

BYRON VS. MARX. MEN IN REVOLT AND "LARA" REVISITED

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"*The true difference between Byron and Shelley consists in this, that those who understand and love them consider it fortunate that Byron died in his thirty-sixth year, for he would have become a reactionary bourgeois had he lived longer; conversely, they regret Shelley's death at the age of twenty-nine, because he was a revolutionary through and through and would consistently have stood with the vanguard of socialism.*" (1)

The fragment above, attributed to Marx, comes to us via Eleonora Marx-Aveling as an opinion expressed by her father. The German philosopher, economist and politician did not publish anything on the subject himself, although he valued poetry. His comrade for life, F. Engels was less reticent: In his work "*The condition of the working class in England*" he referred to "*Shelley, the genius, the prophet, Shelley, and Byron, with his glowing sensuality and his bitter satire upon our existing society, find most of their readers in the proletariat; the bourgeoisie owns only castrated editions, family editions, cut down in accordance with the hypocritical morality of today.*" (2) The high regard in which the fathers of so-called "scientific socialism" held Shelley is obvious. For Byron the words of esteem came less easily; and when expressed they did not concern his political poetry but his satire.

Contemporary writers, experts in the history of the working class movement, are even biting in their criticism of Byron. Robert Reid in his volume on the history of Luddism, "*Land of Lost Content*", called Byron an "opportunist", an "actor" and a man who had discovered in the woes of the working people, "*something on which he was specially keen: a cause.*" (3) We come across accusations that he succumbed to the temptation to

raise the rent on his estates – and of course there is always his correspondence about the English radicals of his time, to contrast with his speeches in the House of Lords. Even within the camp of Byronism there are those who consider Byron “*a mass of inconsistencies*”, “*two-faced*” and a person who “*couldn’t think straight*”. (4)

“...*Opinion an omnipotence, whose veil
Mantles the earth with darkness, until right
And wrong are accidents...*” (5)

It is accurately observed that “*Byron's world is not a system; it is a network of systems and orders, some of which may overlap and, some of which do not*”. (6) Indeed, as a man who stood against all dogmatism, a poet with “*a heart for every fate,*” (7) he could not have helped but feel trapped by his own theories had he attempted to apply them too severely. We would add something further: that Byron, unlike so many other intellectuals, was aware of his contradictions and he lived them, broadening them to the greatest possible extent. This was his own unique method of achieving both emotional release, as well as of expanding the field of his conscious experience. Byron’s approach though, was not divorced from the general social milieu: It arose from it but was not confined within it.

THE MYSTERIES OF THE WORD

“*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. (...) And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us...*” (8)

These famous verses of the Gospel dominated western civilization for about 15 centuries, laying the foundations for religious faith and the form of spirituality. From an evangelical narrative a new world was born, orientated toward the “light of the world”; from an imitation of Christ, the martyrs and apostles of Christianity were born, and from them a religious and secular hierarchy that acted “by the grace of God”. Men were the subjects of a sovereign, who was himself subjected to the power and authority of the Kingdom of God on earth, the Christian Church. The sovereign, at the head of the landed aristocracy, had a duty to be the protector and administrator of the material foundation of that Kingdom, governing relations between the various functions or orders of his personal domain – those who would later be called the “social classes”. The sovereign’s ability to persuade lay in the strength of his weaponry, though his true power was the “love of the people”. The various orders of his subjects, the nobles, the clergy, the monks, warriors, farmers and artisans had their own internal lives, strictly segregated from each other. The fate of each was, in the vast majority of cases, determined by birth.

The traditional social order was self-perpetuating and self-sustaining. The only things that might disturb the harmony and integrity of its inner life were the sovereign’s aspirations of conquest, external threats, human vices or the hostility of the elements – not its internal structure, which was sacred and ‘unblemished’. All that until the Black Death: the plague that devoured Europe also challenged faith. The Renaissance and the printing press tested faith’s interpretation of the world, while the opening of trade routes irretrievably breached the closed medieval system. A new, powerful social order arose, which had its own laws, morality and codes of conduct. It was the class of the merchants, the bourgeoisie, which would become the vehicle of a great upheaval, of the predominance of the relative over the absolute, of dialogue versus absolutism, democracy over aristocracy. The rift would be violent, with the static reacting against the dialectic. The individual would come to occupy the centre-stage of history, not as part of a whole greater than itself, but as its main subject. A new bright era of progress, knowledge and prosperity arose for humanity. As Karl Marx commented in his

essay "On the Jewish question":

"None of the so-called rights of man, therefore, go beyond egoistic man, beyond man as a member of civil society – that is, an individual withdrawn into himself, into the confines of his private interests and private caprice, and separated from the community. (...) The sole bond holding them together is natural necessity, need and private interest, the preservation of their property and their egoistic selves." (9)

In the emergence of this 'profane' world, however, the Sacred exacted revenge for its dissolution. Countless individuals took up the task of defending the absolute against the relative, the glory of Man against "lethargic prosperity", (10) of passion as a fuel for the soul's flight against its repression for the benefit social moderation. "In the beginning" was the word again, a word that traces its origin to the Promised Land, extracted initially from the medieval mythologies ("romans") to be used by its magicians-priests. Romanticism constituted a new idolatry linked to a parallel universe where words, expressions and symbols were raised up and seen as superhuman entities. Its heaven was the "Kingdom of the Gods" - destined to be the permanent residence of heroes that succeed in entering by following their inner calling. A system of idealism so emotionally loaded as to constitute an alternative reality, able to override and thus transform the material word. At the core of the romantic approach lay a discomfort and discontent that acted as a magnet for a miscellaneous multitude: irrationalists, escapists, artists, rebels socially marginalized by oppressive regimes, desperate lovers, peoples resorting to an internal sun and missing the external, seekers of eternal youth and reactionary enemies of social progress, nature lovers homesick for a lost harmony, visionaries and fools. All these agreed on only one thing: that man is not and cannot be "*a sad jar of atoms,*" (11) even if he appears as such. Every possible expression was recruited to awaken and mobilize the soul and spirit – and words with initial capitals raised millions of exclamation marks like bayonets:

*"...yet he knew
How to make madness beautiful, and cast
O'er erring deeds and thoughts a heavenly hue
Of words, like sunbeams, dazzling as they pass
The eyes, which o'er them shed tears feelingly and fast."* (12)

One can, however, also discern another unacknowledged consensus: that man rises up from a state of harmony – either that of Mother Nature or some other “female” concept like Tradition or Country – and is thrown into a world of conflict, which he is called on to define using his own powers against a universe that threatens to crush him, until he is finally called to enter an exalted state, a higher order of harmony, his “final homeland”. The Romantic human being is usually classed based on his orientation to the three main stages of his evolutionary process. He may remain in his harmonic beginning, he may unsuccessfully waste his spiritual energy battling for otherness, or in the end accomplish a glorious entrance into the world of Myth. Lurking beside his every step, however, is the peril of a renewed fall, a regression to a previous state:

*"...And the soft quiet hamlet where he dwelt
Is one of that complexion which seems made
For those who their mortality have felt,
And sought a refuge from their hopes decayed
In the deep umbrage of a green hill's shade..."* (13)

Having written a rather sentimental poem dedicated to the memory of Charles Fox, Byron entered the world of political poetry with Childe Harold's Pilgrimage. Harold is a wandering knight who traces the lost ideals of his order in an era of decay. He himself is also a son of perdition. In the preface of his work, Byron maintained a distance from the Middle Ages, referring to its "*monstrous mummeries*" that should not be regretted, but the poem nonetheless emits a certain nostalgia for the lost chivalry – not the real one, but the romantic, the mythical ideal. To the principles of that chivalry we are brought by the medieval "*Livre de Lancelot del Lac*", where the Lady of the Lake explains that the Order of Knights originated "*when in this world envy and greed started to spread and when force started to outclass right. All then were equal in rank and nobility, but when the weak were no more able to oppose or resist the strong, men were set over them with the mission to vouch for them and to defend them, men who had to protect the right of the miserable, to govern according to righteousness and to fight the oppressors, bringing an end to their offences and malfeasances. For the accomplishment of that mission from all the men were chosen the most valuable, the greater, the most capable, the mightier, the best-built, those who were distinguished for their kindness, bravery and dare, those who had the noblest gifts in body and soul...*" (14)

One realises that the roman has no ties with the real history of human society, something with which Byron agrees in the preface of Childe Harold when he observes that "*I fear that Sir Tristram and Sir Lancelot were no better than they should be, although very poetical personages and true knights 'sans peur' though not 'sans reproche'.*" Nevertheless, Byron doesn't seem willing to throw out the Childe of romantic idealization with the bathwater of tradition. Chivalry exists on the romantic plane as a value per se or as an idol – and the Pieta of the "medieval mummery" only helps to make it accessible to all. Every man may be a knight or turn to a knight under the spell of poetry:

*"Awake, ye sons of Spain! Awake! Advance
Lo! Chivalry, your ancient goddess, cries,*

.....

In every peal she calls – 'Awake! Arise!' " (15)

In Childe Harold we meet another political concept of Byron which is purely medieval and chivalric: the notion of a hierarchy of human virtues which corresponds with the social hierarchy. The leader must be a noble, brave, mighty but self-disciplined man, in contrast with the man of the lower masses, who may be fierce but unrefined or gentle but weak and thus unable to achieve a higher goal. Therefore the poet expresses his surprise when he faces his concept reversed by reality:

*"Such be the sons of Spain, and strange her fate!
They fight for freedom, who were never free;
A kingless people for a nerveless state,
Her vassals combat when their chieftains flee..." (16)*

The two first Cantos of Childe Harold are probably the most radical of Byron's poems, being a legacy difficult for him to surpass or bypass. If the people can show virtues worthy of the aristocracy and at a time when nobility proves itself worthless, if a woman, the Lady of Saragossa (17), may prove to be a real Lady of the Lake, then Monarchy and Aristocracy are useless if not parasitic. Byron appears as a democrat not because he focuses on the form of the polity, the Republic, but because he avoids doing so.

"Here all were noble, save nobility;

None hugged a conqueror's chain save fallen Chivalry!" (18)

The “*Curse of Minerva*” appears as the natural follow-up of Childe Harold. This time the poet concerns himself with the ruling elite of his own country. In that work we can clearly trace Byron’s romantic ideological starting point, aesthetically as well as politically: An ancient Greek goddess, Pallas Athene, speaks to the poet and expresses her loathing for his country. It is her sacred outrage at the vandalism of her temple by Lord Elgin. The Goddess uses Elgin as a focus for an indictment of the whole of British society, however, since the Scottish noble exemplifies the most extreme result of its moral decline:

"Hers were the deeds that taught her lawless son / To do what oft Britannia's self had done" claims the Goddess through the poet. “...That blush of shame / Proclaims thee Briton, once a noble name; / First of the mighty, foremost of the free / Now honour'd less by all, and least by me”. (19) Byron attributes to the Goddess a universal quality – he indirectly identifies her with the spirit of the Glorious Revolution of 1688, the social consciousness of liberal England. That spirit of liberty and might, as Byron defines it, withdraws giving its place to the spirit of exploitation, injustice, treachery and treason. His use of contrasts is revealing: a society, which has put “*blessed paper credit*” (20) in the place of moral values is finally a weak, degenerate society that will not only betray its friends and allies but ultimately decompose.

*"If one with wit the parent brood disgrace,
Believe him bastard of a brighter race:
Still with his hireling artists het him prate,
and Folly's praise repay for Wisdom's hate;
Long of their patron's gusto let them tell,*

Whose noblest, native gusto is - to sell..." (21)

This motif, the battle between the sacred and the profane, runs throughout Byron's poetry and dominates Romantic thought. And it is on this precise point that Marxism differs from even the most extreme Romantic anti-capitalism, such as expressed by Byron in various parts of his poetry. According to Marx, it is man's social being, his position in society and production, that determines his consciousness. (22) In this context, everything beautiful that the old world had to show, everything sacred and "immaculate", reflected feudal productive relations and social interactions and was destined to vanish in the framework of a capitalist economy centered on the individual. The solution was not in the past but in the future.

"THE ROMANTIC ILLUSIONS OF THE LANDOWNER"

In the beginning of the 19th century, British society still had the old feudal structures producing social and economic quality. According to an analysis by sociologist Eli Halevi in his work "*A History of the English people in 1815*", the "*private initiative of the landowners had made England, at the opening of the 19th century, the leading agricultural state in the world. Innovators had increased the fertility of the soil by continuous rotation of crops and by manures(...)* Societies were formed by the landowners of a particular district for the joint search of markets, encouragement of experiments, and popularization of discoveries; in contrast with the world of manufacture, the world of agriculture was characterized by a strong sense of solidarity among producers..."

"Of all the farmers of Europe the English were most foreign to the spirit of toilsome, severe and sometimes sordid routine. They were intelligent capitalists - on the alert for any new method of making money, for every opportunity of

acquiring knowledge. In Lincolnshire and Durham it was the regular custom for a good farmer to make from time to time a tour on horseback through England in order to keep in touch with the progress which was being made in other counties. With the landlord's connivance, the tenants became professional speculators as well as capitalists..."

"The profits of agriculture had increased enormously. In 1814 all witnesses agreed in estimating that rent had risen 100 per cent, perhaps even 150 per cent during the last twenty or twenty-five years. The extent of land under cultivation had increased in an equally high ratio." The farmer's profits were exactly equal to the rent, at 10 per cent of the capital. "Doubtless the harmony of interests between landowners and farmers was far from being complete." With the rise in the price of commodities, the farmer would see his profit rising too; and when his contract with the landowner expired, the latter would raise the rent accordingly. "So long as the rent remained fixed though, it was as much to their interest as to that of the proprietors that the market price of meat and corn should rise."

The agrarian proletariat stood as a separate social category. They saw their wages rising rapidly after 1793 but started to realise that a rise in wages did not lead to a rise in the standard of living. This would lead to riots in 1816. But what of the small farmers, the yeomen? They were slowly vanishing, since their small capital "*was powerless to resist for long a fall of prices.*" However, "*the decline of the yeoman class, rapid during the 18th century, was apparently checked during the years of agricultural prosperity that terminated precisely in the year 1815. After 1815 it proceeded with headlong rapidity...*" The distribution of land among many owners in England, "*was the natural result of the nature of British aristocracy. This aristocracy controlled all the machinery of government. (...) Nevertheless, this aristocracy was not closed to newcomers. Since 1688 financiers, bankers, merchants, and manufacturers had constantly exerted a decisive influence on the affairs of the nation. It was the acquisition of land which enabled these new men to insinuate themselves into the ranks of the old aristocracy...*" (23)

Using Marx's aforementioned formula we may be led to the conclusion that the rural social strata functioning in the field of the agrarian economy showed a great degree of social cohesion, preserving what Marx would call "*the landowner's romantic illusions*". (24) In that context a political platform of "friends of the people" could be sought for and structured on the basis of a need for "national unity" which was threatened by "rampant speculation". That platform would be an effort for a consensus against the centrifugal tendencies created by the economic crisis, which broke out with the Napoleonic Wars. It is the objection raised by the Whigs against the Frame Bill.

THE LEGACY OF ROBIN HOOD

The Luddite movement unquestionably bears the hallmarks of Romanticism. The effectiveness of this Romantic method evades both its accusers, who claim the Luddites were enemies of technological progress, as well as the Marxists who consider Luddites pioneers of the working class struggle for emancipation. The letters sent by "Robin Hood's Cave in Nottingham Forest" may demand that proprietors take down the frames - machines "harmful to the community" - but in their anthems they sing "*give us our old prices as we have had before*" (25), in their *Declaration* they refer to the old protective legislation of Charles the 2nd and they end with the cry "*God protect the Trade*". (26) The workers of Nottingham look to the past. Their successors in Yorkshire, much harder and more violent than the first, proved to be equally romantic, at least in terms of their methods, when they gathered at a spot associated with Robin Hood (27) before the attack on Cartwright's mill that determined their fate.

Defending the Luddites, Byron uses arguments of the sort that find a

fertile soil in the consciousness of his own class. To Samuel Rodgers, he proposed “*conciliatory measures*” (28) in order to avoid “*the most unhappy consequences*”. In his parliamentary speech in the House of Lords he referred indirectly again to a past era when the economy was self-sustaining: “*It is to observe that ye work thus done is far inferior in quality, hardly marketable at home and hurried over with a view to exportation. It was called, in the cant of the trade, by the name of Spider-work.*” (29) Byron stands for the quality of the products, treating it as a virtue that must be protected beyond any tradability they may have. He makes one mistake though; stuck in his romantic perspective, he refuses to understand that the problem over the introduction of the new frames, the question of producing cheaper products, is not just a matter of “*enrichment of a few monopolists*” as he claims, but a means for the survival of the middle class manufacturers in the midst of an economic crisis, due to a lack of markets.

Approaching the new problem using the terms of an economic and social past, Byron missed the pulse of social changes. In the House of Lords though, he took the romantic argument he expressed in the Curse of Minerva to the extreme: he demanded that the elite of his country compensate the starving populace:

“*When the Portuguese suffered under the retreat of the French, every arm was stretched out, every hand was opened; from the rich man's largesse to the widow's mite, all was bestowed, to enable them to rebuild their villages and restore their granaries. And at this moment, when thousands of misguided but unfortunate fellow-countrymen are struggling with the hardships of extremity and hunger, as your charity began abroad, it should end at home. A much less sum, a tithe of the bounty bestowed on Portugal, even if these men (which I cannot admit without enquiry) could not have been restored to their employment, would have rendered unnecessary the tender mercies of the bayonet and the gibbet.*” (30)

Having started from a mistaken diagnosis, Byron suggests an equally theoretically wrong solution. Knowing what followed we can now understand that no charity could have stopped the rapid disappearance of the yeomen from the countryside, which was dramatically accelerated three hours after Byron's speech. No philanthropy could overthrow the law of supply and demand or restore British society to past levels of social cohesion. The era of benevolent kings was vanishing faster than the kings themselves. Byron's suggestion though, contained an idea that was truly explosive at its core: that the dominant classes should compensate the weak in times of crisis, using the wealth they had gathered in times of peace and war. An astonished House of Lords was faced with a Childe Harold crying: Do you claim to be a knight? Open your wallet!

No one in his audience intended to pay for the misfortunes of the British worker. The noble Lords preferred "*a Jeffries for a judge*", justifying Byron's accusations in the "*Curse of Minerva*". Using the second person plural in the ending of his speech, Byron exempted no one in the House. "*I abused everything and everybody*" he writes to Francis Hodgson. (31) He was no longer Childe Harold, the passive observer and commentator, nor the man who hears the accusations of the Goddess and apologizes. He was by now a Corsair, Lara.

A KNIGHT OF DESPAIR

No other Byronic hero is as reminiscent of the poet in the "Age of Despair" as Lara. Also "*left by his sire, too young such loss to know*" (32), Lara abandons his dwelling place - "*a gothic pile*" (33) - and vanishes for years in a foreign country to return with a loyal, devoted servant in an era when "*the feudal chiefs had gain'd such sway, their infant monarch hardly*

reign'd" (34) and "*the serfs contemn'd the one, and hated both*". The similarities with Regency England are more than obvious.

The tale appears to the reader to resemble a nightmare. There is nothing bright in the poem – no serene natural landscapes, no references to Greece or to some love affair throughout the narration. As a nightmare can reflect the unconscious or semi-conscious tendencies of a subject without necessarily making sense, so Lara describes many things without necessarily correlating absolutely to reality.

Byron's unapproachable hero, the man "*with more capacity for love than earth bestows on most*" and whose "*early dreams of good outstripp'd the truth*" (35) encounters a strange guest at a ball attended by fellow aristocrats in the House of Otho. This stranger seems to bear a grudge against Lara due to some unknown incident that took place in some foreign land but Lara does not recognize him. The stranger appears to know him well, however, and is ready to reveal truths about Lara's past. The two men agree to meet the following day but Lara's page kills the stranger. The next day, Otho defends the honor of his guest, who does not appear and Lara injures Otho badly, but without killing him.

*"They raised the bleeding Otho, and the Leech
Forbade all present question, sign, and speech;"* (36)

Let's have a closer look at the analogies: with which aristocrat did Byron cross swords while abroad, without being able to recognize him? The only person who fits the description is Lord Elgin again. The two men never met in person but Byron greatly damaged the Scottish noble's reputation. In a social meeting, Elgin would have recognized Byron but

not the opposite. Even the stranger's name, Sir Ezzelin, seems like an anagram of Elgin's name. If we permit ourselves to speculate further, we might say that the figure of Count Otho conceals Lord Holland, since the monarchs of Holland were descended from Count Otto of Nassau. With his speech in the House of Lords, Byron hurt his mentor, Lord Holland, as he had done in the past with his satire "*English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*". (37)

Lara starts a war against the other feudal chiefs by freeing his serfs and creating a small army from them. Due to the lack of discipline of his men, his army is defeated:

*"Fresh with the nerve the new-born impulse strung,
The first success to Lara's numbers clung:
But that vain victory hath ruin'd all;
They form no longer to their leader's call:"*
(38)

These facts make more or less sense. What seems like a mismatch lies in the following verses:

*"Some reason urged, whate'er it was,
to shun Inquiry into deeds at distance done;
By mingling with his own the cause of all,
E'en if he fail'd, he still delay'd his fall"* (39)

If our interpretation is valid, it is obvious that Byron was afraid that Elgin would pay him back in his own coin, gathering information about Byron's "unnatural" activities in Athens. It wouldn't be difficult for him to find witnesses for the purpose – real or fake. The poet had already published "*The Giaour*," through which there is always the suspicion that Byron tried to forestall the spread of rumors against him. Should we consider his Parliamentary speech part of the same strategy? Could he really believe that he could find refuge by using radical rhetoric in the case of Luddism and the Catholic Emancipation?

Byron tried in 1815 to kill the radical inside him. On the 19th of April he read that in France the Bourbons had been restored to power. All hopes for a political reform in Europe that might bring Britain back "to Freedom's cause" had evaporated. "*I have long despised myself and man, but I never spat in the face of my species before – 'O fool! I shall go mad.'*" (40) Within a month, on May 15th he began to write Lara. The man who claimed while addressing Parliament that he was mindful of "*the public without than the persons within*" (41) in Lara insists that he used those people for selfish reasons and for "*a secret pride / To do what few or none would do beside.*" (42)

"*What cared he for the freedom of the crowd?
He raised the humble but to bend the proud.*" (39)

Such contemptuous phrases, written by a man raised in poverty and disrespect, can only be explained in psychological terms. Byron obviously had a misanthropic streak, which did not, however, represent his whole personality. Opposed to his own class and with no desire to approach the common people any longer, the poet was totally alienated. At the end of his tale he makes a move of deep political significance:

connecting Lara with the Corsair he not only kills Lara at the end but also Britain's favorite hero. And having the feudal chiefs kill Lara, he turns his readers' anger against the dominant class of his country. Was this done consciously, one wonders, or not?

Byron's political path, passing through self-exile, poses a quandary for the researcher. It is clear that something inside him had broken. It is obvious in the following verses:

"...some watchword for the fight
Must vindicate the wrong, and warp the right;
Religion – freedom – vengeance – what you will,
A word's enough to raise mankind to kill;
Some factious phrase by cunning caught and spread,
That guilt may reign, and wolves and worms be fed!" (43)

This is a world away from the picture in Childe Harold of "*vassals combating when their chieftains flee*". In Lara, the rebels are again able only to externalize their blind rage against their former despots. There is no other sentiment or real purpose in their action. And that is what exactly causes the destruction of Lara's troops, since

"In blind confusion on the foe they press,
And think to snatch is to secure success.
The lust of booty, and the thirst of hate,
Lure on the broken brigands to their fate..." (44)

Byron's political pessimism overflows in Lara. We see him much more moderate in the third Canto of Childe Harold, where the poet criticizes the French revolution and radicalism (and probably himself indirectly):

*"But good with ill they also overthrew,
Leaving but ruins, wherewith to rebuild
Upon the same foundation, and renew
Dungeons and thrones, which the same hour re-fill'd,
As heretofore, because ambition was self-will'd". (45)*

The verses which follow are also eloquent:

*"...they who war
With their own hopes, and have been vanquish'd, bear
Silence, but not submission: in his lair
Fix'd Passion holds his breath, until the hour
Which shall atone for years; non need despair:
It came, it cometh, and will come, - the power
To punish or forgive - in **One** we shall be slower." (46)*

The necessary reappraisal of goals needs a new kind of leadership. Against all odds, Byron insists on clinging to the ideal of 1688, which no longer seems to concern anyone. (47) In order to assent to the social struggles in Britain, which he cannot follow from abroad, he looks for Washingtons, Grattans, Sheridans, Falieros (48) "noble hearts" (49) but he does not know such men (50). He considers the Jacobins solely responsible for the return of tyranny in France, although he vindicates the ordinary people who followed them. He blames the British radicals

for being pale imitations of the Jacobins, (51) although he acknowledges that radicals of the sort of Carlile "suffer for conscience's sake" (52). Harrowby, whom he ranked among those who "*value Life at less than a stocking,*" (53), he came to describe after the Cato Street Conspiracy as "*poor Harrowby, in whose house I have been five hundred times at dinners and parties*". (54) Is it a display of remorse that his poetry may have inspired bloody conspirators or has the consciousness of being a bond owner started to crystallize within him? Again, in another letter, he identifies himself with the Luddites. (55) It is not a contradiction: Like Byron, the Luddites wished ultimately to restore a lost unity. The radicals, on the contrary, to Byron's uninformed mind, (56) seemed to be destroying what was left of the old world without any guarantee for the final outcome.

Whatever happened to Byron, the Carbonari movement in Italy would uplift his spirits once again. (57) His liberalism turned to national causes. In the letter where he admits that for Britain "*I see nothing left for it but a republic now*", he adds later that "*if I came home (...) I should take a decided part in politics with pen and person and (...) in the house but am not yet quite sure what part*". (58) Even with his rusted armor of '88 though, Byron would participate in the great struggle for Liberty in Europe, in the two movements which opposed the tyranny of the "*impious alliance*" (59), of which Lord Liverpool's Britain was a founding member. In that struggle, Byron would revive his old heroes, he would be Harold again, but this time with a horse and sword. He would become the Corsair raiding the Seraglio of the Ottoman despot, Lara searching for his dead soldiers to accompany him:

"There are materials in this people, and a noble energy, if well directed. But who is to direct them? No matter. Out of such times heroes spring" (60) he notes in his Journal in Ravenna. But "*the populace are not interested, only the higher and middle orders. I wish that the peasantry were,*" (61) he writes in his Journal, while in a letter to Douglas Kinnaird, he underlines his observation that "*the merchants are buying up corn to supply the armies*".

(62) At Messolonghi, inspired by the generosity of a country woman, he will be quick to acknowledge to the agrarian class the privilege of innocence which only communion with nature and ignorance of speculation may assure: "*The peasantry*," he said, "*are by far the most kind, humane, and honest part of the population; they redeem the character of their countrymen. The other classes are so debased by slavery; accustomed, like all slaves, never to speak truth, but only what will please their masters, that they cannot be trusted. Greece would not be worth saving but for the peasantry*"...
(63)

STAR OF THE SLEEPLESS

As an aristocrat Byron came to Greece and the Greeks wept for their "Milord". In his last two poetical works we trace a new language of radicalism, which would be interesting to follow. His report from pre-revolutionary Ravenna that "*There is in fact, no law or government at all; and it is wonderful how well things go on without them*", (64) seems like a precursor of the contemporary theories of communitarianism. (65) His conception in "*The Island*" of an exotic society with common property, free love and harmony, (66) bears a striking resemblance to the research of the Polish anthropologist, Bronisław Malinowski in the Tobrian Islands one hundred years later. (67) But even in the field of the economy, a comparative study of Byron's poetical accounts with those of Marx leads to very interesting results:

In his "*Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*" (1844), a young Marx notes:

"Thus political economy – despite its worldly and voluptuous appearance – is a true moral science, the most moral of all the sciences. Self-renunciation, the

renunciation of life and of all human needs, is its principal thesis. The less you eat, drink and buy books; the less you go to the theatre, the dance hall, the public house; the less you think, love, theorise, sing, paint, fence, etc., the more you save – the greater becomes your treasure which neither moths nor rust will devour – your capital. The less you are, the less you express your own life, the more you have, i.e., the greater is your alienated life, the greater is the store of your estranged being..." (68)

Byron accordingly comments in Don Juan:

*"Why call the miser miserable? as
I said before: the frugal life is his,
Which in a saint or cynic ever was
The theme of praise: a hermit would not miss
Canonization for the self-same cause,
And wherefore blame gaunt wealth's austerities?
Because, you'll say, nought calls for such a trial; –
Then there's more merit in his self-denial."* (69)

Marx also comments: "It is therefore another great achievement of modern English political economy to have declared rent of land to be the difference in the interest yielded by the worst and the best land under cultivation; to have [exposed] the landowner's romantic illusions – his alleged social importance and the identity of his interest with the interest of society, a view still maintained by Adam Smith after the Physiocrats; and to [have] anticipated and prepared the movement of the real world which will transform the landowner into an ordinary, prosaic capitalist..." (70)

...but almost in parallel with the English political economy, Byron comments in the "Age of Bronze" turning against his own class:

*"The doubling rental? What an evil's peace !
In vain the prize excites the ploughman's skill,
In vain the Commons pass their patriot bill;
The landed interest --- (you may understand
The phrase much better leaving out the land) ---
The land self-interest groans from shore to shore,
For fear that plenty should attain the poor.
Up, up again, ye rents ! exalt your notes,
Or else the ministry will lose their votes,
And patriotism, so delicately nice,
Her loaves will lower to the market price;..."* (71)

Marx indirectly refers to Byron in his critique of the "Young England" political movement in the third chapter of his "*Manifesto of the Communist Party*" - speaking on the "*literary battle of the English aristocracy*" - "*at times, by its bitter, witty and incisive criticism, striking the bourgeoisie to the very heart's core; but always ludicrous in its effect, through total incapacity to comprehend the march of modern history.*" (72) Even thus, Byron will remain a historical singularity by virtue of his death alone, which has a significance of its own.

Dying in the town of free men, Byron rightfully enters the Kingdom of Myth as another melancholy star in the train of the "Sun of the

Sleepless". Thousands of men would feel his suffocation as their own. The process of romantic alchemy that rendered Byron an archetype had already begun though. Byron did not participate in the Greek revolution only personally but also through his poetic self: The head of the Greek insurgents, Prince Alexander Ipsilantis, the man who declared war on the Sultan really constitutes a Byronic hero: An offspring of Black Sea Hellenism, Ipsilantis' family served the Sultan for generations with dragomans and rulers in Moldavia and Vlachia. Ipsilantis' father had defected to Russia and the Sultan had beheaded his grandfather in revenge. In Russia, the young Ipsilantis had serve the Czar as an adjutant and in the battle of Dresden against Napoleon had lost his left hand. Declaring war against the Ottomans, the Greek leader avenged his grandfather, as well as the tyranny that the Greeks had suffered for centuries. He also distributed a radical manifesto under the title "*Fight for Faith and Homeland*" in which he stood for Democracy and said that "*the peoples of Europe who struggle to increase their Liberty call us to imitate [them]*".

Prince Alexander Ipsilantis constructed his general military plan in the town of Chisinau, which then belonged to Russia. His collaborators and advisors were the radical Russian general Prince Michail Orlov and the officers Ivan Poussin and Pavel Pestel. (73) In Chisinau, he met with the poets and Byron admirers Alexander Pushkin and Vladimir Rayevski, who encouraged him in his efforts. After some initial battles against the Ottoman army, the troops of Ipsilantis - consisting of Greek and Balkan warriors, youngsters and philhellenes - had to face a betrayal of their hopes for Russian intervention and a religious anathema that the Greek Patriarch in Constantinople was forced to issue. The turn of events was marked by behaviors similar to Lara's troops and the rebels were crushed in Vlachia. As the revolution progressed to mainland Greece, Ipsilantis himself was captured by the Austrians and imprisoned in Munkac Castle for years, where his health was irreparably damaged, leading to his death. Ipsilantis' Russian friends would hold "freedom's banner against the wind," organizing the Decembrist Revolt against the Czar in 1825. Ahead of them, the poet Condradi Ryleyev walked to the gallows, holding Byron's poems in his heart if not in his pocket. He was

accompanied by colonel Pestel, while Rayevski and Orlof would be sentenced to exile in Siberia. The more moderate Decembrists, Princes Sergei Trubetskoy and Evgeny Obolensky, especially the latter, are real meta-Byronic heroes, men who fought against their own class for the emancipation of the serfs and to establish a constitutional monarchy in Russia, along British lines.

The defeat of the Decembrist revolt would lead the revolutionary movement in Russia down different paths. The Russian nihilists combined the romantic dedication to the peasantry with tactics of the most extreme terrorism. They would leave their imprint on the Narodnic agrarian movement and the Social Revolutionaries (SR), which were divided prior to the Revolution of 1917. Their left wing would unsuccessfully attempt to assassinate the Bolshevik leader V.I.Lenin, discerning in him and his regime the future tyrant of their homeland. Byron's image and his romantic protests would fade before the invasion of new models and ideologies but would not vanish entirely: on the contrary, leading figures like Alexander Herzen and Michail Bakunin expressed their admiration for the poet. And in the second half of the 19th century, we meet another Byronic hero in the face of the father of Russian anarchism, Prince Piotr Kropotkin, who would deny his titles of nobility, be disinherited by his father for his republican ideals and devote himself to science as well as to political activism – which would later cause him to turn to anarchism.

In Kropotkin's Memoirs, we observe Byron's presence through the catalytic influence of the Prince's mother. (74)

Finally, concerning Byron's detractor, Karl Marx, it must be noted that, towards the end of his life, he would flirt with the idea of a new kind of society in Russia, based on the then existing agrarian commune and its communitarian values. That new society would use the products of

technological progress without having passed through the phase of a capitalist economy. In a letter to the Russian radical Vera Zasulich, two years before his death, old Marx would abandon speak of the prospect of preserving the rural Russian commune by way of its further development - something which "*merges with the general trend of Russian society, of whose regeneration it is the price.*" (75)

"...As the commune is bled dry and tortured, its land rendered barren and poor, the literary lackeys of the "new pillars of society" ironically depict the wounds inflicted on it as so many symptoms of its spontaneous decrepitude. They allege that it is dying a natural death and they would be doing a good job by shortening its agony. As far as this is concerned, it is no longer a matter of solving a problem; it is simply a matter of beating an enemy" declares Marx in an almost Byronic "poetry of politics".

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4. Peter Cochran, "Byron's Romantic Politics" p.8.
5. Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, Canto IV, XCIII.

6. Jerome J. McGann, "Don Juan in Context" (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1976) 103 (Quoted in Eric Strand's "Byron's Don Juan as a global allegory", *Studies in Romanticism*, Vol. 43, No. 4).
7. Letter to Thomas Moore, July 10th 1817 (BLJ V, 250).
8. Gospel of St. John, 1: 1-14, King James Bible.
9. Karl Marx, "On *The Jewish Question*", article in Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher, February 1844.
10. "My Dictionary", Ravenna, May 1st 1821 (BLJ VIII, 107).
11. "Detached Thoughts" 96, October 15, 1821 – May 18, 1821 (BLJ IX, 46).
12. Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, Canto III, LXXVII.
13. Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, Canto IV, XXXII.
14. Livre du Lancelot du Lac, translation from the Preface of the Greek edition of Raymond Llull's "Book of Chivalry", written by Harilaos Gitakos.
15. Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, Canto I, XXXVII.
16. Childe Harold's Pilgrimage , Canto I, LXXXVI.
17. Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, Canto I, LV-LVI.
18. Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, Canto I, LXXXV.
19. The Curse of Minerva, 32-35.

20. The Curse of Minerva, 185.

21. The Curse of Minerva, 109-114.

22. *"In the social production of their life, men enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will, relations of production which correspond to a definite stage of development of their material productive forces. The sum total of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation on which rises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the social, political, and intellectual life process in general. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness. At a certain stage of their development, the material productive forces of society come in conflict with the existing relations of production, or -- what is but a legal expression for the same thing -- with the property relations within which they have been at work hitherto. From forms of development of the productive forces these relations turn into fetters. Then begins an epoch of social revolution"* (Karl Marx, Preface to "Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy").

23. Elie Halevy, "History of the English People at 1815", Book II, Chapter 1.

24. Karl Marx, "Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts", Second Manuscript: "Antithesis of Capital and Labour. Landed Property and Capital" (1844).

25. Kevin Binfield, "Writings of the Luddites", p. 195.

26. Kevin Binfield, "Writings of the Luddites", p. 89.

27. *"Before the Sturday evening at the Crispin was out, a probable date for the attack had been fixed – the night of Saturday, April 11th. Also a rallying place where the march on the mill could begin was agreed. (...) The site agreed on was a stone obelisk in a field belonging to Sir George Armytage in thw shadow of Kirklees. It went by the odd name of the Dump Steeple. Local people believed this to be a corruption of Doom Steeple. Legend said it was the place where a doomed man, fleeing his pursuers, might seek safety. It was the place to which*

the dying Robin Hood had fled." (Robert Reid, "Land of Lost Content – The Luddite Revolt", p. 98).

28. To Samuel Rogers, February 4th 1812 (BLJ II, 161).
29. To Lord Holland, February 25th 1812 (BLJ II, 165). See also, Frank Peel's "The Rising of the Luddites", 4th edition, (1968) p. 71.
30. Frank Peel's "The Rising of the Luddites", 4th edition, (1968) p. 74.
31. To Francis Hodgson March 5th 1812. "*His speech was full of fancy, wit, and invective, but not exempt from affectation nor well reasoned, nor at all suited to our common notions of Parliamentary eloquence*" (Lord Holland: "Memoirs" p. 123, quoted in BLJ II, 167)
32. Lara, Canto 1, II.
33. Lara, Canto 1, III.
34. Lara, Canto II, IX.
35. Lara, Canto I, XVIII.
36. Lara, Canto II, V.
37. The reader is also referred to Byron's letter to Lord Holland of the 5th of May 1812 (a week after his speech in the House of Lords) where Byron refers to Dryden's ("Pope's") couplet: "*Forgiveness to the injured (sic) doth belong / but they ne'er pardon, who have done the wrong*". Leslie Marchand comments that Byron "referred to the wrong he had done Lord Holland in his accusations in English Bards and Scotch Reviewers".
38. Lara, Canto II, XI.
39. Lara, Canto II, IX.
40. Journal, April 19th 1814 (BLJ III, 257)
41. "Detouched Thoughts", October 1821-May 1822 (BLJ IX, 17)

42. Lara, Canto I, XVIII.

43. Lara, Canto II, VIII.

44. Lara, Canto II, XI.

45. Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, Canto III, LXXXIV.

46. Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, Canto III, LXXXVI.

47. *"An Englishman, a friend to liberty, having understood that the Neapolitans permit even foreigners to contribute to their good cause, is desirous that they should do him the honour of accepting a thousand louis, which he takes the liberty of offering (...) As a member of the English House of Peers, he would be a traitor to the principles which have placed the reigning family of England to the throne, if he were not grateful for the noble lesson so lately given both to people and to kings..."* (Byron's letter to the Neapolitan Carbonari, October 1820, BLJ VII, 187-88)

48. To Murray, July 17th 1820: "... prince *with* the Commons against the aristocracy..." (BLJ VII, 131-32).

49. See, The Irish Avatar:

*"Yes, I loved thee and thine, though thou art not my land,
I have known noble hearts and great souls in thy sons*

.....
Thy Grattan, thy Curran, thy Sheridan..."

50. To Douglas Kinnaird, October 26th 1819: "You have no man yet (always excepting Burdett - {& you} & H. and the Gentlemanly leaven of your two-penny loaf of rebellion". (BLJ VI, 233)

51. To Hobhouse, October 12th 1821 (BLJ VIII, 240)

52. Don Juan, Preface to Cantos VI, VII and VIII.

53. "Ode to the Framers of the Framing Bill", stanza 1.

54. To Hobhouse, March 29th 1820 (BLJ VII, 62)
55. To Douglas Kinnaird, November 22th 1820 (BLJ VII, 236)
56. To John Murray, September 24th 1821: "*For two years (except two or three articles cut out and sent by you by the post) I never read a newspaper which was not forced upon me by some accident and know upon the whole as little of England as you all do of Italy.*" (BLJ VIII, 220)
57. To Lady Byron, March 1st 1821: "*It is a war of men with monarchs, and will spread like a spark on the dry, rank grass of the vegetable desert. What is it with you and your English you don't know, for ye sleep. What it is with us here, I know, for it is before, and around, and within us.*" (BLJ VIII, 89)
58. To Hobhouse, October 12th 1821. (BLJ VIII, 240).
59. Ravenna Journal, January 8th 1821 (BLJ VIII, 19).
61. Ravenna Journal, January 24th 1821 (BLJ VIII, 34).
62. To Douglas Kinnaird, November 22th 1820 (BLJ VII, 236)
63. William Parry, "The Last Days of Lord Byron", Chapter IV.
64. To Thomas Moore, Ravenna, January 2nd 1821 (BLJ VIII, 55).
65. "Communitarians are not majoritarians. The success of the democratic experiment in ordered liberty (rather than unlimited license) depends, not on fiat or force, but on building shared values, habits and practices that assure respect for one another's rights and regular fulfillment of personal, civic, and collective responsibilities. Successful policies are accepted because they are recognized to be legitimate, rather than imposed. (...) At the same time divergent moral positions need not lead to cacophony...". (Responsive Communitarian Platform - <http://www.gwu.edu/~ccps/platformtext.html>).

Classical anarchism constitutes a form of communitarianism largely of agrarian nature. See P. Kropotkin's "Modern Science and Anarchism:

"One way or another, socialism must become more popular, more communalistic, and less dependent upon indirect government through elected representatives. It must become more self-governing." See also Murray Bookchin's "Thoughts on Libertarian Municipalism" (<http://www.social-ecology.org/1999/08/thoughts-on-libertarian-municipalism/>).

66. The Island, Canto 1, X.

67. See, Borislav Malinowski's, "The Sexual Life of Savages in North-Western Melanesia" (1929). Also Wilhelm Reich's "The Invasion of Compulsory Sex-Morality" (1934).

68. Karl Marx, Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts, Third Manuscript: "Human Requirements and Division of Labour Under the Rule of Private Property" (1844).

69. Don Juan, Canto XII, VII.

70. Karl Marx, Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts, Second Manuscript: "Antithesis of Capital and Labour. Landed Property and Capital" (1844).

71. The Age of Bronze, XIV.

72. Karl Marx: Manifesto of the Communist Party, 3d Chapter.

73. See Ioannes Filimon's "Historical Essay on the Greek Revolution" Vol.1. (Ιωάννης Φιλήμων: Δοκίμιον Ιστορικόν περὶ τῆς Ελληνικῆς Επαναστάσεως (1859)). Filimon was the secretary of Ipsilantis' brother, Demetrius Ipsilantis. See also Ivan Iovva's "The Decembrists of the South and the Greek national liberation movement" (Иван Филимонович Иовва: "Южные декабристы и греческое национально-освободительное движение" – 1963)

74. "(...) I discovered, in a corner of a store-room of our country-house, a mass of papers covered with her firm but pretty handwriting: diaries in which she wrote with delight of the scenery of Germany, and spoke of her sorrows and her thirst for happiness; books which she had filled with Russian verses, prohibited

by censorship, — among them the beautiful historical ballads of Ryléeff, the poet, whom Nicholas I. hanged in 1826; other books containing music, French dramas, verses of Lamartine, and Byron's poems that she had copied.

Our whole childhood is irradiated by her memory. How often, in some dark passage, the hand of a servant would touch Alexander or me with a caress; or a peasant woman, on meeting us in the fields, would ask, "Will you be as good as your mother was? She took compassion on us. You will, surely." "Us" meant, of course, the serfs. I do not know what would have become of us if we had not found in our house, among the serf servants, that atmosphere of love which children must have around them. We were her children, we bore likeness to her, and they lavished their care upon us, sometimes in a touching form." (Peter Kropotkin and Georg Brandes, "Memoirs of a Revolutionist", Cosimo Inc, 2009, p.12).

75. Karl Marx, Letter to Vera Zasulich, March 1881.

<http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1881/03/zasulich1.htm>