tininess of the earth by cosmic standards.' *Creature and Creator: Myth-making and English Romanticism*, p.141.

ultimately thwarting and dizzying: Lucifer shows Cain 'the phantasm of the world; of which [his] own / Is but the wreck' (II.i.152-3), which points towards Byron's unforgiving grotesque image of men as 'maggots of some huge Earth's burial' in *Don Juan* – as 'every new Creation hath decreased / In size, from overworking the material', '[e]ven worlds miscarry, when too oft they pup' (*DJ* IX, xxxix).

Lucifer's *mise-en-abyme* also draws on Cuvier, as Byron points out in his preface to the drama, and works on the basis of the regressive myth of history, which Byron was very fond of, entertaining it in its Classical trope of satire in *The Age of Bronze*, to give one example among many. Lucifer presents life on earth as small, degraded and doomed to death. The splendid space of chance that Cain first sees is thus thwarted by the oppressive thought of a 'dull mass' which 'needs must forfeit' its one asset, 'life' (II.ii.20-21) – the prescribed scheme of the economy of life and death ultimately defeats chance, as Cain perceives it, and dictates instead a sordid game-over. Byron has us reap the full intensity of the dramatic irony here, as the one thing Cain disdains and dreads is inching closer to its inevitable fulfilment – in the fixed game of earthly lives, he will issue the first 'game-over'.[33] However, as decrepit as Cain's generation of earthlings is, Byron's Lucifer, again in the manner of the narrator of *Don Juan*, points towards the infinitely more decrepit and alliteratively irredeemable 'dull damp degeneracy' of the 'sixty-thousandth generation' after Cain (II.ii.71-2) – that of Byron's own present.[34] Byron's drama thus – through Byron's own canny employment of *ilinx* – expands biblical myth to encompass in its potent satirical swipe even a critique of the poet's contemporary world.

Lucifer's agonistic *ilinx* also introduces the unsettling idea of the arbitrariness of values into his conversation, which topples the naïve mind-set of his audience (Cain and later, briefly, Adah). The mystified Adah asks: 'Can circumstance make sin / Or virtue?' (I.i.381-2) – this resonates strongly with Byron's similar strands of thought in the historical dramas, where it is ultimately circumstance that decides the ethics and the historical 'emplotment' of an event. Here, Lucifer's relativizing of the Bible through circumstance

[33] As Martin Procházka observes, 'in *Cain* Lucifer reveals the strategic character of divine politics of … the endless cycles of creation and destruction and the pressure forcing individuals to '[p]urchase the renewal of … life / With agonies unutterable' (II.ii.303-4)'. 'Imaginative Geographies Disrupted: Representing the Other in English Romantic Dramas', in *European Journal of English Studies* 6.2 (2002), p.217, [pp.207-220].

[34] This extemporal game of '[w]hen this world shall be *forme*r' is one of the finest satirical feats of Canto IX of *Don Juan*, and resonates strongly with the treatment of the regressive myth as well as the contemporary naturalist theories in *Cain*.

transposes God into a victor who deliberately warps the value system according to his own aims and goals. God's dominion thus bears the same implications of ethical bias that Byron explores in historical dramas. Byron's Lucifer is also in many ways a proto-Nietzschean creature – in its attack on the eschatological reading of events and on uncontested theodicy, Lucifer's critique of God is reminiscent of Nietzsche's critique of God as 'a kind of spider of imperative and finality hidden behind the great web, the great net of causality'.[35] Alongside a universe ruled by God's 'imperative and finality', Lucifer presents Cain with 'visions of millions of years, with no clear direction to the history of the universe.'[36] Jumping to and fro in time, but also shifting between contradictory world-views – as Byron's polemicizing, chameleon narrators in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* and, especially, *Don Juan* are also wont to do – as well as and moving through a range of agonistic attacks on his enemy, Lucifer also points out the 'faults' in the handed-down religious 'fable' (I.i.236), for instance that 'the serpent was a spirit' (I.i.218). Lucifer's extemporaneous comments on the biblical tradition show this revered tradition to be an inconsistent structure half based on misinterpretations accumulated over time, with myth emerging rather like the layering of geological strata, though here the layers are laid down in wholly arbitrary ways. It is this essential relativity of all traditions, and, crucially, the absolute values these traditions uphold, that remains perhaps the most controversial of all the controversies in Byron's *Cain*.[37] It is also the great achievement of Lucifer's grand performance of agonistic *ilinx*, and lays the ground for the devastating human history that follows it in Byron's drama.

Indeed, it now takes only cunning to challenge Cain – 'Dar'st thou look on Death?' (I.i.249) – which Lucifer frames as a rite of passage, a quest (which indeed it is, in a subversive sense), to consolidate Cain's movingly naïve agonistic persuasion: 'Could I wrestle with him?', he asks, meaning death (I.i.259). Having drawn Cain into this keen, though naïve, agonistic standpoint, Lucifer proceeds with his cosmic education, which leaves Cain, after their journey through the Abyss of Space, infinitely more despondent about, and frustrated by, the inconsequentiality of his existence: 'Alas, I seem / Nothing' (II.ii.420-1). It is out of this sense of 'nothingness' that the first murder – an act of supreme frustration caused by utter powerlessness – is committed. As Paul Cantor remarks, 'Cain no

[35] Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morals* III, 9. Cited in Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, p.27.

[36] Cantor, *Creature and Creator: Myth-making and English Romanticism*, p.141.

[37] As Jane Stabler remarks: 'The most daring cultural revelation in *Cain* was that morality was really a matter of fashion (and that God was as changeable as the English public).' *Byron, Poetics and History*, p.101.

longer has anything secure in which to place an absolute faith. Faced with the infinite space and time of modern cosmology, Cain murders Abel.'[38] Lucifer sells 'death' to Cain as a 'prelude' to higher things (II.ii.412) – in the ubiquitous and intricate irony of Byron's drama, however, it works the other way round and death becomes the postlude to the higher things Lucifer has shown Cain. The paradox of Byron's take on the biblical story ends in a logical impasse – and a very orthodox impasse at that, marking the limits of abstract reasoning – where Lucifer's having taught Cain 'to know [him]self' (II.ii.419) ultimately means death, which in turn marks the end of human knowledge.

Lucifer highlights the crux of the problem as follows: God's paradise, created – crucially – after an unspecified previous attempt which produced 'superior beings' (II.ii.103) is ultimately a 'Paradise of Ignorance, from which / Knowledge was barr'd as poison' (II.ii.101-2). Peace and happiness in a paradisiacal state can only be sustained in a state of 'blindness' (II.ii.100) and 'ignorance' – as soon as knowledge found its way into Paradise, it led to the Fall of mankind, its exile from Paradise. As we shall see in the next chapter, Byron's *Werner* further investigates the line of logic that knowledge leads to action and action inevitably culminates in conflict and violence. Cain 'feel[s] at war' (II.ii.126), and 'the denunciation which drove [his] race out of Eden' means, in Lucifer's apt inversion, 'war with all things, / And death to all things, and disease to most things' (II.ii.149-151).[39] Lucifer concedes only 'one good gift' which 'the fatal apple' has 'given' mankind: 'reason' (II.ii.459). He tells Cain not to let it be 'over-sway'd / By tyrannous threats to force [him] into faith' (II.ii.460-1), and tells Cain 'to war triumphant with [his] own [nature]' (II.ii.466) with the help of this one 'good gift' of 'reason'. This agonistic guidance stands in sharp opposition to Adah's advice to 'compose [his] mind into the calm of a contented knowledge' (III.i.49-50). For Cain, however, this is impossible, and everything is now 'at war'. Blindly bent on agonism in perfect mimicry of Lucifer, Cain's daily toil has now become 'a war / With all the elements ere they will yield / The bread we eat' (III.i.111-3). However, it is as Lucifer piles up the pressure on Cain and drives him towards the crucial breaking point that we see more clearly the problem that Byron is, in fact, cannily drawing our attention to from

[38] Paul A. Cantor, *Creature and Creator: Myth-making and English Romanticism*, pp.142-3.

[39] Lucifer paints a dismal picture of Cain's inherited reality and focuses his attention repeatedly on the 'sole thing certain', 'death', luring Cain with the idea of 'the highest knowledge' (II.ii.163-6).The economy of the first post-lapsarian generation is simple – death is the currency to pay for the one gift Cain treasures – knowledge; in a vast dramatic irony, it is only the knowledge of death that Cain achieves, however, and a mark of eternal exile. Cain's quest for knowledge is naïve in his supposition that it may be 'a road to happiness' (II.ii.231).

the beginning – the adverse side of the logic of Lucifer's (and Cain's) agonistic reasoning. While Byron, as we have pointed out earlier, is manifestly critiquing the 'the unreflecting language of Adam and Abel', he is simultaneously also highlighting the consequences of logical tunnel vision, manifest in Cain, whose 'obsessive empiricism has', in the end, 'an equally narrow perspective on things,'[40] and leads him directly into discontent and conflict, discounting the alternative provided by Adah's love.

Simultaneously, however, and from very early on, Byron's Lucifer slyly insinuates the notion that Cain is only a pawn in his own eternal game of chess with God. As Lucifer informs him, 'He who has not bow'd to him has bow'd to me' – when Cain protests that he 'will bend to neither' (I.i.318), Lucifer replies that he 'is [his] worshipper' 'ne'er the less', as 'not worshipping [God] / Makes [Cain] his' (I.i.317-19). It is a fixed game where one is only allowed to pick sides, and even this supposed volition is undermined by Byron's drama, as it stages 'the self-fulfilling prophecy'[41] of its protagonist. As Lucifer explicates, 'all things / Are divided with me' (I.i.547-8). The sense of Cain being played is highlighted more and more as we proceed with Lucifer's 'educational' conversation.

Indeed, while the drama begins with Cain's personal, haphazard agonistic quandary, Lucifer, from his first appearance, lifts the game of *agon* to a whole new level – beyond any human motivations, beyond human history itself. Any game of *agon* requires two players, locked against one another, aiming to rule out their differences by conquering one another. The game of *agon* Lucifer describes, however, is eternal: it is a cosmic chess match. Throughout the drama, Lucifer narrates the cosmic state of things as an eternal, never-ending contest between himself and God, where God may happen to be winning for the time being

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40 Anthony Howe, '"Why Should I Speak?": Scepticism and the Voice of Poetry in Byron's *Cain*', in Gavin Hopps and Jane Stabler (eds), *Romanticism and Religion from William Cowper to Wallace Stevens* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), p. 158. [pp.155-166].

41 Cheeke, *Byron and Place*, p. 176. 'the mystery play is concerned with the ways in which Cain becomes 'Cain', fulfilling the sign or mark by which he is known, and revealing the tensions between free will and providence with a characteristically Romantic emphasis on psychological compulsion.' By definition, Byron's drama forever anticipates itself, and images are heavy with symbolic potential which impatiently waits to be fulfilled – in the heightened scene of the murder, Abel's bloody offering of innocent lambs prefigures his immediate bloody end. Cain sees Abel's altar as a 'vile flatt'rer of the clouds' (III.i.290), whose 'bloody record' (III.i.303) offends him. Offended by this 'bloody record', Cain is in the process of immediately effecting his own bloody record. 'Then take thy life unto thy God / Since he loves lives' (III.i.316). Cain's act of murder is essentially a bloody baptism, a rite of passage, achieving the one thing he most dreaded: death. As we have seen in *Sardanapalus* and shall see again in *Werner* and *The Deformed Transformed*, this troubling topic of bloody baptism reverberates through Byron's entire oeuvre, inseparably linked to the trope of heroism. Here, of course, we are dealing with the very first instance of it, and as Byron shows us, it is already tied to *agon*.

but where things could change at any time. It is a contest that involves the whole cosmos – even 'the elements … seem now jar'd in storms' (II.ii.379).

Cain wonders how 'spirits wise and infinite' can 'fall out like flesh' (II.ii.380, 385). This is another clever in- or subversion on Byron's part, where Cain, through his ceaseless questioning, arrives at a point where Lucifer no longer holds absolute sway over the conversation – briefly levelling the hierarchy between Lucifer and Cain by reducing the agonistic enmity between God and Lucifer to the level of earthly feuds. 'Infinity with Immortality' clashing 'jar and turn space to misery', but Cain, pursuing a rational argument as he is wont to, asks 'for what'? Lucifer's reply is terse and all-revealing: 'To reign' (II.ii.386-9). When Cain suggests that Lucifer is 'haughty', yet has 'a superior' (II.ii.423, 425), Lucifer flares up in an agonistic oration that 'emplots' the whole of eternity as a 'great conflict' between himself and God for ultimate power:

Lucifer: No! By heaven, which He
Holds, and the abyss, and the immensity
Of worlds and life, which I hold with him – No!
I have a victor – true; but no superior.
…
I battle … against him, as I battled
In highest heaven. Through all eternity,
…
All, all will I dispute! And world by world,
And star by star, and universe by universe
Shall tremble in the balance, till the great
Conflict shall cease, if ever it shall cease
Which it ne'er shall, till he or I be quench'd!
…
He as a conqueror will call the conquered
Evil; but what will be the *good* he gives?
Were I the victor, all his works would be deem'd
The only evil ones. (II.ii.425-446)

Lucifer's agonistic bravado brings us back to the idea of victors rewriting history to suit their own paradigms that Byron so unforgivingly and intricately explored in the historical dramas. Here, however, Lucifer hints at the relativity of the 'emplotment' of the Scripture. God is the temporary winner of the cosmic match of dominion, and so 'the conquered', Lucifer included, are 'deem'd' '*evil*'. Where Byron's historical dramas exposed the politics of historical discourses, *Cain* suggests that a kind of politics underpins the moral values that

stretch across history, and that judge history. Lucifer's agonism represents a discourse of moral sedition, challenging 'the politics of Paradise.'[42]

Cain finds himself swept up by this cosmic battle of *agon*. His own *agon* pushes him forward, but he is powerfully drawn on by Lucifer's relativistic lore and is, ultimately, trapped by Lucifer's own *agon* and *ilinx* – these play strategies are the two 'extremes on the scale'[43] according to Iser and their virulent combination bears witness to Lucifer's formidable tactical skill. Crucially, this combination, which throws the vertiginous complexity and immensity of the cosmic knowledge at Cain, leaves Cain dizzy – in 'a whirlwind of such overwhelming things' (III.i.181) – and he never leaves this whirl of vertigo: he is dramatically trapped in it for the rest of the drama. Left in an 'overwhelming' 'whirlwind' after the cosmic trip, 'a whirlwind' of God then 'throws down the altar of Cain' (III.i. stage directions), and Abel's death produces only a further, exacerbated sense of vertigo in Cain: 'The earth swims round me! (III.i.344). It is, then, *ilinx* that ultimately does for Cain. In a systematic feat of irony, *ilinx* overthrows him – subversion turns on Cain to subvert him.

Our last strategy of play, *alea*, perhaps also shows its hand, in the end. Gazing on his dead brother, Cain exclaims: 'This is a mockery' (III.i.329). Indeed it is – Byron's Cain, the tragic protagonist, has been mocked by his prescribed fate, as the biblical Cain, from the very start. However, the role of *alea* in *Cain* is difficult to pin down. We might, for example, glimpse it at work in what the drama implies about God, deliberately made absent by Byron. While we might suggest that God manifests himself in the drama as the indefatigable and inscrutable force of fate, or *alea*, Byron in fact shows us that when it comes to the ways of God, we are no more in the know than Cain. Byron makes Cain's motives for his actions understandable, and Lucifer's stock motives for his temptation are only thinly veiled. God's reasons for intervening, we assume, only after the murder remain very much veiled. Exploring the Luciferian counter-narrative to the full, Byron refrains from dramatizing the deity per se – indeed this remains another strong orthodox vein of his drama.

What we can say, however, is that Cain's tragic fate is worked out through the play not only of *agon* and *ilinx* but also *mimicry*. As we have seen, Cain slowly comes to mimic

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[42] *BLJ* VIII, p.216.

[43] Iser, *The Fictive and The Imaginary*, p.266. While *agon* is oriented at a win-or-lose outcome, *ilinx* 'takes on everything that is present and throws it into dissipation.' (ibid.)

Lucifer's agonistic stance, but, mimicry plays its part in the second Fall in another sense too. The one given premise of the drama is that Cain needs must wear his dismal 'mark' – the identity of the biblical Cain. In a feat of dramatic irony, he has in fact been wearing this mask from the very outset in a fixed game of mimicry, in the course of which Byron's Cain becomes a copy of the Bible's Cain – the first murderer.[44] Indeed, if history eventually frees Faliero from the *damnatio memoriae* cast upon him by his judges, it is history that insists on Cain's own *damnatio memoriae*. Unbeknown to him, he begins the drama under the 'mark of Cain', which has already set him apart from the rest of humanity, forever, and which has already translated him into a trope of evil. In another clever synchronic, if rather vertiginous, twist of Byron's, Cain becomes his *damnatio memoriae*: even as Eve curses him, 'the word … Cain' becomes shorthand for fratricide, chiming fatefully '[t]hrough all the coming myriads of mankind' (III.i.438-9). Extra-textually, Cain's name thus performs its fateful purpose – prescribing to Byron's Cain the mimicry of his mark.[45]

While *Cain* is fully framed within orthodox myth, however, there is a telling Byronic departure from the Genesis original at the end of the drama. Byron deploys *agon* to supplement and sufficiently dramatize the Bible here – after all, the meek have never been the ideal meat for drama, and the finale needs one last push of dramatic energy. While in Genesis 4:13, 'Cain said unto the Lord, my punishment is greater than I can bear',[46] Byron gives these lines to Adah and instead supplies Cain with a continuing line of Byronic rhetoric – if no longer powerfully defiant, then certainly still replete with nihilistic bravado. In Byron's drama, it is again Adah who continues to lament the consequences of God's

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[44] As Hirst observes: 'Restless and never at peace with himself', Cain 'act[s] as if branded by an imaginary mark of Cain, at last earning the real mark'. 'Byron's Lapse into Orthodoxy: An Unorthodox Reading of *Cain*', *The Keats-Shelley Journal* 29 (1980), p.152, [pp.151-172].

[45] This *damnatio memoriae* comes with its own inherent biblical paradox, however. As a result of his crime, Cain is cast out but simultaneously cast under God's protection: as Byron's robotic 'Angel of the Lord' explains, this is a protective measure against the possibility of further violence and bloodshed: 'fratricide might well engender parricides' (III.i.492). So, by divine intervention, the mark issues a warning: 'Whoso slayeth Cain, a sevenfold vengeance shall / Be taken on his head' (III.i.496-7). This resonates with Byron's *Childe Harold*, where the 'curse shall be forgiveness' (*CHP* IV, cxxxv) – simultaneously 'curs[ing]' and 'forgiv[ing]', the mark of Cain is God's 'seal' (III.i.494) of protection and, in a wider sense, a seal of impasse suspending and forbidding further violence. Cf. Harold Fisch: 'The ambivalence is biblical. The 'Mark of Cain' was in one sense a mark of shame, but in another sense the sign of a privileged status.' 'Cain as Sacred Executioner', in W.Z. Hirst (ed.), *Byron, The Bible and Religion*, p.35. [pp.25-38] While in *Cain*, the marked becomes simultaneously the elect, in *Heaven and Earth*, as we shall see, the elect Japhet becomes marked as a result of his predestined salvation. This is yet another of Byron's clever twists of concurrent meaning binding his biblical diptych together.

[46] *King James Bible*, http://biblehub.com/genesis/4-13.htm (retrieved 22 February 2013).

punishment[47] (these are again Cain's lines in the Bible) – which, crucially, alleviates somewhat the sentence of exile when God (and in Byron's drama, his angel) burns the protective 'mark' on Cain's forehead. Byron's Cain, on the other hand, speaks thus – instead of crying out in fear of the impending weight of God's punishment ('whoso findeth him / Shall slay him' [III.i.481-2]), he nihilistically retorts: 'Would they could! But who are they / Shall slay me? Where are these on the lone earth / As yet unpeopled?' (III.i.482-4). Byron's Cain does not cease to interrogate till the last and he never – in a markedly Byronic rewriting of the Bible – crumbles under the weight of God's judgement – 'stern' and 'stubborn' (III.i.503), he continues in his agonistic line till the end, responding to the Angel of the Lord with cutting agonistic repartee, as in 'What / Would'st thou with me?' (III.i.497-8), and 'Is there more? let me meet it as I may' (III.i.502). While the biblical Cain, having received the mark, 'went out from the presence of the Lord, and dwelt in the land of Nod, on the east of Eden' (Genesis 4:16) without any fuss, Byron's Cain is another transposition of the Byronic hero – 'gloom upon [his] brow' (I.i.53) and 'sick at heart' (I.i.58) at the beginning, his agonistic bravado is only reinforced here, at the very end of the drama, when he opposes the Angel's announcement of the protective mark with an ungrateful 'No, let me die!' (III.i.500). This marks Byron's last subversive challenging of Scripture – and Cain's fervent, stern statement again recalls Marino Faliero:

> Cain: That which I am, I am; I did not seek
> For life, nor did I make myself; but could I
> With my own death redeem him from the dust –
> And why not so? (III.i.509-12)

Apart from emphasizing the essential lack of agency of his existence and pleading with the Angel to swap his life for that of his dead brother, Byron's Cain, in an even bolder rhetorical echo, also recalls the Jehovah of Exodus, who says to Moses 'I am that I am' (Exodus 3:14). But this stoic rhetorical bravado is, again recalling Faliero, only a vent for frustrated *agon*, and stands in sharp opposition to the essential powerlessness of Cain – as always (apart from the one act of murder), Cain is denied agency.[48] Man cannot redeem his own actions – that

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[47] Genesis 4:14, Cain speaking: 'Behold, thou hast driven me out this day from the face of the earth; and from thy face shall I be hid; and I shall be a fugitive and a vagabond in the earth; and it shall come to pass, *that* every one that findeth me shall slay me.' *King James Bible*, http://biblehub.com/genesis/4-13.htm. (retrieved 22 February 2013).

[48] As Madeleine Callaghan notes, there is 'a near-laconic acceptance of fatality' in this last long speech of Cain's. 'The Struggle with Language in Byron's *Cain*', *The Byron Journal* 38.2 (2010), p.132. [pp.125-134] 'Byron makes the reader aware of the experiential nature of Cain's tragedy, and heightens the ambiguity of Cain's fratricide.' p.129.

power rests only with God; and here Byron goes back to stress the orthodox framework of his drama, ultimately countering the subversive Byronic interpolation of agonistic rhetoric that extends to the drama's very end.

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In terms of our strategies of play, then, we can summarize Lucifer's tempting of Cain as follows: Cain's *agon* is first tempted by *ilinx* (in the form of Lucifer's systematic rhetorical inversion of God), which then disempowers any resistance Cain might have to Lucifer's lessons in apostasy with the powerful cosmic vertigo of their 'voyage among the stars'[49]; Cain does not find the knowledge he seeks, but his *agon* is offered the channel of mimicry, of mimicking the agonistic apostasy of Lucifer. Cain's *agon* is thus channelled into mimicry – while to begin with, his inherent *agon* is by definition rendered sin by the set 'politics of Paradise',[50] Lucifer's intervention pushes this state of sin into criminal action. As Byron explained in his letter to Moore, Cain 'comes back and kills Abel in a fit of dissatisfaction' as 'a consequence' of the 'not quite canonical' 'small talk' he had with Lucifer.[51]

Transposing this synopsis into the categories which define tragedy,[52] Cain can be read as a tragic hero whose hamartia (understood as a tragic flaw, as opposed to a tragic mistake or 'misfiring') is his quest for knowledge, which is facilitated by his antagonist (Lucifer), and his hubris is his agonistic nature, his peripeteia is his agonistic schooling by Lucifer, his anagnorisis comes as a result of his murder of Abel, and, finally, catharsis is supplied by his receiving the 'mark of Cain' – 'the curse of forgiveness' – which inspires feelings of fear and pity. As Wolf Z. Hirst observes, *Cain* 'follows the classical development of the tragic hero from hubris to peripeteia and anagnorisis: like Oedipus, Cain ironically achieves the opposite of what he intends'.[53] As Cain ruefully analyses his situation: 'And who hath brought him there? I – who abhor / The name of death so deeply' (III.i.371-7). While Byron cleverly stages Cain's eager and impatient inquiry into the dreaded unknown, imagining

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49 Ravenna, Letter to Moore of 19 September 1821, *BLJ* VIII, p.216.

50 Letter to Moore of 19 September 1821, *BLJ* VIII, p.216.

51 Letter to Moore of 19 September 1821, *BLJ* VIII, p.216.

52 In the abovementioned letter to Moore (*BLJ* VIII, p.216), Byron refers to the drama as 'another tragedy – 'Cain' by name – making three in MS'. In the *Ravenna Journal* (entry of 28 January 1821) he refers to *Cain* as one of 'the four tragedies to be written' and includes a brief 'thought for a speech of Lucifer, in the tragedy of Cain', *BLJ* VIII, p.36. In the manuscript, Byron includes a 'Preface to the Tragedies', referring to *The Two Foscari, Sardanapalus* and *Cain*. The MS page is reprinted in *CPW* VI, p. 273.

53 Hirst, 'Byron's Lapse into Orthodoxy: An Unorthodox Reading of *Cain*', pp.152-3.

Death as a large looming presence, its immediate, crushing effect is of course that of absence and loss.

However, reading Byron's 'mystery play' as a tragedy also directs our attention to the layers of orthodoxy and unorthodoxy in this drama. Like Hirst, I do read Byron's casting the story of Cain as a tragedy, but, contrary to his reading, I see in its tragic affiliation a challenge to orthodoxy. Byron does not directly challenge orthodoxy simply by extensively dramatizing Lucifer (the tradition of popular theatre of the mystery and miracle plays ascribed Lucifer many a role as tempter, including the 'fable' of the snake in the garden of Eden, as Byron's Lucifer describes it in our drama, and then there is of course the vast precedent of Milton), or even by making Lucifer capable of generating sin by virtue of pushing Cain's inherent *agon* towards crime, though this is a departure from the mystery play tradition. Rather, if God, who is only (indirectly but formidably) manifest in the inevitable outcome, does indeed conform to his role in the drama as the wielder of *alea* – the force of fate (here signalling towards predestination), then Byron casts this as a matter for tragedy. And if the orthodoxy of Byron's drama would rest, as Hirst has shown, in the 'sense of the danger of futile revolt against the human condition and against the mystery of the cosmic order', and if, as Hirst goes on to claim,'[f]ar from being an impious justification of man's rebellion against a malignant Deity, the play constitutes an oblique vindication of the inscrutable ways of God,'[54] Byron nevertheless frames this vindication not as comedy but tragedy. In Byron's drama, orthodoxy's cosmos and man's place in it are tragic. So, while Hirst is right to point out the orthodoxy of Byron's drama, he too easily overlooks its unorthodox elements as well as the significant discursive under-currents within it that run counter to orthodoxy – not least in Byron's canny recasting of the original biblical story at the very end of his rendition of it, which problematizes any unambiguous reading of the drama as wholly orthodox.[55] In my reading, it is the disruptive, subversive use of tragedy that most powerfully plays against the traditional narrative of the Book of Genesis, allowing Byron's staging of the inception of *agon* on Earth to itself agonistically engage with the Bible, as it multiplies the play of orthodox and unorthodox interpretations through the figure of Lucifer, the bearer of virulent rhetorical *agon*, but, crucially, also the wielder of a vertiginous and highly subversive *ilinx*, through whom Byron's drama achieves a

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[54] Hirst, 'Byron's Revisionary Struggle with The Bible', p.92.

[55] For an alternative critique of Hirst's reading of *Cain* as overtly orthodox, see Howe, '"Why Should I Speak?": Scepticism and the Voice of Poetry in Byron's *Cain*', p. 159.

vertiginous balancing act between 'the Mosaic account'[56] and the catastrophist discourse of the Abyss of Space.

In all these ways, Byron's *Cain* is not simply a didactic exercise boxed-in within the safe limits of a biblical lesson, but, instead, problematizes both 'the politics' and the ethics 'of Paradise'.[57] And it is the ethics of Paradise that Byron's second biblical drama, *Heaven and Earth*, goes on to interrogate further.

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'How Vain to War with What Thy God Commands'

Heaven and Earth

The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence.
And God looked upon the earth, and, behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth.
And God said unto Noah, The end of all flesh is come before me; for the earth is filled with violence through them; and, behold, I will destroy them with the earth.
Genesis, 6:11-13.[58]

Deluge, n. A notable first experiment in baptism which washed away the sins (and sinners) of the world.
Ambrose Bierce, *The Devil's Dictionary*

Byron's fragmentary mystery play is a self-professed dramatization of chapter VI of the Book of Genesis. The plot unfolds in the time immediately preceding the Deluge: the chosen ones already know of the impending fate of the earth and the majority of its inhabitants, and bear the burden of being destined for survival. The violent events at hand are at the same

[56] Byron's note to the preface to *Cain*, *CPW* VI, p.229.

[57] As Eggenschweiler observes, the reader of Byron's *Cain* 'must balance the predominant scepticism, wit and ironic form of the first two acts with the traditional morality, directness and tragic form of the third. And he must appreciate the clever, detached playing upon and against the myth in the complex ways that Byron requires, as he wittily and intellectually reveals its absurdities, evils and dangers, then passionately absorbs us in its basic symbolic truth.' 'Byron's *Cain* and the Antimythological Myth', p.250.

[58] Genesis 6:11-13, *King James Bible*, http://kingjbible.com/genesis/6.htm (Retrieved 5 October 2012).

time forecast and unforeseeable, the work of a divine decree that highlights the ultimate vanity of human will. Byron sets up a number of conflicting perspectives on imminent events, with characters contemplating these in a variety of ways ranging from the dogmatic acceptance of predestination championed by Noah, through the fruitless contemplation of the meaning of God's will and the ethics of predestined survival (Japhet), to barefaced rebellion (the exogamous lovers). Dramatic tension is achieved by the juxtaposition of Old Testament orthodoxy and Byron's daring suggestion of the redemptive potential of erotic love.[59]

Heaven and Earth stages to some extent the inherited strife of *Cain* – the *agon* here, however, comes with a vital difference. While the wielder of rhetorical *agon* in *Heaven and Earth* is the progeny of Cain, Aholibamah, she is also a woman in love. The shift of the agonistic polemic to a female character heralds, as it did in *The Two Foscari*, a world of strictly prescribed rules, where the protagonists are ruthlessly played by a superior power with an irrevocable agenda, here represented by God's decree, controlling *agon* and *alea* in a seemingly incontestable grip.[60] Japhet, the male protagonist, is a quasi-counterpart of Jacopo Foscari, and though his tortures are purely psychological he is, like Jacopo, marked by a melancholy ache for a world which he is forced to leave behind; the sheer sense of grief for the doomed earth marks Japhet's predestined salvation effectively as an exile. Like Jacopo Foscari, Japhet is 'not defiant but bewildered, not rebellious but frustrated' – all in

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[59] For a discussion of redemption in Byron's drama, see Murray Roston and Jerome McGann, 'Orthodoxy and Unorthodoxy in *Heaven and Earth*', in Robert Gleckner and Bernard Beatty (eds) *The Plays of Lord Byron: Critical Essays*, pp.291-300. For a discussion of Byron's dramatization of the doctrine of the elect, see Ray Stevens, 'Scripture and the Literary Imagination: Biblical Allusions in Byron's *Heaven and Earth*', in W.Z. Hirst (ed.), *Byron, The Bible and Religion*, pp. 118-135.

[60] This links the drama back to the relentless bureaucracy of Venice: Byron rather wonderfully portrays the mechanics of divine decree as an act of divine bureaucracy, playing on the parallelogrammatic dynamic of the violence of bureaucracy and the bureaucracy of violence in the representation of the decreed divine violence in fiery writing posted at the headquarters of heaven.

> Raph: Had Samiasa and Azaziel been
> In their true place, with the angelic choir,
> Written in fire
> They would have seen
> Jehovah's late decree,
> And not enquired their Maker's breath of me. (I.iii.531-6)

To a certain extent, Byron indulges his irreverent satirical impulses here – as Corbett remarks, 'for a moment in this solemn work we catch a brief, even comic, glimpse of the bureaucratic Heaven presented in *The Vision of Judgement*'. *Byron and Tragedy*, p.184. But satire here also obscures, or displaces, judgement – the satire is focused on the mechanics of divine decree, and so looks away from the ethics of the decree itself.

all, Japhet is irredeemably 'thwarted'.[61] It is also at this point that the redemptive alternative offered by the feminine represented by Adah in *Cain* (also Josephine in *Werner* and several female characters in the oriental tales[62]) is granted more potential than an ineffectual plan B, forever side-lined as the male protagonist hurls on regardless down his path to doom. This is not a drama featuring male Byronic heroes, however – Japhet is left brooding on the earth, while Anah and Aholibamah are taken off by their angel lovers. Anah, the meek and loving counterpart of her grandmother Adah, stands as a foil to Aholibamah, the fierce inheritor and rhetorical perpetuator of Cain's existential 'strife' – and it is in this drama that Byron unites these two strands of his female prototypes and through them stages a daring way out of the prescribed biblical frame. As we shall see, this violation of the source text and its implications is effected by *ilinx*.

As a staging of the Deluge – treated as the third Fall of mankind rather than a redemptive occasion – the drama is framed and to a large extent defined by the discussion and manifestation of violence. The violence performed here will be discussed as a series of violations – violations inflicted on and suffered by both heaven and earth.[63] Violation can be understood in various ways: here, we shall be dealing with violation in a threefold sense: one, to violate in the abstract sense of to break, infringe, or transgress (a law, covenant or promise); two, violation in the physical sense of breaking through a barrier or frontier without right; three, violation in the sense of treating something irreverently or disrespectfully, in other words to desecrate or profane.

We shall also address the question of Byron's (un)orthodoxy. His drama violates orthodoxy in all these senses, but, equally, respects what it violates. In *Heaven and Earth*, Byron is exploring, amongst other things, what it means, at a human level, to be confronted with the impending Deluge. The drama, as its title suggests, deals with two spheres – those of heaven and earth – but more profoundly contemplates the violence involved in both upholding the barriers between these spheres and the crossing of those barriers. This marked

[61] Corbett, *Byron and Tragedy*, p. 178. 'The blackest feature of this drama is its demonstration of the sheer irrelevance of personal goodness which, along with passion, beauty, sublime love, radiant virtue, all perish in its terrible catastrophe.' (p.182)

[62] Both Medora and Gulnare in *The Corsair*, each offering a different plan B to Conrad, as these two women follow the same model lines of Byron's meek and rebellious female protagonist; another unrealized feminine narrative is Kaled in *Lara*.

[63] As Alan Richardson notes, 'the principal thematic concern' of *Heaven and Earth* is 'the complex violation of spatial, metaphysical and psychic borders.' 'On the Borders of *Heaven and Earth*', in Robert Gleckner and Bernard Beatty (eds) *The Plays of Lord Byron: Critical Essays*, p.303, [pp.301-320].

liminality of Byron's drama again points our attention to *ilinx* as the prevailing strategy of play, as it heralds, by definition, 'a conflict of norms, values, [and] feelings'.[64]

Two crucial violations dominate Byron's second biblical drama. The first is the violation of the original biblical story in the Book of Genesis, which allows the angels and their doomed Cainite lovers the possibility of escape. The second is the violation of the concept of God's benevolence and divine compassion.[65] Both of these violations lead us back to *ilinx* as the driving force of this drama. Let us begin with the first violation, and what is regarded as the most controversial moment of the plotline – the rebellion and escape of the apostate angels and their Cainite lovers from the earth doomed to perish in the Deluge. This directly violates divine decree, just as Byron's studiously biblical script, which he refers to as 'choral and mystical, a sort of Oratorio on a sacred subject', violates Scripture.[66] Here is perhaps the most provocative moment of Byron's drama:

> Samiasa: We will bear ye far
> To some untroubled star,
> Where thou and Anah shalt partake out lot:
> And if thou dost not weep for thy lost earth,
> Our forfeit heaven shall also be forgot. (I.iii.774-778)

The controversy here does not only lie in the inclusion of the story of exogamous lovers, of course, but also in allowing them the possibility of escaping a fate ordained by God – Byron scripts an essential autonomy, granting the angels the benefit of doubt as to the success of their rebellion: 'Azaziel: Fear not: though we are shut from heaven, / Yet much is ours, whence we cannot be driven' (I.iii.772-3). The Seraphs decide to abandon their master and save their lovers, reaching for a domain outside God's dominion. In the decisive moment, they stake their bet on love, not duty, 'forfeit[ing]' heaven. Their rebellion, then, is an act of *alea* and *ilinx* combined – on the one hand, they multiply chance by introducing the element of contingency to the prescribed script and thereby gain an unprecedented 'way out', on the

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64 Iser, *The Fictive and the Imaginary*, p.263.

65 Cf. 'In its challenge to divine compassion, and perhaps less powerfully to divine justice, *Heaven and Earth* continues the argument of *Cain*.' J.J. McGann, *CPW* VI, p. 682.

66 Letter to Kinnaird of 14 December, 1821: 'I sent by this post – a little lyrical drama to Murray (presuming it may arrive in time for the volume which he is about to publish [featuring *Sardanapalus*, *Cain* and *The Two Foscari*, published 19 December 1821) – You will not like it – for it is choral and mystical – and a sort of Oratorio on a sacred subject – but it will do if 'Cain' does and if not – it must at least take its chance.' *BLJ* IX, p. 81.

other hand, they subvert God's decree which, by definition, is set to control all chance (*alea*) and action (*agon*) within a strict frame of divine will. Their rebellion, however, ultimately represents the 'conflict of norms, values and feelings' effected by *ilinx*, its subversive potential unleashed and directly undermining the authority of Scripture. Raphael, God's messenger angel, and his fierce prophecy, quoted in the title of this section, looms ominous over the apostate angels, however; this corrective prophecy is perhaps an authorial strategy for balancing the overbearing dynamics of apostasy facilitated by *ilinx* here: 'The moment cometh to approve thy strength: and learn at length / How vain to war with what thy God commands: Thy former force was in thy faith' (I.iii.791-4). Nevertheless, the angels continue as they have decided, and exeunt earth and its heaven with the following retort:

> Azaziel: Let the coming chaos chafe
> With all its elements! Heed not their din!
> A brighter world than this, where thou shalt breathe
> Ethereal life, will we explore:
> These darken'd clouds are not the only skies. (I.iii.818-822)

The last line represents the single most intense moment of apostasy staged in the drama. Azaziel's daring speech echoes those other, 'pre-Adamite', worlds created earlier than earth presented in *Cain*, but the idea is also developed further in *Heaven and Earth*, which Byron considered a kind of loose sequel to *Cain* – Samiasa refers to the earth as 'the youngest star of [God's] dominions', 'the latest birth of his great word' (I.iii.526-7). And yet, while transgressing the world of Genesis by direct reference to other worlds, the angels' daring testimony, unlike the cosmogonic magical mystery tour provided by *Cain*'s Lucifer, still proclaims the one biblical Maker. Byron's violation of the Old Testament here is, then, a qualified violation – a violation that respects what it violates. It is an instance of that typical Byronic feat of balancing apostasy and orthodoxy. Bursting the biblical frame with a daring dramatization of the angels' episode, which manifestly subverts the Bible, Byron is still, to some extent, controlling the subversive potential of *ilinx* his drama has unleashed.

The violation of the original Old Testament text is also performed on the textual level, or rather on the inter-textual level, as Byron also seems to be drawing on the apocryphal text of the *Book of Enoch* (2nd century BCE), an ancient text brought to light in fragments of Ethiopian scrolls by the Scottish traveller James Bruce at the end of the eighteenth century, the English translation of which appeared earlier in the same year that Byron wrote *Heaven and Earth*, 1821. The topic of the exogamous lovers in general, and the names of the rebel

angels, Samiasa and Azaziel in particular, most probably come from this apocryphal source, although this immediate influence is still disputed by some scholars,[67] despite Byron's direct reference in the text of the drama: 'Japhet: The scroll of Enoch prophesied it long / In silent books' (I.iii.275). The juxtaposition of 'scroll' and 'silent books' is, perhaps, a chronological blunder on Byron's part, but the idea of Enoch's unheard/unread prophecy is of utmost importance, as it is contained in 'silent books', which links, in an orthodox manner, ignorance and sin, and at the same time links this text to the one piece of writing actually present in the drama, that of the very material divine decree posted in what effectively becomes, by virtue of that image, the headquarters of heaven.[68] But here, again, Byron's violation of the Old Testament is, of course, balanced with a reassertion of its ethos. Crucially, however, Byron's drama ultimately plays against the morality of the apocryphal *Book of Enoch*, too – for there, the angels are vanquished; Azazyel and Samyaza are 'bound' and imprisoned to suffer an eternity of penury:

> [T]he Lord said to Raphael: 'Bind Azazyel hand and foot, and cast him into the darkness: and make an opening in the desert, which is in Dudael, and cast him therein. And place upon him rough and jagged rocks, and cover him with darkness, and let him abide there for ever, and cover his face that he may not see light. And on the day of the great judgement he shall be cast into the fire.' … And the Lord said unto Michael: 'Go, bind Samyaza and his associates who have united themselves with women so as to have defiled themselves with them in all their uncleanness.'[69]

If the drama stages the third Fall of mankind, it also, crucially, stages the second fall of the angels which, as we have seen above, ends equally detrimentally for the angels in the apocryphal text. It also humanizes the angels, as Byron scripts, for example, a daring 'impious' 'wish' (I.iii.584) even on the part of the most righteous messenger angel Raphael, who, trying to win Azaziel and Samiasa back and prevent their fall, gives a long speech

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[67] Notably McGann who states in his commentary that although '[a] complete English translation of the *Book of Enoch* by Richard Laurence was published in 1821, there is no evidence that Byron had seen it,' and he goes on to say that it is more probable Byron was influenced by Moore's *The Loves of the Angels* (1822) which in turn draws on a mediaeval *midrash*. In the preface to *The Loves of the Angels*, 'Moore refers to the rabbinical fictions of Uzziel and Shamchazai.' *CPW* VI, p. 683. McGann does not comment on Byron's direct textual reference, however. It seems much more probable to me that Byron, having referred to the 'scroll of Enoch' in the text of the drama, would have heard of and probably seen/read Laurence's English translation, especially given the proximity of his angels' names, Azaziel and Samiasa, to Laurence's 'Samyaza' and 'Azazel'. *The Book of Enoch*, trans. and ed. R. Laurence, 3rd edition (Oxford: Collingwood, 1838), p. 77.

[68] Cf. in the text of the drama: Raphael's admonishing address to the apostate angels: 'But ignorance must ever be / A part of sin' (I.iii.537-8).

[69] Chapter X: 6-9 and 15, *The Book of Enoch*, pp.67-9.

about Satan, once the most glorious of all angels, whom he 'loved' (I.iii.580), and mourns. Byron makes Raphael harbour a vain hope for God's forgiveness: 'Would the hour / In which he fell could ever be forgiven!' (I.iii.582-3), paralleling the equally thwarted prayer of Japhet for God's mercy to save his beloved Anah. Byron's heaven is, however, 'juridicial' and 'limits pardon, even to angels'.[70] All of this intensifies the general atmosphere of locked-in sufferance and nostalgia for the fallen which not even the most loyal angel of God can suppress. Equally, speaking to his fellow angels, Raphael attests to a personal feat of *agon*, having to 'war' with Satan, whom he 'loved' but who ended on the other side of Eden: 'Long have I warred, / Long must I war / With him who deem'd it hard / To be created' (I.iii.573-6). Although Raphael is manifestly referring to Satan here, the utterance itself is, even in its original context, potentially ambiguous, and the inherent play of language subverts this pious meaning into its mirror image: he 'who deem'd it hard / To be created' could also refer to God, who 'deem'd it hard' for everybody whom he created. And, indeed, in *Heaven and Earth*, 'to be created' means to be 'at war' in some sense of the word – to be born into a world of *agon* – and not even angels, as Byron shows us here, are exempt from this quandary of all existence.

Here, as elsewhere, we see Byron's drama not replicating the moral lessons, traditionally held up as terrifying exempla, of the Book of Genesis and the *Book of Enoch*, but presenting us with a series of problems to ponder. In fact, though Byron never stages the deity, he turns the exempla around in a clever dramatic feat of *ilinx* and points the finger at the implacable nature of God, supplying a daring opposition to this implacable state of affairs by letting the exogamous lovers escape this particular world of *agon*. While warning that it is 'vain to war with what God commands', there is another way out, which, in this one singular instance, does not translate as defiant death or the sombre sufferance of God-ordained exile, but rather a revolutionary hope for a better world yonder, beyond the reach of the absolutist 'politics of Paradise', where freedom can be enjoyed. It is for this reason that the angels' and their lovers' act of *ilinx* can be, and has been, read as a political allegory.[71]

Here, of course, we also begin to see the second crucial violation in Byron's drama – its consistent problematization of the idea of God's benevolence and divine compassion. But

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[70] Corbett, *Byron and Tragedy*, p.184.

[71] As Corbett observes, we can glimpse in Byron's depiction of heaven 'the mysterious and capricious power nexus we have encountered in Byron's Venetian tragedies.' *Byron and Tragedy*, p.184.

this violation is a rather more complicated issue than simply a matter of pointing the finger at God's implacability, and is articulated in the thoughts and utterances of both apostate spirits and human believers. This problematization is, as ever in the case of Byron, done subtly, and a wholly secular critical reading of the events of the Deluge is never the end, or even the means to an end. What emerges is a Byronically synchronic argument calling out for the God of love, invoked in prayer and prophecy, combined with a haphazard anti-theodicy concerning the incumbent wrathful Jehovah of the Old Testament which questions his morality and justice – as Japhet asks in a heated discussion with his implacable father Noah: 'Can rage and justice join in the same path?' (I.iii.762). Scripting the eve of the universal Flood, Byron is mixing the theology of the Old Testament and that of the Gospels, but also adding an element of purely philosophical argumentation. This in itself represents another violation of the Book of Genesis – the text Byron advertises, and quotes, as his hallowed, uninfringed source of inspiration immediately after the drama's title – as does the drama's epigraphic token line from Coleridge's 'Kubla Khan' – 'Woman wailing for her demon lover' – which in turn points to the 'savage, holy and enchanted' dimensions of this mystery play.[72] Yet even this seemingly ornamental or casual juxtaposition of introductory citations creates a dynamic which, by playing the Bible against the dreamy, pagan image of Coleridge's fantasy, brings out the primeval mystery and sheer power of the Genesis text as grounded in the awe-inspiring sexual union between heaven and earth. Once again, Byron's violation of an orthodox text is a violation that takes that text very seriously.

Byron's problematization of the idea of divine benevolence and compassion is most powerfully achieved through his drama's polarization of heaven and earth, making the outcome a feat of truly mental theatre – not in the sense of closet drama, but in the sense of a theatre that makes one think. One of the ways in which Byron does this is through Japhet's poignant soliloquies, where he imagines the impending process of the uncreation of all earthly life, and what this entails. As he sees it, the Deluge will wipe the earth's surface, leaving nothing, and in doing so, in Japhet's words, it will wipe out, if only temporarily, time itself, and with it all points of reference to the world and life as it was, hence wiping out all physical reference to the memory of that world, disrupting – violating – the entire history and memory of human community.[73] Japhet's perspective is of course entirely

[72] 'A savage place! as holy and enchanted / As e'er beneath a waning moon was haunted / By woman wailing for her demon lover!' S. T. Coleridge, 'Kubla Khan', 14-16.

[73] 'without man, time, as made for man, / Dies with man' (I.iii.304-5).

human, and his singularly human grief and sense of loss in the face of this universal doom is irredeemable. At no point does he find anybody to share this acute experience with – his grief is considered incomprehensible and blasphemous by the rest of his family as it is incomprehensible and ridiculous to the apostate spirits. Contrary to Cain, Japhet is not endowed with an agonistic spark – his 'mind' is 'o'erworn' in a 'sullen' and 'fitful state' (I.i.64-5) without any option to make a difference, burdened with the knowledge of the 'o'erwhelming doom' (I.i.67). But through him, Byron's dramatization of man's third Fall, as Corbett remarks, confirms Lucifer's auguries of the ever-deteriorating future of mankind, and therein lies 'the terrible irony' of Byron's take on the Deluge, traditionally understood as a purgative measure to root out violence and evil. Instead, there is a sidling sense that 'glory will fade from the world after the flood and its place will be taken by the futile and fearful, the vapid dreamer and the harsh precisian.'[74]

The sheer isolation and helplessness of Japhet's situation is further intensified in the following exchange, which does not fall short of the unforgiving bravado of the theatre of the absurd:

> *A rushing sound from the cavern is heard, and shouts of laughter – afterwards a Spirit passes.*
> Japh. In the name / Of the most high, what art thou?
> Spirit (laughs): Ha! Ha! Ha!
> Japh. By all that earth holds holiest, speak!
> Spirit (laughs): Ha! Ha!
> Japh. By the approaching deluge! By the earth / Which will be strangled by the ocean! by / The deep which will lay open all her fountains [...] Thou unknown, terrible, and indistinct / Yet awful thing of shadows, speak to me! / Why dost thou laugh that horrid laugh?
> Spirit. Why weep'st thou?
> Japh. For earth and all her children.
> Spirit. Ha! Ha! Ha!
> [Spirit vanishes.] (I.iii.55-66)

The threat of the grotesque, with its mischievous force jeopardizing any ordered universe with dissolution back into chaos, is never very far away in Byron; indeed, it seems to be a

[74] Corbett, *Byron and Tragedy*, p.177. Glory is represented by the Cainite women and their intense love for their angel lovers. In contrast, Japhet is vapid in his helpless melancholy and Noah, the epitome and spokesman of God's righteous lore, comes across as bigoted and harsh.

sine qua non.[75] The spirit's coming out of a 'cavern' indeed plays on the etymology of the grotesque as such.[76] This unsettling encounter is more than 'a conflict of norms, values, and feelings' – it is a truly absurd encounter, where 'that horrid laugh' is the only reply to Japhet's invocations. In Japhet's attempt to communicate with the 'awful thing of shadows', Byron equates, if only tenuously, the deluge with the grotesque, as the world is indeed going to dissolve back into chaos very soon. And this impending chaos will be the work of God's *ilinx*, wreaking havoc on the world to produce a clean slate.

However, this disturbing scene prefigures the lengthy exchange of irreconcilable perspectives between the spirits and Japhet that immediately ensues – where the spirits are rejoicing in the universal destruction of mankind, and respond to Japhet's righteous rebuke with a prophecy echoing Byron's favourite idea of the irredeemably cyclical brutality of history, forever repeating 'man's worst, his second fall' (*CHP* IV, xcvii):

Spirit: Meantime still struggle in the mortal chain,
Till earth wax hoary;
War with yourselves, and Hell, and Heaven, in vain
Until the clouds look gory
With the blood reeking from each battle-plain;
New times, new climes, new arts, new men; but still,
The same old tears, old crimes, and oldest ill,
Shall be amongst your race in different forms; (I.ii.207-14)

This unsettling prophecy – or curse – of the spirits is a powerful, grotesque echo of Byron's 'one page' of history in *Childe Harold*. This prophecy also renders the justification for the Deluge immaterial – far from a tabula rasa granting a new harmonious start, mankind will continue to tread its inglorious agonistic path of recurring violence *ad absurdum*. The gory game of self-perpetuating *agon* is always afoot, and always the same, and always will be.[77] In Japhet's isolation and grief, which he cannot share, Byron portrays the crushing burden

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75 The choruses in *Heaven and Earth* mark a fundamental difference between Byron and Shelley: while the choruses in *Prometheus Unbound* are congenial to man, Byron's spirits are terrifyingly caustic and augur chaos and destruction. For a detailed account of Shelley's opinion of Byron's choruses which are 'almost exact reversals of Shelley's', see Corbett, *Byron and Tragedy*, pp.178-9.

76 The grotesque spirit comes out of 'a cavern', evoking the etymology of the word 'grotesque' – 'grottesco'. According to the OED, the grotesque developed from the 'originally early modern French *crotesque*, noun feminine, an adaptation (by assimilation to Old French *crote* = Italian *grotta*) of Italian *grottesca*'. http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/81794?rskey=NOHaKH&result=1#eid (retrieved September 2012).

77 Richardson points out that 'the demonic voices portray … the Flood as an antetype not of the fiery apocalypse but of the 'moral storms' that will continue to assail mankind.' 'On the Borders of *Heaven and Earth*', p.315.

of historical consciousness he suffers, and the impossibility of communion or community at what effectively is an end of history; the only communion or sense of community or belonging is established as Japhet's soliloquies reach an audience in the drama's readers. But while Byron pauses over the emotional impact of divine decree, he also holds up the decree itself to scrutiny, clearly, if implicitly, questioning God's motives: if with '[n]ew times, new climes, new arts, new men' will come all the 'same old tears, old crimes, and oldest ill', why destroy *these* 'times', 'climbs', 'arts' and 'men'? Is this the act of a benevolent and compassionate God?

God's violation of Earth is nevertheless, given the original biblical story, an irrevocable absolute against the background of which the drama unfolds. And the fulfilment of divine decree, despite its brutality, *is*, supposedly, designed to expiate, redeem and renew. Yet even if this is the case, it still involves, crucially, the violation of one individual, through the gift of a predestined salvation that robs that individual of their whole world – in other words, a violation, by God, through his decree, of Japhet, the third son of Noah.[78] This crucial violation stages another key subversive 'conflict of norms, values and feelings', as the drama unleashes *ilinx* from its ultimate, cosmic (here divine) source, but, in Byron's staging of the biblical event, directs its full force not at humanity at large but at one lone human figure. From the very beginning of the drama, Japhet ponders the impending loss of everything he has known so far, everything everybody has known so far. Recalling Lucifer's portrayal of God as the destroyer in *Cain*, here we are about to witness the mighty uproar of God's *ilinx* in practice. In a masterstroke of unorthodox dramatization, Byron shrewdly analyses the actual *ilinx* of God's decree – the violence of the Flood – through its effects on one of God's chosen ones, Japhet, questioning not only the justice of that decree, but also all notions of God's benevolence towards and compassion for his creations. By turning *ilinx* upon *ilinx*, Byron effectively subverts all of these ideas. Japhet's acute sense of being robbed of all nature and humanity and its destined course, be it doom or salvation, heightens throughout – and the drama ends with Japhet's timeless, pleading 'Why, when all perish, why must I remain?' (I.iii.929). This is not simply an outcry of *ubi sunt*, but the culmination of an individual's mental struggle to comprehend divine *ilinx*.

It is a mental struggle that finds no resolution at the end of the drama. Partly generated by an acute sense of nostalgia, and of the burden of survival, the unbearable heaviness of

[78] As Stevens observes, in Japhet Byron 'shows well the tortures of conscience that … the elect will most likely have at the time of their election.' 'Scripture and the Literary Imagination: Biblical Allusions in Byron's *Heaven and Earth*', p.127.

being, on the eve of the Deluge, Japhet's struggle to understand – or even just cope – also involves profound grief:

> Japh. Oh, men! My fellow-beings! Who
> Shall weep above your universal grave,
> Save I? Who shall be left to weep? My kinsmen,
> Alas! What am I better than ye are,
> That I must live beyond ye? (I.iii.14-17)

This issues in a discussion of why it is not possible to save anyone else. But Japhet is also struggling with the fact of having been scorned by his god-fearing father and reminded of his fate, consisting in a passive submission to God's decree, as delivered by the messenger-angel Raphael. And now, when the Deluge is actually happening all around him, Japhet remains absolutely powerless and inert. Having been predestined for survival, Japhet, as the final stage directions tell us, 'remains seated on a rock, while the ark floats towards him in the distance.' As Corbett notes, 'Japhet is entirely circumscribed by Divine election.'[79] He suffers the sheer shame of outliving the majority of one's own kind (the spirit chorus condemns this as 'base' and cowardly earlier in the drama). And, following the line of thought that Japhet is, according to biblical myth, the forefather of European civilizations (with Ham and Shem peopling the rest of the planet), he is an embodiment of the Byronic take on the regressive myth of history and the recurring fall of man: Japhet, on the eve of the new dawn of the new expiated Earth, is already a heavily burdened man, traumatized by the experience of not only having survived but also an acute sense of loss for a world irredeemably doomed, and, worst of all, having not a soul to share this burden with.

While Japhet is utterly baffled in the face of divine *ilinx*, Aholibamah, the fierce Cainite protagonist, is busy defying her predestined damnation:

> Aho: But thee and me he never can destroy;
> Change us he may, but not o'erwhelm; we are
> Of as eternal essence, and must war
> With him if he will war with us (I.i.119-122)

Aholibamah, the 'stern' (I.iii.406) heroine of Cain's 'haughty blood' (I.iii.398), invoking her angel lover Samiasa, feels compelled to 'war with [God] if he will war with us' – taking up the agonistic bravado of her forefather, she stands firm and defiant, proud of her 'eternal essence', her rhetoric a strong voice for the autonomy of the mind that Byron explores in

[79] Corbett, *Byron and Tragedy*, p.181.

Manfred and *Cain*. Aholibamah's invocation of her angel lover is replete with agonistic diction 'marked by the language of mastery and struggle and by a bitter post-lapsarian consciousness.'[80] Very different from Japhet's response to the same events, Aholibamah's reaction nevertheless combines with that of Japhet to offer a powerful overall comment on absolute power. Though Japhet's hope that 'surely celestial mercy lurks below / That pure severe serenity of brow (I.iii.680-1) and his prayer 'Oh God, be thou a God, and spare' (I.iii.704) is utterly futile, it is precisely the ineffectuality of his hopeful words and prayers that ultimately challenges theodicy and throws a spotlight on the ethics of God's dominion. Aholibamah, on the other hand, true to her defiant Cainite nature, reads the impending deluge agonistically: 'Heaven and Earth unite / For the annihilation of all life. / Unequal is the strife / Between our strength and the Eternal Might!' (I.iii.770-4). But the accumulative effect of both these indictments is an overwhelming sense of being played by a power far superseding man's, which is, of course, in line with Old Testament orthodoxy, but also in line with the modern concerns about political power which haunt the Romantic consciousness. *Heaven and Earth* dramatizes the powerlessness of humanity in the face of the strategies of play through which power asserts itself – while nevertheless leaving the door open to the possibility that one of those strategies of play, *ilinx*, might just offer an escape from dominating imperatives, and tragedy, of all power play.

Nevertheless, *ilinx* is still the force that divine power hurls at Byron's characters. Byron's representation of the Deluge as a divine deployment of *ilinx* in part plays out the scriptural myth through contemporary naturalist discourses. *Heaven and Earth*'s Romantic blending of biblical and naturalist discourses also heightens the sense of the universal violence of the Deluge. The various forecasts and prophecies of the events of the Flood, supplied by both human and supernatural characters offer images of the Absolute, described, rather intriguingly, as an act of un-creation, deletion – 'Till all things shall be as they were / Silent and uncreated, save the sky' (chorus of spirits, I.iii.181-2). However, naturalist discourse is most obviously channelled through the supernatural apostate 'spirits', and so presented as knowledge belonging most intimately to these timeless and godless beings, echoing Lucifer in *Cain*. Japhet may talk at length, imagining the events of the Deluge, but his imagery is that of the Romantic sublime, of 'yon exulting peak' succumbing to the 'boiling of the deep' (I.iii.22,24). The spirits more precisely pinpoint Byron's understanding

[80] Richardson, 'On the Borders of *Heaven and Earth*', p.306.

of the Deluge in a prophecy of geological topsyturvydom – *ilinx* – talking of 'the little shells, of ocean's least things' 'deposed' on remote mountain tops 'where now the eagle offspring dwells' (I.iii.239-40).

Byron's stress on *ilinx* here highlights the impossibility of struggling against the superior power of predestination from a weak position such as Japhet's. To this extent he is being 'true' to the Bible. However *ilinx* also allows Byron to script precisely such a struggle and suggest the possibility of its success (in the renegade angels and their Cainite lovers) – by giving it the benefit of a doubt. As Japhet sees the two pairs fly off into the thundering skies of the cataclysm, their future remains forever uncertain, without closure. Not only, then, is *Heaven and Earth*'s central conflict played out through various assertions of *ilinx* – this strategy of play is Byron's means, in this drama at least, to demonstrate his trademark 'ability to compress violently mingling contraries in dramatic form.'[81]

Ilinx here also marks, and makes possible, Byron's most striking departure from his Scriptural model, pointing to the canny (inter)textual dynamic Byron sets up between his text and the Bible. This begins even with the emblematic Biblical quotation that introduces the drama, from Genesis 6:2: 'And it came to pass…that the sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair; and they took them wives of all which they chose.' Here Byron suggests his drama has its source in Genesis, yet there is nothing in Byron's drama to suggest that, for example, prior to the deluge, the earth, with its marriages between the sons of God and the daughters of men, 'was corrupt before God', as Genesis 6:11 has it, or that the Deluge is a consequence of this fact. As Alan Richardson notes, Byron 'interprets [the story of the lovers] in the best sceptical tradition, as a fragment from a rival, unorthodox account of biblical events, accidentally lodged in Genesis and underscoring the contingency and textual stability of divine scripture.'[82] This is just one example of Byron's ambivalent, playful economy of scripting Scripture. While professing strict adherence to the Biblical source, his 'Oratorio' creates a contemplative arena where Scripture is challenged both internally and externally: internally though the potential utopia of erotic apostasy and Japhet's existential musings; externally though the reference to the apocryphal *Book of Enoch* and the readjustment of the Biblical story and the stretching of the contemplative time of the drama based on the wider influence of the apocryphal source, as well as the New

[81] Richardson, 'On the Borders of *Heaven and Earth*', p.302.

[82] Richardson, 'Byron and the theatre', pp. 146-7.

Testament, rewriting, in the end, both *Enoch* and *Genesis*. And yet, in Japhet's reference to the messianic eschatology of New Testament which seeks to justify the violent work of the divine decree at hand, Byron is hardly doing more than following the tradition of Christian typology. The finale of the drama belies the rather disquieting mindset of the protagonist, and Japhet's interactions with his kin, predestined as he is to survive, betray an essential, and irreducible, disharmony in Byron's 'Oratorio.'

It is a disharmony rooted in violence, and, as we have seen, the violence performed in and by Byron's *Heaven and Earth* is manifold and works on various levels – formal, thematic, discursive – and can be understood as a series of intricate violations performed by different forms of play, with a clear prominence of the subversive *ilinx* – which here is a force for both destruction and potential salvation. The violence performed by Byron's text also combines conflicting biblical and apocryphal sources with contemporary naturalist discourse, creating an ultra-powerful language with which to approach the very idea of universal destruction. The drama's key subversive momentum, however, comes from Japhet, his timely and untimely reflections on the extremity of biblical events, and the resulting implications for our understanding of Old Testament divine morality, which manifests itself ultimately as simply a power override. How vain indeed to war with what thy god commands – and this, in the end, points to Byron's profound orthodoxy as much as to his radical unorthodoxy. For, set against the plea for 'a God of love, not sorrow' (I.iii.460), is Byron's Jehovah not very much the God of the Old Testament: a God of wrath, anger and absolute power; a God to be feared and obeyed, but never understood?

CHAPTER 4

Werner, or the Inheritance
Playing with Tragedy

In this penultimate chapter, we have reached a decisive turning point in our discussion of Byron's dramatic works. Having begun with the solemn, austere, unity-observing yet also carnivalizing 'historical tragedies' of *Marino Faliero* and *The Two Foscari*, where Byron is playing the alternative private histories of the vanquished and the condemned against the official history of Venice, we then proceeded to the still unity-observing but more generically playful tragedy of *Sardanapalus* where Byron introduces elements of comedy and looks for new ways of complicating the inevitable defeat of tragic endings. In the sequence of our study, we have thus traced the tentative movement in Byron's dramatic universe towards the release of those energies of free play that always seek to be liberated. But we have also seen how the four strategies of play we have been focusing on are also held back, in multiple ways, by both literary genre and, particularly, history, as all of Byron's main characters subordinate various kinds of play to one particular strategy of play, *agon*, making all play instrumental in what are fundamentally agonistic conflicts, and thereby channelling and limiting the overall ludic potential of the strategies they either enact or encounter, and ultimately containing them within the agonistic framework of tragedy. Thus, in the first three chapters we traced and analysed the ways in which Byron 'endow[ed] with form' his creative 'fancy' (*CHP* III, vi), but also endowed his dramatic form with ludic energies that push against the formal constraints of tragedy, but which escape that form only extra-textually. We have so far reached Byron's biblical dramas, *Cain* and *Heaven and Earth*, where Byron experiments with dramatic form in different ways – taking his cue from medieval mysteries, but, in the case of *Cain*, subordinating these to the tragic – and where he stages the polemic with Scripture which so outraged the conservative Anglican public of his time. Crucially, in *Heaven and Earth*, we have seen *ilinx* for the very first time in our sequence of Byron's 1820-22 dramas break the confines of Scripture as well as the apocryphal *Book of Enoch*, facilitating a channel of free play, marking a turning point in the gradual process of Byron's unleashing of free play in the course of his dramatic project. Following and expanding on this turning point, in *Werner*, briefly but crucially, tragic form becomes, for the first time in Byron's dramas, overtly and intra-textually subordinated to the

'fancy' of free play. The playful tensions inherent in Byron's German drama again push against the frame of tragedy, continually questioning its limits, but finally breaking its bounds – the finale of the drama shifts the balance from a sustained, poised experiment with tragedy to a new kind of dramatic 'tragic' writing that moves beyond one defining element of tragedy *per se* – moral justice.

Our discussion of *Werner* shall follow a slightly different path from the previous chapters, and will be divided into three discrete sections. In the first, we shall lay out the four strategies of play that we have already discussed at length in relation to the plot and dramatic structure of *Werner*, outlining the ways in which this drama, which stands as a crucial turning point in the sequence of Byron's dramatic works, nevertheless continues to deploy each of these strategies. However, as I shall argue, the concept of agonistic play, though still applicable to *Werner*, and useful to a large extent, is here no longer adequate to the task of describing Byron's understanding of conflict, and the potential for play within this. Precisely because *Werner* goes further than any of Byron's dramas so far in releasing the strategies of play from those literary and historical forces that endlessly seek to restrain and contain them, we need a fifth term to fully get to grips with this particular drama. And because it is through a kind of conflict that is not based on *agon* that Byron finally breaks free of the limitations of tragedy, the term that will be most helpful to us here is *polemos*, which we will need in particular to help us account for the full scope of Byron's treatment of war as a phenomenon. Secondly, this chapter will offer an in-depth analysis of the drama itself, approaching the complex intricacies of Byron's German drama from the vantage point of 'the name', showing that it is the business of naming, and thereby knowing, that comprises the core of its tragic structure, fundamentally defining the drama, and not simply by virtue of its title. Finally, we shall concentrate on Byron's most transgressive character in the text – Ulric. It is Ulric who, by embracing warfare as a way of life, but as a way of life driven not by *agon* but by *ilinx* – a way of life, we might even say, in which *agon* is subordinated to *ilinx* – escapes the naming game dramatized here and thereby propels the drama beyond the boundaries of tragedy. Here again, however, we will need to think carefully about Byron's understanding of war, and we will do so with the help of war theory, both modern and that written by Byron's contemporary, the Prussian war theorist Carl von Clausewitz.

The character of Ulric is pivotal, then. *Werner* presents history locked in *agon*, a point which, as we have seen, Byron is wont to emphasize throughout his dramatic and other works. By virtue of *agon*, especially when this is coupled with *alea*, the drama, its fictional predecessor (Harriet Lee's 'Kruitzner, or the German's Tale') and the historical background

represented in them all fall within the 'emplotment' of tragedy. The character of Ulric breaks free from the tragic frame by becoming the very epitome of *ilinx*, the strategy of play which seeks to subvert all order, and it is through the elevation of *ilinx* above *agon* as the motivation for his actions that he ultimately breaks free from the confines of tragedy. Through Ulric, another of Byron's many rebel chiefs, at least at the end of the drama, Byron points to the possibility of conflict not as agonistic competition but, rather, *ilinx*-fuelled chaos, or, better still, as a force of anarchy in the etymological sense of 'an-arché' as 'without origin/rule'. Of course, Byron's Ulric is an anarchist in many senses of the word – but for our purposes it is vital that through the assertion of *ilinx* he gains entry into, and perpetuates, the realm of chance, a zone of becoming outside the realm of laws where the original dispositions of *physis* as *polemos* reign.[1] For Heraclitus, *polemos* represents the generative energies preceding all superimposed structures of order – 'polemos is both father of all and king of all'.[2] I shall be arguing that the implications of Byron's Ulric in their entirety can only be fully appreciated if we read his actions in relation to the understanding of conflict as a primordial force of becoming which throws things in and out of chaos, rather than agonism – the elemental, rather than motivated, warfare suggested by the concept of *polemos*.[3]

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[1] As Nietzsche has it in his study of the pre-Socratic thinkers: 'the teaching of *law in becoming* and of *play in necessity*, must be seen from now on in all eternity. [Heraclitus] raised the curtain on this greatest of all dramas.' Friedrich Nietzsche, *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, trans. and intro Marianne Cowan (Washington, DC: Regnery Publishing, 1962, repr. 1998), p.68. As Deleuze summarizes it in his study of Nietzsche: Heraclitus 'understands existence on the basis of an *instinct of play*. He makes existence an *aesthetic phenomenon* rather than a moral or religious one.' *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, p.23.

[2] Heraclitus' influential fragment no.53: '*Polemos panton men pater esti, panton de basileus, kai tous men theous edeixe tous de anthropous, tous men dolous epoiese tous de eleutherous*', 'War is both father of all and king of all: it reveals the gods on the one hand and humans on the other, makes slaves on the one hand, the free on the other.' In Gregory Fried, *Heidegger's Polemos: From Being to Politics* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2000), p.21.

In Fragment 80, Heraclitus presents general cosmic implications of *polemos* and *eris*, war and strife: 'It is needful to recognize war [polemos] as being general, and justice [dikē] as strife [eris], and all things as coming to be according to strife [and necessity].' As Fried supplies: 'In the light of this fragment, war would simply be a manifestation, one more easily recognized by mere mortals, of the cosmological principle of strife – that is, a principle that explains the origin and dispensation of the world.' (Fried, *Heidegger's Polemos*, p.24.).

[Heraclitus' fragments are collected, for instance, in the authoritative compilation by Diels and Kranz*: Hermann Diels* and *Walter Kranz*, eds., *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*, 6th *ed.* 3 Vols. (*Berlin:* Weidmann, *1951*-52).]

[3] Crucially for Ulric's role in the drama, polemos also represents a force predating 'laws' of morality, hence Ulric's actions, according to his own mind, fall under an alternative sense of ethics that his father does not and cannot share. Byron's drama stages the game of Fortune and the bequest of war – as Huizinga remarks, '[i]n Greek iconography Dike (justice) frequently blends with the figure of Nemesis (vengeance) just as she does with Tyche (fortune).' *Homo Ludens*, p.115.

However, Ulric's prioritization of *ilinx* can only win him entry to the realm of chance by also finding a way out of the realms of law, and this realm is represented by 'the name' in *Werner*. Indeed, the trajectory of the tragic action in *Werner*, which, as always, sees tragedy enforce 'the law', can be summarized as follows: anonymity – naming – recognition – conflict – tragedy. Translated into our four strategies of play, the above sequence yields the following: fake names are worn as masks, and mimicry is assumed for the sake of safety – unmasking, naming, happens through the serendipity of fate or *alea* – this unleashes *agon* – leading to the reassertion of *alea* in the playing out of tragic fate. The rules of tragedy are thus played for Werner himself, the eponymous protagonist.[4] Crucially, the drama reaches the point of anagnorisis only at the very end when Werner is told the murder of the family foe, Stralenheim, was committed by his son – the carrier of his real family name. At this moment the drama ends, consummated in Werner's final tragic outcry: 'The race of Siegendorf is past!' (V.ii.66). Yet the son, Ulric, a murderer, escapes and lives, beyond the law, beyond justice and beyond tragedy. This raises fundamental questions as to the metaphorical meaning of the drama's subtitle, 'The Inheritance', which we shall discuss later. It is also the key moment with which this chapter is concerned. It is the moment at which Ulric escapes the inheritance of his name.

He does so through conflict. The adopted name of 'Werner' first serves his father as a sanctuary from conflict – here in the form of the relentless pursuit of the family foe, the 'cold and creeping kinsman' (I.i.83), Stralenheim:

> Wer: I weak; he [Stralenheim] strong
> ...
> I nameless, or involving in my name
> Destruction, till I reach my own domain (I.i.626-9).

Unmasking, however, equals naming, and naming equals action – in the case of this drama, the renewal of conflict. The most devastating crux of underlying tragic conflict remains undisclosed till the very final scene, however. Before this, the dramatic action rests on various accounts or contemplations of other conflicts. There are two main thematic, to a large extent interrelated, areas of conflict referred to in Byron's *Werner*. The first is the conflict between Werner and Stralenheim. The second is the general context of the Thirty Years' War, which is invoked throughout the drama by nearly every character, and,

[4] Crucially, the drama is named after the adopted pseudonym of Count Siegendorf, 'Werner'.

naturally, the setting. *Werner* successfully evokes the paranoia of protracted war, accentuating the ubiquitous uncertainty and the topsyturvydom this perpetuates. Ulric breaks free of tragedy by escaping from the laws of the first conflict. He does this by embracing the lawlessness of the second. But for now I want to stay with the conflict he escapes.

The sworn enemies, Ulric's father 'Werner' and the foe Stralenheim, both refer to their mutual struggle in vivid terms evoking the cornerstone aristocratic feudal 'sport'[5], the hunt, complete and replete with animal imagery. The diction of the fatefully interlocked foes represents, on the one hand, the fear of the hunted (Werner), and, on the other, the agonistic bravado of the hunter (Stralenheim). While the gist of all tragedy fundamentally rests on *agon*, the contest of adversaries (or of the protagonist facing adversity), the agonistic part of Byron's tragedy is staged as the pursuit of a prize, the legendary Siegendorf inheritance unscathed by war: 'For this inheritance is worth a struggle', as Stralenheim puts it (II.i.260). Stralenheim speaks of the unremitting pursuit of his enemy: 'The father, whom / For years I've tracked, as does the bloodhound, never / In sight, but constantly in scent' (II.i.266-8). Werner, for his part, passively runs and hides in order to secure the self-same prize by avoiding his foe. Thus in terms of war strategy, Stralenheim stands for the offensive, while Werner assumes the defensive. Indeed, given the outbursts of fear and his son's checking reprimands as to his father's unmanliness, Werner is an odd Byronic twist on the damsel in distress, a vehicle of pathos and nostalgia supporting the Gothic frame of the drama – his diction evokes his state of perpetual angst: 'as e'er the hunted deer [wants] a covert' (III.i.6).

However, the play strategy through which the drama keeps insisting that the conflict between Werner and Stralenheim will unfold itself into, and lead irrevocably towards, tragedy is the principle of *alea* or the inscrutable force of fate, here manifest in a complex play of tragically intertwined destinies. 'In what / A maze hath my dim destiny involved me!' (III.i.145-6), says Werner – this is a recurring leitmotif in many of his speeches. *Alea* is, so to speak, the *Urspiel* of tragedy – playing out 'the misery and injustice of man's fate':[6]

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[5] The etymology of the traditional phrase 'the sport of kings' denoting 'war' exemplifies the interconnectedness of 'sport', a play or entertainment activity and war. 'War' as the tenor of the 'sport' metaphor was later replaced by 'hunt' and this activity in turn gave eventually way to 'horse racing' as the 'sport of kings'. This pertains to the evolution of agonistic ritual throughout the history of civilization; the deep-rootedness of agonistic play in culture, or indeed the interconnectedness of play and culture, is traceable in the etymological development of this traditional trope. Significantly for our reading, Byron's 'Prophecy of Dante' invokes 'sovereigns … paus[ing] amidst their sport of war' (Canto IV, 79). Byron is well aware of the propensity of war to be 'played' or, in the case of 'The Prophecy's' satire, to serve as entertainment for the 'sovereigns'.

[6] George Steiner, *The Death of Tragedy* (London: Faber & Faber, 1961), p.125.

Wer: Oh, my boy! What unknown woes
Of dark fatality, like clouds, are gathering
Above our house! (III.iv.58-60)

This 'dim destiny' and 'dark fatality', which confounds Werner like a dreadful 'maze', is the indefatigable frame of tragedy, regularly hinted at by Werner in his melodramatic outcries: 'My destiny has so involved about me / Her spider web, that I can only flutter / Like the poor fly, but break it not' (IV.i.307-9). Such outbursts do not only abide by the dictates of the melodramatic genre popular in Byron's time. They are also part of a meta-textual strategy highlighting the remorseless game of cat and mouse that any tragedy by definition plays with its protagonist. Byron's drama is, of course, also aleatory inasmuch the tragic action is repeatedly facilitated by fateful chance – the coincidental meeting of family and foe at the beginning; the chance meeting of the murder witness Gabor and 'Werner' as Count Siegendorf at the end. And the larger forces of fate are also represented by the pathetic fallacy of traditional tumultuous elements which 'thicken'[7] the plot – foul weather and the flooded river keeping everyone hostage. The classical principles of tragedy – peripeteia, anagnorisis, catharsis – all fall within this cause-and-effect order, with the tragic orchestrated through the interplay of *alea* and *agon*. But it is *agon* that drives events relentlessly towards their tragic outcome.

Within this agonistic frame, Ulric, as we have said, stands as the epitome of *ilinx*, the fourth strategy of play. *Ilinx* or vertigo represents the elemental force of topsyturvydom which threatens to subvert all order, including, in the case of Byron's *Werner* as in his other dramas, the traditional order of the world of tragedy and its moral prerogatives. Byron takes the character of Ulric from his source text, of course, but whereas Harriet Lee's tale kills him off, Byron has him survive. This is Byron's most important addition to the plot of the original story, since it sees Byron consciously shifting the balance of his own version of the story towards the world of free play beyond the constraints of the laws of tragedy, 'the norms, values and feelings' of which are 'left behind' by Ulric's assertion of pure *ilinx*.[8] But keeping Ulric alive also sees Byron seeking to shift the balance of his own dramatic project more generally. As we have seen, in Byron's dramatic universe, tragedy is a world of play

[7] Wer: So, so, it thickens. (I.i.615)

[8] Iser, *The Fictive and the Imaginary*, p.263. 'With ilinx dominant, the conflict of norms, values, feelings … will become illusory; in consequence, the opposing positions will seem like a past world that has been left behind.'

in which *ilinx* is deployed in the service of, or annihilated by, *agon*, often through *agon*'s appropriation of *alea*. What allows Ulric to ultimately escape the world of tragedy is the existence of a world that is itself beyond the reach of the tragic, and in which strategies of play are not subordinated to the control of *agon*. This world is the world of warfare, but envisaged not as a game ruled by *agon* and chance, but by pure *polemos*. It is this world that Ulric's *ilinx* opens up to him, and it is in this world that his *ilinx* is freed from the laws of tragedy.

Ulric's challenge to tragedy, then, is hardly a joyous, comforting or even comic one. As Jeffrey N. Cox remarks of Romantic tragedy in general, Byron's drama does not confront 'a divine order' but the possibility of 'chaos'.[9] And, as we shall see in the next chapter, this *ilinx*-driven reaching beyond the constraints of tragedy, indeed genre and its formal laws and traditional expectations in general, is explored to the full in the fragment of Byron's last drama, *The Deformed Transformed*. In *Werner*, the character of Ulric presents us with an unprecedented tour-de-force of *ilinx*, through which Byron's drama finally breaks free of its generic frame, moving that drama closer to an open system of free play than it had ever been before. *Ilinx*, according to Iser, represents 'free play at its most expansive',[10] and, crucially, is it this free play that Ulric's *ilinx* unleashes on the feudal world of his father, on the tragic genre, and on the text as such. We have seen *ilinx* freed from the weight of *agon* in *Heaven and Earth*, and it will appear again, as we shall see, in *The Deformed Transformed*, though there in a satirical rather than tragic guise.

Before we explore Ulric's injection of unsubordinated *ilinx* into Byron's dramas, however, we need to address a methodological question. How do we distinguish between *agon*- and *polemos*-based conflict? Both refer to strife. However, *polemos* has direct etymological links to 'war' (where *agon* has not), while also referring back to the elemental, originary strife of being itself, as in Heraclitus' definition – to the principle of generative differentiation or 'setting apart' ('*Auseinandersetzung*') upon which all existence is based in Heidegger's understanding of *polemos*.[11] In other words, unlike the relational,

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[9] Jeffrey N. Cox, 'Romantic Redefinitions of the Tragic', in G. Ernest and P. Gillespie (eds), *Romantic Drama* (Amsterdam, Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1994), p.156 [pp.153-166].

[10] Iser, *The Fictive and the Imaginary*, p.262.

[11] Fried, *Heidegger's Polemos*, p.17. As Necati Polat notes, '[m]ore than a mere negotiation of the relationship between the self and the other, the idea of perpetual contest seems to demand an originary, founding conflict, namely conflict as an unsurpassable, ontological condition. This notion of constitutive violence, presenting an irreducible war rather than a conflict that can be controlled within a new and more inclusive vision of politics, is suggested by Heidegger in his discussion of the primordial and irreconcilable

participatory and thus implicitly political frame of agonism, *polemos* represents the raw experience of existence as pure, unmotivated conflict. *Polemos* shifts our perspective from a specific historical context to a synchronic view of history *per se*. *Agon* is always rooted in, and participating in, the system of order it stands in opposition to. It is an active playing-out of differences – a dialectical contest.[12] *Polemos*, on the other hand, does not stay within the frame of any given system, to be eliminated or subdued like the agonistic rebellions of Faliero, Jacopo and Francis Foscari, Sardanapalus or Cain. Certainly, in *Werner*, *polemos* transcends all systems, bursting not only the limits of its fictional source-text, but also the confines of its own dramatic genre. This marked shift from *agon* to *polemos* is also characteristic of Byron's general artistic development towards free play and can be traced not just in his dramatic project but also in the unfinished mock-epic *Don Juan*. In itself, it is not a shift into play, of course – *polemos* is not a play strategy. Rather, the shift from agonistic conflict to *polemos* is a way of facilitating play, particularly the play of *ilinx*, by releasing the hold over all other kinds of play that *agon* has in so many of Byron's previous tragic dramas and poems.

It should also be clear from this that Ulric is not just a comment on the representational limitations of tragedy, but also on history itself, representing as he does an unmotivated force for historical conflict and social chaos. Set during the Thirty Years War, Ulric's actions release an unfettered nature that does not exemplify a 'reorientation of power' that 'effects a large-scale distortion of moral standards' so much as the possibility of absolute war, reaching 'far beyond the limits that the moral and political periods in which the play was set.'[13] As Martin Procházka observes, the 'new war' that erupts at the end of *Werner* – a

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contestation described in a fragment by Heraclitus. This contestation is polemos, the generative conflict, which, as the fragment states, is 'the father of all'. Literally 'war', polemos is translated by Heidegger not only as contestation or confrontation (Auseinandersetzung), but also as 'setting-apart' (Aus-einander-setzung) for its ontologically regulative function. This function, he notes, is nothing less than 'the irruption of being itself'. Identity, as differentiation, is a play of this primordial conflict, for 'what man is', Heidegger states, 'is first manifested ... in polemos.'' Necati Polat, *International Relations, Meaning and Mimesis* (London: Routledge, 2012), pp.71-2.

[12] As to the political implementation of agon: 'Agon, meaning contest, denotes a relation of adversaries, of two groups whose interests can never be reconciled, whose conflict can never be resolved, but who accept the existence of the other, who in fact need each other for the contest to continue. Through this model of the agon, politics becomes something like a chess match, and so it makes absurd both consensual and antagonistic approaches to politics. It would make no sense in chess to collaborate with one's opponent to create a win-win outcome. … it would be senseless to destroy one's opponent, to eliminate his presence in the game, for that too would make the game impossible.' Mark Purcell, 'Becoming Democratic', in *The Deep-down Delight of Democracy* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), p.79.

[13] Martin Procházka, 'Imaginative Geographies Disrupted: Representing the Other in English Romantic Dramas', in *European Journal of English Studies* 6.2 (2002), p.219. [pp.207-220]

manifestation of Ulric's release of *ilinx* on the world – and 'that disrupts the long-awaited peace' is 'no longer a conflict between nations or creeds, but a diffuse warfare which spreads across borders.'[14]

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> I am glad that you like "Werner" and care very little who may or may not like it – I know nothing yet of opinions about it – except your own. – The story "the German's Tale" from which I took it [ha]d a strange effect upon me when I read it as a boy – and it has haunted me ever since – from some singular conformity between it & my ideas.[15]

This letter is noteworthy for at least two immediate reasons. Firstly, the latter part of the passage quoted above – a 'story' having 'a strange effect' on him 'as a boy' – is almost identical to Byron's description of the powerful 'effect' of the story of Marino Faliero in a letter to Murray.[16] This intense engagement with texts, stories and histories, and also the dramatic manner of telling the story of their formative – 'haunting' – effect on him, is symptomatic of Byron. Secondly, Byron goes on to analyse this 'haunting' as a result of 'some regular conformity between it and my ideas'. Notwithstanding the obvious charge of Byron's canny self-fashioning in his letters, and role-playing bespoke to the recipient, it is, perhaps, legitimate to claim that his letters to Augusta give us Byron in intermittent glimpses of unstudied intimacy, revealing a side of him that he might not have shared with other correspondents. If we work with this supposition, then the 'regular conformity' between 'the German's Tale'[17] and Byron's 'ideas' is worth thinking and speculating about.

It is crucial to note that at this stage of his ongoing dramatic project, Byron is returning to subject matter and a first draft that he had been working on at various disparate stages of his life and career. *Werner* is effectively the first and also the last completed drama of Byron's. Having written a juvenile fragment based on 'the German's Tale' that he 'had sense

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[14] Procházka, 'Imaginative Geographies Disrupted: Representing the Other in English Romantic Dramas', p.219. Indeed, 'Byron's last finished drama may be said to refer to any time in modernity following great social cataclysm.' (ibid.)

[15] Letter to Augusta Leigh of 12 December 1822, *BLJ* X, p.55.

[16] 'There is still, in the Doge's Palace, the black veil painted over Faliero's picture, and the staircase whereon he was first crowned Doge, and subsequently decapitated. This was the thing that most struck my imagination in Venice'. Letter to John Murray of 2 April 1817, *BLJ* V, p. 203.

[17] Harriet Lee, 'Kruitzner, or the German's Tale', in Harriet and Sophia Lee, *Canterbury Tales*, 5 vols (London: G.G. & J. Robinson, 1797-1805) vol. IV.

enough to burn',[18] he went on to write another draft in 1815 while involved in the Drury Lane committee, which then lay idle for another six years before Byron took it up again, reproducing the 1815 version from memory, which he then rewrote in Pisa.[19] It would seem that the 'regular conformity' between the source text of the plot and Byron's 'ideas' most likely points towards the *Sturm und Drang* side of things – the boisterous, wild, untamed nature of Lee's rebel hero Conrad and other Byronic Heroes, set in the unforgiving Calvinist universe of cause and effect. However, as we shall see, Byron's definitive 1822 take on the original story inevitably complicates matters even here.

There is another way in which we might see 'some singular conformity' between '"the German's Tale" & [Byron's] own "ideas"', though. In the scheme of the progressive unleashing of free play in Byron's dramatic works that we are tracing in this study, *Werner* once again exemplifies play held within the 'instrumental'[20] bounds of the tragic genre. But there are two basic – not opposed or contradictory – genres at work in Byron's *Werner*: that of tragedy and that of the Gothic. Tragedy insists on the inevitability of fate, of closure. This structure seeks to overwhelm free play and aims to bind the plotline in a tight tragic knot of closure, and death. The Gothic is, on the other hand, more interested in the kind of spectacle of terror and horror that often runs alongside an essentially tragic trajectory – the gruesome special effects, as it were, of tragedy, exploring and exploiting their potential. Byron was, in many ways, as drawn to these special effects as he was to tragedy. In *Werner*, however, something significant happens on the level of genre, as it does on the *Sturm and Drang* level of the Byronic Hero – in the conflation of tragedy and the Gothic (drawn from the short story which served as plot inspiration), loose ends are not tied; though the extinction of 'the race of Siegendorf' is professed at the end, this is true only in terms of the family name, not the male line. Byron's refashioning of the Kruitzner story turns the focus of the drama on to the fragmentary, the unresolved, the transformed rather than the closure of dramatic justice dictated by the tragic genre. Here, however, we reach the limit of that 'strange singular conformity' between '"the German's Tale" & [Byron's] own "ideas"' – for Byron's gothic subversion of tragedy finds no precedent in its original source.

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[18] Preface to *Werner*, Pisa, February 1822. *CPW* VI, p.384.

[19] Byron worked on the drama between 18 December 1821 and 20 January 1822.

[20] Cf. Again, Iser's concept of 'instrumental play' imposing limits on free play.

Indeed, *Werner*'s peculiar mixture of genres may have no single precedent at all. The drama has been called many things: a 'literary ugly duckling', 'all things to all men',[21] a 'humorous, horrible, poetic, domestic tragedy', a 'tour de force in Gothicism'[22] and 'a shoddy farrago' featuring 'murder, remorse, mouldering castle walls, secret passages, honour, improbable deception and disguise',[23] for example. In fact, the stylistic hallmarks that made it vastly popular in its day subsequently, once theatrical taste changed, doomed it to neglect or deprecation for the most part of critical posterity.[24] Yet there is much more to *Werner* than just a gothic override of sentimentality and heightened bravado. *Werner* plays against, and seeks to transcend, from within, as it were, the tragic genre that has been a cornerstone of Western culture for the last 2,500 years.

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[21] T.H. Vail Motter, 'Byron's *Werner* Re-estimated: A Neglected Chapter in Nineteenth Century Stage History', in *Essays on Dramatic Literature: The Parrot Presentation Volume* (Princeton, 1935), p. 243 [pp.243-75]; cited in Corbett, *Byron and Tragedy*, pp.190-1.

[22] John Ehrstine, *The Metaphysics of Byron: A Reading of the Plays* (The Hague: Mouton, 1976), p.132; cited in Corbett, *Byron and Tragedy*, pp.190-1.

[23] Barton, '"A Light to Lesson Ages": Byron's Political Plays', p.139. Barton is unforgiving in her critique of the drama, calling it 'Byron's one genuinely bad and derivative play', ibid.

[24] Only after the 1970s did critics set out to engage with the text's many subtleties, mostly drawn to the spectacular mirroring of fates and coincidences in the drama and the tense psychological framework therein, confronting it especially with psychoanalytical theories. Recent years have seen a long-awaited re-appreciation of the drama, e.g.: most recently David Punter and Pamela Kao's lucid Freudian reading of the drama '*Werner* and Psychoanalytic Criticism', in J. Stabler (ed.), *Palgrave Advances in Byron Studies* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp. 171-190.

Notable exceptions to a psychoanalytical reading of the drama include Martin Procházka's articles 'Byron's *Werner*: Redrawing Moral, Political, and Aesthetic Boundaries', in *Re-mapping Romanticism: Gender - Text - Context*, eds. Christoph Bode and Fritz-Wilhelm Neumann (Essen: Die Blaue Eule, 2001), pp. 79-90, and 'Imaginative Geographies Disrupted: Representing the Other in English Romantic Dramas', in *European Journal of English Studies* 6.2 (2002), pp.207-20. ; see also Piya Pal-Lapinski, 'Byronic Terror and Impossible Exchange: From *Werner* to Baudrillard's *The Spirit of Terrorism*', in Matthew J. A. Green and Piya Pal-Lapinski (eds.), *Byron and the Politics of Freedom and Terror* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp.182-195.

Know Thine Enemy: Names and Knowing in *Werner*

The name hidden in its potency possesses a power of manifestation and occultation, of revelation and encrypting.[25]

The structure of Byron's *Werner* hinges on names and naming. Names impose histories, so that naming is an act of both knowing and power – *nomen est numen*. Knowing makes justice possible, but it also enables violence. Indeed, in Byron's drama, set during the Thirty Years War, knowing is the basis of all conflict, the basis upon which history itself works. Not knowing, and especially not knowing a name, seems, briefly, to make judgement, and therefore action, impossible, suggesting an aporetic impasse of plot, action, thought and even genre, an impasse that resonates with and through the rhetorical, ethical and also historical frame of the drama, coinciding with the Peace of Prague, *Prager Frieden*, of 1635. Names and naming, on the other hand, release characters and events from this impasse by facilitating knowledge, judgement, violent conflict and change. Knowing releases being, but also channels and contains it: knowing imposes identity, and identity imposes its own consequences. In fact, even the moment of not knowing in the drama, the aporetic moment during which the Siegendorf inheritance is won, the family reunited and reinstituted and settled in peace, though brief, contains its own ethics of identity and identification, an ethics imposed by the feudal system that the Siegendorf inheritance represents, and an ethics that seeks to unite Ulric, the heir of Siegendorf, and Ida, the heir of the dead family foe, Stralenheim. But then 'this peace' – 'but a petty war' (II.i.169-70) – is itself overwhelmed by the knowing, and all that this in turn imposes, unleashed by the name 'Werner'.

Since we are concerned with names and the importance they impart, it is noteworthy that the drama begins in utter anonymity, on an 'unnamed' spot on the Silesian border. It is, according to Werner's wife, Josephine: a 'remote, unnamed, dull spot / The dimmest in the district's map' (I.i.701-2). The situation we find Werner in at the very start is, as he puts it, that of an 'Exiled – disinherited – nameless outcast'.[26] Byron's *Werner* stages this original

[25] The quotation continues as follows: 'What does it hide? Precisely the abyss that is enclosed within it. To open a name is to find in it not something but rather something like an abyss, the abyss as the thing in itself.', Jacques Derrida, *Acts of Religion*, ed. Gil Anidjar (New York and London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 213-14. Hence the 'vertigo' of the name at the centre of the drama as a mise-en-abyme.

[26] November 1815 draft, (I.i.21); *CPW* VI, p. 698.

locus of anonymity as a liminal space for the combined forces of serendipity (fortunate chance) and fateful coincidence: Ulric unwittingly saves the family foe from drowning in the flooded river and brings him to the nameless spot where his parents are hiding under an adopted name, which completes a universal reunion of family and foe.

This primary setting of universal not-knowing is staged as a kind of name-game. On the one hand, the name-game comprises a comic sub-plot which allows Byron to lighten somewhat the melodramatic mood of his Gothic tragedy. Through the character of Idenstein the drama offers a few moments of comic relief that pivot particularly on the absurdities of feigned or forced anonymity:[27]

> Idenstein: What's your name, my friend?
> Werner: Are you not afraid to demand it?
> Idenstein: Not afraid?
> Egad! I am afraid. You look as if
> I ask'd for something better than your name,
> By the face you put on it. (I.i.174-7)
> ...
> Werner: Have you not learn'd his name?'
> Idenstein: His name? Oh Lord!
> Who knows if he hath now a name or no?
> 'Tis time enough to ask it when he's able
> To give an answer; or if not, to put
> His heir's upon his epitaph. Methought
> Just now you chid me for demanding names? (I.i.243-8)
>
> …
>
> Idenstein: Pray, good friend, and who may you be?
> Gabor: By my family, Hungarian.
> Idenstein: Which is call'd?
> Gabor: It matters little.
> Idenstein (aside): I think that all the world are grown anonymous,
> Since no one cares to tell me what he's call'd! (I.i.282-6)

On the other hand, the name game is not merely comic relief intended to make the onslaught of the tragedy less shattering. The name-game simultaneously fuels the intricate crescendo of uncertainty, doubt and suspicion as an ironizing leitmotiv that gradually gains truly tragic proportions, exemplifying the ethical rift between the father and the son

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[27] As Corbett observes, Idenstein's antics are 'strongly reminiscent of Byron the letter-writer'. *Byron and Tragedy*, p.204.

Siegendorf. In an extemporizing Beckettian twist, the character of Werner is named in the script as 'Wer' in the first half of the drama, an inadvertent semantic supplement emphasizing the increasingly pressing question of 'Who?' – a trans-linguistic German echo in Byron's German play – which is at the centre of the eponymous drama: who is who, and, ultimately, 'who dunnit?' (*Wer hat's getan*?) But the riddling name-game at the beginning of the drama reaches only impasse. It is only later on that naming and knowing unlock the impasse of anonymity, and re-open the drama up to action, conflict and the tragic workings of *agon* and *alea*. Bound up in a name are the issues of legitimacy and inheritance (and, vice versa, the legitimate name opens the path to inheritance) – and Byron's drama is, after all, called *Werner, or The Inheritance*. The name, Siegendorf, is of course the symbol of this much sought-after inheritance, but also much more than this – with Ulric's ultimate break with the hereditary name, the whole feudal world order locked into, and dependent upon, that name is crushed. But first, Ulric must be named.

In the meantime, the drama explores some of the implications of anonymity. On the morning after the murder of Stralenheim, Ulric advises his father to escape and pursue the Siegendorf inheritance which is rightfully theirs. He explains how his father's temporary namelessness and unknowability is key to his freedom:[28]

> Werner: Fly! And leave my name ... [t]o bear the brand of bloodshed?
> Ulric: Pshaw! … What name? You have no name since that your bear
> Is feign'd.
> …
> Ulric: ... the unknown Werner ...
> The laws (if e'er
> Laws reach'd this village) are all in abeyance
> With the late general war of thirty years,
> Or crush'd, or rising slowly from the dust
> To which the march of armies trampled them. (III.iv.118-123)

Here, then, in the traumatized, lawless times of unstable, immediately post-war reality, leaving even the feigned name of Werner, but also the undisclosed identity this name hides, means a refuge, a chance for a new life. Sheltered under temporary anonymity, Werner can

[28] As Thomas J. Corr remarks, 'Ulric thus perceives names as instruments to promote practical interests … the name 'Werner' was nothing but an expedient that allowed Siegendorf to escape the pursuit of Stralenheim.' 'Byron's "Werner": The Burden of Knowledge', in *Studies in Romanticism* 24.3 'Lord Byron' (Fall 1985), p.380. [pp.375-398]. Corr reads the drama as a manifestation of man's eternal exile from paradise and Byron's study of a 'damned world'.

just about slip through the nets of fate that are closing in. To forget a name, or negate its existence – as Ulric admonishes his father, he 'has no name, since the one he bears is feigned' – means to banish memory and, as a consequence, to bypass history, obliterating that part of it which was connected to the name of 'Werner'. Thus, having unwittingly saved the family foe from drowning, Ulric now, metaphorically, saves his father from 'drown[ing] in the waters of [his] name in which everything is engulfed'.[29]

If not knowing someone's name enables new identities, then not knowing also produces an impasse of both plot and ethics that creates a temporary win-win situation. In the middle of the drama, there is a significant intermezzo before tragedy resumes. Its setting is the Peace of Prague and the celebration of the engagement of Ulric, the heir of Siegendorf, and Ida, the sole heir of Stralenheim. Conflict is seemingly suspended and the old world of feudal splendour temporarily restored. All action is stalled – the foe is dead, the war has stopped, the hunted Werner is now Count Siegendorf and his energetic son Ulric is tethered at home. The aporetic vacuum also temporarily transposes the genre of the drama – instead of tragedy, this is the world of romantic comedy or romance. This idyll is sustained by and can only last, however, in a state of not-knowing. Even absolution is sought and granted in a state of anonymity: through the *rouleau* of gold Siegendorf gives to the abbot to atone for an anonym's sins (meaning his own sin of theft committed under the name of 'Werner', having stolen a *rouleau* of gold from Stralenheim):[30]

> Prior: His name?
> Sieg: T'is from a soul, and not a name, I would avert perdition.
> (IV.i.477)

This is yet another of many hints pointing towards the fatality of names. And while Werner, as Count Siegendorf, symptomatically listed in the script as 'Sieg' – victory – exemplifies the 'win-win' situation of the intermediary impasse, in a typically Byronic echo of Genesis, the temporary idyll is destroyed by knowledge: 'Gabor: T'is then Werner!' (V.i.149). If Byron's drama is interested in the possibilities opened up by not knowing a name, it is also interested in the power of names. In this instance, paraphrasing Derrida, the name of 'Werner' 'appropriates itself violently, harpoons, "arraigns" [*arraisonne*] what it

[29] Jacques Derrida, '*Pa*ce Not(s)', trans. J.P. Leavey, in *Parages* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011), p. 98.

[30] As Piya Pal-Lapinski notes, 'the language of economic transactions is deeply imbedded in the play.' 'Byronic Terror and Impossible Exchange: From *Werner* to Baudrillard's *The Spirit of Terrorism*', p.192.

seems to engender, penetrates and paralyzes with one stroke'.[31] Names paralyze because they are the bearers of histories and thus preserve memory. With the return of memory comes the paralysis of this fragile present built on the escape from a name, as the new stable institution of Count Siegendorf is harpooned and penetrated by his history as Werner. And in the collision of these two names, and all it entails, the man bearing both is crushed, as Gabor 'await[s] the current's pleasure' (II.i.315).[32]

'The current' is the flow of tragedy here, and in fact Gabor has a crucial role in facilitating that current: 'a chance and passing guest' (I.i.319), he is a tool of fate and hence the facilitator of the tragic plot – like that of Tiresias in *Oedipus Rex*, his insight is fateful to the impasse that maintains the present equilibrium. Gabor's particular knowledge is unlocked by the name 'Werner' – transformed from a random pseudonym to hide under, the name has now acquired the role of a code, encrypted with secrets. Werner's melodramatic outbursts about the fatefulness of entwined 'destinies', and of his name, are thus no longer mere vehicles of the popular genre of melodrama, or libations to the theatrical tradition of Byron's day, as previously argued, but rather unwitting auguries pointing to the fateful name at the centre of the eponymous drama, again as in *Oedipus Rex*. 'I nameless, or involving in my name / Destruction' (I.i.628-9), Werner states at the beginning, and this retrospectively becomes tragic ironic insight – the name of 'Werner' originally functions as a protective mask of anonymity, but later becomes the bane of Siegendorf, the mask's bearer. *Mimicry* is once again at the service of *agon* and *alea*: Gabor's agonistic attempt to use his knowledge in order to blackmail Siegendorf also sees him function as fortune's messenger, signalled in the text through telling hints which echo around him and in his own speeches, tightly focusing Byron's canny characterization: 'my chance' (V.i.226), 'chance favour'd me' (V.i.255), 'Chance rather than / Skill made me gain the secret door of the hall' (V.i.351-2), 'Chance led me here after so many moons' (V.i.362).

With Gabor's recognition and naming of Count Siegendorf as 'Werner', the tragic plot is set in motion once again and the content, balanced resolution set in place by the dramatic impasse of not-knowing is violently appropriated by the force of names and knowledge, throwing the dramatic action back into the claustrophobic confines of fear and suspicion:

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[31] Jacques Derrida, *Glas*, trans. J.P. Leavey and R. Rand (Lincoln, London: University of Nebraska Press, 1986) p. 6, column B.

[32] Originally referring to the flooded river, another facilitator of the tragic genre here.

Sieg: … as I live, I saw him –
Heard him! He dared to even utter my name!
Ulric: What name?
Sieg: Werner! *'twas* mine.
Ulric: It must be so
No more: forget it.
Sieg: Never! never! all
My destinies were woven in that name:
It will not be engraved upon my tomb,
But it may lead me there. (V.i.86-92)

Knowing triggers action and judgement, imposing its own order and resulting in the destruction of the idyll of the Siegendorf restitution. Siegendorf himself acknowledges his former name's power of 'manifestation and occultation, of revelation and encrypting'. The spectre at the feast, Gabor, brings with him the truth about Stralenheim's murder. The new emerging age, personified by the intrepid Ulric, unscrupulously recommends forgetting the past and eliminating its unwelcome messenger, who has dared to remember and 'harpoon' the present with the fatal name of 'Werner' and all its troublesome implications. However, Werner's sense of honour, locked and locking him in a Christian feudal framework, absolutely prohibits the murder of a guest under one's own roof. Yet the overall effect of the act of knowing – which in the world of Classical tragedy and the feudal code that his father honours, transforms the intrepidity of Ulric into hubris and further accentuates the helplessness of his father – is, ultimately, the destruction of a whole feudal order and all it represents: 'The race of Siegendorf is past' (V.ii.66). Knowing, in other words, facilitates change, but directs that change into tragedy. Siegendorf, the famed inheritance as if magically unspoilt by the Thirty Years' War – a 'victory-village' or the 'village to be won' – is 'violently appropriated, harpooned, re-engendered, penetrated and paralyzed with one stroke', along with the feudal world order, and morality, that it and Werner represent. Through knowing, and being known – through a knowing of the past by means of names – the morality of tragedy imposes its own rules and not just on the individual identified by a name. In the naming of count Siegendorf as 'Werner', Ulric is identified as the murderer of Stralenheim, the family foe, and, perhaps more importantly, as the leader of the *condottieri* insurgents terrorizing the Bohemian border. Naming Werner makes the punishment of Ulric possible. Knowing is the mechanism by which both tragedy and morality gain power over the events of human history.

Indeed, it transpires that the name of 'Werner' is fateful in a number of ways and plays a far more intricate role in larger historical processes than simply identifying an individual. The legacy of a whole, protracted war is masterfully captured in *Werner*'s game of names. The power of names is negatively highlighted in the game of forced or fake anonymity played within the paranoid atmosphere of the brief *interbellum* period of the Peace of Prague, preceded by seventeen years of war and shortly followed by another thirteen years of pan-European conflict. But the true power of naming – recognition, involving as it does a historicized version of the mechanisms of anagnorisis – is here ultimately manifested in its capacity to ruin not just an individual, or even an entire feudal code, but also a peace that affects the future of a whole continent – it is his father's naming that ultimately sends Ulric out to break that peace. But it is also at this precise point that Ulric breaks clear both of the histories bound to the names of 'Werner' and 'Siegendorf' and of the tragic moral framework they bring with them, and this final Byronic, genre-bending twist also marks the limit of the name's power – Ulric, his identity unveiled at last, escapes that identity.

In part, this is because his name, Siegendorf, cannot hold together the identities of aristocratic heir, murderer and chief of the 'black bands' (II.i.124). Ulric's triple identity cannot be contained by the official Siegendorf title – he has, we might say, too many names and identities.[33] His ability to slip between those identities is crucial –and this ability is the result of his deployment of *ilinx*. Indeed, without the concept of Ulric as a representative of *ilinx*, the moral of Byron's drama here is puzzling, especially compared to its source-text, where Conrad, Ulric's textual predecessor, escapes to the forests only to be duly killed by an Austrian hussar. Yet, in the end, Byron's drama is perhaps less moral than *about* morality, and especially about its limits. For Ulric's *ilinx* leads him out of morality altogether, and, as we shall see, into the rule-less world of *polemos*.

[33] Gabor: He / May have more names than one. (V.i.172-3)

'Look[ing] into the fiery eyes of war'[34]

The consequences of an immoral act – the murder of Stralenheim – are clear insofar as Ulric's ties with his family and fiancée are torn – the heir is disinherited, yet again,[35] this time, ultimately, as a moral outcast. This, however, is not the message that Byron's ending unequivocally puts across[36] – Ulric leaves of his own accord, and, given his disdainful speeches mocking the constraints of the social life of high feudal nobility at the castle that so curtails his free spirit, he is more than happy to take off and go back to the life of a wandering outlaw and brigand chief wreaking havoc and prophesying war:

> Ulric: What would you have? You have forbid my stirring
> For manly sports beyond the castle walls,
> And I obey; you bid me turn a chamberer,
> To pick up gloves, and fans, and knitting-needles.
> And list to songs and tunes, and watch for smiles,
> And smile at pretty prattle, and look into
> They eyes of feminine, as though they were
> The stars receding of a world-winning battle –
> What can a son or man do more? (IV.i.402-11)

His 'nature' 'not given / To outward fondling' (IV.i.329-30), Ulric cuts a bold, 'manly', 'sporting' figure, and here exhibiting a strong sense of being oppressed by filial duty. The courtly life of an aristocrat bores him and 'feasts in castle halls, and social banquets, nurse not / [his] spirit' (IV.i.21-2). His bitter, ironic glance at the 'stars receding of a world-winning battle' signals his true allegiances and aspirations.

In fact, throughout the drama, but especially in the final scene, Ulric is the symbol and precursor of an impending war soon to take over after the all-too-brief interlude guaranteed by the peace treaty. As Schiller's *History of the Thirty Years' War* puts it, the 'treaty of

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[34] II.i.160.

[35] Repeating 'the sins of the fathers', referring to Werner's own fleeing the castle of Siegendorf in his time. This facilitates the Freudian reading of the drama. See for instance Peter J. Manning, 'The Sins of the Fathers: *Werner*', in Robert Gleckner and Bernard Beatty (eds) *The Plays of Lord Byron: Critical Essays*, pp.363-378.

[36] Cf. Shelley in the dedication to *The Cenci* (1819) openly maintains that tragedy has to transcend 'what is vulgarly termed a moral purpose'; Shelley describes the grotesque world of his drama 'sad reality'. (*The Complete Poetical Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. T. Hutchinson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, repr. 1970), p.276.

Prague only covered the embers of a future war',[37] and, according to Jerome McGann, 'Byron may owe to Schiller some of the historical particularity that encourages the revisionary view of the rebel hero'.[38] How exactly is Byron's rebel hero 'revisionary' though? This question calls for a discussion of the character and his role in a wider scheme of things – specifically in the context of war. Undeniably nurtured in the *Sturm und Drang* tradition featuring the likes of Schiller's Karl Moor[39] and drawing to a certain extent on the Byronic Hero, the character of Ulric fulfils and transcends both these traditions to signify something far more interesting than the inherited dramatic conventions of the time – he is the epitome of a new order, or rather disorder, his actions not only marking the end of a feudal order but also the immediate onslaught of another thirteen years of war.

Indeed, Byron revises inherited, literary notions of the 'rebel hero' by scripting the personification of certain kind of warfare, rather than simply rebellion. Ulric and his band of 'forresters' (V.ii.47) are the agents of guerilla warfare, which Deleuze and Guattari describe as a 'war machine' that is

> of a different origin, is a different assemblage, than the State apparatus. It is of nomadic origin and is directed against the State apparatus. One of the fundamental problems of the State is to appropriate this war machine that is foreign to it and make it a piece in its apparatus, in the form of a stable military institution.[40]

We might even say that Ulric stands for the Ur-nature of war – the 'nomadic' war that has its origin outside the state, is always 'foreign to it', and that is fundamentally, in its 'very assemblage', 'directed against' the state, rather than rebelling against the state's ideological hegemony from within. Ulric is 'directed against' state authority in whatever guise this confronts him in, be it Stralenheim, the family foe, who is eliminated so that Werner and his family can reach their rightful Siegendorf inheritance, or Werner himself, on assuming the title of Count Siegendorf. Thus, once again, through a different theoretical prism, we see that Ulric's double identity as the chief of the *condottieri* insurgents and the heir of

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[37] Friedrich Schiller, 'The History of the Thirty Years War', in *The Works of Frederick Schiller*, 4 vols, vol. I, trans. Rev. A.J.W. Morrison (London: Bohn, 1846-9), Book V, http://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/6774/pg6774.html, retrieved 9 November 2009.

[38] *CPW* VI, p. 696.

[39] Friedrich Schiller, *The Robbers* (*Die Räuber*, 1781)

[40] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, trans. B. Massumi (London: Bloomsbury, 2004) p.312.

Siegendorf cannot hold. These identities belong to two systems, of 'different origin[s]' and 'foreign' to one another. The laws of one are not the laws of the other.

Ulric's men, then, are not mere 'marauders' (IV.i.57), but guerilla fighters, referred to as 'our force' (IV.i.112), or 'ten thousand swords, hearts, and hands' (V.ii.45-46) at Ulric's disposal. The phantom menace of the frontier forests is uncovered at last. In Harriet Lee's tale, the atrocities of war, lawlessness and anarchy are marked as 'excesses [that were not] confined to the base or the ignorant alone'. As she puts it, 'souls class themselves.'[41] The shadow companies 'came no one knew whence, vanished no one knew whither',[42] terrorizing the country. Crucially, Byron's rendition of Ulric's 'black bands'[43] places their existence beyond the confines of morality. 'Unlike its model', as Martin Procházka notes, 'Byron's *Werner* repudiates a generalized, ethical vision of society. … [T]he general ethic of social duty is supplanted with individual strategies of power.'[44] Byron eschews moral issues such as whether 'the forresters' are driven by the base motive of greed; what repeatedly comes across is Ulric's innate nomadic urge for essential freedom, unfettered by the state-ordained constraints of the feudal code. Ulric's rebellion thus marks the limit of the old feudal order, and speaks instead in the tones of Rousseauesque freedom: 'I'm a forester and breather / Of steep mountain-tops, where I love all /The eagle loves' (IV.i.222-4).

Ulric's role is not, however, simply an affirmation of individualistic rebellion, nor of a spiritual, Rousseauesque freedom in nature. Ulric's last retort, aimed at his father, now representing the state machine, is effectively a threat to plunge Europe back into full-blown military conflict, confirming Ulric's anarchic role as an incendiary device: 'Go tell / Your senators that they look well to Prague; / Their feast of peace was early for the Times'

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[41] Harriet and Sophia Lee, 'Kruitzner or the German's Tale', in *The Canterbury Tales,* Vol II (London: Colburn and Bentley, 1832) p.241.

[42] Harriet and Sophia Lee, 'Kruitzner or the German's Tale', p.241.

[43] Gabor's descriptive account of the activities of the condottieri: '...banditti, / Whom either accident or enterprise / Had carried from their usual haunt – the forests / Of Bohemia – even into Lusatia. / Many amongst them were reported of / High rank – and martial law slept for a time. / At last they were escorted o'er the frontiers, / And placed beneath ... civil jurisdiction'. (V.i.233-240) brings us to Clausewitz' historian's view of the condottieri phenomenon: 'extremes of energy or exertion were conspicuous by their absence and fighting was generally a sham'. From their feudal heyday, 'the *condottieri* survived into the Thirty Years War'. Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, translated and edited by Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), pp.587-8. This sober, de-romanticized historical rendition of the condottieri would suggest a counter-argument to the role of Ulric as a representative of new order, and see him rather in the waning light of another feudal remnant.

[44] Procházka, 'Imaginative Geographies Disrupted: Representing the Other in English Romantic Dramas', p.218.

(V.ii.49-50). It would take thirteen more years of bloody chaos before the Westphalia Peace treaties were signed. As Fritz, Stralenheim's valet, aptly remarks earlier on, the war 'had dwindled into / A kind of general condottiero system / Of bandit warfare; each troop with its chief / And all against mankind' (II.i.126-9). Ulric reactivates precisely this kind of generalized warfare, with everyone fighting everyone else. According to Deleuze and Guattari, this is an inevitable by-product of the official (or 'State') war machine – particularly its potential to 'continually recreate unexpected possibilities for counterattack, unforeseen initiatives determining revolutionary, popular, minority, mutant machines'.[45] But this is only part of the story in *Werner*. Ulric needs must be in opposition to the state machine, not simply because its own attacks on him, not least in the person of his own father, force him into counterattack but also because his heart, as we see in the final act, truly lies with his fellow 'forresters' (V.ii.46). Their 'different', 'nomadic origin' and their 'different assemblage' at the margins of the 'realm of [state] law' betray their polemic[46] state of 'wild dispositions' beyond the world of 'order and progress'. Disavowing his filial ties to Werner, and in so doing his ties to the state, Ulric exits the official stage to take up arms at the fringe and wage war against the system, but not just for those reasons he brings with him from that system. Rather, his is an allegiance to war itself – to *polemos* – which '[l]eave[s] no less desolation, nay, even more / Than the most *open* warfare.' (IV.i.53-4).

> Stralenheim: …[A]fter thirty years of conflict, peace
> Is but a petty war, as the times show us
> In every forest, or a mere arm'd truce.
> War will reclaim his own. (II.i.169-172)

As the antagonist aptly puts it, 'peace is but a petty war' in the world of Byron's drama and 'war will reclaim his own'. It certainly reclaims Ulric. For this reason, we need to think a little bit more about exactly what war means to Byron in *Werner*, and the most comprehensive treatise on war, the Ur-text of all modern war theories, which emerged from the same historical context as Byron's drama, Carl von Clausewitz' opus magnum *On War* (*Vom Kriege*) helps us to do precisely this.[47]

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[45] Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p.313.

[46] 'Polemic' is used as the adjective of 'polemos' here (not in its usual sense of 'debate').

[47] The opus magnum is unfinished, published posthumously 1832-1834.

An obvious question presents itself at this point, however – namely – how exactly is Clausewitz's theory of war relevant to reading Byron's *Werner*? It is not a text Byron could have read (originally published in the 1830s) and I have not found any evidence as to Clausewitz ever having read Byron. There are, nonetheless, pertinent reasons for bringing Clausewitz into the picture. On the one hand, there is Clausewitz's 'Romantic' approach to his subject, working against the established Enlightenment closed system of law and order discussed with the ironic detachment of a *philosophe*. What Clausewitz's unfinished treatise presents us with is an open system of swiftly changing values, perspectives and situations. On the other hand, Clausewitz's account of war deliberately builds on its parallels with art, especially dramatic art – his military jargon reflects this in its terms, exemplified in 'the theatre of war'.[48] The *theatrum belli* becomes the focus of the *theatrum mundi*, presenting war essentially as a *mise-en-scene*, a carefully crafted theatrical production. If we recall that the staged strategic plans of battles and lined-up combat of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries fall nothing short of choreography, it is not far-fetched to consider the many striking similarities between the stage and the battlefield. Indeed, the theatre of war – with its protagonists and antagonists staging the strategies of offensive or defensive with a range of possible results – often evoked dramatic, rather than purely historic, genres, as in the case of Waterloo, which became a lasting synonym for tragic defeat.[49]

If theatre and its tropes proved so useful to war theory based on the Napoleonic wars, then the most influential treatise on those wars seems likely to provide an illuminating perspective on Byron's drama, first drafted in the wake of Waterloo.[50] Crucially, we find that in Clausewitz's rendition the logical order of pre-considered strategy is shattered in practice by other forces at large in the theatre of war:

> War is more than a true chameleon that slightly adapts its characteristics to the given case. As a total phenomenon its dominant tendencies always make war a paradoxical trinity – composed of

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[48] Clausewitz, *On War*, x.

[49] 'It may be true that many a petty play of emotions is silenced by the serious duties of war, but that holds only for men in the lower ranks who, rushed from one set of exertions and dangers to the next lose sight of the other things in life […] The higher a man is placed, the wider his point of view. Different interest and a wide variety of passions, good and bad, will arise on all sides. Envy and generosity, pride and humility, wrath and compassion – all may appear as effective forces in this greater drama.' Clausewitz, *On War*, p. 139.

[50] We should also recall Byron's tour de force 'self-Napoleonization' in *Don Juan* (XI, lv, lvi): he '[w]as reckon'd, for a considerable time / The grand Napoleon of the realms of rhyme.' 'But Juan was my Moscow, and Faliero / My Leipsic, and my Mont Saint Jean seems Cain'.

> primordial violence, hatred and enmity, which are to be regarded as a blind natural force; of the play of chance and probability within which the creative spirit is free to roam; and of its element of subordination, an instrument of policy, which makes it subject to reason alone. […] A theory which ignores any one of them or seeks to fix an arbitrary relationship between them would conflict with reality to such an extent that for this reason alone it would be totally useless.[51]

Clausewitz presents a particularly vivid idea of war as organic, flexible, inscrutable, governed by a 'paradoxical trinity' of forces – brutal violence and subjective feeling, complemented by a free-play space created by the interaction of chance and probability, all under the guiding instrument of rationality set to restrain and control the other two random forces.[52] Precisely this 'paradoxical trinity' of forces is present and plays itself out in *Werner*, and for this reason Clausewitz is an interesting lens through which to bring into focus and better understand Byron's take on war. The interlocked, 'grappl[ing]' foes, Werner and Stralenheim, might, for example, stand for the first of Clausewitz's forces – primordial violence – while the second, the element of chance and probability, nicely describes the plot of Byron's tragedy, bringing as it does friend and foe to the same spot on the Silesian border, and bringing Gabor to Prague for the tragic denouement. The third of Clausewitz's forces – the force of rationality – is, perhaps surprisingly and with an acute Byronic twist, manifested in the character of Ulric. But Clausewitz, in fact, enables us to do more than simply map out the conflicts in Byron's drama with useful terms and concepts. He enables us to pinpoint precisely what is wholly original about *Werner*, what it adds to contemporary war theory. And here we find, once again, that our terms from the theory of play prove most useful.

Clausewitz's treatise provides a captivating analysis of the intricate interplay of forces and elements which constitute and nourish the phenomenon of war, and Clausewitz repeatedly refers to them from various vantage points throughout his *opus magnum*: 'Four

[51] Clausewitz, *On War*, p. 89.

[52] These random forces of 'primordial violence' on the one hand and the inscrutable 'play of chance and probability' on the other are represented in two basic strategies of play – namely agon, or contest and strife, and alea, the play of chance and probability. To complicate matters slightly, war, especially in its 'modern' variants, is considered by both Huizinga and Caillois, the founding fathers of modern theory of play, an instance of corruption of the game of combat and competition that agon ideally stands for; the unleashing of violent primal energies in war opposes the principle of play best described by the traditional agonistic activities of ordered contest – the duel, the tournament, wrestling, in other words activities which play at combat without primarily engaging the stakes of life and death.

elements make up the climate of war: danger, exertion, uncertainty, and chance.'[53] This clearly designates *agon* and *alea* as the ruling forces defining 'the climate of war', just as they govern the world of tragedy. But Clausewitz is particularly interested in the element of unpredictability and chance and the extent to which these unaccountable forces influence and shape the phenomenon of war. This is where he throws particular light on Byron's understanding of war, and helps us to better grasp this understanding. He sums up these subversive influences under the principle of 'friction':

> Everything in war is very simple, but the simplest thing is difficult. The difficulties accumulate and end by producing a kind of *friction* that is inconceivable unless one has experienced war … Countless minor incidents – the kind you can never really foresee – combine to lower the general level of performance … Friction is the only concept that more or less corresponds to the factors that distinguish real war from war on paper. …it is a force that theory can never quite define.[54]

In war, we are dealing with uncertain variables – chance, imagination, emotional forces such as hatred, rancour and fear, and primordial violence. Hence there are irrational passions at work, inscrutable games of chance and probability (or *alea*), co-defining and complicating the sphere of influence set by rational forces such as political orders or the aims of military campaigns as defined by the authority of state. The recurring echo in Clausewitz unequivocally chimes that 'war is the realm of chance':

> War is dependent on the interplay of possibilities and probabilities, of good and bad luck, conditions in which strictly logical reasoning often plays no part at all and is always apt to be a most unsuitable and awkward intellectual tool.[55]

Byron's drama captures the very essence of war as defined above, illuminating the crucial importance of what Clausewitz terms 'friction' – the unforeseen, the unexpected, which alters or mars strategic plans, however brilliant in theory.

Despite rational theoretical strategy setting itself up as the sole controlling element within the 'trinity' of forces that comprise Clausewitz's war phenomenon, the 'subjective nature of war – the means by which war has to be fought', Clausewitz tells us, ever mindful

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[53] Clausewitz, *On War*, p.104. This clearly designates agon and alea as the ruling forces defining 'the climate of war'.

[54] Clausewitz, *On War*, pp. 119-121.

[55] Clausewitz, *On War*, pp. 580-1.

of the ubiquity of the unpredictable – 'will look more than ever like a gamble', as 'the element in which war exists is danger'[56] – from 'the very start there is an interplay of possibilities, probabilities, good luck and bad that weaves its way throughout the length and breadth of the tapestry'.[57] These unpredictable forces render the 'subjective nature of war' as the setting for a 'gamble' whose untold stakes are life and death. Crucially, Clausewitz points out that the 'creative spirit is free to roam' within this fluid space shaped by the 'interplay of possibilities and probabilities'. And if we take this line of argument a step further, this intricate 'tapestry' of war becomes not only a fretwork featuring intermittent randomness and potential absurdity – a premise which Byron often builds on – but also a free-for-all of unbridled creativity. This unbridled creativity is manifest in the character of Ulric, and we shall see later how Clausewitz's theory of war helps us specify the intricacies of Ulric's engagement with war.

Clausewitz's free-for-all is played out at its most intense in *The Deformed Transformed*. But Clausewitz's abstract theories of warfare also help us to get to grips with *Werner* – a drama that has not, on the whole, enjoyed wide critical appreciation. The first of Clausewitz's 'paradoxical trinity' of forces in war is 'primordial violence, hatred and enmity', and in Byron's drama Stralenheim's and Werner's contest for the famed Siegendorf inheritance (highlighted in the subtitle of Byron's drama) is referred to by both contestants as a 'hunt' – in Werner's words, for example: 'I have been a soldier, / A hunter, and a traveller (I.i.33-4); 'when the ebb / Of fortune leaves [us] on the shoals of life (I.i.41-2); 'I have been full oft / The chase of Fortune' (I.i.61-2). As we have seen, whereas Stralenheim's strategy is the offensive, an active pursuit of the inheritance, ruthlessly hunting down Werner and his family, Werner plays the role of the hunted – on the defensive, hiding under a pseudonym, eluding his enemy. From the information provided about his past, this has often been the case. Werner is and always has been 'the chase of Fortune'. And the game of Fortune brings both to the self-same nameless spot on the Silesian border, bringing into play the second of Clausewitz's trinity of forces: 'the play of chance and probability'.

Werner repeatedly refers to the aleatory inscrutability of fate at work, as we have also seen. These melodramatic outcries evoke the characteristic features of the state of war in Clausewitz's early writings on the Thirty Years' War, specifically his study of Gustavus

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[56] Clausewitz, *On War*, p. 85.

[57] Clausewitz, *On War*, p. 86.

Adolphus' martial strategies, which concludes with the following dictum: '[der Krieg] *gab so dem launischen Spiel des Schicksals Raum für seine Zufälle*'[58] – 'thus war gave the capricious game of fate space (occasion) for its coincidences'. Clausewitz's understanding of war allows us to see the extent to which war and its unpredictable climate *fills* the dramatic space of *Werner* – war is fundamental to Byron's drama; even the time of peace occupied by the action of the drama is saturated with war, and its atmosphere of ubiquitous fear and suspicion is partly caused by what Clausewitz summarizes under the heading of the 'Uncertainty of all Information':

> The general unreliability of all information presents a special problem in war: all action takes place, so to speak, in a kind of twilight, which, like fog or moonlight, often tends to make things seem grotesque and larger than they really are. Whatever is hidden from full view in this feeble light has to be guessed at by talent, or simply left to chance. So once again for lack of objective knowledge one has to trust to talent or to luck.[59]

This quite perfectly spotlights both the quandaries of anonymity and the heightened Gothic atmosphere we encounter at the beginning of *Werner*, which lends itself to the grotesque shadow-play of cloak and dagger drama down gothic galleries where 'chance' and luck or sheer 'talent' are the only decisive forces. As Clausewitz observes, '[d]aring … boldness, rashness, trusting in luck are the only variants of courage, and all these traits of character seek their proper element – chance.'[60]

If Werner is 'the chase of Fortune', bedraggled and on the run, his son Ulric enters the drama as a true hero, having saved Stralenheim from a flooded river. He is 'of that mould which throws out heroes' (II.i.157); a 'stalwart, active, soldier-looking stripling, / Handsome as young Hercules ere his first labour' (II.i.254-5). Indeed, Ulric stands out as a paragon of heroic prowess, in the Clausewitzian terms of 'daring, boldness' and 'trusting in luck', until the very end. Even when the truth about Stralenheim's murder must out, Gabor's rendition concentrates on Ulric's 'wonderful endowments' – with 'unrivall'd' courage, Ulric is deemed 'almost superhuman': a 'man / Of wonderful endowments: – birth and fortune / Youth, strength, and beauty, almost superhuman' (V.i.244-6). Furthermore, the uncertain

58 'Strategische Beteuchnung mehrerer Feldzüge von Gustav Adolph', in *Hinterlassene Werke des Generals Carl von Clausewitz über Krieg und Kriegsführung*, vol 9 (Berlin: Ferdinand Dümmler, 1837), p.67.

59 Clausewitz, *On War*, p. 140.

60 Clausewitz, *On War*, p. 85.

climate that Werner finds crippling is Ulric's 'proper element' – he exemplifies Clausewitz's 'creative spirit', 'free to roam'[61] within the 'play of chance and probability'. As Fritz, Stralenheim's valet, puts it, 'there [is] something strange and mystic in him' – his nature is 'wild' and 'exuberan[t]' (II.i.122-3). Indeed, this 'wildness' and 'exuberance' are two of the many signals signposting Ulric's true allegiance to *polemos* – the force of Ur-nature, which, according to Heraclitus, exists, like Ulric, in the realm of eternal change and flux: '*panta chorei*', '*panta rhei*'.[62] It is Clausewitz's world of 'chance and probability' found in warfare, that Ulric finally retreats back to, having cut all familial ties, and that forever threatens to wreak havoc on the world of order – the feudal order, the order of tragedy but also the interim period of peace, which, as Byron never ceases to remind us, would have, at some point, inevitably dissolved back into the chaos of conflict.

Ulric is, in fact, 'the child of war' exactly as this is envisaged by Clausewitz. Ulric is marked by the

> fierceness the late long intestine wars
> Have given all natures, and most unto those
> Who were born in them, and bred upon
> The knees of Homicide; sprinkled, as it were
> With blood even at their baptism. (IV.i.66-72)

Ulric is the offspring of war, 'bred upon the knees of Homicide'.[63] Ulric's heroism and 'superhuman' prowess are tainted – as these qualities are in Byron's last drama, *The Deformed Transformed*. The 'mild twins, Gore and Glory' always walk hand in hand for

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[61] Ulric's self-portrait is telling in this respect, circling around the concept of the superhuman:

> Ulric: I'm the true chameleon
> And live but on the atmosphere; your feasts
> In castle halls, and social banquets, nurse not
> My spirit – I'm a forrester and breather
> Of the steep mountain-tops where I love all
> The eagle loves. (IV.i.219-224)

Ulric stands outside society – feudal 'feasts in castle halls' 'nurse not his spirit'. He aligns himself with the elemental forces and liminal spaces – forests and mountain tops – again, in a telling signal of his allegiance to the elemental conflict which defines *polemos*. Ulric proclaims his right to freedom with Manfred-like bravado.

[62] The theory of universal flux was attributed to Heraclitus by Plato in the fragmentary *Cratylus*. Plato, *Crat* 402a: 'Heraclitus says … that all things move and nothing remains still, and he likens the universe to the current of a river, saying that you cannot step twice into the same river'. See 'Heraclitean Flux', in Barry Sandywell, *Dictionary of Visual Discourse: A Dialectical Lexicon of Terms* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), p.322. Heraclitus sees 'the world is an interminable activity and process.' (ibid.)

[63] The unsettling, subversive motive of a 'bloody baptism' of the hero recurs throughout Byron's oeuvre.

Byron: pedestaled heroism has no place in his thinking. In the proverbial chatter of the castle guards, Ulric is both a hero of unparalleled chivalric dexterity, 'whose plume nods knightlier'[64] than anybody else's, and, simultaneously, 'the sort of knave' war 'leaves living. / Like other parents, she spoils her worst children' (IV.i.41-3).[65] Ulric is marked by 'the savage love of enterprise', 'seeking peril as a pleasure'.[66] This brings us yet again back to Clausewitz who reminds us 'the element in which war exists is danger'. Ulric's 'pleasure' in this element is the key point. Ulric is that kind of 'creative spirit' that *desires* to be 'free to roam' in a climate of heightened existence – war is his 'pastime'. Crucially, Byron puts Ulric on a par with the illustrious players on the 'grand scale' of history: 'Your Wallenstein, your Tilly and Gustavus, /Your Bannier, and your Torstenson and Weimar' (II.i.139-141), emphasizing both the idea that Ulric is not just a fictional character, but one that represents a historical phenomenon, and the fact that the concept of war-as-play lies at the basis of this drama, as well as of Byron's understanding of war as such.

In part, then, we might already describe Ulric as a Clausewitzian figure – possessing a natural 'talent' for war and the 'courage' to 'trust' that 'talent' – or even just 'luck' – a character defined by 'daring' and 'boldness'. But for much of the drama he also, and perhaps most strikingly, bodies forth Clausewitz's third force driving war – that of rational override. As Clausewitz observes, 'true war, or absolute war' is 'completely governed and saturated by the urge for a decision'.[67] Before Act V, Ulric's key decision is the murder of

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64 Eric: Pity the wars are o'er! ....
Pity, as I said, that the wars are o'er: ...
Who like him with his spear in hand, when, gnashing
His tusks, and ripping up from right to left
The howling hounds, the boars makes for the thicket?
Who backs a horse, or bears a hawk, or wears
A sword like him? Whose plume nods knightlier?
Hen: No one's, I grant you. Do not fear, if war
Be long in coming, he is of that kind
Will make it for himself, if he hath not
Already done as much. (IV.i.22-38)

65 Clausewitz instructs us as follows: 'It may be true that many a petty play of emotions is silenced by the serious duties of war, but that holds only for men in the lower ranks who, rushed from one set of exertions and dangers to the next lose sight of the other things in life [...] The higher a man is placed, the wider his point of view. Different interest and a wide variety of passions, good and bad, will arise on all sides. Envy and generosity, pride and humility, wrath and compassion – all may appear as effective forces in this greater drama.' 'Other Emotional Factors', *On War*, p. 139.

66 Fritz: But there are human natures so allied
Unto the savage love of enterprise,
That they will seek peril as a pleasure. (II.i.132-5)

67 Clausewitz, *On War*, pp. 488-9.

Stralenheim. It tells us a lot about Ulric as a character. His decision is, for a start, chillingly rational – murder is a means to a logical end:

> Ulric: Is it strange
> That I should *act* what you could *think*?
> We have done with right and wrong and now must only ponder
> Upon effects, not causes. Stralenheim ...
> Was a rock in our way which I cut though
> As doth the bolt, because it stood between us
> And our true destination – but not idly.
> As stranger I preserved him – and he *owed* me
> His *life*: when due, I but resumed the debt. (V.i.452-463)

Ulric's disturbing self-justification hinges on a kind of 'economy' of murder – having unwittingly 'preserved' Stralenheim at the beginning, Stralenheim 'owed [him] his life' – he 'but resumed the debt' 'when due'.[68] Still, this is little more than self-justification. Ulric's superhuman self-awareness is, in fact, made manifest by his simply 'cut[ting] through' the 'rock in our way' as 'doth the bolt' – here Ulric works with the alacrity of lighting – fundamentally driven by the 'urge for a decision'. Crucially, as Clausewitz instructs us, 'any move made in a state of tension will be of more importance, and will have more results, than it would have made in a state of equilibrium. In times of maximum tension this importance will rise to an infinite degree.'[69] Ulric's murder of Stralenheim is, of course, of crucial importance to the drama, and Clausewitz helps us not only to read Ulric, but also to see how Byron presents this particular historical peace not as 'a state of equilibrium', but as 'a state of tension', indeed of 'maximum tension' – an ongoing state of war, in fact – and, as such, a situation in which Ulric assumes for himself a 'heroic' role – that of a soldier, not a murderer.

Thus Clausewitz's war theory allows us a more methodical appraisal of the character of Ulric than we yet have – one that sees him driven not by the vengeful *agonistic* motivations of tragedy, nor working within the constraints of tragic morality, but, instead, driven by the demands, necessities, challenges and impulses of all-out warfare. Ulric is the epitome of a war-like state of being – he has courage, he is blessed with luck and he is able

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[68] As Pal-Lapinski observes, 'if Stralenheim becomes indebted to Ulric for saving his life, by killing him, Ulric creates the perfect symbolic reciprocity between life and death, and cancels the debt, simultaneously extricating himself from a system of capitalistic exchange.' 'Byronic Terror and Impossible Exchange: From *Werner* to Baudrillard's *The Spirit of Terrorism*', p.192.

[69] Clausewitz, *On War*, p.222.

to navigate the confusing climate of war because it is his natural habitat. Moreover, he is also in possession of all information, that invaluable currency in this uncertain time of feeble peace, and he has a rational plan of action based on this information which he executes when chance lends him an opportunity to act. Ulric, then, deploys all three of Clausewitz's 'paradoxical trinity of forces' of war to his advantage. From this military perspective, all other strategies in Byron's drama are flawed: Werner is hindered by a lingering sense of ethics, which to Ulric translates as simply lack of courage, while Stralenheim is on a par with Ulric when it comes to everything but the information that makes Ulric's 'force of rationality' possible – not knowing that Ulric is Werner's son proves to be fatal. From a Clausewitzian perspective, Ulric represents the only successful strategy for dealing with conflict, leading to the elimination of the enemy and a rightful restoration of the inheritance. In 'the climate of war', made up of 'danger, exertion, uncertainty, and chance', the Ulrics of the world rule. But it seems that this is also the case, in *Werner*, when peace is restored. In this way, Clausewitz allows us to also say something larger about Byron's drama – that it is an exploration of the fact that even in peace, the tensions of war still play themselves out, even to the point where 'war will claim its own'. For Byron, in *Werner* at least, the rules of peace and the rules of war seem to be no different – each is a game of violence, hatred, enmity, chance, probability, creativity and reason, and each is a game to be won or lost by whoever has the courage to trust 'to luck' and the 'talent' to make the best of the chances thrown at them.

With the help of Clausewitz's theory of war, then, we can more accurately see how Ulric's decision to kill Stralenheim marks him out as a 'child of war' through its demonstration of his apt use of rationality, his natural 'talent' for conflict, and his courage, daring and boldness in the face of 'chance'. But we need to go further than Clausewitz takes us to get a full picture of Ulric's ultimate significance – indeed, back to our terminology of play. For Ulric's way out of tragedy, though linked to all of these war-like characteristics, is won, finally, by none of them so much as Ulric's final, wholehearted adoption of, and commitment to, *ilinx* as his guiding strategy for the future. Indeed, at the very end of the drama, Ulric becomes a pure force of *ilinx*, wreaking war on the world in general, and on the world represented by his father in particular:

Ulric: Go tell
Your senators that they look well to Prague:
Their feast of peace was early for the times;
There are more spirits abroad than have been laid

With Wallenstein! (V.ii.48-52)

Ulric, 'born on the knees of homicide', threatens more war: 'look well to Prague'. The 'feast of peace was too early for the times'. Moreover, he is 'not alone: nor merely the vain heir / Of [Siegendorf's] domains; a thousand, ay, ten thousand / Swords, hearts, and hands' are with him (V.ii.44-6). His threat is not motivated by revenge, however. Refusing his father's aid of 'protection' (V.ii.43), he disinherits himself – 'No count, / Henceforth you have no son!' (V.ii.39-40) – and hurries off to join his 'forresters' (V.i.46), but not to wage a private war on his father. Rather, his threat is directed at Prague and the peace treaty recently established there. Nor is his threat motivated by remorse, guilt or a desire to cover the tracks of his own violence with general violence. He does feel remorse for having killed the father of his fiancée, Ida, but, as we have seen, and as he repeats in this fraught final scene, he has no regrets for having killed Stralenheim himself. Indeed, his father's morality, which would lead to 'sacrifice [his] whole race to save / A wretch to profit by our ruin' (V.ii.38-9), is contemptible to him. Stern and unyielding, he offers a dark comment less on individual motivations than on larger forces that operate on and through history. Ulric will wreak chaos on the world not for emotional or psychological reasons but out of sheer contempt for all forms of order, all 'archés', all those rules that would see him '[d]enounced – dragg'd, it may be in chains' to submit to the moral prerogatives that they uphold. This to Ulric translates as merely 'inherent weakness, half-humanity, / Selfish remorse, and temporizing pity' (V.i.35-7) – a whole world of rules and the pitiful submission to those rules that he now vows to fundamentally subvert by throwing it back into the chaos of warfare and into the 'realm of chance'. It is at this moment that Ulric pulls clear of the world of tragedy altogether, shifting instead into the world of *polemos*. It is at this moment that Ulric transforms himself into a pure force of *ilinx*.

The ending of the drama sees Ulric exit the stage as a new kind of Byronic Hero about to embark on a new kind of tale. We are not privy to this tale. However, the inglorious implications of Ulric's future role in history, outside the scope of this drama, might, in part at least, be supplied by the final part of Schiller's *History*, which renders vividly the infamous ramifications of the Thirty Years' War. In the end, that war would become nothing but a mercenary war fought for gain by official or unofficial pirate gangs that flew out of control, a war that dragged on miserably, corrupting and bankrupting almost everyone involved:

> In this long and general confusion, all the bonds of social life were broken up; – respect for the rights of their fellow men, the fear of the laws, purity of morals, honour, and religion, were laid aside, where might ruled supreme with iron sceptre. Under the shelter of anarchy and impunity, every vice flourished, and men became as wild as the country.[70]

One cannot but surmise that the Peace of Westphalia was one of utter exhaustion. The war machine, having gained momentum, continued by itself – war for war's sake. As general Isolani remarks in Schiller's *Wallenstein*: 'der Krieg ernährt den Krieg', war feeds itself, *bellum se ipsum alit* – not only in the original strategic meaning of feeding the armies off the spoils of the currently occupied territory, but also in the larger metaphorical sense of a war machine perpetuating itself *ad absurdum*. Byron's *Werner* points directly to this universal destruction, degeneration and demoralization – the true inheritance of a protracted, universal war – while, and this is crucial, simultaneously opening up his tragic drama to a world beyond the moral constraints of dramatic justice. Abounding in complex resonances as to the nature of war as a phenomenon, and its effects on society, *Werner* is a step-change not only in Byron's dramatic project but in his entire mature oeuvre, disclosing an unforgiving universe founded upon ubiquitous conflict. Even within supposed peacetime, Byron presents us with a canny play between states of order and randomness – acts of tragic order triggered by knowing/naming, versus randomness, nourished by not knowing/anonymity. Their clash fuels the dramatic action, since not knowing is always under threat from knowing and naming immediately incites conflict. The drama thus represents a historical *inter-bellum*, and by implication, perhaps, all times of peace, as a paradox – the Thirty Years War is here suspended only for the duration of a dramatic conflict that is itself inescapably part of that war, part of the violent past and the grounds for the impending violence of the future. Byron's drama thus unfolds a complex ontology of perpetual, inescapable conflict. It is through Ulric's ultimate unleashing of *ilinx* on the temporarily established order that the drama delivers its unsettling gospel of what is, in essence, *polemos*.

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[70] Schiller, 'The History of the Thirty Years War', Book V: http://www.gutenberg.org/dirs/etext04/fs14w10.txt, (retrieved 29 November 2009). As Peter Limm concludes in his study of the Thirty Years' War: 'Once it was realised that the fighting could not be terminated by a single victory or a brilliant feat of arms, a general cynicism helped to create a depressing war psychology which perceived life as nasty, brutish and short.' *The Thirty Years' War* (London and New York: Longman, 1984), p.93.

Byron's *Werner* makes it very clear that while peace is, at best, made possible by kinds of not knowing, it cannot survive the intrusion of knowledge – which echoes *Cain* and its insistence on the inescapable, essential connection between knowledge and conflict, though there this connection is related to the notion of sin, while here it is related to history. Indeed *Werner* insists that knowing always overwhelms not knowing – which, in Derrida's terms, and perhaps also Byron's, is ultimately a form of impossibility. Like Derrida, Byron identifies what knowing is in abstract terms, but, more devastatingly, he also dramatizes its power in the real world of politics, warfare and history at large. Like *The Deformed Transformed*, Byron's Bohemian 'rhapsody', set during the fragile interim of the Peace of Prague in 1635, recalls but also amplifies *Childe Harold*'s famous reading of the 'one page' of history, dramatizing as it does one of the most devastating European relapses into barbarism and chaos – a turbulent era of history acutely relevant to the contemporary post-Napoleonic times of its creation. But in an even wider context, Byron's drama epitomizes 'the disproportionate part assigned to the play of probability and chance in determining the course of events' throughout human history,[71] as well as laying bare the unsettling implications of a world of being and becoming that is, essentially, anarchy – implications that Nietzsche would so famously, and devastatingly, take up later in the nineteenth century.

[71] Clausewitz, *On War*, p. 139.

CHAPTER 5

The Deformed Transformed and the Bloody Circus of History

Civilized, barbarian,
Or saintly, still the walls of Romulus
Have been the circus of an empire. Well!
'Twas their turn – now 'tis ours.[1]

In this final chapter, we shall discuss the ways in which Byron's last, unfinished, dramatic piece, *The Deformed Transformed*, deploys the four strategies of play in a manner decidedly less 'instrumental'[2] than any of the previous dramas we have analysed in our study so far, making a case for Byron's unprecedented unleashing of free play in this experimental drama. Free play is not only channelled through the subversive play strategy of *ilinx*, as we saw in *Heaven and Earth* and *Werner*, but – crucially – through all four strategies of play. Drawing chiefly on Joshua Pickersgill's novel *The Three Brothers* for the transformation scene,[3] Byron transposes what was a Gothic historical fantasy, and a tale of revenge, into a Byronic satire directed at heroism and history, taking the 1527 Sack of Rome as its central setting. Byron's last drama bodies forth a shrewd, unrelenting take on history – loosening the generic grip of instrumental play which controlled all the previous dramas discussed here,[4] and thereby unleashing the full potential of free play, it is one culmination of Byron's satirical critique of history, only paralleled in its unforgiving playfulness by *Don Juan*, and *the* culmination of his dramatic project.

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[1] I.ii.280-4.

[2] As we have specified in the introduction and throughout this study, in *The Fictive and the Imaginary*, Iser identifies play in literature as the dynamic 'contraflow of free and instrumental play' (p.247), where 'instrumental' play functions as 'a recuperation of what free play disperses' (xviii).

[3] For a detailed discussion of Pickersgill's 1803 novel and Byron's drama and the exchange of classical allusions therein, see Imke Heuer, '"Shadows of Beauty, Shadows of Power": Heroism, Deformity and Classical Allusion in Joshua Pickersgill's *The Three Brothers* and Byron's *Deformed Transformed*', in *Cardiff Corvey: Reading the Romantic Text* 12 (Summer 2004), pp.11-28.

[4] Here we should note that *Manfred* is a dramatic experiment equally unfettered (though in slightly different ways) by the constraints of instrumental play – our study, as specified in the introduction, does not discuss this highly playful piece only because we are primarily concerned with history and play in Byron's dramas.

The Deformed Transformed, interested, like all of Byron's dramas, in exploring new ways of experimenting with given structures, blends, to some extent, selected experimental elements from Byron's previous dramas – for instance, the unsettling satirical potential of the chorus he introduced into *Heaven and Earth*, or the searing critique of heroism in particular and agonism in general most prominently laid out in *Sardanapalus* and *Cain*, here transformed into a satirical mode not unlike that of *Don Juan*. The hero is also treated as a mask, emptied of its meaning. In this and other crucial ways, Byron's last fragmentary drama leans strongly towards the grotesque, reiterating, but with a notable difference, the grotesque theme of the evil puppeteer. Akin to the indiscriminate evil spirits in *Heaven and Earth*, the Stranger represents cosmic power with no particular allegiance, and, through his unremitting commentary, that of an underwhelmed supernatural reporter, history is revealed as an ever-repeating spectacle of violence, staged on the most apt of classical loci, the eternal city of Rome. Indeed, while the specific setting for the drama is the Sack of Rome, its critique of heroism and *agon* as the driving forces behind all historical acts shifts Byron's dramatic perspective to the spectacle of history per se, and reveal it to be a dull show of agonistic sameness, repeated ad absurdum.[5] But the Stranger is not only an observer. Combining the figure of the evil puppeteer with a wider sense of the inscrutability of the universe, he channels *alea* and *ilinx* in ways which thread them into history in a range of ways, pointing to a nexus of forces that roam free in an ever-changing cosmos whose sole law is that of perpetual change. What goes on in the human world is the *Urspiel* of war and glory – an endless game of *agon* and mimicry, with a predictable element of *ilinx* thrown in that repeatedly subverts this agonistic order into chaos, from which the same order then eventually reinstates itself only to be subverted again in the dynamic scheme of an aleatory universe whose larger aims, if it has any, are hidden from human view. Contrary to Caillois' positive rendition of *alea* as a democratizing force that makes all players equal in their subjection to the forces of fate, Byron's *alea* accentuates the adverse side of the same idea – for Byron it is a formidable force of relentless and unforeseeable change that all must suffer and against which all are powerless. *Alea*, *agon*, *mimicry* and *ilinx* are here all released from constraints and limits of any kind, each serving only to perpetuate itself, but all thereby contributing to the same cosmic dynamic of play, a dynamic that ensures that history is a process of constant, violent, chaotic change. On the textual and discursive level, then, free

[5] As Imke Heuer notes, 'the play rejects an idealised image of … heroism and warfare.' '"Shadows of Beauty, Shadows of Power": Heroism, Deformity and Classical Allusion in Joshua Pickersgill's *The Three Brothers* and Byron's *Deformed Transformed*', p.15.

play puts all ideals and traditionally accepted values in question in what is perhaps Byron's most experimental drama, and certainly the culmination of Byron's experimentation with dramatic form.

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On 14 November 1822, Byron sent Mary Shelley the text of *The Deformed Transformed*[6] with the following comment: 'I am sending you the completion of the first part of the drama, as I think it may be as well to divide it, although *intended* to be *irregular* in all its branches'.[7] At another point he refers to the piece as 'an odd sort of drama',[8] a note which has been used by critics as a ratification of the deprecatory readings listed below. Focusing instead on the tragicomic bravado and sheer dramatic (and, indeed, strikingly cinematic[9]) energy with which *The Deformed Transformed* lays bare the carnivorous vortex of human history, I intend to show the ways in which the theory of play can help us to do justice to this highly experimental dramatic text brimming over with creative potential. In a shamelessly playful manner, Byron lays bare the peripeteia of Western civilization, the vicious circle of violence fuelled by the agonizing agonistic struggle for superiority and power. Nor does he shy away from the threat of the pointless absurdity of existence – having found and perfected, first in *Beppo* and then in *Don Juan*, a vehicle for a full-blown satirical portrayal of the wretchedness and tragicomic ridiculousness of the *theatrum mundi*, he here renders with a particularly unforgiving gusto, through the cutting witticisms of the supernatural Stranger, the relentless absurdity of human history twisted into a vicious circle of heedless destruction and an ambition-driven hunt for spoils – be it riches, position or simply victory. The 'bloody

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[6] Byron's work on the drama was intermittent, having been written in the early months of 1822. In a letter to John Hunt in May 1823, Byron describes his piece as an 'odd sort of drama', saying that he doubts if he 'shall go on with it'. The first two acts were published in *The Liberal* as late as February 1824, the final part of Act II is unfinished and the very last extant bit consists of a fragment of Act III written in Byron's hand, amounting to some 100 lines only.

[7] Letter to Mary Shelley of 4 November 1822, *BLJ* X, p.33. Original emphasis. Byron employed Mary Shelley to transcribe his manuscripts after her husband's death in order to help her financially. For their epistolary exchanges about the drama, see Peter Cochran's introduction to the drama, part of his alternative annotated electronic edition of Byron's letters and poetic and dramatic works based on manuscript material (as opposed to printed editions): http://petercochran.files.wordpress.com/2009/03/the_deformed_transformed.pdf. (retrieved September 2010).

[8] Letter to John Hunt of 21 May 1823, *BLJ* X, p. 182.

[9] See the final chapter of Martyn Corbett's *Byron and Tragedy*, p.212. 'It seems to be that his macrocosm could only be presented in the cinema.'

chaos' of recorded time invoked in 'The Prophecy of Dante'[10] is transposed into a full-fledged subversive satire peppered with a gallows humour that is pushed to grotesque extremes. This 'marvellous fragment'[11] is an exercise in distortion – not only of the physical (which is magically ameliorated) and psychological, but also of ethics, aesthetics and, most importantly, history. The Stranger's and Arnold's magical mystery tour reveals an extemporary, condensed version of the crisis of humanism, cast in tragicomic colours – an unrelenting exposé of history as war and war as play.

In the criticism of Byron's dramas, *The Deformed Transformed* has, like *Werner*, often been underestimated or practically ignored. Chew criticises Byron's abandoning of the unities in this 'formless, chaotic piece',[12] and laments the waste of the poet's energy and time on his whole dramatic project, dreaming of the 'ten more cantos of *Don Juan*' that could have been written instead. Barton, though favouring it with the phrase 'that marvellous fragment',[13] does not discuss the drama at any length, only noting that it is more at home in the context of Brecht and Beckett.[14] The critical response dealing with Byron's dramas *en masse* has most often focused on the autobiographical aspects of *The Deformed Transformed*, or on the Faustian theme of the doppelgänger, disregarding or simply unaware of the elaborate dynamic potential of this protean pageant.[15] The autobiographical ballast of the drama (the theme of physical deformity, the mother's abusive disdain) and Byron's persistent fascination with the doppelgänger have given rise to a dominant understanding of the drama that is biographical and often rather simplistically psychological.[16] Yet of all

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[10] Canto II, 42.

[11] Barton, '"A Light to Lesson Ages": Byron's Political Plays', p. 161.

[12] Samuel C. Chew, *The Dramas of Lord Byron* (Göttingen: Vendenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1915), p.40.

[13] Barton, '"A Light to Lesson Ages": Byron's Political Plays', p. 161.

[14] Corbett offers an alternative reading of the drama: 'It is tempting to see *The Deformed Transformed* almost as a parody of *Cain*: inherited deformity replaces inherited guilt; rather than undertaking a journey through space and tie, Arnold is conveyed through a world at war.' Corbett, *Byron and Tragedy*, p.209.

[15] E.g. G. Wilson Knight, who dismisses the drama as 'Byron's "Richard" complex'. *Byron and Shakespeare* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966), p.155. For possible unacknowledged sources for the drama, see Charles E. Robinson, 'The Devil as Doppelgänger in *The Deformed Transformed:* the Sources and Meaning of Byron's Unfinished Drama', in Robert Gleckner and Bernard Beatty (eds) *The Plays of Lord Byron: Critical Essays*, pp.321-345.

[16] A notable exception is Daniel P. Watkins, 'The Ideological Dimensions of Byron's *The Deformed Transformed*', in Robert Gleckner and Bernard Beatty (eds) *The Plays of Lord Byron: Critical Essays*, pp. 347-362, where he analyses Byron's ideas about politics and the social structure in this fragmentary drama. More recent studies include Joshua D. Gonsalves, 'Typological Revisions of The Sack of Rome in Byron's *The Deformed Transformed*', a conference paper given at the 37th International Byron Conference, Valladolid, Spain, July 2011, full text available online on the website of the International Association of Byron Societies (IABS):

Byron's dramas – eight altogether, counting *Manfred* – *The Deformed Transformed* is the most experimental, daring and playful, both thematically and formally. The text plays with virtually every single one of its ideas and themes, and stages, through the central topos of Rome, a relentless satire on human history. An unfinished fragment, it presents an open system of values subject to constant subversion, its dynamic never quite resolved at any given point, the moral of the tale unfolding and unravelling at the same time, forever ebbing to and fro, galvanizing and simultaneously thwarting any ethical potential. The insistent immediacy of Byron's sense of history comes to a climax here through the synchronicity of history dramatized in intense satirical glimpses.

The four strategies of play – *agon*, *alea*, *ilinx* and *mimicry* – and their various combinations are all represented in the text, emphasizing the playfully dynamic crux of its dramatic structure, a structure that corresponds to Byron's intentionally experimental approach, and which he described as 'oddity' or 'irregular[ity] in all its branches'. Even at a glance, we can see that *The Deformed Transformed* reverberates with diction suggestive of play – be it the cruelty of Arnold's mother at the very beginning ('Thou monstrous sport of nature' [I.i.15]), the warmongering cries in the heat of the onslaught to Rome ('Up! Up! The world is winning!'[17] [II.i.154]), or the Stranger's many insightful comments and asides throughout (such as his warning that war is 'no boys' play' [II.i.160]). In this chapter, then, we will follow the four strategies of play through this last dramatic text of Byron's, commenting on the ways in which they are all involved in its dramatic structure, highlight its contours and bring the drama alive – deforming and transforming in their wake all prescribed ideals, tropes and generic conventions.

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http://www.internationalbyronsociety.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=49&Itemid=29, and Jonathan Gross, '"I have a penchant for black": Race and Orphic Dismemberment in Byron's *The Deformed Transformed* and J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*', in Matthew J. A. Green and Piya Pal-Lapinski (eds), *Byron and the Politics of Freedom and Terror*, pp.167-181. Gross points to the critically completely overlooked point of the Stranger's skin colour, arguing that *The Deformed Transformed* was 'post-colonial *avant la lettre*' in its ironic treatment of the Faust myth in relation to skin colour, parodying accepted clichés (p.176).

[17] Uttered by the dying Duke of Bourbon as he falls off the battlements of Rome – here, dramatic irony accentuates and simultaneously ridicules the theme of the high stakes of war-as-play, life and death.

Agon

Caesar: The field is wide, too;
For now the Frank, and Hun, and Spanish Scion
Of the old Vandals, are at play along
The sunny shores of the world's garden. (I.i.503-6)

Agon represents play where conflicting powers are locked in contest, aiming at overcoming difference by force. They do so through the deployment of strategic planning – the ludic principles of *agon* are set on winning.[18] The Stranger's lines cited above evoke the idea of the agonistic *playground* of Rome, fought over in the 'play' between the 'Frank, and Hun, and Spani[ard]'. Rome is also described as 'the world's garden', invoking its mythical and historical status as the earthly garden of Eden, the holy seat of Christianity. The city's special status is further emphasized and simultaneously undermined by the metaphor of 'sunny shores' – Byron's lofty mythical image presents Rome as a timeless island sanctuary surrounded by various warmongering nations 'at play' on the battlefield of history that surrounds and threatens it. Rome is rendered a characteristic Byronic 'spot' where the fabric of space and time comes alive in an evocative palimpsest of synchronicity in which the agonistic forces of history gather.[19]

The drama's geographical setting is a site of agonistic play, then. So is the central plotline. This gets under way after a prelude to the war scenes proper of the Sack of Rome which comprise Part II of the drama:

Caesar: Where shall we now be errant?
Arnold: Where the world
Is thickest, that I may behold it in
Its workings.
Caesar: That's to say, where there is War
And woman in activity. (I.i.493-6)

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[18] Ordered and well chartered though it may seem, agonistic play also contains a strong element of violence which is a primeval force and hence hard to contain within a fixed set of rules. War games (cf. Clausewitz) have sets of rules that must be respected by all parties involved, but war-as-play involves a looser frame of agonistic reference where forces clash and powers assert themselves freely, creating a field far more unpredictable and treacherous than the idea of a war game would let on. According to Caillois, war has to be excluded from the domain of play because of its unchecked unleashing of primal violence, an element of corruption of agon. 'The Corruption of Games', in *Man, Play and Games*, p.54.

[19] The locus of Rome is also tied to the world of Greek epic through the figure of Arnold as Achilles. As Heuer notes, 'The Romans saw their city as a second Troy, which makes Arnold's position as Achilles even more poignant.' '"Shadows of Beauty, Shadows of Power": Heroism, Deformity and Classical Allusion in Joshua Pickersgill's *The Three Brothers* and Byron's *Deformed Transformed*', p.18.

After the magical transformation, Arnold is eager to start living a full life worthy of the form he has chosen, that of the great warrior Achilles. He 'ask[s] not / For valour, since Deformity is daring' (I.i.312-3) – indeed, as Arnold proudly tells the Stranger, it is deformity's very 'essence to o'ertake mankind / By heart and soul, and make itself the equal - / Aye, the superior of the rest' (I.i.314-16). Offstage, the Stranger takes him to 'where the world is thickest', that is through scenes of plunder and pillage, before they end up in Rome, where the dramatic action resumes. The Stranger deliberately chooses settings for Arnold's quest 'where there is war and woman in activity' – violence and sex, in other words, constitute the agonistic frame of the adventure. Initially, these scenes clash with Arnold's ideal notions of a chivalric quest, yet later on, as we shall see, Arnold's own deeper wishes – his explicit intimations of superiority and desires for conquest – assert themselves to mar his own project of a noble quest, and this in part explains the drama's title – both the transformation of Arnold into Achilles and the grand educational tour through which this transformation is consolidated and developed are not parts of an idealized chivalric quest but rather of a process of transformation that exposes, releases and comments on the basic agonistic motives of human aspiration and ambition – Arnold's desire to win, be it power or love, resonates with ethical dilemmas.

The promise of 'war and woman' also gestures back towards the metaphor of masculine 'sport', of course, presenting two primordial male pastimes juxtaposed. Simultaneously, the line resonates with the 'shadows of beauty and power' (I.i.157-8) invoked by the Stranger during the transformation ritual. Both phrases comment on the same underlying principle, that of abstracting life into ideals – heroic warfare, beauty, power. As they manifest themselves in Arnold's 'transformation', all of these ideals are reduced to agonistic play.

Heroism in *The Deformed Transformed* is not only a contested issue – in a feat of satirical wit, the drama presents a total wipeout of ideals concerning heroes and heroism in the context of modern Europe, starting with the Classical fashion show at the beginning wherein the archetypal hero of Antiquity is, in the world of the sixteenth century, merely an empty disguise/mask to be worn, no more than one of those 'shadows of beauty and power'. By 1527, in other words, the demi-god warrior has been reduced to an aesthetic object, his epic, warrior status forgotten in favour of his beautiful and desirable appearance by the

modern world. Erasing epic distance and its absolute values, and placing the Classical hero very much in the world of early modern Europe, Byron imagines it as no more than an archaeological feat, which spotlights the modern world's diminished proportions:[20]

> Stranger: But thou, my manikin, would'st soar a show
> Rather than hero.
> ... by being
> A little less removed from present men
> In figure, thou canst sway them more; for all
> Would rise against thee now, as if to hunt
> A new found mammoth; and their cursed engines,
> Their culverins and so forth, would find way
> Through our friend's armour there, with greater ease
> Than the adulterer's arrow through his heel (I.i.299-308)

But while the modern world is, in one sense, a much smaller world than the classical one, a world in which heroism is reduced to a mere 'show', and to which Achilles would appear a 'mammoth', Byron's satire here also reverses the regressive myth of history in another sense[21] – Achilles, a demigod hero out of time, place and larger-than-life in any modern setting would nevertheless stand no chance against modern weapons – he would be beautiful, epic, but useless. This reversal is, of course, entirely negative in ethical terms. The modern world is better than the classical world, but only at war. Modern weaponry renders the world of Greek epic obsolete, but, equally, the Classical ideals of heroism and warfare are simply and totally overwhelmed by the 'cursed engines' of modern warfare. *Agon* has done away with heroic idealism. And yet history still requires violence on a 'heroic' scale. It also requires the commitment of individuals to that violence:

> Arnold: But name your compact:
> Must it be signed in blood?
> Stranger: Not in your own.
> Arnold: Whose blood then?
> Stranger: We will talk of that hereafter.
> But I'll be moderate with you, for I see
> Great things within you. You shall have no bond
> But your own will, no contract save your deeds. (I.i.146-151)

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[20] In a feat of historical irony that Byron might have been aware of at the time, the 'controversial statue of Achilles, raised in honour of Wellington by 'The Ladies' of Britain' was erected in Hyde Park in 1822 – a 'colossal 18-foot high representation of the hero of the *Iliad* … It was to be London's first nude statue [erected outside]', which raised a wave of controversy and inspired famous cartoons by Cruikshank. Philip Shaw, *Waterloo and the Romantic Imagination* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), p.197.

[21] 'I sometimes think that Man may be the relic of some higher material being wrecked in a former world.' *Detached Thoughts*, *BLJ* IX, p.46. This recurs, as we have seen, in *Cain*'s pre-Adamite beings.

In *The Deformed Transformed*, Byron not only comments on the ruthlessly agonistic foundations of the modern world by way of its negation of Classical ideals but also by presenting his own twist on a rather more modern myth – the Faustian contract. In this scheme, the price for having one's wish to enter history granted is not valour, skill, honour, or victory, but simply blood – yet not the supplicant's. Here, the price for entering into and participating in history is not even 'greatness' or 'heroic deeds': as the Stranger points out later, Glory's 'mild twin' is 'Gore' (II.ii.12).[22] The way into history is no longer heroism, but simply a willingness to get your hands dirty:

> Stranger: You are well entered now
> Arnold: Aye; but my path
> Has been o'er carcasses: mine eyes are full
> Of blood. (I.ii.1-3)

Byron's appropriation of the Faustian heritage is symptomatically unforgiving, itself appropriating Classical ideals for satirical purposes. The ideals of the Classical world still have a legacy, but this is wholly negative – history's big Mephistophelean trick on humanity is to draw people into a world of blood and carcasses with the now outdated, but still powerful, *notion* of heroism. History tempts men with the idea of glory. But what history wants is blood – and as Byron's nice twist on the Faust story stresses, one pays for glory with other people's blood, not the sacrifice of one's own. The 'mild twins, Gore and Glory', walk hand in hand, making history – and Byron's drama catches them red-handed:

> Caesar: I cannot find my hero; he is mixed
> With the heroic crowd that now pursue
> The fugitives, or battle with the desperate.
> …
> He comes,
> Hand in hand with the mild twins – Gore and Glory. (II.ii.1-12)

While the drama's geographical setting and main plot are sites of agonistic play, its protagonist, as we have already begun to see, is driven by agonistic impulses, desires and ambitions, as he engages in a 'sport' involving the highest of stakes – those of life and death. In the heat of the invasion of Rome, rather more idealist moral principles are upheld by the

[22] As Simon Bainbridge notes: Arnold's 'Faustian pact with the Stranger …is signed in the blood of all those he kills during the siege of Rome. In this most bloody of all Byron's treatments of war, the achievement of fame through a martial career is represented as nothing less than a compact with the devil.' *British Poetry and the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars: Visions of Conflict*, p. 198.

kind of aristocratic leaders represented here by the Duke of Bourbon, but, in practice, the overall scene of 'war as play' that Byron depicts here is very different. And it is a scene that increasingly corrupts Arnold the longer he stays in it. He accepts no moral responsibility for the graphic violence of the Sack committed by troops under his command, and does not face up to the ethical complexities of his own conquests.[23] To the Stranger's taunting remark that although he has assumed Achilles' form, he has not been dipped in the Styx and so is not immortal, Arnold proudly retorts: 'And who / With aught of soul would combat if he were / Invulnerable? That were pretty sport' (II.ii.23-5). The rules of war, in other words, have become wholly those of agonistic play for Arnold – war is an 'exhilarating game of courage', though not of 'honour',[24] played for the highest of stakes, life or death. The haughty, disdainful dismissal of fighting with an unfair advantage, such as divine invulnerability, as unworthy of a true warrior 'of soul' – 'that were pretty sport' – sounds, of course, like honour, but, as Huizinga remarks, 'war with its grimness and bitterness offers but scant occasion for this noble game. Bloody violence cannot be harnessed to any great extent in truly noble form; hence the game can only be fully experienced and enjoyed as a social and aesthetic fiction.' This fiction is 'enjoyed' through the making of 'fair imaginings of the life heroic which is played out in the ideal sphere of honour, virtue and beauty'.[25] It is through such idealistic imaginings that Arnold does indeed 'enjoy' his war – fitted with an ideal body, he plays out in his mind the fiction of a world that follows the fair rules of an idealized 'sport'. Yet Byron is at pains to show that he thereby fails to recognize, while we do not, the symptoms of his own, deeply ingrained corruption of these ideals, which manifests itself even before he embarks on the quest that takes him across the minefield of history. In the figure of Arnold, *agon*'s self-sustaining, self-idealizing illusions are, once again, laid bare as such:

Arnold: You have opened brighter prospects to my eyes,
And sweeter to my heart. As I am now,
I might be feared, admired, respected, loved
Of all save those next to me, of whom I
Would be beloved. (I.i.357-361)

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23 Arnold's saving of Olimpia is not a selfless act of chivalrous charity, as, based on the extant fragment of Part III, he will claim Olimpia as his rightful prize, and demand her affection.

24 Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, p. 101

25 Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, p. 101.

Arnold's greatest hopes are voiced through his desire to inspire 'fear', 'admiration' and 'respect' – before 'love'. His 'daring deformity' (I.i.312) thirsts first and foremost for power; he claims that it is in order 'to o'ertake mankind / By heart and soul, and make [himself] the equal – / Ay, the superior, of the rest' (I.i.313-5) that he seeks his own transformation – he wants to command and wield all that has been denied him in life as a hunchback, a classic Renaissance paradigm widely endorsed in the Elizabethan world picture.[26] The disconcerting repercussions of the paradigm of power that defines his new life quest, however, are scrutinised in the ongoing discussion of ethics that runs 'between the lines' of the drama, facilitated by the *schadenfroh* Stranger.

Then, of course, there is warfare itself. Caillois writes war off as a corruption of agonistic play.[27] According to Huizinga, only war that respects the principles of fair play can be regarded as a form of agonistic play;[28] yet was war ever played fair? Regardless of the aestheticized annals of written history, war is essentially primeval and organic, and, despite any imposition of the rules of the game on the battlefield, once the action starts it is very difficult to control. Yet, even though the rules of the grand game we call civilized society are inevitably transgressed during wartime, as Huizinga points out, 'the absence of the play-spirit civilization [at any given point] is impossible', because 'even in a society completely disintegrated by the collapse of all legal ties, the agonistic impulse is not lost, for it is innate.' *Agon* marks the 'eternal desire to succeed and excel', whether the motives are noble and aims formative, or, more often than not, quite the opposite.[29] In *The Deformed Transformed*, certainly, war is innately and fundamentally agonistic.

Huizinga's take on the subject of war and combat, like much else in *Homo Ludens*, is anthropologically and linguistically predisposed – he tends to draw on idealized Classical and mediaeval principles based on historical and literary texts, focusing on the etymology of various play activities in different languages, and thereby on the cultures that have spoken them. Similarly, John Ruskin's notion of 'creative or foundational war', bound within framework that 'disciplines' agonistic play, is an idealized one,

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[26] Most famously by Shakespeare on the stage (*Richard III*), and theorized by Bacon in his short essay 'Of Deformity' (1612, 1625 amended version).

[27] Caillois, 'The Corruption of Games', in *Man, Play and Games*, p.54.

[28] Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, p. 101.

[29] Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, p. 101.

> in which the natural restlessness and love of contest among men are disciplined, by consent, into modes of beautiful – though it may be fatal – play: in which the natural ambition and love of power of men are disciplined into the aggressive conquest of surrounding evil.[30]

Ruskin's almost criminally idealized approach to war stands in sharp contrast to the infinitely more nuanced attitude that Byron exhibits throughout his oeuvre. While agonistic play pervades *The Deformed Transformed* in its entirety, it is far from the realm of the idealized theorizing of war perpetuated by Ruskin; rather, we are thrust into the grubby truth of the profane reality of war, which leaves us ample space for thought. A truly 'mental' *coup de théâtre*, the drama presents history as a sequence of disjointed violent episodes, disturbingly recurring in the synchronic view of history provided by the Stranger. The Stranger's commentary further reveals the non-existence of ethics in the course of history as perceived through war, illustrating the impossibility of a 'noble' or 'just' war. There has been, is and always will be an inescapable element of carnage and collateral damage which no code of ethics, intimations of morality or rules of conduct can account for, justify or contain. Arnold stands alone in his faith in ideal principles, but fails to comprehend the wider ethical implications of his role in the brutal invasion he is eagerly commanding in the stead of the deceased Duke of Bourbon. Indeed, Byron persistently undermines the idea of war as an arena of idealized, rule-bound 'sport' in which the 'love of contest' is 'disciplined, by consent, into modes of beautiful [...] play' through the omniscient perspective of the Stranger, who explicitly refuses to read war per se as 'noble sport', showing up instead the difference between agonistic play understood as a game played according to rules and the ignoble reality of war itself. In the heat of the Sack of Rome, for example, the following altercation takes place between the Stranger and Arnold:

> Arnold: And what dost thou so idly?
> Why dost not strike?
> Caesar: Your old philosophers
> Beheld mankind, as mere spectators of
> The Olympic games. When I behold a prize
> Worth wrestling for, I may be found a Milo.
> Arnold: Ay, 'gainst an oak.
> Caesar: A forest, when it suits me.
> I combat with a mass, or not at all.

[30] John Ruskin, 'War', in *The Crown of Wild Olive and the Cestus of Aglaia* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1930), p.71.

> Meantime, pursue thy sport as I do mine;
> Which is just now to gaze, since all these labourers
> Will reap my harvest gratis. (II.ii.54-63)

Nevertheless, the entire dialogue is interlaced with allusions emphasizing the relevance of *agon*. Even while the bravado of the Stranger's speech lies in its brazen declaration of calm and controlled detachment from the world of *agon* – he sends Arnold off 'to pursue [his] sport [of war]' and leave him to his business – the Stranger's assertions of supernatural superiority over the world of human *agon* are themselves agonistic: 'I combat with a mass, or not at all'. Also interesting are his remarks about the ludic quality of life, and about the similarities between the deliberate gaze of a spectator and a 'detached' philosophical perspective, through which the philosophers of ancient Greece 'beheld mankind as mere spectators of / The Olympic games'. And, on top of all this, the Stranger 'may be found a Milo' as and when he sees a 'prize worth wrestling for'. His inaction or passivity in between times is thus part of his own 'sport' – not part of the ideal vocation, or detached ethical standpoint, of a stoic. 'Just now', he enjoys 'to gaze'. The uncertain economy of this gaze is troubling. The witless men out and about during the historical Sack of Rome, the 'labourers' he now gazes upon, 'will reap [his] harvest gratis' – one cannot but wonder what the 'harvest' these men will collect, for free, is, and how exactly it is the Stranger's harvest. Even though there are plenty of verbal allusions to his quasi-Mephistophelean nature throughout the text, as Daniel Watkins remarks, the Stranger also 'lambasts conventional notions of devil-man agreements'.[31] At this very moment he seems to be merely enjoying the role of a spectator watching the pitiful mayhem play itself out, yet we are clearly meant to suspect that behind appearances, and behind historical events, there is another, agonistic war going on that we can at most glimpse but in which all are involved as players. The Stranger's synchronic view of history points to perhaps the most complex – and most deeply agonistic – element of the drama as a whole. For Byron, while war is no civilized, honourable game governed by the principle of 'fair play', it is nevertheless driven, at all levels – even those we might not comprehend, or even be aware of – by the 'eternal desire to succeed and excel' – by *agon* – though for Byron the 'desire to succeed and excel' takes on much darker shades than it does for Ruskin or, later, Huizinga.

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[31] Daniel Watkins, 'The Ideological Dimensions of Byron's *The Deformed Transformed*', p.353. Similarly, as Peter A. Schock notes, 'neither the end … nor Caesar's motivation can be gleaned from Byron's unfinished drama.' 'Ironic Modes of Satanism in Byron and Shelley', in *Romantic Satanism: Myth and the Historical Moment in Blake, Shelley and Byron* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p.168.

Byron's supernatural spectator also brings into focus another larger dimension of play at work in the drama's depiction of war's innately *agonistic* nature down the centuries, linking the Sack of Rome directly to Huizinga's take on the spectacle of the Roman games. For Huizinga, the

> agonistic element was not altogether lacking in the Roman civilization. Rather, we are dealing with the singular phenomenon showing how the competitive impulse shifted […] from the protagonist to the spectator, who merely watches the struggles of others appointed for that purpose.[32]

This shows the development of agonism from ancient Greece to ancient Rome according to Huizinga.[33] In the context of Huizinga's history of *agon*, we might say, Arnold as Achilles evokes the Greek notion of agonistic competition – that of an idealistic involvement in contest that stands in sharp contrast to the Stranger's mere spectatorship. The Stranger, having opted for the name 'Caesar' and by virtue of his adopted name and the pose of the spectator, embodies the shift of ludic allegiances that Huizinga traces between ancient Greece and Rome.[34] Although Huizinga does not comment on this potentiality, the 'shift' from 'the protagonist to the spectator' he describes inevitably points towards the expansion of agonism beyond its own spectacle, the projection of *agon*'s 'competitive impulse' on to what seems its external spectator too, the involvement of that spectator in the *agon* of the contest he 'merely' observes. Byron does something similar, though on a cosmic scale, through the Stranger – with, naturally, implications for the history of modern, rather than Classical, Europe. But in doing so he implies more yet, for the Stranger is not the only spectator to witness the events of *The Deformed Transformed* – his 'competitive' involvement in those events *as* a spectator implicates us in ways that worryingly extend the drama's all-pervasive *agon* to our own acts of individual reading of Byron's work.

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[32] Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, p.94.

[33] Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, p.95. 'There was no transition from "battle" to "play" in Greece, nor from play to battle, but a development *of* culture *in* a play-like contest'.

[34] Needless to say, Huizinga's notion of the Hellenic agonistic combat is not based on any reality of war, but rather on the cultural understanding of combat.

Alea

When atoms jostle –
The System is in peril (III.i.86-7)

Alea is the strategy of play which accentuates all difference and randomness. It is the domain of chance and change. In *The Deformed Transformed*, the aleatory rules of the universe render fixity impossible, subject to only one paradoxical constant, that of inexorable change. After transforming his physical shape from deformity into an ideal of Classical beauty, the Stranger initiates Arnold into precisely this world of rapid change, eliciting the following complaint from Arnold:

> Arnold: Thou hast lured me on, through scenes of blood and lust, till I am here.
> Caesar: And where wouldst thou be?
> Arnold: Oh, at peace – in peace! (I.ii.19-20)

Having been 'lured on through scenes of blood and lust', Arnold's wish to be 'at peace – in peace!'[35] This resonates powerfully with Sardanapalus' wish to sustain a peaceful empire, a historical oxymoron in itself. But it is at this point that *The Deformed Transformed* most pointedly moves beyond the cynicism of *Sardanapalus* about heroism and towards something that at a first glance seems rather like nihilism. The Stranger, now aptly named Caesar, replies as follows:

> Caesar: And where is that which is so? From the star
> To the winding worm, all life is motion; and
> In life *commotion* is the extremest point
> Of life. The planet wheels till it becomes
> A comet, and destroying as it sweeps
> The stars, goes out. The poor worm winds its way,
> Living upon the death of other things,
> But still, like them, must live and die, the subject
> Of something which has made it live and die.
> You must obey what all obey, the rule
> Of fixed necessity: against her edict
> Rebellion prospers not.
> Arnold: And when it prospers –
> Caesar: 'Tis no rebellion. (I.ii.21-33)

[35] As Heuer remarks, Arnold 'has no desire to be a war-hero, but as the new Achilles, he is trapped in that role.' '"Shadows of Beauty, Shadows of Power": Heroism, Deformity and Classical Allusion in Joshua Pickersgill's *The Three Brothers* and Byron's *Deformed Transformed*', p.17.

The Stranger makes a momentous philosophical point here: the rule of 'fixed necessity', the necessity for change – 'motion', '*commotion*' – renders all life constantly subject to that change, and there is no escaping it. The very idea of peace is made an impossibility by the grand scheme of things. The one law of the universe is, according to Byron's supernatural commentator, as follows: once born, be it as planet or as worm, one must 'live and die', be 'subject', 'obey'. And all life is driven towards 'commotion' – wanting to be 'at peace, in peace' is to try and negate what life, by 'fixed necessity', is. Values, ideals, philosophies, desires do not drive the cosmos. 'Something' undefinable does, and ours is simply to obey it. Rebellion 'prospers not' – or if it does, it 'is no rebellion' – but as an integral part of the commotion of necessity, and here our earlier reading of *Sardanapalus* is confirmed: whether he rebels against the cult of glory, or heroically insists on peaceful ignominy, his rebellion against history prospers only to the extent that it is not rebellion at all, but simply more commotion that 'obeys what all obey' – the 'rule' of historical 'necessity', which brings us back to Nietzsche's 'hands of necessity shaking the dice-box of chance'.[36]

Universal 'commotion' is perpetuated not by pattern or design but chance. The Stranger, and through him Byron, expresses no sentimentality about this state of play. 'Commotion' is simply 'life'. This troubling concept, according to which constant, disruptive change comprises the defining basis of all existence, is also reflected in at least two nineteenth-century treatises on the nature of war based on the example of the Napoleonic campaigns, one of which we have touched upon earlier, Clausewitz's *Vom Kriege*. The other is William Napier's *History of the War in the Peninsula*. In Napier's account, war 'is the condition of this world. From man to the smallest insect all are at strife'[37] – a line of argument which clearly mirrors the Stranger's. In *The Deformed Transformed*, history itself is presented as a sequence of violent episodes – war is not one feature of history but 'the condition of the world' – that offer no prospect of evolution, since man is unable to learn any lessons from the errors of the past, but simply moves on and on through circles of persisting bloodshed. As Byron's comment on Johnson's Juvenalian variation on this theme, *The Vanity of Human Wishes*, a work that he admired for its timeless wisdom, puts it:

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[36] Nietzsche, *Daybreak: thoughts on the prejudices of morality*, eds. M. Clark and B. Leiter, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997, repr. 2005), p.81.

[37] William Napier, *History of the War in the Peninsula* (London: John Murray, 1828-40), vol. VI, p. 688, cited in J.R. Watson, *Romanticism and War: A Study of British Romantic Period Writers and the Napoleonic Wars* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p.200.

> ’tis a grand poem – and so *true*! – true as the 10th of Juvenal himself. The lapse of ages changes all things – time – language – the earth – the bounds of the sea – the stars of the sky, and every thing ‘about, around, and underneath’ man, *except man himself*, who has always been, and always will be, an unlucky rascal. The infinite variety of lives conduct but to death, and the infinity of wishes lead but to disappointment.[38]

This Johnsonian thought clearly reflects on the imperfectability of man, but also does so through the lexis of *alea* – man is an ‘unlucky rascal’ – and in so doing points to an important ludic current of existential thought dramatized in *The Deformed Transformed*’s depiction of history as war: man is doomed to remain, to ‘always’ ‘be’, an ‘unlucky rascal’ in a game of chance that ‘changes all things’ ‘except man himself ’ – and that he cannot possibly win.

Like Byron’s note on Johnson, which sees ‘the lapse of ages’ changing ‘the earth – the bounds of the sea – the stars of the sky’, the Stranger’s speech heralding the ubiquity of commotion also draws on the naturalist science of the age, a fundamental semiotic current which Byron weaves, as we have seen, into his metaphorical framework throughout his works. These eighteenth-century naturalist theories set out to describe the existence of past worlds documented by paleontological finds and sought to explain the destruction and the emergence of successive new worlds. Despite its naive cosmological ideas about the origin and fate of comets, the Stranger’s speech also, significantly, anticipates Darwin’s theory of survival in the grand game of odds against death. In the violent interludes of the Sack of Rome, the ‘chance’ of surviving ‘is even’ – fortune is fickle, and could be summarized as a *coup de dés*, never abolishing the element of hazard:

> Arnold: And my thirst increases; - but
> I’ll find a way to quench it.
> Caesar: Or be quench’d thyself.
> Arnold: The chance is even; we will throw
> The dice thereon. (II.i.50-3)

The moral of this un-moralizing drama, then, combines a pessimistic Schopenhauerian sense of inevitable, fruitless resignation, and the liberating, if ethically challenged, Nietzschean notion of a self-contained existence that no longer depends on a higher principle to justify itself, and capable, at last, of rejoicing in the possible. A Dionysian *Weltanschauung* heralds the incessant dynamics of life, ‘the playful construction and destruction of the individual

[38] *The Ravenna Journal*, January 1821, *BLJ* VIII, p.26.

world as the overflow of a primordial delight',[39] and while Byron voices a pure resignation influenced by the regressive catastrophist myth of history inspired by Cuvier, he also brings into play an ultimate affirmation, anticipating Nietzsche, of the idea that 'to will is to create'.[40] The game of odds against death is an exciting gamble – and 'commotion' is the 'extremest point of life'. The manifestation of will here, however, is simply the willingness to partake in the game of war – 'we will throw / The dice thereon' as Arnold says. This in turn brings us back to the concept of the disturbingly seductive vitality of violence. War accentuates the sense of living to the full, and the excitement of exerting one's full powers in a gamble of life and death where the fact that the 'chance[s]' are 'even' is met with both cynicism and appreciation in Byron's drama. The impromptu exchange between Arnold and the Stranger hints at the crucial element of this gamble: that of Fortune, thriving on the individual will to life invested in the game, favouring or thwarting the individual's chances of survival in uncertain turns – and Fortune, 'that name for the unknown combinations of infinite power' without whose 'aid the designs of man are as bubbles on a troubled ocean',[41] for Byron as for Napier, 'asserts her supremacy in war'.[42]

Ilinx

Thus
The world runs on, but we'll be merry still (I.ii.78-9)

Ilinx, or vertigo, is the strategy of play which manifests itself in the spinning-out of differences to the point of bringing down any sense of order – activating or encouraging the underlying topsyturvydom of life in ways that highlight life's entropy-ridden nature. Throughout *The Deformed Transformed*, the Stranger's satirical running commentary

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[39] Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, in P. Gay (intro) and W. Kaufmann (trans. and ed.), *Basic Writings of Nietzsche* (New York: Random House, 2000), p.142.

[40] Deleuze, 'The Tragic', in *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, p. 36.

[41] Napier, *History of the War in the Peninsula*, vol. VI, p.688, cited in Watson, *Romanticism and War*, p. 207. Though this 'simile' undeniably is 'Johnsonian in its resonance' (Watson), the image of 'bubbles on a troubled ocean' is also strikingly Byronic; more so, perhaps, because it replaces the wise fixity of divine power which traditionally figures in similar images with the inscrutability of Fortune.

[42] Napier, *History of the War in the Peninsula*, vol. VI, p. 687, cited in Watson, *Romanticism and War*, p. 206.

produces a sense of vertigo by universally carnivalizing and subverting the action at hand. His untimely asides bring the dicey dynamics of dramatic irony to perfection; in this respect, the drama is Byron's true *Meisterstück*. Zooming in and out, the Stranger's commentary offers a disenchanted, distanced viewpoint combined with a shrewd analysis of immediate events. The commentary is relentlessly mocking – reducing the events happening around him, and, by implication, history itself, to disorientating, dizzying, meaningless acts of violence. Here is a symptomatic episode in St Peter's:

> Caesar (*To the Spanish Soldiery*):
> Well, cut-throats!
> What do you pause for? If you make not haste,
> There will not be a link of pious gold left.
> And *you*, too, Catholics! Would ye return
> From such a pilgrimage without a relic?
> The very Lutherans have more true devotion:
> See how they strip the shrines!
>
> Soldiers: By holy Peter!
> He speaks the truth; the heretics will bear
> The best away.
>
> Caesar: And that were shame! Go to!
> Assist in their conversion. (II.iii.43-52)

Through humour, the Stranger transforms violence into art – comedy – by highlighting its random pointlessness. Byron is mocking the absurdity of the entire show – material lust overriding religious differences, the cardinals and the pope fleeing, Catholic and Protestant invaders alike pillaging the historic seat of Western Christianity. We might want to argue that the historic event itself is more than absurd in both its context and denouement – the Sack of Rome marked the end of the Italian Renaissance and damaged the papacy's prestige, but also enabled the Holy Roman Emperor to battle against the Reformation movement in Germany. As Luther shrewdly reflected in a famous aphorism: 'Christ reigns in such a way that the Emperor who persecutes Luther for the Pope is forced to destroy the Pope for Luther'.[43] But aphorisms too belong to the world of art – in this case rhetoric – and the Stranger's similar balancing of absurdities is, like Luther's comment, a representation of history, not the thing itself. Indeed, the Stranger's vertiginous balancing act has the odd

[43] Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, ed. J. Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehmann, 55 vols (St Louis: Concordia, 1955-85) vol. 49, p. 169, cited in Carter Lindberg, *The European Reformations*, 2nd ed. (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 1996, repr. 2010), p.219.

effect of violating violence: violence *per se* is *turned into* absurdity, and enjoyed as such. *Ilinx* has the last word in *The Deformed Transformed* when it comes to the violence of war – what we see of that violence in the drama is made to appear sheer, pointless farce, bloody as it is.

Mimicry

> Caesar: Fear not, my hunchback - if the shadows of
> That which existed please not your nice taste,
> I'll animate the ideal marble, till
> Your soul be reconciled to her new garment. (I.i.261-4)

Mimicry, the play of masks, is the strategy directed at making the differences accentuated by *alea* seemingly disappear. In *The Deformed Transformed*, personal transformation, or self-masking, is itself doubled: in Arnold's change of body and in the (ex)changes both Arnold and the Stranger undergo as they interact.[44] From the beginning of the drama, and Arnold's first encounter with the Stranger, we also bear witness to a critique, in the form of a playful travesty, of the Renaissance devotion to mimicking Antiquity. As the Stranger parades a selection of Classical heroes in front of Arnold, these idols of Antiquity are reduced to a kind of fashion collection – a catwalk show of forms to pick and wear at will. Aesthetics cancels ethics here, and the transformation of an unsightly rural hunchback, with the help of Classical ideals, into a quintessential hero is effected under the sign of vanity alone. Arnold's intrinsic vanity is accentuated by the fact that, offered the body of his choice, he becomes picky and passes over the catalogue of real historical heroes of Antiquity, featuring the likes of Alcibiades and Caesar. In the process of choosing a new body, the Stranger assures Arnold that if he indeed cannot decide on a form recalled from the past, his necromantic powers will 'animate the ideal marble' to match the high demands of Arnold's 'aspiring' soul. In the end, only the form of the demigod Achilles will suffice. The Stranger's promise to bring the idealized Classical forms of chiselled marble to life thus parodies the Renaissance theme of rebirth through mimetic art. It also points to the violence of mimetic representation, a theme taken up especially in relation to sculpture – as a kind of 'still life'

[44] Arnold assumes the heroic shape of Achilles, while the Stranger exchanges his figure 'of a tall black man' for Arnold's discarded body of a hunchback.

– in the Olimpia and Cellini episodes, where the relationship between actual human life and the 'ideal marble' it so often aspires to is intricately explored.

Indeed, the metaphorical masking of Olimpia as a marble statue of essential beauty contains a strong element of violence. The violence of art is demonstrated in the aesthetic objectification, or masking, of the beloved. In a random encounter in the midst of the battle, Olimpia, a beautiful and brave Roman aristocrat fleeing the savage troops, is unwillingly rescued by Arnold. Having seen her attempt to commit suicide by flinging herself from the high altar at St Peter's on to the marble floor, Arnold instantly falls in love with her, exclaiming:

> Arnold: How pale! how beautiful! how lifeless!
> Alive or dead, thou essence of all beauty,
> I love but thee! (II.iii.142-4)

This scene features a rather disturbing revelation of the violence of all aestheticising impulses: the potentially dying Olimpia is transformed into a statuesque image of the 'essence of all beauty' – her perilous state obscured by her objectification into a work of art. Indeed, perceived as the 'essence of all beauty', the woman is transformed into an image and, as such, is herself negated in her entirety – made doubly lifeless, and essentially powerless. In his earnest outburst, Arnold unconsciously expresses a wish that could be read as an inversion of the Pygmalion myth: a wish to immobilize and objectify the beloved woman within an 'ideal marble' version of her sex, and to admire her newly chiselled marble form from beneath a pedestal.

This Classical objectifying of Olimpia continues but also changes in the fragment of Part III of the drama, set in a pastoral idyll, where the cohabitation of Arnold, Caesar and Olimpia is increasingly troubled, as Olimpia does not return Arnold's ardent affections. Here too, Olimpia is metaphorically re-cast in marble, this time by the Stranger, whose tone, however, is far from admiring, and much closer to bawdy satire:

> Caesar: This precious thing of dust – this bright Olimpia –
> This marvellous Virgin – is a marble matron –
> An Idol – but a cold one to your heat
> Promethean – and unkindled by your torch? (III.86-9)

The Stranger's speech is penetrating and mischievous – and symptomatically unsympathetic to Arnold's idealization of Olimpia. The speech again employs the conceit of marble that

follows and haunts Olimpia throughout the text, satirizing Arnold's objectification of her. In a smart twist of the continual metaphorical play that runs through the drama, Olimpia never escapes the marble altar she stands on when Arnold first sees her in St Peter's; her subsequent life in the drama becomes that of a mute sacrifice set in stone, her metaphorical mask of 'ideal marble' moulding her into 'an Idol', 'a marble matron'.

Other sophisticatedly obfuscating masks have already been put in place even before the protagonist embarks on his quest. The Stranger poses as the servant of Arnold and adopts the name 'Caesar', wearing Arnold's old hunchback body, with Arnold in turn clad in Achilles' form, while the roles of master and servant are quite the reverse in reality – the Stranger is the master of the entire show, fully superior and in control at all times, as his numerous asides and soliloquies constantly remind us: 'Think'st thou that […] this crooked coffer, which contain'd / Thy principle of life, is aught to me / Except a mask?' (I.ii.311-4). Indeed, *The Deformed Transformed*, its title implying the transformation of deformity into something else, is profoundly concerned with masks, masking and their implications at all sorts of levels. The thaumaturgy of the transformation ritual itself, for example, usually focused on in previous critical analyses for its Faustian undertones, crucially resonates within a larger framing spectacle staged within the drama and points to the serendipitous etymological relationship between 'thauma' and theatre.[45] The very theatrical transformation ritual, then, as an act of thaumaturgy, belongs to the realm of sacred play.[46] Yet the vanity and pragmatism of Arnold's selection of the 'mask' of a new body, as well as the Stranger's mischievous recycling of his old one, also playfully profane the sacred in unsettling ways.

The transformation ritual also taps into another related thematic current in the drama, namely that of travesty. Travesty naturally implies within its etymological frame the play of disguise, or masks, alongside its suggestion of transgression. Even the generic characteristics of this drama's motley combination of genres, the 'tragical-comical-

[45] The root of 'thauma' is originally similar to that of 'theatre' in ancient Greek, evoking wonder or marvel and, consequently, spectator or sight. Raymond Adolph Prier, 'Sight and Wonder, A Place of Intermediation: Vision and the Semantic-Symbolic Nature of Archaic Greek', in *Thauma Idesthai: The Phenomenology of Sight and Appearance in Archaic Greek* (Tallahassee: University Press of Florida, 1989), p.69.

[46] Huizinga traces the mythical realm of sacred play through 'the central figure in archaic cultural life who appeared before us successively as the prophet, medicine-man, seer, thaumaturge and poet and whose best designation is *vates*.' *Homo Ludens*, p. 146.

historical-pastoral, scene dividable or poem limited',[47] are best described as a travesty played out on the traditional dramatic genres of tragedy, comedy, history play and pastoral. This essentially ludic impulse, then, which forms the generic outline of the fragmentary drama, brings with it another strong sense of free play. A mangled generic mongrel at first glance, the text is, however, a genially playful and subversive exploitation of the Romantic concept of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*: a mimicking of all genres that travesties the very idea of genre.

'Mix'd in one mighty scene' (*CHP* I, xix)

The interlacing of historical moments and epochs across the vertiginous chasms of time in *The Deformed Transformed* produces a dynamic of playful ambiguity that draws on and combines all of these different kinds of play. And this dramatized palimpsest of history, with its agonistic juxtaposition of specific historical moments, combined with the timeless perspective of a mask-wearing and mask-projecting Mephistophelean figure who utilizes elements of *alea* and *ilinx* to perpetually fictionalize the events of the epoch-breaking 6 May 1527, repeatedly results in a moral waywardness, or, rather, in the lack of a moral. In the midst of the Sack of Rome, for example, Byron stages an impromptu meeting between Arnold and Cellini, the Mannerist sculptor, a voluntary defender of Rome and the self-proclaimed killer of the leader of the invading troops, the Duke of Bourbon. Far from being a mere extravagance, this meeting marks a crucial instance of the drama's intrinsic playfulness, illustrating the dynamic interplay between the various strategies of play at work on various levels throughout the drama.

How are we to understand the Cellini episode? It will not do to simply discard it as a superficial 'historical' embellishment.[48] The episode is tied into the drama's wider thematic

[47] Paraphrasing Polonius, *Hamlet* (II.ii.380-1) – 'scene dividable' as the unities are not kept here and 'poem limited' as *The Deformed Transformed* is a fragment. The amalgamated term 'tragical-comical-historical-pastoral' pinpoints the drama's eclectic nature perfectly; the elements of all the four genres are present there. Corbett identifies the medley of genres as follows: 'an experimental dramatic fantasia combining elements of tragedy, melodrama, comedy and pantomime.' *Byron and Tragedy*, p.215.

[48] Carla Pomarè reads *The Deformed Transformed* through Cellini's autobiography, and identifies the Stranger/Caesar with Cellini. See chapter four of her study *Byron and the Discourses of History* entitled 'History as Auto/Biography: *The Deformed Transformed* and Cellini's *Vita*, pp.101-133. 'Byron adapts Cellini's stance of frank and disingenuous commentator of human affairs to the character of Caesar, whose

concerns by the fact that it takes the form of a duel, evoking the Classical idea of single combat as a demonstration of personal prowess – an ideal game of *agon* – as well as another Classical instance of sacred play, namely the aleatory forecast or augury in which two contestants representing warring sides are locked in combat to predict the outcome of a larger battle, pitting their personal prowess, and fate, against one another. Equally, the interweaving of chance, violence and art that runs through the drama is also epitomized in the Cellini episode. The famous sculptor and artisan, actively involved in the defence of Rome and proud self-professed killer of the Duke of Bourbon in his autobiography, aims at a random group of invaders, his shot finding the Duke by pure chance. Calling on Nietzsche, we may on the one hand surmise that this event signifies the innocence of pure chance and that Cellini himself exemplifies the Nietzschean play of the will, the rejoicing in the possible. Engaging in 'the playful construction and destruction of the individual world as the overflow of a primordial delight',[49] Cellini could in this way be perceived as a Dionysian man. Rejoicing in sheer entropy and the possibility of pure chance within the synchronicity of history, Byron also mocks and parodies his way to a similar insight while sporting the mask of the Stranger. Here is how Byron, studiously obsessed with all things historic and factual, weaves Cellini into his own plot:[50]

Caesar: Thou hast in hand
A famous artizan, a cunning sculptor;
Also a dealer in the sword and dagger;
Not so, my musqueteer; t'was he who slew
The Bourbon from the wall.
Arnold: Ay, did he so?
Then he hath carv'd his monument!
Roman: I yet
May live to carve your better's.
Caesar: Well said, my man of marble! Benvenuto,
Thou hast some practice in both ways; and he
Who slays Cellini will have work'd as hard
As e'er thou didst on Carrara's blocks. (II.ii.32-42)

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bitingly ironic remarks, accompanied to the gruesome details of the slaughter surrounding the Sack, lend the play the general colour of its cutting description of the reality of warfare. Together, they display the mingling of facetious and tragic elements that is one of the distinguishing features of Cellini's account of the episode.' p.128. Pomarè remarks that '[l]ike Cellini's, Caesar's voice is fundamentally disrespectful of hierarchies.' p.130. Also p.133, 'Caesar muses on man's puny role in history'.

[49] Nietzsche, 'The Birth of Tragedy', in *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, p.142.

[50] As Watkins notes (and Pomarè devotes her entire chapter to), Byron's 'description of the sack of Rome is taken directly from Cellini's *Autobiography*.' 'The Ideological Dimensions of Byron's *The Deformed Transformed*', p.356.

While casually re-introducing the use of sculpture as a means of 'carving', projecting and wearing identities (Cellini is both a 'cunning sculptor' and a 'man of marble'), Byron makes their combat to the death playful in yet another sense – resonating with witty repartee. Metaphorically casting Cellini in stone, the Stranger attributes to him nigh superhuman qualities – he is a man of Carrara marble – full-time artist and part-time murderer and delinquent; a kind of sculpted Mannerist monster combining the gravity of the Commendatore's stone-cast form and the levity of a Don Giovanni in a monumentally haunting, yet agile and witty presence. Here is another example of sculpture being presented as a perverted means of rebirth in the drama, with Byron once again deforming and transforming the ideals of the Renaissance, or indeed ideals per se, and playing on the Renaissance obsessive mimicking of ideal Classical form, in plastic and all other arts, problematizing the projection of ideals of abstract beauty and heroism on to actual, historical human beings.[51]

Echoing the fragmentary form of the drama, then, the Cellini episode is a momentary (and unfinished) interlude that exemplifies the interweaving of play strategies at work throughout the drama to explore issues of form, deformity and transformation. Indeed, the living energy of the combat is even, by definition, balanced upon and heightened by the tempting but dizzying verge of death, perhaps the ultimate play of *ilinx* and certainly the ultimate deformation/transformation. The episode also makes clear the absurdity of carving one's own posthumous 'monument' either out of dead, inorganic, Classical marble or through an act of killing. The very idea of having 'carv'd' one's 'monument', or of becoming someone's 'man of marble' for one's 'deal[ings] in the sword and dagger', resonates with the drama's 'cold pastoral' theme of casting life as lifeless statuary art, in a scene that again highlights that inverted Wildean mimesis whereby life wears the masks of art and imitates its ideals.

Ultimately, however, all of the playful strategies of dramatization outlined above, individually and in various intricate combinations, are focused on the theme of violence, and especially warfare. In the first instance, the cosmic, timeless perspective on history supplied

[51] 'Cellini's sculpture in all its grandeur embodies the abstract system of belief at the centre of Roman culture. The eternal laws it insists upon mystify actual experience – including the violence to which Cellini is partner – and thus mask the ugly machinations of the culture from which it grew.' Watkins, 'The Ideological Dimensions of Byron's *The Deformed Transformed*', p.357.

in the Stranger's untimely reflections on humanity and existence in general offers a whole set of transformations of chance events into art, but his interests very much centre on violence. In the Stranger's pointed *schadenfroh* soliloquy at the close of Part I, he offers the following commentary:

> Caesar: This is the consequence of giving matter
> The power of thought. It is a stubborn substance,
> And thinks chaotically, as it acts,
> Ever relapsing into its first elements.
> Well! I must play with these poor puppets: 'tis
> The spirit's pastime in his idler hours.
> When I grow weary of it, I have business
> Amongst the stars, which these poor creatures deem
> Were made for them to look at. 'Twere a jest now
> To bring one down amongst them, and set fire
> Unto their anthill: how the pismires then
> Would scamper o'er the scalding soil, and, ceasing
> From tearing down each other's nests, pipe forth
> One universal orison! Ha! ha! (I.ii.316-29)

In an image exemplary of the Romantic grotesque, the Stranger describes himself as a wanton *Drahtzieher*, a puppeteer staging a somewhat boring show with men as the 'poor puppets' – he toys with the idea of staging a cosmic disaster, 'set[ting] fire / Unto their anthill' and watching them 'scamper o'er the scalding soil', as a way of stopping men 'tearing [...] down each other's nest' in a perpetual agonistic struggle, which, fun though it is to watch at times, ultimately gets quite boring. As Schock notes, this 'speech negates both of the Satanic roles already explored by Byron, the tempter and the Promethean mentor, substituting for them the leisurely play that staves off the boredom of an immortal.'[52] War and violence here is a jest, another form of 'play', staged chiefly for the Stranger's own amusement. The Stranger presents an 'unimpassioned view of life on earth as an empty, meaningless puppet play'.[53] The disenchanted bravado of this cosmic spirit is symptomatically Byronic. The idea of a human anthill is reflected for instance in the macabre 'maggots of some huge Earth's burial' of *Don Juan* (IX, xxxix); and this in turn

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[52] Schock, *Romantic Satanism: Myth and the Historical Moment in Blake, Shelley and Byron*, p.169.

[53] Kayser, *The Grotesque in Art and Literature*, p.186. Indeed, there are other kinds of the grotesque imbedded in the drama - discussing the grotesque of deformed bodies, Mirka Modrzewska notes in her study, '*The Deformed Transformed* is a hybrid ('deformed') text ... and reveals a consciousness of the grotesque as understood in seventeenth century art: humour based on monstrosity.' *Byron and the Baroque* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2013), pp. 99. See also pp. 100-102 and 108. Corbett notes that '[t]his fusion of the ghastly with the absurd is developed Byron.' *Byron and Tragedy*, p.213.

resonates with the 'winding worm' living 'on the death of other things' in the Stranger's cosmic reprimand to Arnold we discussed earlier, arguing the ubiquity of change – a comment on the inescapable interdependency of life and death, but also (the classical gravediggers' macabre chain of being aside) on the devolutionary catastrophist theories of past worlds destroyed and new, lesser, 'maggot' worlds sprouting on their oversized remnants, or 'burials'. The witty, insightful image of man as unstable, 'stubborn' matter rather unrewardingly impregnated with thought corresponds to the idea of man Byron presented in *Detached Thoughts* – namely 'a sad jar of atoms', incapable of ever perfecting himself.[54] Yet, significantly, the Stranger takes this line of thought further, violating the pitiful randomness of human existence by turning it, via warfare, into a performance of randomness, directed by him and enjoyed by him as an artistic spectacle: 'As Dacia men [...] die the eternal death / For a sole instant's pastime', as he puts it elsewhere (I.ii.60-1).

Indeed, in *The Deformed Transformed*, as in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, Byron presents history's repeated battles over Rome as a paradigm for the never-ending *Urspiel* of human history. *Panem et circenses* was the strategy of keeping the masses contented in ancient Rome, facilitating social rest by the state-ordained gift of bread and death, entertaining the public by daily displays of bloody violence in the circuses. In this drama, Byron resurrects the trope of violence-as-entertainment in ancient Rome and displays it as a historical model that extends across the ages. But he is also playing intricate inter-textual games with the famous stanzas of the dying gladiator in Canto IV of *Childe Harold*, where the fixed lottery of life enforced in the bloody spectacle of the arena is deftly re-played: 'Here, where the Roman million's blame or praise / Was death or life, the playthings of a crowd' (*CHP* IV, cxlii),[55]

> And here the buzz of eager nations ran,
> In murmur'd pity, or loud-roar'd applause,
> As man was slaughtered by his fellow-man.
> And wherefore slaughter'd? wherefore, but because
> Such were the bloody Circus' genial laws,
> And the imperial pleasure. – Wherefore not?
> What matters where we fill the maws
> Of worms – on battle plains or listed spot?
> Both are but theatres where the chief actors rot. (*CHP* IV, cxxxix)

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[54] *Detached Thoughts, BLJ* IX, p.46.

[55] Cf. Vincent Newey: '[T]he scene, though placed very precisely in history, yields for Byron an eternal pattern of futility and death.' 'Authoring the Self: Childe Harold III and IV', in B. Beatty and V. Newey (eds), *Byron and the Limits of Fiction*, p.171.

The 'genial' laws of the ruthlessly staged slaughter give twisted, self-referential meaning to the ubiquity of death, accentuating the corrupted game of life and death put on show in the 'bloody Circus', its outcome manipulated by the whim of the audience and granted by 'imperial pleasure'. The audience present at the Coliseum enjoys the violent spectacle, but, more importantly, revels in twisting the power over life and death from the grasp of fate, staging this ultimate decision according to the 'genial' laws of imperial decree in an illusion of temporary popular authority. This sense of authority over life and death, however, as Byron is quick to add in the last three lines, is an obvious delusion, at least in the grand scheme of things seen atemporally: 'What matters where we fill the maws / Of worms – on battle plains or listed spot? / Both are but theatres where the chief actors rot.' *Omnia vincit mors* – the final scene of one's demise hardly matters at all, be it a Roman circus, battlefield or 'listed spot'.

However, with a twist symptomatic of the entire drama, indeed its very title, Byron goes further still, to deform and transform the trope of the deadly Roman arena laid bare in the final canto of *Childe Harold*. The idea of the 'bloody circus' in *The Deformed Transformed* applies no longer only to the ancient arena of the pagan games of Antiquity, or even to Rome, but to the whole world throughout history. Rome, pagan and Christian, is simply one example of this gory show – for the Stranger, the whole world of men is the gladiator dying in the Coliseum for the amusement of the Roman crowd – though the crowd has now gone and only he remains: 'I must play with these poor puppets; / 'Tis a spirit's pastime in his idler hours'. This disconcerting shift in perspective is a powerful dramatic device – it reiterates the trope of the traditional games of cheap violent spectacle staged 'for a sole instant's pastime' and transposes it from the beaten Roman track on to a new symbolic level, so that it now renders the entirety of earthly conflict, violence and warfare as the Punch-and-Judy-style sport of a slightly bored supernatural spectator/puppeteer. The ancient trope of *theatrum mundi* gains both gravity and levity here as the 'strutting and fretting' of Shakespeare's version of the metaphor is carnivalized into ruthless violent mayhem from

which each and every 'poor player'[56] exists into the folds and creases of a shabby pantomime curtain:[57]

> Caesar: Now, priest! Now, soldier! The two great professions,
> Together by the ears and hearts! I have not
> Seen a more comic pantomime since Titus
> Took Jewry. But the Romans had the best then;
> Now they must take their turn. (II.iii.30-4)[58]

The Stranger's commentaries on the ubiquitous bloody chaos, like his reading of the plundering of St Peter's by Catholic and Protestant soldiers alike, are disturbing for a number of reasons. Most disturbing, however, is the fact that the idea of human history as a set of farcical violent interludes – a *divina commedia* for the amusement of some superior being who would only be entertained – manifestly subverts any sense of ethics. Reading violence as pantomime transforms that violence into 'a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing'.[59] Life and death, victory and defeat, are granted in turns, and it is only a matter of time before the wheel of fortune turns things topsy-turvy once more in yet another 'comic pantomime'. Human history, driven and governed by *agon*, *alea*, *mimicry* and *ilinx* results in a moral blank.

However, in the on-stage game of semiotic vertigo, or *ilinx*, interlaced with aleatory and agonistic elements, another crucial reverberation of the act of transforming violence into

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[56] Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage
And then is heard no more. It is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury
Signifying nothing. *Macbeth* (V.v.17-28)

[57] As Martin Procházka notes, the 'figure of history as *theatre mundi* [is] a site on which past events can teach a viewer to live by their self-evidence, … taking a moral lesson which can help the observer to establish continuity between generations, avoid ancestral errors and act wisely in the present'. 'Imaginative Geographies Disrupted: Representing the Other in English Romantic Dramas', in *European Journal of English Studies* 6.2 (2002), p.208. This meaning is problematized in Byron, and most acutely in *The Deformed Transformed* – no longer an unambiguously educative platform, the *theatrum mundi* of history in Byron is a spectacle of ever-recurring violence, a heedless iteration of the 'one page of History'.

[58] In the *Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche discusses the origins of the concepts of Good and Evil as a fateful dichotomy of two irreconcilable worldviews – that of the aristocracy versus that of the priesthood. The aristocratic civilizing characteristics were based on the potentially playful activities of 'combat, adventure, the chase, the dance and war games', while their vividness was vilified by the sombre morality of the priests. The dichotomy of morals was the result of this jealous clash between 'warriors and priests', according to Nietzsche. Zooming into the action of the Sack of Rome, Byron's cynical supernatural commentator spots the scene of 'comic pantomime' we discussed earlier: 'Now priest! Now soldier! The two great professions, / Together by the ears and hearts!' (II.iii.30-1). In this bitterly satirized sequence, Byron captures the Nietzschean crux of the agonistic basis of civilization.

[59] *Macbeth*, V.v.26-8.

art and art into violence manifests itself in the theme of bloody baptism and rebirth. This echoes throughout the text, coinciding with the violent mythical birth of Rome (whose 'earliest cement was brother's blood' (I.ii.83), a passage echoing the Ur-fratricide Cain[60]), and its continual rebirth throughout the bloody conundrum of history. The eternal city is never entirely destroyed by recurring bloodshed of history, but, rather, perpetuates and reinvents itself through that bloodshed, in a red circle of ongoing renaissance and reinvention, never parting or indeed learning from its own vertiginous past, a 'never-ceasing scene of slaughter' (I.ii.89), but in a suggestive twist, finding in that violence itself the offer of a redeemed and revitalised self, culture and meaning – if only to eventually return to the same game of bloody agonism.

Evident right from the hunchback's transformation into a hero at the very beginning of the drama, the theme of rebirth also manifests itself, albeit in a strikingly different way, in the scene in St Peter's featuring Olimpia's attempted suicide. As we have seen, Arnold reads Olimpia as a representation of essential beauty, cast in stone. The models informing Arnold's thinking are Classical and statuary. Yet her suicidal attempt is a rather somatic, subversive and violent mix of Christian and pagan rituals of rebirth – a 'bloody baptism' into martyrdom. Having killed one of her pursuers with a heavy crucifix, she casts herself off the high altar with the following words directed at Arnold, meant to be her last:

Olimpia: I see thee purple with the blood of Rome;
Take mine, that's all thou e'er shalt have of me,
And here, upon the marble of this temple,
Where the baptismal font baptized me God's,
I offer him a blood less holy
But not less pure than the holy water
The saints have sanctified. (II.iii.124-31)

Committing suicide is of course one of the cardinal sins; Olimpia's heroism is thus essentially pagan, recalling Rome's Classical past, though in a very different way from Arnold's objectification of her. Yet there can be no doubt as to her Christian virtues, while her violent attempt to transform herself from victim to martyr recasts Arnold's Classical

[60] The Stranger's satirical depiction of the founding father of Rome, Romulus, who 'slay[ed] his own twin … because he leapt a ditch' (I.i.81-2), pointing at the relentless banality of violence rooted in agonism – Romulus kills his twin brother Remus because he beat him in a jumping competition; moreover, it ascertains the future conundrum of history prefigured by Lucifer's auguries in *Cain*.

objectification of her, painting over that Classicism in blood, a semantic crimson tide that inextricably mixes paganism and Christianity.

The 'purple [...] blood of Rome' which besmears Arnold in this scene also recalls rebirth, in two different ways. On the one hand, it evokes the imperial *purpura* of ancient Rome which exemplifies the interconnectedness and continuity running through the eternal city's historical self-reinventions – its repeated *re*birth. On the other hand, it points directly back to the sad reality of Arnold's quest, his personal, violent involvement in history. Arnold complains that in his introduction to the workings of the world he has been 'lured on through scenes of blood and lust' (I.i.19) – his guide, the Stranger, has treated him to a primeval ritual of initiation into violence and sex: once again, we encounter the idea of rebirth through blood. The theme of bloody baptism[61] in fact recurs throughout the entire drama. Crucially, it also resonates within the larger scope of the drama's experimentation with, or deconstruction of, Renaissance principles, painting in blood the very name of that era, the 're-birth' of Antiquity and its Classical ideals and artistic forms. If the world of *agon*, *alea*, *mimicry* and *ilinx* that is history is a world of perpetual violence and death in *the Deformed Transformed*, it is also a world of births and rebirths, of change and transformation.

'And sovereigns shall pause amidst their sport of war'[62]

As we are beginning to see, then, Byron's ambiguously playful handling of the 'sport of war', in *The Deformed Transformed* but also elsewhere, is underpinned by, troubled by and

[61] The theme of bloody baptism also found elsewhere in Byron's work dealing with war, most famously perhaps in the Ismail stanzas of the eighth canto of *Don Juan*, where a scene of graphic Gothic beauty appears:

> Ismail's no more! The crescent's silver bow
> Sunk, and the crimson cross glared o'er the field,
> But red with no redeeming gore: the glow
> Of burning streets, like moonlight on the water,
> Was imaged back in blood, the sea of slaughter. (cxxii)

The conceit here is based on 'the contrast between the blood of Christ as a symbol of redemption and the blood on the streets', of course (Watson, *Romanticism and War*, p.193). The violent, bloody baptism of Ismail is effected under the sign of the cross, crimson to match the scene, which 'glare[s]' over the conquered town, a symbol of utter horror and indiscriminate carnage rather than redemption. In both scenes discussed above the cross becomes a symbol of violence wreaking havoc – as the emblem of the holy war campaign at Ismail, and as the murder weapon in Olimpia's hands.

[62] 'The Prophecy of Dante', Canto IV, 79.

culminates in an equivocal attitude to the problem of violence – not least as the defining characteristic of human history. On the one hand, Byron resists the customary mode of war poetry celebrating conquest in traditional terms of courage and honour,[63] and makes his rendering of battles and combat in general bitterly realistic in its depiction of the violence that is inevitably committed during *agon*-inspired human activities, be it the siege of Ismail, the plight of the dying gladiator, or the agony of the *corrida*. Through the unrelenting portrayal of acute violence (the Tartar's severed head biting into the Russian soldier's tendon at Ismail in *Don Juan* VIII, for instance), Byron satirizes and subverts the notion of honourable combat in a searing critique of war campaigns as the all-too-predictable and petty plight of human history. On the other hand, he is drawn, not by the emblems of glory and courage, but, crucially, by the sheer vital energy of combat, and the concept of the acute accentuation of life in the face of death thrills him. The paradox of the game of life and death is both satirized and endorsed in Byron's writing. There is perhaps only one exception to the employment of this paradox: a central recurring topos in Byron's writing, namely that of slaughter staged for the amusement of an audience, which, as we have seen above, even if masterfully lyricized as in the scene of the dying gladiator, is unconditionally criticized and/or mocked by Byron.

In *The Deformed Transformed*, the paradox of violence as a ruthless, deadly form of vitality is for Byron exemplified in the figure of the Stranger who supplies the running commentary. The Stranger mocks and parodies the scenes of carnage during the Sack of Rome and the violence of human history as perpetual strife and war in Part I and II of the drama. In the peaceful pastoral of Part III, however, when 'the wars are all over' (III.i.23), he sings of boredom and decay, in pointed disharmony with the 'chorus of peasants singing' springtime praises to the time of love and dalliance: 'our swords are all idle / The steed bites the bridle'; 'armour is rusty, / And the veteran grows crusty, / As he yawns in the hall', 'No bugle awakes him with life-and-death call.' (III.i.24-25, 28-30, 33). The Stranger's hackneyed phrases here bear testimony to a crucial line of thought that points, as we shall see, to the otherwise disparate writings of an art critic and a philosopher: Ruskin and Nietzsche.

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[63] Ruskin notes that Byron 'was the first great Englishman who felt the cruelty of war, and, in its cruelty, the shame.' *Works*, ed. E.T. Cook and A. Wedderburn, 39 vols. (London: George Allen, 1903-12), vol. XXXIV, p. 328.

The troubled and troubling idea of war as the ultimate game of life appears repeatedly in nineteenth-century discussions of war, be they poetic, factual or philosophical. The idea is taken a step further by Ruskin in his lecture on war, which posits a disconcerting correlation of civilization, art and war that extends into the realm of the sacred. Ruskin not only claims that 'no great art yet rose on earth, but among a nation of soldiers',[64] but also goes on to say that there 'is no great art possible to a nation but that which is based on battle.'[65] For Ruskin, war is a 'great art', and, even more depressingly, 'all pure and noble arts of peace are founded on war'.[66] Once on his hobby-horse, the mediaeval age of Gothic art, there is no taming him. The 'romantic knighthood' of Europe finds the only 'noble employment' imaginable, that of warring 'for war itself, for the sake of war'.[67] The chutzpah of Ruskin's reasoning culminates in his rendering of the origins of the Renaissance:

> under the fighting dukeships and citizenships of Italy, art is born again, and rises to her height in the great valleys of Lombardy and Tuscany, through which there flows not a single stream, from all their Alps or Apennines, that did not once run dark red from battle. [68]

Ruskin suggests here that Renaissance art was born in the protracted bloodshed of the 'fighting dukeships and citizenships' of 'Lombardy and Tuscany'. This brings us back to Byron's employment of the theme of bloody baptism in his drama. But Ruskin's rhetoric is also frustratingly full of imperial patriotism, holding up the troubling Victorian values – 'the purity of the household' and the 'nobleness' of British national 'institutions' – which, for Ruskin, 'sanctify' the unleashing of 'natural instincts of self-defense',[69] while his reading of military history in general is subjectively biased by 'his preferences in art'.[70]

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[64] Ruskin, 'War', in *The Crown of Wild Olive and the Cestus of Aglaia*, p.67.

[65] Ruskin, 'War', in *The Crown of Wild Olive and the Cestus of Aglaia*, p.67.

[66] Ruskin, 'War', in *The Crown of Wild Olive and the Cestus of Aglaia*, p.67.

[67] Ruskin, 'War', in *The Crown of Wild Olive and the Cestus of Aglaia*, p.69.

[68] Ruskin, 'War', in *The Crown of Wild Olive and the Cestus of Aglaia*, p.69. This brings to mind a similar line of argument wrapped in the exquisite humour of Orson Welles's Harry Lime in *The Third Man*: 'In Italy for thirty years under the Borgias they had warfare, terror, murder, bloodshed - but they produced Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci, and the Renaissance. In Switzerland they had brotherly love, five hundred years of democracy and peace, and what did that produce? The cuckoo clock.'

[69] Ruskin, 'War', in *The Crown of Wild Olive and the Cestus of Aglaia*, p.71. Ruskin claims that it is 'very strange ... and very dreadful' 'but undeniably true' that war is the 'foundation of all the high virtues and faculties of men' pp. 83-4.

[70] Watson, *Romanticism and War*, p.220.

The moral of Ruskin's tale is that peace produces mediocrity at best and wantonness and downfall at worst, while war ideally inspires noble feelings and contributes to the creation of great art.[71] The concept of the 'art of war' is a tricky one and nineteenth-century military theorists such as Napier and Clausewitz are too wise to wield the term without caution. Interestingly, though, they too commend 'poetic' qualities such as imagination, talent and genius as the necessary qualities of a successful military leader. The contrast between Byron's satirized critical perspective on war exhibited in *The Deformed Transformed* and the worryingly idealized approach of Ruskin seems very clear at this stage, yet the following discussion of Nietzschean undertones in Part III of the drama will show the complex ambiguity of Byron's take on the subject on which he ultimately focuses all the strategies of play we have been discussing throughout this thesis. The lure of sheer vivid energy at large in battle or combat complicates any ethical standpoint here. On the one hand, the naturalism and physicality depicted in *The Deformed Transformed* stresses the 'coagulate gore'[72] which is the indispensable 'twin' of military glory. The seductive vitality of war and violence, on the other hand, sends the drama ricocheting towards, yet never to unequivocally endorse, an *Übermensch*[73] ethic.

In the Stranger's song in the drama's fragmentary Part III, there are clear undertones foreshadowing Nietzschean concepts. The Stranger's song is a cacophonic repartee to the

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[71] 'Peace and the *vices* of civil life only flourish together. We talk of peace and learning, and of peace and plenty, and of peace and civilization; but I found that those were not the words which the Muse of History coupled together: that, on her lips, the words were – peace and sensuality, peace and selfishness, peace and death. I found, in brief, that all great nations learned their truth of word, and strength of thought, in war; that they were nourished in war, and wasted by peace; taught by war, and deceived by peace; trained by war, and betrayed by peace; - in a word, that they were born in war, and expired in peace.' Ruskin, 'War', in *The Crown of Wild Olive and the Cestus of Aglaia*, p.84. To be fair to Ruskin, his lecture eventually moves on to discuss the negative aspects of war if played with 'puppets or pieces in the game of death'; 'whatever virtue or goodliness there may be in this game of war, rightly played, there is none when you thus play it with a multitude of small human pawns' p.85. And furthermore, he appeals to the 'gentlemen' that 'if you ... choose to make war your pastime ... set not up these unhappy peasant-pieces upon the green fielded board. If the wager is to be of death, lay it on your own heads, not theirs. A goodly struggle in the Olympic dust, though it be the dust of the grave, the gods will look upon, and be with you in; but they will not be with you if you sit on the sides of the amphitheatre ... to urge your peasant millions into gladiatorial war.' This corrective ties his take on war tenuously in with the problem of spectatorship in Byron's drama. pp. 85-86.

[72] *Hamlet*, II.ii.463.

[73] Nietzsche 'first used in the "Germania" lecture on Byron in which *Manfred* is described as "ein übermenschliches Werk" and in which attention is drawn to "die fürchtbare Erhabenheit dieses geisterbeherrshenden Űbermenschen" […] In fact, the word "superhuman" appears twice in Byron's play.' David. S. Thatcher, 'Nietzsche and Byron', in G. Abel and W. Stegmaier (eds.) *Nietzsche-Studien: Internationales Jahrbuch für die Nietzsche-Forschung*, vol. 3 (1974), p. 143. [pp.130-151] As Thatcher adds, the word draws on the Greek term *hyperanthropos* and appears, *inter alia*, in Goethe's *Faust*.

harmonious lays of peaceful spring sung by the Arcadian peasant ensemble. Its conceit traces the transformation of primordial violence into the ritual of playful mock-warfare, namely the hunt, while also bemoaning the disintegration of the original hunt of the golden age of Nimrod, 'the founder of Empire and chase', into a bronze age of peaceful merry-making aimed at amusing the peasantry:

> Caesar: Oh! Shadow of glory!
> Dim image of war![74]
> But the chase hath no story,
> Her hero no star,
> Since Nimrod, the founder of
> Of Empire and chase,
> Who made the woods wonder
> And quake in their race.
> When the lion was young,
> In the pride of his might,
> Then t'was sport for the strong
> To embrace him in fight;
> To go forth, with a pine
> For a spear, 'gainst the mammoth,
> Or strike through the ravine
> At the foaming behemoth;
> While man was in stature
> As towers in our time,
> The first-born of Nature,
> And, like her, sublime! (III.i.42-62)

The Stranger's ditty links the drama back to *Sardanapalus*, and argues the exact opposite of the eponymous Assyrian king's pacifist manifesto; the Stranger's voice here is an ancestral voice prophesying *agon*. The ambiguity of Byron's stance here rests on the fact that though the Stranger's enthusiasm for war is somewhat ironized by the happy festivity surrounding him, the Stranger has heretofore been 'essentially a truth-representing force'.[75] Here, his lament over the lapse of a primal, agonistic masculinity is deeply patriarchal and anchored in both Classical myths and catastrophist theories, and summons up the potentially explosive neo-pagan *Übermensch* myth. With the Stranger bemoaning the demise of the agonistic ritual characteristics of primitive civilization, namely war and primeval hunt, and scorning

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[74] This reverberates Byron's account of the siege of Ismail in *Don Juan*, canto VIII, namely stanza lxxxii: 'Oh, Caesar's Commentaries! Now impart ye, / Shadows of glory! (lest I be confounded), / A portion of your fading twilight hues, / So beautiful, so fleeting, to the Muse.'

[75] Watkins, 'The Ideological Dimensions of Byron's *The Deformed Transformed*', p.354.

the pastoral idyll that has taken over, Byron also seems to anticipate some key ideas presented in Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy*, especially the deterioration of the ancient Dionysian chorus into the ditty-singing Arcadian ensemble, featuring the lover and his lass. But while the image of the sublime man of yore invoked by the Stranger reflects Byron's fascination with the regressive myth of history – the decline from the Golden Age into increasing mediocrity, an age symptomatically wanting in heroes – it also looks forward to Nietzsche's idea of the gradual dissociation of man from nature and primeval Dionysian rituals, but with an ironic eye, because these lines are, after all, spoken by a supernatural spectator, who requires varied mayhem for his own entertainment; the show of peace is simply boring. Yet, while Byron's framing of them is manifestly ironic, the Nietzschean notes here are still disturbing. Byron's irony does not negate them entirely – the Stranger's love of *agon* is not his alone, as history after the Sack of Rome to Byron's day and onto our own makes very clear.[76]

Equally, while *The Deformed Transformed* renders the bloody circus of Rome throughout history as a kind of hermeneutic hell, the *città eterna* an eternal stage of carnage, this conceptualization also makes war essentially playful – and the dicey dynamics of the drama, the to-and-fro movement of meaning through bathos and paradox, maintains an essential indeterminacy between these two readings of violence in an open system where the strategies of play interact to create an endless performance of unfixed meaning – be it conceptual, discursive or simply metaphorical. Indeed, we might say, Byron offers us a 'playful construction and destruction of the individual world [of the drama] as the overflow of a primordial delight'.[77]

Nevertheless, Byron's attitude towards war can never be reduced to an idealisation of it. *The Deformed Transformed* presents history by insisting on the uncomfortable spectacle of war, stressing the carnage of historical scenes of violence, while the Stranger's stinging commentary facilitates the dramatization of the painful synchronicity of history set in recurring circles of bloody violence. Historically and ethically indifferent, the humour of the Stranger's commentary is used as a distancing technique which paradoxically allows for the acute immediacy of the violence rendered – as in the case of the Ismail stanzas in *Don Juan*, the war scenes depicted here are grim, and while we are compelled to laugh by the satirical

[76] As Bainbridge observes, Byron depicts 'the force of history as it enacts itself through war.' *British Poetry and the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars: Visions of Conflict*, p.218.

[77] Nietzsche, 'The Birth of Tragedy', in *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, p.142.

rhetoric of the narrator we also shudder at the graphic details of the carnage. Furthermore, Byron summons us to bear witness to scenes of horror framed by a satirical commentary which problematizes the aestheticization of violence – what emerges from that commentary is a violent kind of art which, through the artifice of satire and farce, betrays the sad, poignant banality of it all. The Stranger's violation of violence through humour exemplifies the ambiguity of history for Byron, which is never so straightforward as to inspire only one kind of response in him.

Indeed, history, as it emerges in *The Deformed Transformed* from the interaction of those strategies of play that characterizes all of the dramas we have discussed, is, for Byron, neither an arena of objectivity nor a refuge from the self – his literary rendering of it makes history personal. Nor is time a healer for Byron – there is no comfort to be found in the lapse of historical ages. His playful rendering of history in *The Deformed Transformed* amounts to the hallmark mix of intensity and detachment we know from the best of his satires and from *Don Juan*. The fleeting liveliness of Byron's satire in *The Deformed Transformed* involves continual undercurrents of gravity and scrupulousness concerning history and an incessant quest for a *mot juste* (or *mots justes*) with which to describe a particular historical moment or comment on a more general historical panorama. At the heart of this mix of seriousness and playfulness, we can also see Byron using all the stylistic arms he can wield to escape from the monotonous depiction of war campaigns framed by the glorification of the 'just' winners and lament for the fallen. Rather than indulging in the traditional blend of eulogy and *ubi sunt* nostalgia revolving around the central theme of heroism in war, Byron engages his talent and wit in acutely presenting the irreducibility of actual historical experience. Yet the uncomfortable closeness of the show is simultaneously exacerbated and alleviated by the theatrical trope of history as an ever-recurring bloody pantomime – always reminding us of the fact that the horror of those war scenes cannot be easily contained within pure aesthetics. Byron's humour also accentuates the fact that there is nothing in the scenes of violence captured by art here that any sense of the 'noble' can attach itself to – even the sense of war as a tragedy governed by a set of values is undermined by Byron's unrelenting, piercing satire – a sustained caveat against the temptation to glorify or indeed explicate history, to pin down history with an idealized, aestheticized version of it. Byron successfully fends off the cant of romanticizing war, something that Ruskin indulges in while moralizing about the ends that sanctify the means. Indeed, rather than falling into the portentous trap of the 'art of war', Byron thematizes art *in* war – the violence of war and the violence of art,

and the ways in which they make up history. Through jarring satirized details, the violence depicted in *The Deformed Transformed* seeks to problematize, interrogate and subvert the accepted modes of depicting war and indeed of cataloguing history as such through war, refusing to fall back on self-salutary heroic poeticisms. Rather than a cheap spectacle, Byron's truly mental theatre portends a teasing of the intellect that 'tease[s] us out of thought' – or rather out of those conventional thoughts we so often thoughtlessly rest in.[78]

Thus *The Deformed Transformed*'s highly playful staging of the *sacco di Roma*, which marked the end of the Italian Renaissance, results in a complex discussion of the ethics of artistic representations of violence, the concept of history-as-war and the concept of war-as-play. Yet it also does more than this. The drama's strategic playfulness stages a complex, subversive deconstruction of Renaissance principles, problematizing the Renaissance perpetuation of idealizing plastic forms by focusing on that recurring emblem of Renaissance culture – sculpture. In the episodes featuring Cellini and, especially, Olimpia, the imagery of sculpture haunts the stage as mimetic life-in-death, as an uncanny spectral presence invoking the Classical past of Antiquity that the Renaissance so eagerly sought after.

Indeed, Huizinga's analysis of the ways in which the Renaissance itself 'played' helps us to see the full extent of Byron's intricate playing upon and twisting of the entire Renaissance ethos in *The Deformed Transformed*:

> The spirit of the Renaissance was very far from being frivolous. The game of living in imitation of Antiquity was pursued in holy earnest. Devotion to the ideals of the past in the matter of plastic creation and intellectual discovery was of a violence, depth, and purity surpassing anything we can imagine. […] This striving, at once sophisticated and spontaneous, for beauty and nobility of form is an instance of culture at play.[79]

This 'culture at play' comes alive in Byron's drama, staged in all its complexity. In crucial contrast to Huizinga, however, Byron draws attention to the perversity, or corruption,[80] of

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[78] As Watson observes, '[i]t was part of Byron's poetic and moral strategy to set contemporary feats of arms in a wider perspective, as part of the human endeavour which is subject to the great movements of history, and the vast forces of nature.' *Romanticism and War*, p.186. Byron 'injects a salutary dose of scepticism about war into the discourse of the time.' p.196.

[79] Huizinga, 'Western Civilization *sub specie ludi*', in *Homo Ludens*, p.206.

[80] Following the original Latin meaning of *perversus* as 'turned away from', 'contrary to' or 'askew'; *pervertere* – 'to corrupt'. As Watkins remarks, 'the desperate struggle for love, honor, glory, and beauty – for a permanently ennobling ideal – totally deadens Arnold and the warring soldiers to genuine human compassion … and makes them contributors to public chaos and madness.' Byron is not only making a

these ideal Renaissance principles. If Olimpia represents a set of Classical ideals and simultaneously instances the 'earnestness' of the Renaissance 'game' of 'imitation' inspired by an essentially nostalgic impulse for resurrecting an ideal past, this game is ultimately perverted in the fragment of Part III where the Stranger mockingly sees her as a 'marble matron'. Artistic representation is exposed as fundamentally violent. Cellini, on the other hand, is a sculpted Mannerist monster rather than an 'earnest' pursuer of Classical ideals, and a symbol of another kind of aesthetic violence, as well as, alongside the ethos of the entire drama, a symbol of epoch-breaking. Insofar as we can speculate from the fragment, if Olimpia belongs to the Renaissance past, Cellini belongs to the raw new future of Modernity. The violence of art extends across the ages.

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The playful iconoclasm of Byron's last drama is manifold and well-wrought, notwithstanding the text's fragmentary form – indeed, that fragmentation in the end becomes a fundamental part of *The Deformed Transformed*'s meaning: the game of history knows no tidy endings. Relentlessly pulling down the edifices of idealism, both Classical and Romantic, the strategically playful humour of the Stranger's cynical commentary yields unsettling insights into the ubiquity and pragmatism of violence, the worrying levity as well as contagious energy of war-as-play and the vacuity of heroism. The drama stages the synchronicity of history through war, where the wheel of fortune justifies winning or losing 'in' indifferent 'turns'.[81] Thus, while history has no moral to offer us, Byron's drama does, and this blood-blotted 'moral' connects what is usually thought of as a marginal work to the core of Byron's oeuvre, not least *Childe Harold*'s famous 'one' page of History:

> There is the moral of all human tales;
> 'Tis but the same rehearsal of the past.
> First freedom and then Glory - when that fails,
> Wealth, vice, corruption - barbarism at last.
> And History, with all her volumes vast,
> Hath but *one* page... (*CHP* IV, cviii)

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moral point here about the destructive nature of ideals, though, but a more general statement on the state of affairs. Watkins, *A Materialist Critique of English Romantic Drama*, pp.205-6.

[8181] This stands in contrast to the 'justice' of history depicted in the Roman stanzas of *Childe Harold* IV – the dying gladiator will be avenged: 'Arise, ye Goths, and glut your ire!'. In *The Deformed Transformed*, the blood-smeared page of history is played out across centuries with no discernible moral save its eternal 'rehearsal'.

Like so much of Byron's poetry, then, Byron's 1820-22 dramatic project thematically ends where it began, while leaving us with a deeper, richer, broader and keener sense of what we thought we already knew, but, as it turns out, did not. In doing so, it presents us, challenges us and 'leave[s]' us with 'a problem' (*DJ* XVII, xiii): the nature of human history in a cosmos run by the forces of play.

Postlude in Lieu of a Conclusion

As we have come to see, Byron understands history as 'revolution' in the original sense of the word, forever 'revolving' in a vicious circle, but never losing the wretched 'r' to actually evolve. As George Ridenour has put it:

> As violence and disorder lurk behind the most winning manifestations of tranquillity and harmony, the tranquil and harmonious are fated inevitably to dissolve again in the violent and chaotic. This is an apparently immutable law of Byron's world.[1]

This, as we have come to see in our study, is the 'moral of all human tales', according to Byron, as the forces of *agon*, *alea*, *mimicry* and *ilinx* forever perpetuate conflict, upheaval and change, and 'tranquillity and harmony' is at most but an interlude. Byron's dramatic works do not impose any moral framework on their audience – however, true to their definition of 'mental theatre', they determinedly problematize and interrogate received traditions, contesting inherited ideas, continually provoking thought, and challenging the ethics of traditionally accepted concepts of morality. Indeed his dramas question morality per se. In them, 'history is perceived as a drama against which it is pointless to complain, not simply because the plot always ends in death, but because it *is* a drama, a pageant without purpose beyond that of its own self-sufficient spectacle.'[2] In our study of the dramas, we have also explored the theatricality of Byron's understanding and portrayal of history – his dramatic project of 1820-22, as we have seen, ends in a cutting satirical analysis of this perpetual self-perpetuating spectacle – and its dubious audience. This sets the scene for the project that Byron began and Nietzsche took up and developed along his own idiosyncratic lines. In Nietzsche's interpretation of Heraclitus, we find a line of thought that, similarly to *The Deformed Transformed*, redefines the trope of the *theatrum mundi*, and recalls the Stranger of Byron's last drama:

> While Heraclitus' imagination saw this restless motion of the universe, this 'reality,' with the eyes of a blissful spectator who is watching innumerable pairs of contestants wrestling in joyous combat and refereed by stern

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1 George Ridenour, *The Style of* Don Juan (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1960), p.145.

2 Newey, 'Authoring the Self: *Childe Harold* III and IV', p.172.

> judges, he was overcome by an even greater idea: he could no longer see the contesting pairs and their referees as separate; the judges themselves seemed to be striving in the contest and the contestants seemed to be judging them.[3]

This also takes us back to *Cain* and *Heaven and Earth*, where Byron reveals the realm of transcendental 'judges' as equally governed by *agon*. And, of course, as Cox remarks, 'we who witness this becoming are ourselves a part of it; our interpretations are contestants in the game of agon.'[4]

Indeed, the ultimate delight and originality of Byron lies in the deliberate *amorality* of his moral, intensely steeped in and conceptualized as play. It is this which anticipates Nietzsche's reading of Heraclitus. Read in the light of the satirical spiel on history presented in *Don Juan* and *The Deformed Transformed*, Byron seems to be saying, with Nietzsche: ''It is a game. Don't take it so pathetically, and – above all – don't make morality of it!''[5] Highlighting the amorality and arbitrariness of history and depicting in his works a dramatic world of constant becoming, Byron also anticipates Nietzsche's interpretation of the world as an aesthetic phenomenon: 'Becoming is not a moral but an aesthetic phenomenon.'[6] Indeed, for Nietzsche, 'becoming is "necessary" in the sense that it neither originates from nor is directed by the "purposes" and "intentions" of any transcendent being. Rather, its errant movements are solely the result of immanent conditions and forces.'[7] For Nietzsche, there are only '[t]hose iron hands of necessity which shake the dice box of chance' and 'play their game for an infinite length of time.'[8] Like Nietzsche's, Byron's is not a world reaching out for any transcendental remedy from metaphysics – it is a very real world of becoming, at times terrifying and grotesque, depending on the current state of play, a world that is always in commotion, and where, crucially, life is always conceived of as a game. In Nietzche's 'characterization' becoming' is 'a perpetual artist's agon or dice game'[9] 'affirm[ing]' 'being in becoming'.[10] It is something very similar for Byron, in a universe

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[3] Nietzsche, *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, p.57.

[4] Cox, *Nietzsche: Naturalism and Interpretation*, p.202.

[5] Nietzsche, *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, p.64.

[6] Nietzsche, *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, p.113.

[7] Cox, *Nietzsche: Naturalism and Interpretation*, p.110.

[8] Nietzsche, *Daybreak: thoughts on the prejudices of morality*, eds. M. Clark and B. Leiter, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997, repr. 2005), p.81.

[9] Cox, *Nietzsche: Naturalism and Interpretation*, p.184.

[10] Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, p.23.

with no apparent purpose, where existence equals perpetual change and chance, which heralds ceaseless turmoil but also channels unfettered multiplicity, creativity: 'Chance, Providence, or Fate – / Uncertainty is one of many blisses, / A mortgage on Humanity's estate' (DJ VII, lxxvi). For Byron, this world of becoming is the only reality. All humanity can do is take part and place its bets, for the game is always afoot: 'all these things – like most things are a lottery – it may be as well at least to have the ticket drawn.'[11]

[11] Letter to Kinnaird of 29 July 1823, *BLJ* X, pp.92-3.

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Marino Faliero is quoted from *Lord Byron: The Complete Poetical Works,* ed. Jerome J. McGann and Barry Weller, 7 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980-93), volume IV. All remaining dramas are quoted from volume VI of the same edition, and all other Byron's works follow this edition. Act, scene and line references follow quotations in the main text.

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ABSTRACT

History is a major point of inquiry and exploration in all Byron's major, and many of his minor, works. Byron understands and conceptualizes history and its tight and troubled relationship with literature, drawing attention to the literariness of history and the historicity of literature in his wake. The aspiration to the 'truth' of history is, for Byron, a highly creative process, highlighting the cross-pollination of fact and fiction, and also exploring history's inherent theatricality. Historical writing shapes but, crucially, also distorts our understanding of history.

The dramatic works of Lord Byron are, on the whole, traditionally the least critically explored territory of his oeuvre. Byron's singular understanding and conceptualization of history in his dramas is the focus of this study, comprising the seven dramatic works he wrote between 1820 and 1822. As this thesis shows, these dramas make up a dynamic dramatic project, creating a space of formal, discursive and thematic experimentation, which reveals not only Byron's intense involvement in matters of drama but also, in a wider perspective, his understanding and treatment of history.

This study takes up Byron's treatment of history in his dramas and analyses it through the methodology of play laid out and adapted for use in literary studies by Wolfgang Iser. Iser adapted his conception of play from the founding anthropologically centered treatise on play by Roger Caillois, *Man, Play and Games* (1961), which he presented in his works *Prospecting* (1989) and *The Fictive and the Imaginary* (1993). Iser's methodology of play features Caillois's four strategies of play – *agon*, *alea*, *mimicry* and *ilinx* – and recasts them slightly in order to render them useful for analyses and exegeses of literary texts. This methodological framework, as this thesis argues, is especially useful for the discussion of Byron, whose essentially ludic style and thinking has often been misinterpreted as lack of intellectual rigour or authorial negligence. As this study shows, Iser's theory of play helps to rectify this misinterpretation and produce in its stead an exploration of the fine intricacies of Byron's dramatic works, placing them alongside the established masterpieces of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* and *Don Juan*.