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JEROME CHRISTENSEN

Theorizing Byron's Practice: The Performance of Lordship and the Poet's Career

My Muse despises reference.

—Lord Byron, *Don Juan*

LORD BYRON'S REMARK HAS A contemporary ring. Romantic indulgence in indeterminacy is a conspicuous feature of what Christopher Norris has called "the deconstructive turn." Indeed, given our particular literary-historical position, Byron's skepticism may be less striking than his aristocratic avowal of contempt. If his evasion of reference identifies Lord Byron's romanticism, his contempt expresses his strength. That strength is irreducible; it is not to be explained away by referring it to some desperate defense, say *clinamen* or *kenosis*, by deriving it from some set of social or political circumstances, or by deciphering some unspeakable secret, whether it be incest or homosexuality. "Lord" marks Byron's privilege; and in part it is a privilege to confound reference.

Lord Byron's contempt is not without an object. "Reference" has a referent. The pith of the view that Lord Byron despises was put by David Hume, who in the *Treatise of Human Nature* pronounces that "We can form no wish which has not a reference to society. . . . Whatever other passions we may be actuated by . . . the soul or animating principle of them all is sympathy; nor would they have any force, were we to abstract entirely from the thoughts and sentiments of others."¹ For Hume and for the political economy he launched, force does not belong to the individual as virtue or capacity; force, strength generalized, is a property of someone only insofar as he sympathizes with someone else.

1. David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge, 2nd ed., rev. by P. H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon, 1978) 363.

Sympathy is the affective correlative of the systematic relation that constitutes and regulates the social. Force is an effect of that social field, to be referred to a grammar that itself has no referent.

The contrast between Humean force and Byronic strength corresponds to Michel Foucault's distinction between a juridical notion of power in which "power is taken to be a right, which one is able to possess like a commodity, and which one can in consequence transfer or alienate" and a power that "is neither given, nor exchanged, nor recovered, but rather exercised, and that . . . only exists in action, [a power] that is above all a relation of force."² I shall reserve the term "power" for the juridical or Humean notion and apply "strength" to the executive. Despite Foucault's intervention, "Humean" remains apt because it was Hume who first made the case that the difference between power and strength is not ontological but epistemological. In his essays Hume describes the relations between the executive and the juridical as a relation between the particular and the general (e.g., a past and the historical present, an aristocratic body and the monarcho-bourgeois subject); and he displays the technique by which the power of the general can be *derived* from a particular strength, which is then subordinated to the status of illustration or fact. The perfection of this inductive technique, the protocol of juridical power, became the business of a new intellectual class, the enterprising ideologists of political economy (Hume, Adam Smith, Dugald Stewart, Henry Brougham, Francis Jeffrey, et. al.), who understood power dynamically, not as the simple *product* of derivation but as emergent in and as the very *process* of deriving, as the strategic movement from one level to another. Their precedent suggests that Foucault's definition ought to be supplemented by Michel Serres' description of power "as the passage from the local to the global."³ Global dominion may be the end result of this passage; but power emerges in the particular, historical act of engineering the passage to the global. Many of the political implications of the man of letters' strategy of enlightenment were played out by British imperialism in the nineteenth century. But there were domestic advantages as well, which were fully exploited by the monarch and the commercial class, who combined to curtail the "friendships" of aristocrats, to hobble any strength not subject to king or coin.

That the taming of the aristocracy was monarchic policy from the Tudors through the Hanovers is, thanks to Lawrence Stone, a familiar

2. Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings*, ed. Colin Gordon, trans. Gordon et al. (New York: Pantheon, 1980) 88–89.

3. Michel Serres, *The Parasite*, trans. Lawrence R. Schehr (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1982) 215.

thesis; and on this matter at least Anglo-American social historians and Foucault are in accord. They differ, however, in their estimation of its success. "One needs," Foucault writes, "to be nominalistic, no doubt: power is not an institution, and not a structure; neither is it a certain strength we are endowed with; it is the name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society."⁴ More significant than the so-called "complex strategic situation" is that calling itself, Foucault's imperative nominalism that, responsive to a "need" in excess of his intention, exactly marks the return of an aristocratic ethic. This ethic can return on such short notice because it is never altogether absent; this strong, lordly nominalism has been and is being exerted all along, throughout the history that we are always in the process of writing.

The middle class has finally stopped rising. Historians as diverse as Lawrence and Jeanne C. Fawtier Stone, J. C. D. Clark, Harold Perkin, J. V. Beckett, and John Cannon agree that the emergence of the bourgeoisie as a dominant class, which has ever been retreating farther back in the English past, did not in fact occur until at least 1820, 1832, or even the 1880's.⁵ The postponement of middle class dominion corresponds to a revived sense of the vitality, authority, and impermeability of the English aristocracy. The revaluation of aristocratic rule has accompanied a redefinition of aristocracy to include not only titled peerage but also the landed gentry. A proto-Marxian analysis has been conscripted into the service of a decidedly non-Marxian historical narrative: the aristocracy has been redefined from a status-group into an economic class. The line between this class and the bourgeoisie has surely been sharpened, but at the cost of blurring the partition between the peerage and the gentry. The gentrification of the aristocracy anchors itself in the oft-cited postulate of William Marshall's that "landed property is the basis on which every other species of material property rests; on it alone, mankind can be said to live, to move, and to have their being." Robert Lacey's more recent comment that "aristocracies have not been able to survive the loss of their land" is in the same spirit and circular to the extent that it is precisely land ownership that has been used to define the aristocracy (Beckett 43, 13).

4. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, Vol. 1, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Pantheon, 1978) 93.

5. Harold Perkin, *Origins of Modern English Society* (London: Routledge, 1969); J. C. D. Clark, *English Society 1688–1832* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1985); Lawrence and Jeanne C. Fawtier Stone, *An Open Elite? England 1540–1880* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1984); J. V. Beckett, *The Aristocracy in England 1660–1914* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986); John Cannon, *Aristocratic Century: The Peerage of Eighteenth-century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1984). Subsequent citations appear in the text.

There is another standard, that of the standard of nobility itself—a man's entitlement to sit with his peers in the House of Lords. A peerage-oriented definition urges that aristocracy "has for its intellectual or moral foundation the conviction that the inequalities or differences which distinguish one body of men from another are of essential and permanent importance" (A. V. Dicey, in Clark 7). Such was the conviction of Lord Byron, who localized its application: "in England none are strictly noble but peers—not even peers' Sons—though titled by Courtesy."⁶

The English aristocracy, then, can be defined in either one of two mutually inconsistent ways: in an integrative and economic fashion—as peerage and gentry—or in a conflictual, by and large cultural and political manner: peerage vs. gentry. The former involves, if not an outright bourgeoisification of the aristocracy, then at least an admission that the aristocracy is a social class equipped with the economic means and intelligence sufficient to survive, even prosper, in the face of bourgeois assertion. The conflictual definition of strong aristocracy emancipates the aristocrat from land as his material condition, and from economics as his ultimate determination. It may have been economically true that no aristocracy could survive the loss of its land, but it remains culturally and even politically true that no aristocracy could exist without subscribing to an ethos that countenanced the genuine risk of that land—a truth exemplified in fact and fiction by the accounts of those aristocrats who hazarded their patrimonies on the battlefield or at the gaming tables (see, e.g., *BLJ* 5: 19). To prove that it disdains calculation and serves no class interest is the burden of the aristocratic ethic.

Integrative and conflictual definitions of aristocracy are respectively grammatical or constative and rhetorical or performative in their orientation. By grammatical I mean that the integrative definition refers wealth to a prior code by means of which it can be analyzed. Describing this as a grammatical mode of definition enables us to register the displacements of one index by another in the history of the aristocracy (as well as in the histories of aristocracy). Land became the most convincing index of membership in the aristocracy when the prevailing heraldic procedures collapsed, in large part due to a policy of royal commodification and inflation of titles. Although the Book of Heraldry was superseded by the rent rolls, the grammatical mode of classification stayed the same.

A performative emphasis demands that status be defined dynamically. I shall use "performative" loosely enough to refer to two related but not

6. *Byron's Letters and Journals*, ed. Leslie A. Marchand, 12 vols. (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1973–82) 7: 25. Hereafter *BLJ*.

necessarily harmonious aspects of the aristocratic ethos. First, the “essential and permanent” differences between men are manifested in an act or what Nietzsche would later call a “deed.”⁷ The aristocrat distinguishes himself in his deed, by his deed, as his deed. At the ideal limit, as Byron identifies it in “A Fragment” from *Hours of Idleness*, the aristocrat’s deed is absolutely coincident with his honorable name, whose nobility must be his own doing. Second, aristocratic merit is confirmed before the eyes of one’s peers, whether at the threshold of the House of Lords or outside the city walls in a duel under the gaze of one’s second. The ritualistic character of these confirmations does regulate aristocratic aggressiveness; but ritual tolerates violence; unlike theatrical representation it is open to misfires and allots shame.

The Byronic paradigm for such misfires is recounted by Thomas Moore: “It is said that the day after little Byron’s accession to the title, he ran up to his mother and asked her ‘whether she perceived any difference in him; since he had been made a Lord, as he perceived none himself.’”⁸ With status, status anxiety. This moment of failed self-recognition approximates the tension between the generality of the law and the necessity of its application that Paul de Man reads in Rousseau’s *Social Contract*:

Just as no law can ever be written unless one suspends any consideration of applicability to a particular entity including, of course, oneself, grammatical logic can function only if its referential consequences are disregarded.

On the other hand, no law is a law unless it also applies to particular individuals. It cannot be left hanging in the air, in the abstraction of its generality. Only by this referring it back to particular praxis can the *justice* of the law be tested. . . . There can be no text without grammar: the logic of grammar generates texts only in the absence of referential meaning, but every text generates a referent that subverts the grammatical principle to which it owed its constitution.⁹

Keep in mind that this is a commentary on Rousseau intended to traverse just that impossible space between a general law and its particular ap-

7. Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1969) 45.

8. *His Very Self and Voice: Collected Conversations with Lord Byron*, ed. Ernest J. Lovell, Jr. (New York: Octagon, 1980) 4.

9. Paul de Man, *Allegories of Reading* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1979) 268–69.

plication that the *Social Contract* describes. Nonetheless, if, cautiously, we substitute “genealogical text” for “legal text,” we approach Byron’s state of mind in Moore’s anecdote. Like the legal text, the genealogical text claims generality; but unlike the law, genealogy rejects universality—it is exclusive in principle and discursively case specific. The authority of the genealogical code is subverted not by the necessity of application but rather by the “point of view” from which application is *made*. The smooth functioning of the aristocratic code has always been troubled by the ancient antinomy of blood: the incompatible and irrepressible claims that excellence is hereditary, colored by the blood that flows, and that excellence is merited, tintured by the blood one sheds. The antinomy between the grammar of birth and the performance of merit translates into a fundamental incompatibility between being made an aristocrat as, through a contingent set of circumstances, Byron was, and the imperative to *make oneself* an aristocrat, regardless of monarchic enfranchisement or popular recognition, a charge that the young lord acknowledged and had not yet fulfilled.¹⁰

Arguments that this incompatibility is structural appear in the grammatical projects of Horne Tooke, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and William Cobbett, who for radically different reasons attempted to normalize aristocratic eccentricity by rendering genealogical *aporiae* in terms of etymological evolution (e.g., Coleridgean desynonymization). But to appeal to the linguistic projects of Tooke, Coleridge, and Cobbett presupposes that the structure of incompatibility has a specific historical setting and a particular agonistic embodiment: what I have called the gentrification of the English aristocracy and Byronic apposition. The task for the theorist of Lord Byron’s practice is to fine tune this relation, to show how extremes, though heterogeneous, can seem to meet. In Rousseau, according to de Man, “incompatibility between the elaboration of the law and its application . . . can only be bridged by an act of deceit” (de Man 269). The Byronic text works in a similar way. The Byronic text heroically pretends to resist the massive encoding of culture while providing an ensemble of identificatory procedures and inducements that “solve” the incompatibility between general law and individual application by mystifying it. The story is told in the verse romances (*Childe Harold* I–IV; the Oriental tales) that enact it. There the elaboration of the law, explicitly represented as a genealogical text, becomes the-

10. On the performativeness of Byron’s poetry, John Murray, his publisher, is authoritative. “I am most happy,” he writes regarding the *The Corsair*, “to tell you that your last poem *is*—what Mr. Southey’s is *called*—a *Carmen Triumphale*” (Samuel Smiles, *A Publisher and His Friends: Memoir and Correspondence of the Late John Murray* [London: John Murray, 1891] 223).

matized as a dark, guilt-ridden past which is mysteriously encoded on the face of the hero and then efficiently "applied" to the reader-surrogate in the poem by the hero's fascination. The hero's nameless guilt is the place where the general (familial past, the *zeitgeist*, poetic tradition) meshes with the particular. By making the hero impossibly responsible for a past that can neither be spoken nor remembered, the nameless guilt fuels an impressive assertion of force that appears at once completely spontaneous and utterly destined. Critical employment of Byron's biography has consistently recapitulated this mystification: the poems are imagined as an elaborate code which, by way of a handily metamorphic secret, can be brought into some determinate relation with a singular circumstance of Byron's life. Now as then, both the incompatibility between code and life as well as the mystification that "solves" it are highly productive of critical discourse and financial profit.

The incompatibility between the literary code and Byron's life that invites critical resolution tempts a reader to make application to him or herself (why not my life as well as Byron's? why not this moment as well as that? what could the difference be, when at some level it is the presupposition of making any application of the Byronic code to a particular life that any particular is pretty much the same as every other?). Byron's romances simultaneously convey to their consumer that he or she is an intentional subject and instill anxiety about the singularity of that position. To put it another way: what the reader identifies with, what he or she applies to him or herself, is not any particular feature of the Byronic hero but the very incompatibility between code and instance that structures the Byronic hero and that, because of its instability, propels the Byronic plot—which is a self-reflexive exercise in habitual identification. Romantically conceived, habit is the characteristic disguise or costume by which the particular is generalized or domesticated. Because each identification is both a resolution and a failure, the process is eminently suited for serial elaboration: a coding over time of the flawed but powerful identificatory procedure that one participates in at any moment. The mystified passage from code to instance becomes an instance that is repeated in a code called the Byronic text. Recall Serres' formulation. The passage from the particular to the global (from an always hypothetical narrative instance to a never fully generalized representational code) in poem after successful poem generates power—a power that nominally belongs to the author, but which is by law the property of the publisher, the capitalist who owns the right and the means to copy.

From a psychoanalytic perspective the failure of the young Byron to perceive a difference bespeaks his failure fully to enter the symbolic order. Byron's notion of what difference might be is incommunicable,

radically personal. This aphasia has social coordinates. As Pierre Bourdieu remarks,

A social history of all forms of *distinction* (of which the *title* is a particular case) would have to show the social conditions and the consequences of the transition from a personal authority which can neither be delegated nor inherited . . . to the *title*—from honour to the *jus honorum*. In Rome, for example, the use of titles . . . defining a *dignitas*, an officially recognized position in the State (as distinct from a purely personal quality), was, like the use of *insignia* progressively subjected to detailed control by custom or law. . . .¹¹

The progressive subjection of the personal to the delegated (from the tactical body to its strategic representation), of honor to law, and of act to insignia recapitulates the passage from the imaginary to the symbolic.

Although a scheme that weaves together the social and the psychic has considerable value as an instrument for plotting Byron's career, the charm of symmetry should not obscure the psychoanalytic insight that no transition from one form of distinction to another is ever complete—an insight that troubles the ambitions of psychoanalytic science as much as social history. Despite the ability of Freudian psychoanalysis to comprehend in general the passage from the imaginary to the symbolic, the discipline takes its place on the side of the symbolic. Psychoanalysis is a partisan of the symbolic for other than ethical reasons; it coalesced historically as a discipline after the passage *in theory* to the symbolic (to the truly theoretical)—after, that is, the discovery and determination of the oedipus complex. Psychoanalytic grammar cannot command the pre-oedipal any more than sociology can command aristocratic performance. The persistence of the pre-oedipal in the world of adults (some of them psychoanalytic critics) correlates with the persistence of a performative aristocracy in an age of gentrification and reminds us of the inadequacy of enlightenment to master the differences it perceives.

The correlation of the pre-oedipal and the aristocratic can be derived from Moore's anecdote. It is the necessary condition of Byron's failed recognition that his father be absent. Although in the course of things his father had to die before Byron could rise to the peerage, Jack Byron died far away and well before it really mattered. The death that counted came later and was entirely contingent: William John Byron was killed in the battle of Calvi. Mrs. Byron, as Doris Langley Moore notes, only

11. Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1977) 236 n. 42.

learned of the crucial event by "chance": "not a single one of her late husband's kith and kin had bothered to let her know. . . ." ¹² Thus although there was some time before Byron became a lord—he awaited the death of his great uncle "the Wicked Lord"—the boy had no paternal ideal either to emulate or contest. As Byron remained, in Moore's words, "almost unreal" to his paternal kin, so the accession into the "place" of the father/uncle/cousin seemed unreal to the child. However we may describe the epistemological status of what Perkin has called the "aristocratic ideal" for the aspiring middle classes (Perkin 237 ff.), for this particular aristocrat it would always have a peculiar unreality, like a ghost haunting an imaginary abbey. The father absent, the boy appeals to his mother for a verdict that she—a Gordon, a woman, a mother—cannot legitimately give. Mrs. Byron is a type of all the feminine readers (Annabella Milbank is another) to whom Byron presents his heroic romances: each poem demands an act of recognition from its reader that she is constitutionally unable to execute. Frustration, anger, and rejection follow. The money paid (by the mother to her profligate son, by the reader to her fickle romancer) is the token of that flawed recognition and the debased simulation of a difference that cannot fully be credited. Byron's numerous battles with his mother from this epochal moment until her death do not reflect his failure to resolve an oedipal crisis; they perform his refusal to oedipalize at all. His repeated rejections of her repeatedly punish her for her inability (which cannot be her fault) to explain or symbolize difference. Rejection is a deed that is never done. Over and over again Lord Byron makes the difference that everyone fails to perceive.

Social history has made familiar the concept of the "abdication of the governors" at the end of the eighteenth century, whether that is seen as the breakdown of a relatively benign paternalism or whether it is regarded as a rational consolidation of economic interests. Byron's career novelistically sutures the historical and the psychological by particularizing this general event as the abdication of the father(s). The scenario of abdication is played out both in Byron's humiliation at the hands of Lord Carlisle, who in refusing to attest to Byron's pedigree at his young relative's ceremonial induction into the House of Lords, cast doubts on Byron's paternity; and, as we shall see, in Henry Brougham's aggressive denial of the claims of "Lord Byron Minor" to cross into the public world via his book of poems *Hours of Idleness*. Particularizing in this

12. Doris Langley Moore, *Lord Byron: Accounts Rendered* (London: John Murray, 1974) 50.

respect means not only registering social change as psychological disorder but also making an aristocratic crisis out of what, according to E. P. Thompson and others, had been the historical fate of the plebes. In Catherine Clément's words, "Societies do not succeed in offering everyone the same way of fitting into the symbolic order; those who are . . . between symbolic systems, in the interstices, offside, are the ones who are afflicted with a dangerous symbolic mobility."¹³ It has been ever and will always be this symbolic mobility—between the general system called Byronism and the writer who signs his name, between the body of the debauchee and the bulimic, between the love of women and of men, between narrative flow and digressive blockage—that makes Lord Byron fascinating. It is the task of a biographical criticism to plot those vicissitudes, to map the interstitial career.

Lord Byron's career begins in contention: a state of obligatory reciprocity between the poet and the self-confirmed arbiters of culture. "Obligatory reciprocity" is the answer to the question that motivates Marcel Mauss's anthropology and that ought to orient all forays into romantic aesthetics: "What force is there in the thing given which compels the recipient to make a return?"¹⁴ For Mauss, a thing is not a property, an object that stands in some measurable relation to a proprietor. A thing occurs in a gratuitous deed that forcefully articulates the continuous action of the socius. The thing given is the *donnée* of the social, that which from before my beginning has obliged me to participate willingly in the continual crisis of its recreation.¹⁵

13. Catherine Clément, "The Guilty One," in Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément, *The Newly Born Woman*, trans. Betsy Wing (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1986) 7.

14. Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies*, trans. Ian Cunnison (New York: Norton, 1974) 7.

15. The supreme representation in Lord Byron's poetry of the dynamics of the "thing given" (misnamed "sexual attraction") is *Don Juan* I: 111–12:

The hand which still held Juan's, by degrees
Gently, but palpably confirm'd its grasp,
As if it said, 'Detain me, if you please,'
Yet there's no doubt she only meant to clasp
His fingers with a pure Platonic squeeze:
She would have shrunk as from a toad, or asp,
Had she imagined such a thing could rouse
A feeling dangerous to a prudent spouse.

I cannot know what Juan thought of this,
But what he did, is much what you would do
His young lip thank'd it with a grateful kiss,
And then, abash'd at its own joy, withdrew. . . .

Lord Byron bestows gifts. He gives because he is obliged by the thing given him, his title, which compels his return and in turn makes him a compelling thing. It is as a gift that Lord Byron Minor presents *Hours of Idleness* to the public. It is as a gift that the volume is received by Henry Brougham, the brilliant, prickly, and anonymous *Edinburgh* reviewer, who sarcastically congratulates the "noble minor" on his resolution to publish never more: "let us be thankful; and with honest Sancho, bid God bless the giver, nor look the gift horse in the mouth."¹⁶ True to his word, Brougham does not check Byron's teeth; but he does put the gift horse through his paces, counting his feet and mocking his gait.

Derrida *avant la lettre*, Brougham devotes much of his review to a deconstructive reading of the book's "title-page," which he tropes as the flourish of the author's status: "Lord Byron Minor." The forwardness of the "Minor," which follows Lord Byron's "name like a favorite part of his *style*," especially irritates the reviewer. He recognizes that "Minor" may be intended as an "extenuation of this offense" of publishing "stagnant" verse on the strength of a noble name, but the plea that would excuse fault magnifies it. The addition of "minor" baldly attempts to extenuate aristocratic presumption by a legal claim for privilege (lordly deed as adolescent symptom). The move has the infelicitous consequence of bringing the lord as plaintiff before the law.

Brougham does not waste his opportunity. With a show of justice he discards the plea of minority:

[I]t is a plea available only to the defendant; no plaintiff can offer it as a supplementary ground of action. . . . [B]ut as he now makes voluntary tender of the article, he hath no right to sue, on that ground, for the price in good current praise, should the goods be unmarketable. This is the view of the law. . . .

The supplement of "Minor" graduates the distance between a supposed gift and an actual publication; it betrays Lord Byron's awareness that this is no personal exchange but a market transaction into which he has voluntarily entered—despite himself. The context of the law is the proper metaphor by which to confront the lordly poet with his subjection to the law of context. The self-thwarting ambivalence that the civil Brougham exploits is especially acute in Byron's preface, where the

For a fuller discussion of lordship and sexuality, see Jerome Christensen, "Setting Byron Straight: Class, Sexuality, and the Poet," *Literature and the Body. Selected Papers of the 1986 English Institute*, ed. Elaine Scarry (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1988) 125–59.

16. *Edinburgh Review*, January 1808, in *Byron: The Critical Heritage*, ed. Andrew Ruth-erford (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1970) 32.

"noble minor" veers between self-characterization as an audacious Caesar—"I have passed the Rubicon," and must stand or fall by 'the cast of the die'"—and a retiring Cowper, who plays the minor to the conqueror's reckless venture. Cowper's extenuation of Caesar (sensitivity's blushful mitigation of heroism) marks the difference between crossing the Rubicon in the first century before Christ and publishing a book of poems in England in 1807. A volume of poems is not truly a conquest, any more than this particular volume of poems is actually a gift. The extenuation of Caesar, like the extenuation of his title, reflects Byron's need to be recognized in order to make the crossing from the private world of friendly circulation to the adult world of public business. Defense and plea, "Cowper," like "minor," is, as Brougham senses, the clumsy exposure of the mystification necessary to bring off the ritual crossing that the book of poems aims to perform. Gatekeeper Brougham withholds the recognition sought. With the poet's complicity Brougham's satire punctures the pretense that there is anything more to lordship than a legal fiction, useful for the pursuit of the usual acquisitive interests. Brougham, however, is not so vulgar as to call that fiction "mystification"; he gives it its polite name, "style."

A Bloom before the letter, Brougham interprets the title-page as a defense, the recourse of a marginal artistocrat or a weak poet. The difference hardly matters. Byron fails to be original, and Brougham, like Bloom, identifies poetic strength with originality. Hence his mockery (following Byron's prefatory clue) of Byron's translations, his borrowings from Gray, his addiction to clichés. Abandon all furniture, Brougham instructs; the poetry would be better served by the addition of "at least one thought, either in a little degree different from the ideas of former writers, or differently expressed." A rhetorical injunction: be original or worry about it. The reviewer does not know his man. Brougham penetrates all Byron's disguises—his minority, his borrowings from other poets, his phony Scotticisms—but instead of sweeping away Byron's ambivalence he crystallizes it in its most virulent form. Not Caesarian thunder makes Lord Byron dangerous but a symbolic mobility that confounds reference and generates a field of confrontation. In this case, the young lord vainly attempts to extenuate his aristocratic bravura by an appeal to the law, but the grammarian, despite himself, recalls the poet to the aristocratic ethic.

He gets personal. This is most conspicuous in his characterization of the patrimonial elegy "On Leaving Newstead Abbey" as not "deserving the name of poetry." Not "deserving the name" knowingly plays on Byron's next to worst fear—less only than not having a name worth deserving. Byron's plaintive fear of rejection is fulfilled by Brougham's

mockery. Byron's vow to his ancestry "that he ne'er will disgrace you," is broken by Brougham's reproduction of it—the "innocent" aftereffect of the noble minor's vanity publication. But if the attacks on Byron's worthiness to bear the ancestral name design dishonor, the limit of the personal is reached with an attack against the aristocratic body itself: "Lord Byron should also have a care of attempting what the greatest poets have done before him. . . . [he] should really have kept out the ten *hobbling* stanzas 'on a distant view of the village and school of Harrow.'" Lest there be any doubt, Brougham gratuitously asks of a minor piece, "And why call the *thing* in page 79 a translation . . . where μεσονυχτιοιο ποθ' ὥραιο is rendered by means of six *hobbling* verses (emphases added)." Challenged by verse that has no lawful status, Brougham responds in kind. He intends to inflict a mortal wound on Byron's name by remarking on the deformation of Byron's foot. But by responding to the text as a thing given, the demystifier remystifies the book. He reads it as a body that performs its unique weakness on every page. He reads every page as a *title* page—an agonistic reading to which he is obliged by the "thing" given.

Brougham's scornful counsel that Byron add "at least one thought, either in a little degree different from the ideas of former writers, or differently expressed" would qualify as the best advice that the poet ever received, were it not that Brougham's response to *Hours* demonstrates that Byron is already master of the tactic: a new idea, as reading Byron impresses on Brougham, is not finally something original but something different—not the expression of a voice or an anxiety about voice but the eventful elaboration of a personal style, in which the pretended extremes of translation and original are continually transgressed by a hobble that opaquely resists generalization, that is the performance of lordship. As the extenuation of the Greek, Byron's six hobbling stanzas align with the extenuations of "minor," of "Cowper," of the preface, and of the offensive volume itself—supplements which may furnish no "grounds for action" in the court to which Brougham refers them but which act forcefully in the text where they live, move, and have their being.

If we regard this episode from what Brougham describes as the "view of the law," we can see that the reviewer's enlightenment claim to have emancipated cultural disputes from magical thinking is as mystified as Lord Byron's wishful version of himself. Brougham has no right to judge and no principled basis for his criticism. English judges wear wigs, not cowls. The anonymity of the critic, as Coleridge would later argue in the *Biographia Literaria*, is a symptom of criticism's failure to professionalize itself. A criticism that lacks disciplinary autonomy (a

systematic, philosophically informed poetics; institutional independence) cannot be lawful or integrative and will inevitably fall back on the violent, ritualized language it has claimed to transcend—inquisitor of all excellence. Under the circumstances, writing in 1807 before Coleridge and Coleridgeans, Brougham cannot be blamed for his excess. Writing in advance of that grammar to which the professional would refer, all he and his colleagues have is the pretense of disinterested judgment that anonymity confers. Namelessness graduates the distance between a supposed professionalism and an actual ideological instrumentality—call it a socio-cultural minority. Lord Byron brings out the worst in Brougham because the reviewer's anonymity is the double of Lord Byron's "minor"—negative to positive. Over writers' dead bodies critics must climb; but in this writer this critic views the mirror image of his own aspiration, which appears as the flaw in the ideal which will forever frustrate his dream of ascent. There is no court to adjudicate this standoff. Lord Byron and Henry Brougham can meet no place to settle their differences except the supplemental ground of action outside the city walls where challenge is met, strength is proved, and satisfaction gained.

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