SOME OTHER BEING: THE AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL PHANTOM IN

WORDSWORTH AND BYRON

by

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THESIS ABSTRACT

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I explore Wordsworth and Byron's use of a mediating "other Being," or a third-person narrative voice, that functions as a "guide" through their autobiographical texts. After establishing this poetic voice, both poets employ their "other Being" to navigate spaces of ruin. Founded on fragments of memory and experience, as well as mediatory gaps, the poetry of Wordsworth and Byron illuminates the autobiographical poet's struggle with textual self-representation and the sustention of a poetic subjectivity that often substitutes for the poet's own. Through the rhetorical device of prosopopoeia, Wordsworth and Byron find distinct ways to create a voice that will continue to "speak" for them in the lines of their text. While *The Ruined Cottage* represents a version of Wordsworth's understanding of breakdowns and poetic subjectivity, Byron's *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage III* and *IV* push Wordsworth's boundaries even to their limits and turn the autobiographical "other Being" into a "tyrant spirit."

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: THE RUIN OF AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL SUBJECTIVITY

Narrative voices with autobiographical connections are no anomaly in poetry. In Romanticism, many critics have distinguished William Wordsworth as exemplary in his use of autobiography, highlighting his ability to unite with a textual voice distinctly illustrative of the thoughts and experiences of the poet himself. Reflecting on Wordsworth's innovative and eloquent poetry, many readings focus on his meditations on individuality and imagination as well as on how he explores natural communion. Conversely, Lord Byron's use of autobiography is often criticized as pompous, artistically inferior, and employed for self-promotion or for other narcissistic ends, causing his historical escapades to become more critically popular than his actual poetry. Such divergent focuses on these poets' autobiographical works cause the similarities between the two poets to be lost or ignored.[i]

In his Preface to *Poetry of Byron*, Matthew Arnold declares Wordsworth and Byron to be the "glorious pair, among the English poets" of his century and, that when "the year 1900 is turned," England will "recount her poetic glories" with their names first.[ii] Today, the names of Wordsworth and Byron are less commonly paired under the heading of mutual glory and are most often placed contiguously to illustrate their difference, usually emphasizing the superiority of one's poetic genius over the other.[iii] While my project is certainly not an attempt to equate the two, I find that certain crucial similarities provide a more productive path for analysis, as opposed to focusing on their personal or professional disparities. I suggest that by reading Wordsworth's *The Pedlar* and *The Ruined Cottage* alongside Byron's *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage III* and *IV*,

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connections between this "glorious pair" illuminate aspects of their poetry frequently overshadowed by their cultural antipathy and produce a new way of understanding their use of autobiography.

Stemming from the work of Neil Hertz in "Wordsworth and the Tears of Adam," I focus on Wordsworth and Byron's use of a mediating "other Being," or a third-person narrative voice, that functions as a "guide" through their autobiographical texts. Establishing this poetic voice, both poets employ their "other Being" to navigate spaces of ruin. Founded on fragments of memory and experience as well as mediatory gaps, the poetry of Wordsworth and Byron illuminates the autobiographical poet's struggle with textual self-representation and the sustention of a poetic subjectivity that often substitutes for his own. Through the rhetorical device of prosopopoeia, Wordsworth and Byron find a way to create an immortal voice that will continue to "speak" for them in the lines of their text. Paul de Man explains that in autobiographical texts, prosopopoeia is a face, and eventually a voice, substituting tropologically for "an absent, deceased, or voiceless entity," usually the author (*RR* 75).[iv] Through the embodiment of a linguistic abstraction, Wordsworth and Byron articulate versions of their own experience and highlight temporal, linguistic, and subjective incompatibilities, emphasizing the need for the mediation of "some other Being" (OED).[v]

By following our "guide" through the landscape of the poem, we are led to the ruin. Marking the space through which the "other Being" wanders as something other than an encounter solely with the Sublime, the presence of ruins within the landscape mirror the "other Being's" existence in the poet's language. Physical ruins often mark the decline or failure of man's domain over Nature. The ruin is always already deprived of

permanence, subjected to Nature and time, but is upheld within the margins of the text as a poetic image. The use of and reliance on poetic mediation also depicts the failure or inability of permanently marking oneself in language. It is only through the words of poets, in "their elegies and songs," that we can access that which has died and passed away, calling forth memories and images through poetic voice (*The Ruined Cottage* 73). Like the ruin, the "other Being" is created and preserved within the text, representing something that is no longer a united whole. By placing these two figures next to one another, the ruin gives us the visual representation of a linguistic predicament, mediated through the very subject whose own creation acts as the link between poet and poetic process. While the ruin is not a new image of interest in Romantic criticism, its function as the simulacrum of a linguistic predicament has not been directly articulated. My interest in examining the image of the physical ruin is to look at how landscapes, through which the "other Being" guides us—poet and reader—mirror the breakdown, or "gaps," in signification: the fragmented buildings or monuments reflect the fragmented self just as the mediation of the "other Being" always points back to the splitting of the self that Hertz identifies. Both the image and the poet rely on some "other Being" to narrate these relationships and breakdowns.

Notes

[i] Even in the collection *Mortal Pages, Literary Lives: Studies in Nineteenth-Century Autobiography*, one can't help but notice the absence of chapters on Lord Byron all together. Having a total of 6 references to either "Byron" or *Don Juan*, the focus on Byron's autobiography is less for productive exploration for his own sake but used to illustrate what other writers do differently than, or in response, to his work.

[ii] The section of Matthew Arnold's Preface, from which this has been quoted, is reprinted in *Byron's Poetry and Prose*.

ⁱⁱⁱ Even in "Visionary Moments and the March of Time: Influence of Wordsworth in 'Childe Harold' I and II," Alan Rawes writes to expose the "fundamental difference between Bryon and Wordsworth."

^{iv} De Man spells prosopopoeia "prosopopeia" throughout his chapter "Autobiography as De-Facement" in. I have avoided directly quoting de Man's spelling. All citations for *The Rhetoric of Romanticism* will be abbreviated thus: *RR*.

^v The OED defines "prosopopoeia" thus: "A figure of speech by which an inanimate or abstract thing is represented as a person, or as having personal characteristics, esp. the power to think or speak; a person or thing in which some quality or abstraction is embodied."

CHAPTER II

"I HAD THERE A GUIDE": FOLLOWING THE OTHER BEING THROUGH

WORDSWORTH'S *THE PEDLAR* AND *THE RUINED COTTAGE*

> A Tranquilizing spirit presses now
> On my corporeal frame: So wide appears
> The vacancy between me and those days,
> Which yet have such self-presence in my mind
> That, sometimes, when I think of them, I seem
> Two consciousnesses, conscious of myself
> And of some other Being.
> (Second Book *The Prelude* (1805) 27-33)[i]

Neil Hertz identifies Wordsworth's poetic project as not merely a "recreation of the past," but something that gives him the ability to articulate past experiences through a voice that "will mediate to him a truer sense of his poetic identity" (111, 115). Wordsworth's turn to a narrative voice that can mediate between the poet and his poetic representations affords him the ability to remember and reproduce a physical experience in the lines of the text. Examining the complexities of Wordsworth's autobiographical "third-person voice," Hertz understands the employment of the "other Being" as demonstrative of "the disjunctive nature of the self" (108, 110).[ii] The use of this autobiographical "third person" results in a splitting of "the self into a poet existing in the present and 'some other Being' who acts as a mediating figure—often a childhood self," as Wordsworth does, for example, in "There was a boy" (111). To split the self affords the poet a special temporal advantage to occupy both his physical person and an identity or voice on the page. The chain of mediation Hertz establishes "exists in a mode of present time," or a "narrative present," that is created in and through the language of the poem in which these three figures—the "other Being," poet, and reader—"mutually participate" (112). Becoming the only signifier for the autobiographical poet himself, the

textual voice or "other Being" is not only necessary for narrative progression and expansion, but functions as the immortal phantom-like sign, lingering in the lines of the text and always pointing to its absent referent: the poet. Both a spatial and linguistic guide, the "other Being" mediates "the link in the chain" between poetic subjectivity and expression (Hertz 111).[iii] Initially a narrative tool for the poet to recount his thoughts and experiences of the world in verse, the voice of the "third-person" "other Being" becomes the defining mechanism for the autobiographical poetic.

Considered to be Wordsworth's "dry run" for *The Recluse* and *The Prelude*, *The Pedlar* is an early autobiographical poem in which Wordsworth establishes the "other Being."[iv] In *Wordsworth's Profession*, Thomas Pfau examines *The Prelude* as "the great experiment in Wordsworth's career" that could not have begun without his quest for what Pfau calls "the Poet" in Wordsworth's earlier works (304). Pfau argues that Wordsworth's creation of the self-legitimated poet begins in the B manuscript of *The Ruined Cottage*, continues through *The Pedlar* and "Tintern Abbey," and culminates in its "full conceptual articulation" in the 1800 Preface (304). In *The Pedlar*, Wordsworth's "quest" for "the Poet" leads him to his "other Being" that will be the "guide" through *The Ruined Cottage* and eventually lead him, and his readers, through other poems as well. Wordsworth navigates the relationship between his lived experience and the "dangerous craft of picking phrases out / From languages that want the living voice" by turning to a prosopopoeic "other Being" (*Prel.* VI.130-1). Identifying himself as a "wanderer among the woods and fields" who "With living Nature hath been intimate," Wordsworth establishes his ideal "other Being" as the voice of a wanderer, or traveler: the mediator between poet and Nature, subject, and reader (*Prel.* V.611-2).

The Pedlar begins with the narrator's introduction of a "he" who had been "born of lowly race / On Cumbrian hills" (8-9). Destined to become a shepherd and learning to read from his bible, the young Pedlar "yearns" for something other than what his future holds, finding joy and fulfillment in the "solitude" of the "hills" and "caves forlorn" (21, 49). His explorations cause his mind to "burn" until he "resolve[s] to quit his native hills" (225-6). Identified as "a chosen son," the young Pedlar possesses an artistic and poetic power. Able to hear the voice of Nature, he can "bind his feelings even as in a chain," and through the mediation of his own voice and imagination, translates the voice of Nature (326, 356). As the Pedlar is described standing alone "in the middle of the public way" (2) with his eyes "turned / Towards the setting sun" (3-4), one recalls de Man's attention to the emblem of the sun in Wordsworth's *Essays upon Epitaphs*: "Relayed by the trope of light, the sun becomes a figure of knowledge as well as of nature, the emblem of . . . 'the mind with absolute sovereignty upon itself'" (*RR* 75). With the Pedlar's eyes turn towards this "figure of knowledge," his staff becomes "fixed" behind him, foreshadowing his departure from the confines of labor and movement towards the embodiment of the sovereign mind: free to peddle his knowledge of existence and serve as mediator for poet and reader. The scope of Wordsworth's vision, illustrates the ability or power of the poet to comment on the natural world through the mediation of his own interactions with it. The visionary access afforded to the poet is the same awareness given to, and mediated through, the Pedlar.

While the abrupt opening of the poem is most likely a result of its original placement within *The Ruined Cottage*, the awkward and fragmented temporality of the anachronistic "other Being" appears in the narrative structure as well.[v] Like an

apostrophe to a formless muse, the speaker of this poem also addresses a figure without form: the Pedlar. Rather than beginning with a definitive "Oh!" addressed to a spirit in anticipation of creative inspiration, we have an unknown "Him." The "Him" describes the Pedlar, but because of the unidentified pronoun, we do not yet know that he is the figure through which the poem itself will find its own creation and mediation. Because the poem narrates the creation of the subject of the Pedlar, the past tense beginning— "Him had I seen" a vision witnessed "the day before"—disconnects the body of the Pedlar from time. Introducing the "other Being" in this way allows for Wordsworth to navigate the spaces of the poem and the contemplations of subjectivity through an "other Being" independent of the confines of normative experiences of space and time. Consequently, the figure that inspires the creation of the poem, a narrative not yet told but already past, produces a non-chronological timeline within which the "other Being" is allowed to traverse the boundaries of human consciousness and subjectivity.

As in Hertz's understanding of Wordsworth's project, the demands of the poetic imagination "are not fully met" by preliminary mediations between the natural world and the poet, thus the mind moves "beyond them toward a confrontation with . . . 'some other Being'" (115). For example, while in his youth, and the world of poesy, Wordsworth's "ears began to open to the charm / Of words in tuneful order," but the ways in which these subjects were expressed "were false and in their splendor overwrought" (*Prel.* V.577-8, 594). Atop a mountain, the Pedlar is awakened to the mysteries of life where he does not just "*believe*; he saw" (original emphasis 128). Seeing the connection between all things, "lost beyond the reach of thought / And human knowledge, to the human eye / Invisible," the eyes of the Pedlar are opened to the common notion of Wordsworthian

oneness where he sees "one life" (210-12, 218). As the Pedlar's communion with Nature overpowers his bodily sense, we see his relationship to the landscape shift. Rather than continue to wander the hills with his father's sheep, he is inspired into a dis-location after being taught by Nature. Flashing with "poetic fire," the eye of the Pedlar is able to look "deep into the shades of difference / As they lie hid in all exterior forms" (319, 347-8):

> From years of youth, which, like a being made
> Of many beings, he had wondrous skill
> To blend with meanings of the years to come,
> Human, or such as lie beyond the grave. (308-11)

Blending himself with "many beings," the Pedlar occupies the "other Being's" position in the chain of mediation Hertz identifies. Able to be transported to many "beings" and "years," even ones that "lie beyond the grave," the "wondrous skill" of the anachronistic "other Being," allows him to commune with Nature and to observe "the progress and decay / of minds and bodies too" (288-9). As a result, the Pedlar will continue his wanderings, but he will do so as a poet rather than a shepherd. Instead of being a husband, he will be a teacher: the mediator between landscape, poet, and reader.

Wandering onto the pages of *The Ruined Cottage*, the Pedlar is reintroduced, and renamed, as Armytage, who will, more literally, be the "guide" through the poem.[vi] *The Ruined Cottage* is presented through the voice of a speaker that meets his "fellow-traveller" (sic) Armytage on a "cottage bench" in the "cool shade" (34, 43). As Hertz notices, Wordsworth sets Armytage "off at a distance, in a realm of calm self-possession that the poet himself has yet to attain. This distancing provides Wordsworth with a principle of dramatic structure for the rest of the poem" (120). Through Armytage's distance, he can narrate the downfall of the cottage, now in ruin, and its inhabitants, Robert, Margaret, and their children, now all dead. While the poem's speaker identifies

himself as "Other," he is ultimately inadequate as the mediating "other Being" because he doesn't possess this critical distance Hertz identifies in Armytage.[vii] The speaker is too engrossed in exaggerated visions of labor and weakness and can only represent physicality. He, like the reader, must rely on Armytage for the narrative of the cottage to "open [our] eyes, else shut" (*Prel.* (1805) VI.120). Relying on layers of mediation and representation, Wordsworth's project becomes an elaborate weaving of poet, speaker, Armytage, Margaret, Nature, ruin and reader, making the narrative only decipherable through mediation and careful attention to the intricacies of language and subjectivity.

The path through these narrative webs highlights the importance of wandering or walking through the spaces of the poem. While wandering is also central to *The Pedlar*, the connection between movement and the spaces in *The Ruined Cottage* functions differently than the expanse through which the Pedlar must move to be able to come into being, so to speak. Spatial relationships, both boundaries and the movement around them, become *The Ruined Cottage's* focus as it addresses the narrative of subjectivity and ruination. Foreshadowed by the opening imagery of the elm tree roots and the four walls of the house, Nature begins to reclaim the spaces of habitation as the established boundaries break down: the fields become places of idleness, not labor; there is an aimless turn to the urban while the garden and home fall back into the hands of the wild; the gates and roads become places of lingering wanderers and are insufficient for maintaining or designating boundaries. Untended sheep and untrellised vines wander over the homestead as the garden walls crumble (55-60). The corner-stones of the cottage, "Till then unmarked," only become visible through the presence of the shepherd-less, wandering sheep (331). However, through Armytage's narration of the ruined

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landscapes, the poem stops the spaces and ruins from completely collapsing as they are

upheld in the language and memory of Armytage.

Jacques Khalip explores the possibilities of "dwelling in the rubble of disaster," as

he reads Wordsworth's ruins as "littering" the landscape of the poem (par. 2). Khalip

argues that Armytage not only "hews an imaginary path" for us to follow, but also

mediates our access to and, most importantly, experience of the rubble (par. 2).

Armytage, who sees around him "Things which you cannot see" (68), navigates the ruins

of the poem. As Armytage begins the story of the fall of the family and cottage, his poetic

vision, as in *The Pedlar*, affords him anachronistic and boundless access to the narrative

of the family and ruin. He reveals to have felt not only kinship with the family, but

oneness with the natural landscape surrounding the dwelling: "One sadness, they and I"

(84). Continuing to loiter in this seclusion, even after the inhabitants have died, the ruined

cottage has become Armytage's cell both in the physical or spatial reality of the narrative.

Looking for an etymology of "Armytage," one cannot help but notice the name's

similarity to "hermitage" and "ermitage." In acknowledging Wordsworth's shift from the

profession of peddling to the occupation of wandering—usually in solitude—the

connection between Armytage and a hermitic lifestyle becomes apparent. Definitions

ranging from the "habitation of a hermit," to **"**a solitary or secluded dwelling-place," to

the "name of a French wine produced from vineyards on a hill near Valence: so called

from a *ruin* on the summit supposed to have been a hermit's cell," emphasizes the choice

of Armytage's name that unites him with the ruined cottage itself (emphasis added OED).

Not only do physical spaces fall, but the inhabitants begin to collapse as well.

With Robert's own mental and physical decline, the seasonal boundaries begin to break

down, causing chaotic and arbitrary labor eventually resulting in Robert's abandonment of the cottage (170-7). Robert turns toward unproductive work and pointless creations (165-170), and loses the ability to articulate, perverting natural songs that become as empty and arbitrary as his toil (163-4). After Robert's departure, Margaret becomes the character who most resembles her predicament, as she is made part of the rubble of her ruined cottage. Even when Margaret is introduced, she is already dead in the present, and instead of highlighting the temporal disjunction of an "other Being," Margaret is a human "thing."[viii] Because she cannot abandon her dependency on the absent Robert, Margaret's fall is a representation of what happen to a subject in the face of not physical but linguistic breakdown or ruin without poetic insight or mediation. While Margaret did have the companionship of Armytage, she becomes too much a part of her surroundings and, like the ruin, can only be upheld or remembered in the words of Armytage.

The crumbling of both the poem's characters and boundaries offers a unique vision of not only man unsuccessfully living in harmony with Nature, but man's inevitable "disastered" state in language: "there was no disaster per se, only the experience of disaster—one was 'disastered'" (Khalip par. 6). Rather than ruminate on purely a sympathetic tale of tragedy, Wordsworth emphasizes the mutual ruination of human subjects and their surroundings, ultimately reinforcing the importance of the mediator in the significance of the ruin. Armytage's mediating here is not simply of the impossibility of human agency in Nature, but of the possibility of translating the experience of death and absence through the voice of a poet. As Armytage "saw / The hardships of that season," the emphasis on his separation allows him to remain as teacher and guide, bridging the gap over the rubble (140-1). We, as readers, just like the poem's

speaker, need this "other Being" to allow us access or sight because we must rely on his

poetic vision. While Armytage does not reveal gateways to other divine worlds, he does

reveal a world that is at once intriguing, terrifying, and familiar to us. Just as the speaker

attempts to understand why he is both thankful and disturbed by Armytage's narrative,

we too have been taught to "no longer read / The form of things with an unworthy eye"

and can begin to see the significance of the "other Being's" poetic vision (510-1).

As we turn to consider Byron, the tropes of disaster, rubble, gaps, and mediation,

follow his "other Being" through spaces of ruin. While *The Ruined Cottage* represents

Wordsworth's understanding of breakdowns and poetic vision, *Childe Harold's

Pilgrimage* will push Wordsworth's boundaries even to their limits. As Khalip asked in

his examination of *The Ruined Cottage*, "what would it mean to think of persons as

things themselves," Byron's "other Being" takes on this question as he looks "upon

disaster" "to see and meditate on the deviant mutability of persons and things" (Khalip

par. 2).

Notes

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[i] All lines of poetry will be cited according to the stanza, if appropriate, and line number.

[ii] Hertz identifies an example of this through Wordsworth's use of the third person in "A
Night Piece" where "he seems . . . to have gone out of his way, by writing in the third
person, to insist on the disjunctive nature of the self" (110).

[iii] Hertz makes the connection in Wordsworth's use of mediation in "A Night-Piece,"
where he utilizes the "pensive traveller" (sic) as mediator between the natural object, the
moon, and the poet himself: "What he thus succeeds in creating is a chain of successive
and analogous relations: the moon is to the pensive traveller as the pensive traveller is to
the poet as the poet is to the reader" (111).

[iv] As Duncan Wu relates in his footnote to *The Pedlar*, this poem is "Wordsworth's
earliest piece of autobiographical and philosophical poetry" resulting in its status as a
"dry run for both *The Recluse* and *The Prelude*" (*Romanticism: An Anthology* 289).

Additionally, both *The Pedlar* and *The Ruined Cottage* were revised and included in *The Excursion*, "in which the Pedlar, renamed the Wanderer, was the central character" (Wu 289).

[v] Hertz begins his project by linking Milton and Wordsworth through anachronism, both his non-chronological study of their works and the writers' own affiliation with it:

> Their works have traditionally raised questions about the nature of poetic subjectivity, and they are poets for whom anachronism held no terrors. . . . As such, it will not be in their relation to one another, but in the encounters that take place within their individual works, that Milton and Wordsworth can help us to understand the encounter of poet with poet. (107-8)

[vi] The renaming of the "Pedlar" as "Armytage," highlights the spatial relationship between the "other Being" and his surroundings, emphasizing space as opposed to profession. Like the Pedlar, Armytage is named for his actions: the Pedlar wandered the countryside peddling his knowledge of human existence and Nature; Armytage wanders the countryside, always returning to inhabit, or haunt, the space of the cottage.

[vii] While Hertz reads the speaker of the opening of the poem as Wordsworth's own voice, I find this contradictory to his understanding of distance. The poet doesn't need another mediating voice between himself and his "other Being" but between his experience and his expression. Armytage as the "other Being" fulfills that role. Also, Hertz's emphasis on distance is important in considering the use of the introductory speaker and Armytage, as well as drawing our attention to the "gap" in representation and need for mediation. So, while the speaker does mediate our relationship to Armytage, Armytage is the character with poetic sight; he is the Wanderer.

[viii] See Khalip for more on his argument on the "thingification" of Margaret. While turning Margaret to a "thing" in the rubble of the poem is interesting in the context of my own reading, she is not in the position of the "other Being" and therefore not operating in the same way as the "guide" and mediator.

CHAPTER III

SOUL OF MY THOUGHT: THE OTHER BEING AND THE RUINATION OF

SUBJECTIVITY IN BYRON'S *CHILDE HAROLD'S PILGRIMAGE III & IV*

> 'Tis to create, and in creating live
> A being more intense, that we endow
> With form our fancy, gaining as we give
> The life we image, even as I do now.
> (*Childe Harold's Pilgrimage III* 6.46-9)

I would like to begin with an unlikely pairing. Before I turn to my understanding

of Lord Byron's project, I want to recall one of John Keats's letters in which he defines

the poet. As Keats explains, the poet has "no Identity—he is continually in for—and

filling some other Body" and Keats himself, in the act of writing the letter, notes the

disjunction between himself—the writer—and the character on the page: "But even now I

am perhaps not speaking from myself; but from some character in whose soul I now live"

(Letter to Richard Woodhouse, Oct. 27, 1818 295). [i] Keats's articulation of the non-

identity of the poet, who can occupy various souls through his characters, not only

illuminates Keats's own work but also provides a distinguishing characteristic in the

project of the Romantic poet. Additionally, as Percy Shelley's *Defence of Poetry*

suggests, the poet must capture the fancies of his imagination and solidify his own "truth"

in poetry: "A Poem is the very image of life expressed in its eternal truth" (515).

However, as a result of the medium through which the poet represents his truth, this task

of occupying souls and turning "truths" to "images" proves more complex than simply

"filling" a narrative body and "expressing" "fancies." Keats, more than most, makes this

struggle the focus of his work. Lord Byron, on the other hand, may not be the first poet

that comes to mind when thinking of figures to embody Keats's understanding of the poet

or even Shelley's definition of poetry. However, reading Byron's work purely with attention to his historical and cultural magnetism, the lens through which he is most often critiqued, reduces and distracts from what is happening in the language of the texts that created and perpetuated the image of "Lord Byron"—the most famous "other Body" he filled. I find that bringing in Keats's notion of the poet in addition to Wordsworth's "other Being" illuminates some of the most powerful and interesting aspects of Lord Byron's own poetic project, stemming from the same anxieties about language, mediation, and representation.

Throughout Lord Byron's work, the association between the poet and his characters created and sustained his success. Nowhere is this connection between poet and character more apparent than in Byron's poem *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*. However, the association between Byron and Harold was not purely a "filling" to express "truth" but rather an elaborate cultural and poetic construction to establish an image. Nicholas Mason explores the branding of "Lord Byron" in anticipation of Byron's poetic and cultural success that arrived with the publication of *Cantos I* and *II*. Mason pays particular attention to the extensive advertising and self-promotion that occurred prior to the poem's release arguing that the "real story" of Byron's fame was a result of intricate collaborations between the poet and his publisher John Murray (425).[ii] Through his artistic and political reintroduction to the public, Byron "made himself a distinctive figure on the social scene" "[t]wo weeks before he supposedly awoke one morning and found himself famous" (Mason 431, 429). After the publication of *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*, which highlighted the "flaws in all existing poetic products," Byron called for "a new voice in the world of poetry," which he filled with the voice of Childe Harold

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(Mason 429). By both "disavowing any link between Lord Byron and Childe Harold" and simultaneously emphasizing Byron's name in the advertising of the poem, the cumulative success of both poem and the "Lord Byron" brand name created "the most consciously autobiographical 'nonautobiographical' poem of the nineteenth century" (Mason 438). Once the first two cantos were published, the association between Harold and Byron was inevitable. Consequently, in order for Byron to maintain his poetic success, he had to be linked to "some character" with whose "soul" he could live. If Harold gained "life" through Byron's "creating," "Lord Byron" was contiguously born.

Byron may have initially created *Childe Harold* as an autobiographic exploration for the perpetuation of a persona, but his project proves more complex than a man's desire for fame. While Mason's work invaluably uncovers the historical complexities surrounding the poem's publication, purely focusing on the historical link between "Lord Byron" and the poet George Gordon can detract from the equally complex layering of linguistic tropes that defined "Lord Byron" and his poetic voices. In writing characters like Harold, Byron is able to ruminate on articulations of his cultural image and subjectivity through a mediating "other Being." Like Wordsworth's search for "some other Being," or "a figure who will mediate to him a truer sense of his poetic identity" (Hertz 115), Byron initially identifies with Harold who acts as his guide through the lines of his first epic poem. However, this relationship is distinct from Wordsworth's embodiment of "other Beings," like the Pedlar or Armytage, because the souls Byron occupies are constituted by the cultural identification or link between his image—"Lord Byron"—and the voice of his poem. By looking closely at specific instances in the poem that self-consciously highlight the multiplying and fragmenting effects of language, we

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can see how Byron explores ways to both build and break down his connection to his

mediating "other Being."

When in 1816 Byron returned to *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*,[iii] the poet's

relationship to Harold became the focus of his poetic exploration. Rather than depict

sublime bullfights or Oriental mythologies, the journeys of *Cantos III* and *IV* are

prominently linguistic ones.[iv] As a result of the success of *Cantos I* and *II*, the "other

Being" identified with Byron became "more intense," not only in relation to

Wordsworth's "other Beings," but came to surpass Byron himself in image and in agency

(*III*.6.47). In *Canto III*, Byron turns toward some "other Being," distinct from Harold,

who is able to more successfully "mediate to him a truer sense of his poetic identity" after

his association with Harold proved to be so complicated (Hertz 115). However, because

Byron's success is contingent upon his association with Harold, the opening stanzas of

Canto III seek to reinscribe the troubled relationship. In order for Byron to leave Harold

behind and turn toward the embodiment of another "soul," he must introduce the speaker

as paramount. For example, in stanza 6, the speaker not only mediates Byron's

relationship to the self-exiled Harold, but is the active participant in both Harold's and

the poem's creation: "*we* give," "*we* endow," "*we* image," "even as *I* do now" (emphasis

added 48-9). Consequently, with this shift in identification to the voice of the speaker, the

instability of Byron's poetic subjectivity is foregrounded in the linguistic sign that unites

the poet with his speaker: the "I." Here, the equation of Byron with his speaker is both

highlighted and challenged by the text's attention to the "Nothing-ness" of the "I"s:

> What am I? Nothing: but not so art thou,
> Soul of my thought! with whom I traverse earth,
> Invisible but gazing, as I glow
> Mix'd with thy spirit, blended with thy birth,

And feeling still with thee in my crush'd feelings' dearth. (*III*.6.50-4)

Byron draws our attention to the emptiness of his "I" and both the "mix" and separation with the "soul" of his "thought." Unlike Harold, who will now remain "invisible," the speaker of *Cantos III* and *IV* only exists as the "I." In the act of writing, Byron gives textual "form" to his "fancy" and "blends" the "birth" of his new "other Being" in the "I." But, because the "I" that should signify Byron's own subjectivity is questioned and revealed to be "nothing," rather than capitalize on the equation between the speaker and "Lord Byron," he emphasizes the split and consequently the need for mediation.[v]

As G. Wilson Knight's reading of Lord Byron suggests, even though Byron's work is "out-distanced by [his] importance as a man," Byron nonetheless represents a "man in whom poetry has become incarnate" (803). The incarnation of Byron's poetry however is problematic. The shift in identification in *Canto III* illuminates complications of Byron's embodiment of poet and poetry. Like Keats's non-identity of the poet, Lord Byron was forced to occupy and "live" in some other character, Harold. Likewise, the image of Harold was upheld by the cultural image of Lord Byron. Here, the "soul" of this "other Being" is upheld and represented textually in the "I," which is "nothing." The non-identity of "Lord Byron" occupies the non-identity of the "other Being"; Byron's new occupation of the speaker is an empty embodiment. Because of the inevitable autobiographical connections between Byron and the voices of his characters, the significance of the "nothing-ness" of the "I" illustrates the instability of the conception of "Lord Byron." Knight's proclamation proves useful in considering Byron's exploration of linguistic representations that link the bodiless poet to his poetic incarnation in the "other Being." Byron and the "other Being" can only be incarnate in the text.

In *Cantos I* and *II*, Byron's autobiographical presence was found through the narration of Harold's journey. Presence in *Cantos III* and *IV* is tied to the position of the "I." His incarnation happens through prosopopoeia as Byron gives a voice to the "nothingness" of the "I." The prosopopoeic reproductions in Byron's work emphasize the instability of Byron's subjectivity and the mutability of his autobiographical incarnations. Inherent in linguistic mediation, the poet can never seamlessly speak through the "I" of the text. Like Wordsworth's turn to the "other Being" of *The Pedlar* and *The Ruined Cottage*, the relationship between Byron and the "other Being" makes prosopopoeia essential for articulation and for the continuation of his poetic image. Byron's "other Being"—the soul of his thought—functions as a pneuma,[vi] essential for his textual and cultural life while continuing to highlight his distance or absence from physical embodiment of "some character in whose soul I now live" (Keats 295). Like the "broken mirror" making a "thousand images of one that was," Byron's subjectivity is a textual "shatter'd guise" (*III*.33.289, 291). Through the positing of a "face" or "voice," the image of the absent, bodiless, Byron can continue to be found and heard in the various mediations of the "other Being" as he acts as the guide through the "fragments" of the text (290).

Like the poet, the images of Byron's poetry are notable for what they are not, for what is absent, and the distance—physical or representational—between the text and poet. For example, in the opening stanzas of *Canto III* Byron establishes not only his distance from an "I" but from a specific being who should possess some portion of his true self: his daughter. However, the stanza focuses on Byron's separation from Augusta Ada, both in physical distance and in physiognomy. Beginning with a question—"Is thy

face like thy mother's, my fair child!"—and ending with Byron's—not Harold's—departure from England, *Canto III* situates the historical reference in the uncertainty and separation of the speaker's language. Through the autobiographical link to his personal life, if we can refer to it as such, Byron sets the project of *Canto III* apart from Harold's journeys of *Cantos I* and *II* by bracketing this canto with reference to Ada. As the second stanza begins—"Once more upon the waters! yet once more!"—the reader is called upon to remember the journeys of Harold in *Canto I* and *II* but as the lines progress we not only move further away from Ada and England but depart from the fancies of the poet's youth:

> In my youth's summer I did sing of One,
> The wandering outlaw of his own dark mind;
> Again I seize the theme, then but begun,
> And bear it with me, as the rushing wind
> Bears the cloud onwards: in that Tale I find
> The furrows of long thought, and dried-up tears,
> Which, ebbing, leave the sterile track behind,
> O'er which all heavily the journeying years
> Plod the last sands of life,—where not a flower appears. (*III*.3.19-27)

The "ever-shifting surface" of Byron's poetic subjectivity turns to emphasize the poem's speaker as the guide through the progression of the poem (Stabler 866).[vii] The "One" of the youth's summer, who is neither an "I" nor named as "Harold," is afforded a physical power—he must be borne "with me"—as well as an imaginative and generative agency: "The wandering outlaw of his *own* dark mind" (emphasis added). Seizing the "theme" of Harold's adventures, not Harold himself, the speaker sets out to carry this "Tale" with him as he plods through the sands of his narrative life.

The mediating voice of the narrator, guides the progress of the poem through meditations on the creation and undoing of subjectivity. Drawing attention to the

fragments or "sands" of the narrative, the referential absences of the poem can only be imagined through the mediation of the "other Being" as he attempts to turn the pieces into a coherent image of a past whole.[viii] By calling up themes of the previous cantos— "Tales" only "begun" in *Canto I* and *II*—the "other Being" marks the disjunction between these fragments in the form of linguistic subjects: Harold, Byron, I. Physicality, although a significant aspect of Lord Byron's persona, is distinctly complicated by his text. As the narrative progresses, the prosopopoeic faces and voices become even less substantial as the "other Being" wrestles with his incarnation of language and thoughts:

> Could I embody and unbosom now
> That which is most within me,—could I wreak
> My thoughts upon expression, and thus throw
> Soul, heart, mind, passion, feelings, strong or weak,
> All that I would have sought, and all I seek,
> Bear, know, feel, and yet breathe—into *one* word,
> And that one word were Lightning, I would speak;
> But at it is, I live and die unheard,
> With a most voiceless thought, sheathing it as a sword.
> (original emphasis *III*.97.905-913)

What is "most within me" is the "voiceless thought" that "lives" and "dies" with the "I." The "I" "sheaths" the "thought," covering it in the structure and writing of the text. Because of the poet's necessary reliance on language for expression, the failed attempts to either merge with, or completely withdraw from, the "other Being" or the "I," complicate the poet's subjectivity. If the "I" could both embody and *un*-bosom what is "most within me," the "I" would be able to give voice to the "thought." However, the "I" too remains unheard.

Rather than collect bone and battlement fragments as he does in other episodes of *Canto III*, Byron complicates the collection of words themselves. The words "sheath" or cover instead of illuminate or electrify thoughts. Desirous of finding the "*one* word" to

encompass all feeling and thought, Byron calls up "Lightning,"[ix] to unite experience and

voice in an electrifying blast. Unfortunately, because of the impossibility of turning

words to lightning, Byron ruminates on this linguistic impossibility by composing

hundreds of stanzas that illustrate the inadequacies of such piles of empty words and

images. The lightning of experience cannot be confined to language, just as the "I" of

"Lord Byron" cannot be confined to one referent or "other Being." However, all can be

illuminated in the collection of their fragments; the words as well as representational

absences build the monument of the epic poem. The poem is the only access Byron has to

making the "I" heard, even if what is heard is precisely its absence: the "sheath" of

experiences whose "I" "lives" and "dies." Even if words fail to electrify, they remain

fixed in the lines of the poem.

As *Canto III* draws to its close, Byron returns to illustrate the necessity of

mediation in poetic representations. Reflecting on the project of *Canto III*, the speaker

summarizes:

> Thus far have I proceeded in a theme
> Renew'd with no kind auspices:—to feel
> We are not what we have been, and to deem
> We are not what we should be,—and to steel
> The heart against itself; and to conceal,
> With a proud caution, love, or hate, or aught,—
> Passion or feeling, purpose, grief, or zeal,—
> Which is the tyrant spirit of our thought,
> Is a stern task of soul:—No matter,—it is taught. (*III*.111.1031-39)

As he "seized" the "theme" in stanza 3, the speaker has "proceeded" to this stanza,

"bearing" it along with him and mediating between the poet and the reader. Guiding us

through the journey of the narrative, and pausing occasionally to call our attention to the

split within the linguistically created subject, the "other Being" here directly addresses

the failures in mediation. Now, the speaker "feels" that "we" are neither "what we have been," like Byron and Harold in *Canto I* and *II,* nor "what we should be" at this point in the canto. Illustrated as early as stanza 6, Byron's struggle in uniting himself with his "other Being" reaches back to the foundations of the figure of the "I." The "form" that the "we" endowed in stanza 6 has not yet reached the desired representation *Canto III* set out to achieve. Unable to "conceal" the "tyrant thought" of "No matter," the "other Being" struggles to negotiate between what was the "voiceless thought" of the "I" in stanza 97 and what has now become the "tyrant spirit of *our* thought" (emphasis added). While thoughts cunningly escape linguistic enunciation, Byron still maintains a hope for the possibility of finding words that function as things: "I do believe, / Though I have found them not, that there may be / Words which are things" (*III*.114 ll.1059-61). However, Byron not only emphasizes the difficulty of pinning down the transitory "tyrant spirit," but challenges the truthfulness of the words themselves:

> And for these words, thus woven into song,
> It may be that they are harmless wile,—
> The colouring of the scenes which fleet along,
> Which I would seize, in passing, to beguile
> My breast, or that of others, for a while. (*III*.112.1040-44)

The emphasis on the devious quality of poetic language, the "wiling" and "beguiling" of the "song," challenges not only the truthfulness of narrative representations, but the mediation between the poet and the "I." The wily words of the "tyrant spirit" are the only place for the "I" to remain, and Byron only gains expressive access through these "words" that have been "woven into song." As he turns to *Canto IV*, Byron's project becomes more self-conscious of the mediation between his self and the "other Being."

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Uncertain of the future of the "I" and the image of "Lord Byron," *Canto III* leaves the "I" to await its fate: "I stood and stand alone,—remember'd or forgot" (112.1048).

Canto IV begins with a singular image of Byron and his "other Being" united in the "I" who stands on a bridge. Instead of calling attention to the "nothingness" of the "I," here the focus is on instability. Appearing to begin with a strong declaration, "I stood," the surface on which the "I" stands is the Bridge of Sighs, used to convey prisoners toward either trial or death (Byron's note). Words, upholding the "I" on a bridge-like surface, maintain the link between Byron and his "other Being" as well as convey both onwards. In order to articulate his poetic subjectivity, Byron's relationship to the "I" must be mediated and bridged. As the "I" gazes over the image of Venice, the bridge functions as a mirror for the gap in autobiographical poetic mediation. As Hertz explains, the gap that is created through the use of the mediating "other Being" is a result of the splitting of the self "into a poet existing in the present and 'some other Being' who acts as a mediating figure" (111). The gap created through mediation "may be bridged but is not thereby removed" (Hertz 111). As the canto progresses, where the bridges lead the "I" affect its ability to "stand." The "I" is upheld by a surface that will lead towards an uncertain final fate and, like stanza 112, the dichotomous future of the "I" is subject to the fate of the poem.

In *Canto IV*, Byron's poetic images become more concerned with gaps and absences. Rather than attempt to build images out of fragments, *Canto IV* breaks them down; ruination becomes the focus of the project. Like Wordsworth's turn in *The Ruined Cottage*, the "other Being" of *Canto IV* functions as the guide through ruined landscapes. However, as Byron's relationship to his "other Being" is already founded on breakdowns

and shortcoming in representation, his textual "shatter'd guise" further emphasizes the significance of ruin. Rather than *point* to the breakdown in linguistic representation, as Wordsworth's mediator does, the "other Being" of *Canto IV* exposes the strong monument that stands as "Lord Byron" to be nothing but an unstable linguistic creation upheld in the margins of the text. As the unstable subjectivity of the poet is highlighted by mediation, the placement of the poetic voice in relation to images of physical ruin draws attention to the connection between these two figures; the ruin becomes the illustration of poetic subjectivity for Byron. Ruins, fragments or debris, are the simulacra of subjectivity in language. Whether it is through fragments of images, the accumulation of empty words, or the identification with physical ruin in *Canto IV*, Byron's "other Being" navigates the poetic ruination of subjectivity.

The only way for Byron's subjectivity to be visualized is in his text. Because the "tyrant spirit" evades accurate articulation Byron immortalizes the silent voice of the "I," with which he could never truly merge, through prosopopoeia. Solidifying one "I" is better than having the whole self disappear completely. In the ruin, Byron finds an image that will illustrate his representational predicament allowing him to explore his own self as ruin:

> But my soul wanders; I demand it back
> To meditate amongst decay, and stand
> A ruin amidst ruins; there to track
> Fall'n states and buried greatness [. . .] (*IV*.25.217-9)

As the soul of Byron's thought has been wandering for over 330 stanzas,[x] here the speaker calls it back to "meditate" "amongst" the decay. In the act of recalling the soul, the speaker "demands" that "it" return to "stand" as a "ruin." Like the Wordsworthian call for a "guide" for mediation, here the "I" asks for the "soul" to "track" the processes

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and remains of ruination. Jacques Khalip's account of *The Ruined Cottage*, in which he

explores the experience and state of "disaster," is helpful in reading ruins and rubble

presented here.[xi] As Khalip himself tracked the "Fall'n states" of Wordsworth's poetic

landscape, arguing that "to look upon disaster is to see and meditate on the deviant

mutability of persons and things," the "other Being's" meditation on ruin here

compliments Armytage's "looking" at the remains of disaster (par. 2). Finding the self

and its surroundings "disastered"—"a ruin amidst ruins"—the "soul" is commanded to

"stand"—as the "I" "stood and stands"—and "track" the "buried greatness" and "Fall'n

states" of its self (Khalip par. 6).

The "guiding" or "tracking" of the "other Being" through landscapes of ruin is

more directly articulated as the canto progresses. For example, in stanzas 137 and 138 of

Canto IV the "other Being" walks in the shadow of the physically ruined Colosseum.

There, his identification with the monument gains him access to a vision of future

immortality: while his body will lose its force, the memory of his text will remain as a

trace of his existence:

> But I have lived, and have not lived in vain:
> My mind may lose its force, my blood its fire,
> And my frame perish even in conquering pain;
> But there is that within me which shall tire
> Torture and Time, and breathe when I expire;
> Something unearthly, which they deem not of,
> Like the remember'd tone of a mute lyre, (137.1225-31)

Like the piles of thoughts that turned into a "tyrant spirit," "Something unearthly" will be

remembered when the "I" expires and is silent. Even more transitory than Harold, the

"tyrant spirit" typifies poetry's struggle with confining the "intensity and shapeliness" of

life into words (Barton 818).[xii] Consequently, as Byron searches for the "buried

greatness" of "Fall'n states," his "other Being" guides him to and "tracks" the image that

gives shape to his predicament of articulation and signification:

> Thy haunts are ever where the dead walls rear
> Their ivy mantles, and the solemn scene
> Derives from thee a sense so deep and clear
> That we become a part of what has been,
> And grow unto the spot, all-seeing but unseen. (138.1238-42)

In places where "dead walls rear / Their ivy mantles," the "other Being" is at last able to

find an image that unites his feelings and struggles with expression in a figure that is born

from the memory of its absence. In the shadow of the ruined Colosseum, the "other

Being" becomes "all-seeing but unseen," growing unto the spot of the text even after

Byron's physical body is gone. The body will die, but the presence of its memory will

"tire / Torture and Time," the "tyrant spirit" of the page.[xiii]

In narrating the journey of some "other Being," Byron illuminates the inevitability

of dwelling not just in the rubble of disaster but in the "disastered" state of his project,

leaving him "doubly curst." As the speaker proclaims:

> We wither from our youth, we gasp away—
> Sick—sick; unfound the boon—unslaked the thirst,
> Though to the last, in verge of our decay,
> Some phantom lures, such as we sought at first—
> But all too late,—so are we doubly curst.
> Love, fame, ambition, avarice—'tis the same,
> Each idle—and all ill—and none the worst—
> For all are meteors with a different name,
> And Death the sable smoke where vanishes the flame. (*IV*.124.1108-16)

The "unfound" "boon" and "unslaked" "thirst" have left the *we* not just *on* the border of

decay but "*in* verge of our decay" (emphasis added). While the last cantos set out to

redirect the "Tale" only "begun" in the first cantos, the project has found itself

"withered" and taunted by the same desires that "curst" the ambitious poet in his youth.

There remains "Some phantom," reminiscent of youth's desire for immortality, and like the "Something unearthly" of stanza 137, that which "they deem not of" will be found in the text. Byron's textual phantom is restored with each reading of his words, "lingering" and "desiring" even here in the "sable smoke" of "Death." The "other Being" leads Byron into the borders of "decay" and in the "luring" "smoke" of desire and "Death," turns the "tyrant spirit" of his thought into his textual autobiographical phantom that will be heard "Like the remember'd tone of a mute lyre."

In the final stanza's "farewell," Byron's autobiographical phantom haunts the last lines of the poem:

> Farewell! a word that must be, and hath been—
> A sound which makes us linger;—yet—farewell!
> Ye! who have traced the Pilgrim to the scene
> Which is his last, if in your memories dwell
> A thought which once was his, if on ye swell
> A single recollection not in vain
> He wore his sandal-shoon, and scalloped-shell;
> Farewell! with *him* alone may rest the pain,
> If such there were—with *you*, the moral of his strain!
> (original emphasis *IV*.186.1666-74)

The autobiographical phantom does not "burst" to "illumine our tempestuous day," like Shelley's phantoms do for instance, but through the "tracing" of the reader, the "recollection" of Byron's "other Being" rises out of the "sable smoke" of his inky words and ascends to "dwell" in the "memories" of the one who read them.[xiv] The "tyrant spirit" of Byron's "thought" becomes the "thought" of the one who reads. Consequently, while the "other Being" may not have been able to precisely pin down Byron's "tyrant spirits," he has established an image that will remain immortalized in the text and will be reborn with each new reading guiding us through the journey of his pilgrimage.

Byron hoped to find "words" that were "things" themselves, but his maturing

understanding of the function of his poetry comes to fruition in *Canto IV* as the "other

Being" guides him through the breakdown of physical and linguistic creations. While his

contemporaries turned to images such as the sky-lark or the nightingale to represent their

desire for the transport of their poetry and poetic visions, Byron turned toward images

that emphasized the non-transcendent aspects of language and highlighted the importance

of the text itself. Unlike Shelley, who for example calls on the wind as he desires his

words to be scattered as "ashes and sparks" "among mankind," Byron remains intent on

his words being firmly fixed to the page of the poem (*Ode to the West Wind* V.67).[xv]

While the "tyrant spirit" will rise as "Something unearthly," it can only do so through its

connection to the text like the "I" that "stood and stands" in the poem. Byron uses the text

itself to "track," "trace," and "record" evidence of his existence and experience:

> But in this page a record will I seek.
> Not in the air shall these my words disperse,
> Though I be ashes; a far hour shall wreak
> The deep prophetic fullness of this verse,
> And pile on human heads the mountain of my curse! (*IV*.134.1202-6)

Denying even the ashes of his body to disperse in the air, physical images are emphasized

to illustrate the tangible "traces" found in the text. While "tyrant spirit" may seem to be

allowed to "burst" into the air, like Shelley's, the image of the phantom-like "other

Being" can only exist in the text itself. Through his various explorations of the building-

up and breaking-down images of his self and persona, Byron finds ways to mirror his

struggles with linguistic representation through his phantom-like haunting of spaces of

ruin and language.

As language can only represent and solidify a past experience in the absence of the actual event, Byron concentrates on gaps, losses, and lacks as well as on his own notion of self, as he fuses and transforms the musings of his imagination into his epic monumentalizing of a linguistic predicament. Perhaps, Byron's strength may even begin to be understood as something more akin to Keats's Negative Capability, dying into the immortal life of absence.[xvi] Like Hertz's explanation of the splitting of the self, the poet that existed in the "present" of the poem's creation, is immortalized through the self that remains in his words (111). Byron's difficulty with this split, or at least with sustaining his mediation with Harold, has always been present in the text: "The clumsiness of the split between the poet and his character Harold, which has fueled commentary on the poem since its publication, should not be dismissed as failed artistry; it is the symptom of a misbegotten project of reference fatal to poetic strength" (Christensen 14). The pompous, strong, and self-sustaining "Lord Byron" may therefore be more artistically complex than some critics assume. What is often passed-off as fragmented and ineffectual musings about fantastic adventures are in fact explorations of both the impossibilities of merging the image with the referent and the possibility of finding poetic reference in something like a "tyrant spirit." While his phantom appears "too late," the "sable smoke" in which the physical life of Byron may vanish will leave an autobiographical mark for his textual life.

Notes

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[i] All quotations from John Keats are from *Keats's Poetry and Prose*. Hereafter they will be referenced with the appropriate page number. This letter is on page 295.

[ii] In "Building Brand Byron: Early-Nineteenth-Century Advertising and the Marketing of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*," Mason explains how Lord Byron and John Murray

"reintroduced" "Lord Byron" to the public sphere through Byron consciously assuming "the pose of the eccentric poet," and delivering his first speech in the House of Lords (Mason 431, 429).

[iii] As Alice Levine explains in her introduction to *Canto III* in *Byron's Poetry and Prose*, Byron left England for Belgium in April 1816, "in the wake of scandal over his marital separation" (195). After traveling through Germany, Byron "arrived at Lake Geneva on May 24, and only a few days later began his important relationship with Percy Shelley" (ibid.). During this time, Byron was not only greatly influenced by Shelley himself, but "read Wordsworth more sympathetically than at any other time in his life" (ibid.). *Canto III* marks Byron's poetic maturation during a time that was both artistically influential and personally detrimental as he was estranged from his wife, cut-off from his daughter Augusta Ada, and separated half-sister Augusta Leigh.

[iv] While *Canto III* follows the "other Being" through famous battlefields, Lake Geneva, narrations of Napoleon and Rousseau, and *Canto IV* focuses on journeys through Italy and Greece, the Friulian Alps, and the Colosseum, the progression of the narrative is one of one of subjective exploration, rather than chasing after Harold like the narrator of *Cantos I* and *II* tends to do.

[v] In his chapter "The Speculative Stage" in *Lord Byron's Strength*, Jerome Christensen most comprehensively explores the commodification of "Lord Byron," as a space for the poet to become his own image while simultaneously losing and fragmenting his "I":
> *Lord Byron* is the name for the "I" to which reflection refers as well as for the propulsive structuration of self-reflection itself. Whatever else has been lost, the "I" retains its privileged capacity to "bear" *Childe Harold* as the poet had earlier borne Childe Harold: the poem has become Lord Byron's "child of imagination" . . . bred out of its own barrenness and ruefully substituted for the child of his "house and heart." (153)

[vi] The OED defines "pneuma" thus: "spirit, soul, or life force."

[vii] In "Byron, Postmodernism and Intertextuality" Jane Stabler understands Byron's textual attention to his poetic form to both create the effect of a linguistic sublimity and break from formal norms:
> Byron's poetry draws attention to the mystery of an ever-shifting surface and involves the reader in the formation of that surface. . . . Byron's sudden poetic breaks and gulfs were a form of sublimity, but they also violated the law of genre and the expectation that sublime poetic boundlessness would disturb its readers only within certain acceptable parameters. (866)

[viii] For example, stanza 32 of *CHP III* illustrates images living as portions of a whole or a "shatter'd guise": smiles conceal mourning, ruined walls stand as markers for battlements long since destroyed, natural things attempt to conceal their death by standing as

skeletons before their final fall, and the heart lives on as a broken piece of the remembered but lost whole.

[ix] As Christensen notes, the significance of lightning links back to Byron's marked position as Lord, highlighting the aristocratic "privilege to confound reference" (3). Drawing attention to the relationship between performative action and Nietzschean "deeds," Christensen focuses on the use of "lightening" in Nietzsche to help explain Byron's difficulty with expression in relation to poetic strength (13-14).

[x] *Canto I* has 93 stanzas; *Canto II* has 98 stanzas; *Canto III* has 118 stanzas.

[xi] In addition to Khalip's invaluable argument about ruin, not only is the presence of ruin in Byron's poetic landscape significant, but some of the critiques of Byron's poetic style link to images of ruin. In the "Preface" to "Studies in the History of the Renaissance," Walter Pater criticizes Byron for his inability to cast off his "debris," or leave his reader "only what the heat of [his] imagination has wholly fused and transformed" (643). However, I would argue that it is precisely through Byron's use of, and identification with, this debris that the significance of physical ruin comes to the foreground and his work becomes so interesting.

[xii] In "Byron ad the Mythology of Fact," Anne Barton argues that Byron turned to poetry to escape the difficulties of expressing himself in life, struggling for adequate ways to comprehend his personal turmoil and lived experiences, in addition to having to overcome his ethical aversion to poetic vocation. However, while poetry may have provided momentary solace for the writer, I read his poetry as continuing to be filled with too many meditations on the inadequacy of language to allow for such conclusive or alleviative expressions to take place purely through the act of writing.

[xiii] As Christensen explains, "The ruin of Lord Byron's name . . . does not any more than the ruin of Italy mean extinction but *allegorization: Byron* becomes the name of ruin" (original emphasis 191). The image and linguistic sustention of "Lord Byron" is synonymous with ruin. While the page affords Byron a version of autobiographical immortality, his text provides a further complication with linguistic permanence. For example, Christensen highlights the disembodiment of Byron's self through his words as in stanza 9 of *Canto IV*, when the speaker contemplates his travels and distance from England: "In this peculiar act of self-reflection, Lord Byron imagines himself burying himself (or the ashy fragments of himself) so that he may be phantomized and, a revenant, 'resume' England" (211). While Christensen claims that "ashes cannot be stitched into even a monstrous facsimile of the human body" (referring to the stitching that created Victor Frankenstein's Creature) the words that Byron wrote play a significant, if not the most significant, role in stitching—or weaving together—the image of "Lord Byron" (210). Turning to the historical body of Byron, which was not burned, Christensen hints at the significance of Byron's burnt memoirs: "the disfiguration of his body assured that he could not be fully re-membered, even by Hobhouse" (note 42, 401). By burning the memoirs, the words that sought a record on the page turn to ash. Even

though this burning did not spread to the pages of *Childe Harold*, the ceremonial act of killing the "other Being" that lives in any text of Byron's is helpful in understanding how seriously Byron strove to both embody and unbosom his own creation: "Byron" is the spirit of ruin (Christensen 191).

[xiv] See Shelley's *England in 1819* lines 13-14.

[xv] In Shelley's *Ode to the West Wind*, he pleads for the wind to scatter his leaves, the leaves of his poetry, like it scatters the autumn leaves. As the "spirit" of the wind is the "fierce" "Destroyer and preserver," the speaker asks for it to become his spirit and thus afford him the same power of creation: "Be thou me" (V.61, 14, 62). Through poetry, the speaker hopes the wind will reinvigorate his words as they are scattered and given a voice: "Make me thy lyre"; "Be through my lips to unawakened earth / The trumpeter of a prophesy!" (V.57, 68-69).

[xvi] Keats defines his understanding of Negative Capability in his Letter to George and Tom Keats, December 21, 27?, 1817:
> that is when man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact & reason. . . . This pursued through Volumes would perhaps take us no further that this, that with a great poet the sense of Beauty overcomes every other consideration, or rather obliterates all consideration. (109)

While Byron is less interested in "Beauty," I find that his exploration and establishment of poetic subjectivity effectively "obliterates" everything else about his "self." Consequently, while Keats and Byron are usually understood to be diametrically opposed, their anxieties about their strengths and weaknesses begin to look more similar the more they are read together.

CHATPER IV

CONCLUSION: AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL PRESERVATION AND ANNIHILATION

> It is a wretched thing to confess, but is a very fact that
> not one word I ever utter can be taken for granted as an
> opinion growing out of my identical nature – how can it,
> when I have no nature? When I am in a room with people
> . . . the identity of everyone in the room begins so to press
> upon me, that I am, in a very little time, annihilated.
> (*From* John Keats's Letter Richard Woodhouse, October 27, 1818)

Through the self-fragmentation or ruination embodied by Wordsworth and

Byron's "other Beings," each poet moves further away from being able to link any word

he utters with a personal or autobiographical referent. In the poetry of Wordsworth and

Byron, to exist in language is to have a disembodied or "annihilated" nature. The

identities surrounding the poet, "other Beings" or otherwise, afford him the ability to

occupy various souls, but in so doing, he risks becoming less like "himself." However, if

as de Man enigmatically asserted, "Death is a displaced name for a linguistic

predicament, and the restoration of mortality by autobiography . . . deprives and

disfigures to the precise extent that it restores," then the significance of Wordsworth and

Byron's aesthetics of ruin, not only the appearance of images of ruin and ruination but in

their specific employment, pushes discussions of autobiographical poetry far beyond

traditional understandings of historical personae and replication (*RR* 81). What are

considered to be examples of the poets' autobiographical works may even become

monuments to their self-ruin and annihilation. Without falling victim to the habit of

focusing on Wordsworth or Byron's strength as cultural figures in order to understand

their works as the poeticization of subjectivity, the problem of poetic subjectivity comes

to the forefront in the ruins of *The Ruined Cottage*, and *Childe Harold III* and *IV*, illuminating the significance of the poet's struggle in representation.

The loss of words and the annihilation of the self are predicaments that are by no means unique to Wordsworth or Byron, for example similar explorations occur throughout some of the best-known Romantic poetry.[i] While many Romantic poems explore aspects of this dilemma, I believe the ones that become the most interesting are also tangled in autobiographical and referential complications as well as "littered" with images of ruin and ruination. As Paul de Man understands, unlike a painter who "merely records and imitates sense perceptions," the poet's power lies in his representation of the interplay between the natural image and his imagination (*RR* 126). If the ruin becomes more prominent than natural images in autobiographical poems, then the experience of self-ruination, stemming from the gaps in mediation, is marked in the poet's imagination and fills his landscapes: the poem itself becomes a form of a ruined monument to the past selves and experiences of the poet. Alienation and displacement, like Keats's anxiety in the crowded room of identities, allow for the poet to find prosopopoeic substitutions through which he can attempt to stamp *some* image of a self into the lines of his work. Their textual selves, even though they may be non-identical, "linger"—phantom-like— reminding us of the identities that have been annihilated, lost, or have passed away. Ruin highlights this connection and dissipation inherent in subjectivity and the turn to a mediating "other Being." Even when the poets are gone, their words and textual souls will remain in the line of the poems, perpetually guiding us through, and arising out of, their fragments.

Notes

[i] To name a few: Wordsworth's "There was a boy," Coleridge's "Kubla Khan," Keats's "On Sitting Down to Read *King Lear* Once Again," Shelley's "Mont Blanc," and Byron's "Darkness" not only explore various effects of language and nature in the poet's search for meaning and representation, but highlight the breakdown, instability, or mutability of subjectivity.

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