CHAPTER - II

"CHILDE HAROLD" & "THE TALES"
Childe Harold is not a narrative in the strict sense of the term for it does not contain a story with a definite plot. Yet it is a narrative of a sort. Like Odyssey it is the tale of a journey, like Odyssey it is mostly told in the first person, but unlike Odyssey, it is very much personal; there is but a single character, there are no adventures in the land of fables, and there is a wonderful blending of the lyrical with the narrative. Its publication made him famous at once and set him off on a poetic career which is as kaleidoscopic in its notoriety and fame and as controversial as any one can imagine.

The hero is a young man of noble lineage and wastrel character who, having reached satiety in worldly pleasures, feels lonely, which becomes the cause of the travel. In a ten-stanza poem embedded into the main body, the narration is taken over by Harold himself. Though he feels lonely and alienated "But why should I for others groan / When none will sigh for me" (10th Stanza), he does not feel himself a total outcast, "And then it may be, of his wish to roam / Repented he" (1-12). This personal note which makes a beginning here becomes more prominent as the poem proceeds.
Harold is Byron’s first romantic hero of the melancholy type for he suffers from an inner contradiction like the poet himself— and hence he sees contradiction between the past and the present, of countries and its people, seen in a historical perspective. In ‘Childe Harold’ this contradiction grieves the hero, a romantic, passive reaction. Later on, in ‘Don Juan’, when Byron’s disillusionment is complete, he can look at it without anger or grief. There the hero finds the contradiction in human conditions and within man himself which are exposed and ridiculed in terrible thrusts, — an anti-romantic, active reaction. The romantic anger and grief are replaced by pity and contempt of the disillusioned satirist.

As Harold travels through different countries, the romantic Byron is much impressed by their wild, scenic beauty and remembers their great and glorious past. But the modern Byron, a product of his own time, temperament and upbringing, sets them against their present political and social debasement and comments nostalgically but with Byronic passion.

Byron is moved by the grand natural beauty of Portugal which is described in typical Byronic style.
"The horrid crags, by toppling convent crown'd,
The cork-trees hoar that clothe the shaggy steep,
The mountain-moss by searing skies imbrowned
The sunken glen, whose sunless shrubs must weep,
The tender azure of the unruffled deep,
The orange tints that gild the greenest bough,
The torrents that from cliff to valley leap
The vine en high, the willow branch below,
Mix'd in one mighty scene, with varied beauty glow.

(I/19).

A single sentence of nine lines, as if the poet holds his breath till he is finished with it. It is highly romantic but of an extrovert character. It is the wild and grandiose aspect of nature that always appeals to the highly strung and masculine temperament of Byron. The words are chosen for their virility and the imagery is brief and condensed but unambiguous.

The glorious past of Spain is seen against her present moral debasement,

"Here Folly still her votaries enthrals;
And young-eyed Lewdness walks her midnight rounds;
Girt with the silent crimes of Capitals,
Still to the last kind vice clings to the tottering walls". (I/46).
The lure of a life of action leads him to admire the Spanish youth who pit their raw courage and skill against wild, untamed brute strength in the bull-fight arena. He describes the scene in the arena in a single condensed image of wonderful strength, "The don-expended, and Expectation aute/ Capes round the silent circle's peopled walls" (I/75). But he also sees the obverse side of the coin and interprets it from a different angle.

"Such the ungentle sport that oft invites
The Spanish solda, and cheers the Spanish Swain
Nurtured in blood, betimes, his heart delights
In vengeance, glistening on another's pain
That private feuds the troubled village stain".

(1/80).

In their love of the bloody sport he sees the brutal, vengeful character of the people, their thirst for blood at the slightest affront.

Byron had always had a soft corner for Greece and he recalls her great past quite nostalgically,

"First in the race that led to glory's goal,
They van, and passed away - is this the whole?"

(II/2).

But for the people who accepted the enslavement by the Turks he has a lashing tongue, "Hereditary bondsmen:
Knew ye not/ Who would be free themselves must strike
the blow?/ By their right arms the conquest must be wrought?" (II/26). Yet for Byron Greece has a different appeal, "Wherever we tread'tis haunted, holy ground" (II/88). The Albanian natural scene surpasses even that of Greece in many respects, but again it is the grandiose that moves Byron,

"Dusky and huge enlarging on the sight,
Nature's volcanic amphitheatre,
Chimera's alps extend from left to right;
Beneath, a living valley seems to stir;
Flocks play, trees wave, streams flow, the mountain fir
Nodding above; behold black Acheron".

(II/51).

Nothing is missed; whatever the eye can take in at a single glance is told in a sweeping frozen, single sentence.

The Calvinistic doctrine of predestination which he imbibed in his childhood made him a fatalist of a sort. In all death, decay and ruin he sees the hands of Fate and Time which acting as the agents of Predestination, prove too strong for men's temporal achievements. In the ruins of Greece he sees the same hands of Fate and Time.

"A Thousand years scares serves to form a State;/ An hour may lay it in the dust:/ and when/ Can man its shatter'd splendour renovate/ Recall its virtues back, and vanquish
Canto III was begun five years later in 1818.
The intervening years between Canto II and Canto III were the years of Byron's trial. Within these years - 1812 to 1816 - he rose to the peak of his fame, became a legendary figure among the younger poets of the continent and was dragged to the lowest pitch of social ignominy to be ultimately booted out of England.

The feeling of loneliness and the tone of melancholy, the echo of which we already heard in Canto II,

"What is the worst of woes that wait on age?"
"That stumps the wrinkle deeper on the brow?"
To view each loved one blotted from life's page,
And be alone on earth, as I am now!" (II/38),

now becomes an important element of the narrative. But whereas what was a little romantically assumed in the former becomes real and hence intensely personal in the latter, in Canto III.

"The furrows of lonely thought, and dried up tears,
Which ebbing, leave a sterile track behind,
O'er which all heaving the journeying years
Plod the last sands of life, - where not a
flower appears". (III/5).

In the stanzas on Waterloo he admires Napoleon's great military achievements, "Battling with nations,
flying from the field; /Now making monarch's necks
thy footstool" (III/38); but he also notices his weak-
ness and tells us that too, "An empire thou couldst
 crush, command, rebuild, /But govern not thy restless
 passion ... nor, curb the lust of war" (III/38). He
 seeks to find the cause of Napoleon's downfall in his
 unrelenting ambition. "But quiet to quick becom is a
 hell,/And 'there' hath been thy bane", (III/42). Ambition
 for these restless souls becomes a self-destroying creed
 and they reap the harvest of its poisoned fruit. In the
 long digression on Rousseau he finds the same lust for
 glory in that great man. Byron admires him for his indes-
 mitable spirit and the flaming inspiration that roused
 the French to crush the Tyranny of Centuries. But, "Whose
desire/ was to be glorious; 'twas a foolish quest,/The
 which to gain or keep, he sacrificed all rest" (III/78).
 His analysis of the cause of the French Revolution in
 this connection is most logical and practical. He
 interprets it to be an intense fear-psychosis, "Reused
 up to too much truth, which follows overgrown fears".
 (III/31). But he has a word of defense for the oppressed
 people who carried their hate and anger to a pitiless
 end, not knowing the difference between friend and foe,
"But they,
Who in oppression's darkness eaved had dwelt,
They were not eagles nourished with the day;
What marvel then, at times, if they mistook
their prey". (III/83).

He welcomes the Revolution for restoring the inalienable rights of man, Liberty, Equality and Fraternity; for creating a new social order and, for destroying the age-old ideals which were untenable in the changed situation.

"They made themselves a fearful monument!
The wreck of old opinions - things which grew
Breathed from the birth of time; the veil they rent,
And what behind it lay, all earth shall view". (III/82).

In the beginning of Canto III Byron's feeling of loneliness is more dominant than ever. Written just after he was ostracised he has not yet adapted himself to the new life and the new situation. But already there are signs of the things to come in his manner of composition and style. Words begin to be chosen for their colloquial character wherever he wants it to be forceful.

"Fit retribution! Gaul may champ the bit/ And foam in fetters" (III/19). And the phrases marked by a speech-like quality, making them so lively and entertaining,
also begin to make their appearance, "Did ye not hear it? - No; 'twas but the wind, /Or the car rattling over the Stony Street" (III/22). The Spenserian stanza no longer carries the spensrien grandeur but is cast into a modern mould and by the end of the 4th Canto completely yields to it.

There are some lyrical stanzas of exquisite breadth and depth. Here is one describing the approaching night,

"It is the hush of night, and all between
Thy margin and the mountains, dusk, yet clear,
Mellow'd and mingling, yet distinctly seen,
Save darken'd Jura, whose cast heights appear
Precipitously steep; and drawing near,
There breathes a living fragrance from the shore,
Of flowers yet fresh with childhood; on the ear
Drops the light drip of the suspended oar,
Or chirps the grasshopper one good-night carol more". (III/86).

Apart from the visual image the pervading image is one of silence which is described with three principal imagery: the silence of the mountains, the silence of the smell of flowers and the most intensely vivid of all is the silence that enables us to hear the water dripping from the suspended oars of boats, and by the last he
transforms sound into silence. Nothing is left to chance and yet there is no elaboration and no involvement.

But whereas in the midst of the serene beauty of nature Byron sinks into himself, in the midst of her wilder aspect his heart goes out with a passion.

"The sky is changed! and such a change! Oh night, And storm, and darkness, ye are wondrous strong, Yet lovely in your strength, as is the light Of a dark eye in woman! Far along, From peak to peak, the rattling crags among Leaps the live thunder! Not from one lone cloud, But every mountain now hath found a tongue And Jura answers, through her misty shroud, Back to the joyous Alps, who call to her aloud:

And this is in the night! — Most glorious night! Thou wert not sent for slumber! let me be A sharer in thy fierce and far delight!"

(III/92-93)

The last line reminds us of 'West Wind', but whereas Shelley wants the energy to fulfil his vision and rather beag, Byron wants it for its own sake, its ferocity and wildness. Of this, one of the contemporary critics, John Wilson, remarks, "He came into competition with Wordsworth upon his own grounds, and with his own weapons (Canto III); and in the first encounter he vanquished and overthrew
him. His description of the stormy night among the Alps - of the blending - the mingling - the fusion of his own soul, with the raging elements around him, - is alone worth all the dull metaphysics of the 'Excursion'.

In the midst of human society, however, the tone of bitter passion is unmistakable,

"What deep wounds ever closed without a scar? The heart's bleed longest, and but heal to wear That which disfigures it; and they who war With their own hopes, and have been vanquished, bear Silence, but not submission" (III/84).

Submission was neither in his own nature nor in the nature of his characters. Canto III is the most personal of all, for it is the bitter fruit of the English society's rejection of him. Indignation lends a vehement, fiery quality to his verse and travel again becomes an escape as in Canto I.

In Canto IV Byron's tone is more settled, it is quieter and deeper. The bitterness and indignation are softened up by time and a tone of detached, calm resignation is heard instead. Instead of finding a scapegoat he is now self-critical,

"The thorns which I have reap'd are of the tree
I Planted; they have torn me, and I bleed:
I should have known that fruit would spring from
such a seed" (IV/10).

Shelley falls 'upon the thorns of life', 'bleeds' and backs out to his own world of vision. Byron falls upon the thorns of his own creation; he fights, recovers and comes back to life again. He is not after a philosophy for the beyond but of this earthy world, "I speak not of men's creeds - they rest between Man and his Maker - but of things allow'd, Averr'd, and known, and daily, hourly seen" (IV/95).

The device of placement of words in quick succession for the brevity and concentration of an image he begins to adopt. Of Rome he says, "The field of freedom, faction, fame and blood". (IV/113); of the pantheon of Rome, "Simple, erect, severe, austere, sublime". (IV/146) and of the total image of Rome", from Jove to Jesus', he says, "Admire, exult, despise, laugh, weep, - for here/ There is such matter for all feeling" (IV/108). The words are not placed at random but with an eye to their sequence which represents the sequence of our moods or feelings as in the last two, and of history as in the first.

There is a digression on love whose ephemeral character, far it is subject to disillusionment, leads
him to conclude, "Our life is a false nature; 'tis not in/ The harmony of things" (IV/126). Life itself is not false, its apparent falseness arises from the disparity and contrasts between our desires and our achievements, our expectations and their fulfilment, between appearance and reality.

*Childe Harold* is a one-man show, a story which has no story. It records the experiences of travels of the single character and the poet narrates his observations for good or bad. There is no action of the character or any interaction of events that bring any dramatic element in it. Harold is the first English specimen of the Romantic hero, passive and self-analytic, given to brooding and contemplation. In the absence of any action there is little scope for the development of the character, yet it develops. The gloomy wanderer of the first two cantos, meditating on ruins, death and the vanity of life changes later into a sensible and sober hero, sensitive and meditative, the meditation leading to romantic melancholy.

Had it been a mere record of travels it would have been monotonous, had it been only a meditative poem of such length - 4800 lines - it would have been dull. So Byron alternately shifts his focus on travel, description, digression and observation, and constantly changes
his moods, he is angry, indignant, passionate, bitter, self-analytic, personal, brooding – with suitable changes in the tone of the language, and with this narrative technique he keeps the poem on its feet. The descriptions and reflections are made living by the interaction of the poet’s own mind and personality. This lends a peculiar energy to the poem and is also responsible for its coherence and unity.

The narratives under study are essentially romantic in character, but unlike those of his contemporaries, of an extrovert nature. They are definite stories with well-planned plots, having preconceived ends in case they spring from his imagination. Here we must look not so much for those techniques which we find in his satires but for those which should make a story seem well told. Here we are concerned with realistic background, plot construction, character development, dramatic elements like suspense, climax, etc., which are revealed as the story proceeds. We have already mentioned the time and circumstances of their composition which not only determine their character – an extrovert romanticism – but also their language, diction and imagery which have a romantic dash steeped with Byron’s masculine temperament. Though they reveal the poet’s temperament and personality yet there are no personal elements as we find in Childe
Harold or even in Don Juan. There is no digression, no observation and no commentary which make his satires so lively but would invariably have made the stories loose and dull. The nature of the narratives has determined our method of their treatment here.

The Bride of Abydos (1813)

Plot Construction:

The Plot: Giaffir, the ruling pasha, is in court and in quick succession he gives three orders - the first to clear the court of all outsiders except his only son Selim; the second to call the chief of the harem guard; and the third to the chief of the guard Haroun, to bring his only daughter, Zuleika, there. This sets the story in motion.

The cause of the peremptory tone of the orders seems to be that, Selim and Zuleika went out in the garden for a stroll and having, perhaps, guessing an intimacy between the two young persons Giaffir arranges Zuleika's marriage with one Osman Bey, in the same peremptory fashion. He cannot dream of consulting Zuleika in this regard, for the will of the father is the will of the children - a much hallowed Turkish custom.
The two are really in love though they have never expressed it, so this arrangement of Zuleika's marriage puts Selim in a very pensive mood. Zuleika responds to the crisis by disclosing her deep love to Selim which changes his demeanour so suddenly that Zuleika wonders. "This morn I saw thee gentlest, dearest;/ But now thou'rt from thyself estranged" (I/385-386).

Selim arranges a secret meeting with her at night. At the appointed time and place Zuleika is surprised to see Selim in the dress of a Turkish Sailor. Selim then tells her the story of his life and his dream, which is to flee with Zuleika to a distant land and to live there happily ever after. But the dream is shattered by a sudden attack of Glaffir and in the ensuing battle Selim is killed.

_Treatment:_ In the beginning Selim's position is shrouded in mystery. When the court is cleared of all outsiders and Glaffir and Selim are left alone, "Son of a slave" - the Pacha said - "from unbelieving mother bred". (I/81-82). If Selim is his only son why he is called the son of a Slave? He is also called a coward, "Go - let thy less than woman's hand / Assume the distaff - not the brand". (I/99-100). Though Selim does not say anything - unbecoming for a Moslem child - his looks do,
"Oh Selim's eye he fiercely gazed;
That eye returned him glance for glance,
And proudly to his Sire's was raised
Till Giaffir's quailed and shrunk askance'.

(1/127-130).

This is rather puzzling for the reader.

A little of the puzzle is cleared by the long conversation between Zuleika and Selim when she assures him of her love. So long as Selim was not sure of Zuleika's love he could not decide his course of action. Assured of this he says, "I've arms, and friends and vengeance near". (1/382) This explains the fire of his eyes that could not come out in the open before Giaffir. The reader now knows the cause of his sudden change in demeanour, that he has taken a firm decision. But the decision seems to have an ominous tone. Why he talks of 'arms' and 'vengeance'? But keeping the reader and Zuleika in suspense he only asks her to await him at night at an appointed place when, "thou shalt hear/ My tale, my purpose, and my fear:" (1/480-481). This deepens the mystery further.

As the tale gets told a whole drama is revealed. Selim's father, Abdallah, was the brother of Giaffir who poisoned him to get his estate. Selim's mother was a Greek which explains, 'From unbelieving mother bred'.
It was his infancy and the mercy of Haroun, then in Abdallah's service, that saved Selim's life. Haroun entered the services of Giaffir and looked after Selim. But Giaffir never trained Selim in weapons, never took him to a battle, for he never believed him. "Thou Greek in soul if not in creed" (I/87). So on the outside Selim appeared to be a gentle, dear thing to Zuleika which really he was not. For when Selim came to know of his life's story from Haroun he secretly joined a band of pirates and acquired what Giaffir denied him—a training in the art of war and a love of danger, strife and struggle.

By making Selim's father a victim of Giaffir's greed Byron has introduced an intense dramatic twist in the plot. The reader now understands Selim's problem. By all logic of filial affection he should avenge his father's death, by all logic of his passionate love for Zuleika, he cannot. How does he intend to solve the problem? His 'purpose' will tell.

His 'purpose' is a long passionate dream. He will sail away with Zuleika to a distant island where, "For thee in those bright isles is built a bower/ Blooming as Aden in its earliest hour", (II/408-409). His 'fear' turns out to be the common fear of a lover of losing his love. "Yes, fear; the doubt, the dread of losing
thee" (II/446). Selim does not know if Zuleika will agree to his proposal, if she will have the courage to disobey her father - almost a sin for Moslem children - and fly with him. His fear is that the inevitable result of either Zuleika's indecision or her disagreement will make him lose her for ever.

The situation has reached its peak and the reader is almost hopeful of the young lovers of having their dreamy future in their hands, when Giaffir's sudden attack topples it down. Selim is killed and Zuleika dies grief-stricken leaving a terrible scar in the heart of her despotic father. "Hark to the hurried question of Despair; 'Where is my child?' - an Echo answers - 'Where'?" (II/862-863).

The drama is over but the melodrama is to come. For all practical purposes the story has come to an end - the accounts of both the hero and the heroine are settled, and the father is left to reap the fruits of his greed, hatred and despotism. At this period of his life Byron's romantic imagination sometimes got the better of him and here he comes up with an epilogue in which passion is kneaded with Pathos and the resulting dough turns the story into a legend.
Zuleika is symbolised as an unfading and undying white rose blooming over her grave. An unseen Bulbul sings in the garden and lest there be any doubt as to what the bird sings, "That note so piercing and profound/Will shape and syllable its sound/Into Zuleika's name" (II/710-712).

One night Zuleika's tombstone is seen carried - no body knows how - to the water's edge where Selim died. The white rose - Zuleika - begins to bloom there, and still blooms. The stone where rested the head of the dead Selim has earned a legendary name, "the pirate-phantom's-pillow".

Composition: The story contains very little action except in its last leg and hence it appears rather loosely knit compared with his other poems. There are short descriptions of scenes and situations and the long monologues of Selim and Zuleika. The latter makes the movement of the story sluggish and would have become dull but for the infusion of Byronic passion into them. The interest in the story is sustained mainly by its dramatic plot and the passionate love of the hero and the heroine.

Yet there are Byronic touches throughout the poem. Here is a romantic effusion describing Zuleika's
beauty. "Soft as the memory of pure love; Pure as the prayer which childhood wafts above, /Was she" (I/166-168), and,

"The light of love, the purity of grace,
The mind, the Music breathing from her face,
The heart whose softness harmonized the whole,
And oh! that eye was in itself a soul"
The imagery is not only plain, it seems a little affected.

In the long monologue of Selim in which he tells his dream to Zuleika, the imagery,

"The Dove of peace and promise to mine ark!
Or, since that hope denied in world's of strife,
Be thou the rainbow to the storms of life!
The evening beam that smiles the clouds away,
And tints tomorrow with prophetic ray".

(II/397-401), is plain, and but for the use of words, 'strife', 'storm' 'clouds', 'prophetic', which infuse passion into it, would have become almost trite.

But the extrovert temperament of Byran feels more at ease when he goes out,

"Ay! let me like the ocean - patriarch roam,
Or only know on land the Tartar's home!
My tent on shore, my galley on the sea,
Are more than cities and "cresses to me:
Borne by my steed, or wafted by my sail,
Across the desert, or before the gale,"

(II/388-393).

In his details he misses but very little,
This is a scene of Zuleika's chamber at night,

"Yes! there is light in that lone chamber,
And o'er her silken ottoman
Are thrown the fragrant bands of amber,
O'er which her fairy fingers ran;
Near these, with emerald rays becast,
(How could she thus that gas forget?)
Her mother's scented amulet,
Whereon engraved the korean text,
Could smooth this life, and win the next;
And by her sombre lie
A Koran of illumined dyes;
And many a bright embazon'd rhyme
By persian scribes redeem'd from time;
And o'er these scrolls, not oft so mute,
Reclines her now neglected lute;
And round her lamp of fretted gold
Bloom flowers in urns of China's mould;
When he wants to be brief he freezes his image solid and yet it reveals itself wonderfully. This is Selim’s change of aspect when Zuleika assures him of her love.

"He lived, he breathed, he moved, he felt"

(II/327) We must also note the sequence, first comes the signs of life, last comes the sense of feeling. The swords of his comrades will, "Wait - wave - defend - destroy" (II/411) to fulfil his dream.

In the beginning of the 2nd Canto there is a short digression referring to the myth of Hero and Leander; the ruined city of Troy, its glory and its death and his own swimming feat in crossing the strait of Bosphorous. Zuleika’s waiting for Selim is compared with Hero’s waiting for Leander who swum the Bosphorous to meet her.

The long epilogue of 69 lines is broken into three sentences; one of 43 lines is assigned to the white rose, symbolizing Zuleika, one of 6 lines for the interpretation of the Bulbul’s song, and the last of 20 lines for the Selim - Zuleika legend. We can have a look at the romantic imagery.
"A single rose is shedding there
Its lonely lustre, meek and pale;
It looks as planted by Despair-
So white - so faint - the slightest gale
Might whirl the leaves on high;
And yet though storms and blight assail
And hands more rude than the wintry sky
May wring it from the stem - in vain -"

(II/672 - 679).

Words of Asiatic origin like, Bulbul (a bird),
Gul (a flower), firman (a written order), Ater, (a perfumed), Tchocedar, (a guard), Serai (an inn) etc. are
frequently used which give the Turkish background of the
story a touch of perfect realism. The Turkish customs
and way of life are also faithfully represented.

Characters: Except Giffir's, the characters
of Selim and Zuleika do not develop much through their
actions. In the beginning we see Selim meek and obedient
before his 'father' Giaffir in court. But the uncalled
for insult of Giaffir brings out the fire in him to his
eyes, the fire which ultimately sets the whole house af-

lame. Zuleika's arrangement of marriage sends him in a
pensive mood. But this is not his weakness for he says,
"But life is hazard at the best" (II/444); he is not sure
of Zuleika yet and he cannot think of taking her away forcibly against her will. But once he is assured of her love he becomes a living brand of fire and passion, acts decisively, taking the story to its climax and his own end.

Zuleika's reactions to different situations is consistent with her upbringing and her character develops in that way. She has been brought up in a sheltered life and in the midst of age-old, rigid social customs. She does not protest against the arrangement of her marriage, a natural behaviour of a Moslem girl who obeys her father unflinchingly. But when she has the opportunity she shows her resentment, "Deep were my anguish, thus compell'd/To wed with one I ne'er beheld" (I/435-436), which shows the spark of rebellion in her but this is unable to start a fire. The influence of centuries of social practice is in her blood, she cannot help it. As she stands irresolute for sometime after Selim's proposal to run away with him, Gieffir's attack spells Selim's doom. Like Francesca in The Siege of Corinth, she faces two alternatives, her father and her lover, and considering her background her hesitation is quite natural. Though she does not act but it is she who moves the decisive part of the story; it is her assurance of love that leads Selim to action taking the story to its end.
Glaffir is a typical Moslem ruler of the late middle ages; greedy, hateful, despotic, full of deceit, with an ungovernable temper and pride. It is his actions, past and present, that really move the story and in the end he comes like the 'deux ex machina' to cause the doom of all, including himself.

Conrad in *The Corsair* and Alp in *The Siege of Corinth* are social outcasts for one reason or another, but though Selim is not one, he knows what society is. Byron himself had no great regard for it and his personal experience of it was quite bitter. Hence as Selim tells Zuleika of their future life we see his attitude towards it, speaking about man in society,

"Mark where his carnage and his conquests cease! He makes a solitude, and calls it peace! I, like the rest, must use my skill or strength, But ask no land beyond my sabre's length: Power sways but by division - her resource The last alternative of fraud or force! Ours be the last: in time deceit may come When cities cage us in a social home: There even thy soul might err - how oft the heart Corruption shakes which peril could not part!"

(II/430 - 439)
This is Byron himself. He not only speaks of the corruption engendered by men in society but says also that nothing is absolute in this world, not even the deep and passionate love of Zuleika — everything is subject to change. This bold and unorthodox view of things gave him an open mind which enabled him to look at the world dispassionately and write his classic 'Don Juan'.

The Corsair, (1814).

Plot Construction:

Plot: The story is about a Pirate leader who disappears in the end, rather in a romantic fashion, because the last bond that held him to life, his love, is severed.

The first narrator is a pirate who speaks of their life of courage and daring, of blood and adventure, their feeling of deep comradeship and their abhorrence of a life of domestic peace. This sets the tone and atmosphere of the poem. Then the narration is taken over by the poet himself.

Conrad, the leader, is informed by his spy that the ruling Pasha has planned to destroy him by a sudden attack on his island. Conrad plans to forestall the Pasha's move by a pre-emptive strike on the Pasha's
harbour and city. Though no action starts yet, but the plan and the counter plan intensifies the situation for we know that it will lead to action whose result is uncertain. Conrad in the disguise of a dervish, gets himself caught as a prisoner who escaped from the pirates, by Seyd's - the Pasha's - men. His purpose is to feed Seyd the story that the pirates are in total ignorance of the letter's plan to destroy the pirate-den. When the time will be ripe Conrad is to sound a bugle and his men will set fire to the galleys in Seyd's harbour. The situation gets complicated by a twist in the plot. Without any signal from Conrad his men start action and the harbour is set on fire. By this untimely and foolhardy action of Conrad's men the poet prepares the ground for Conrad's ultimate defeat and capture.

However, the surprise being on Conrad's side, the pirates win the first round of the battle, which is quite logical. The palace is set on fire and Gulnara, the harp queen, is saved from the flames by Conrad himself. Apart from being a heroic and gentlemanly deed, this action of Conrad becomes responsible for his own escape in the end.

By now Seyd's men having got over their surprise and panic, rally, and their counter attack, backed by
their superior number proves more than the daring and dexterity of Conrad's men, who are beaten and Conrad himself is taken. The surprise achieved by Conrad's men which leads to their first victory and the superior number of Seyd's men, which leads to the pirates' ultimate defeat, make the results of the incidents quite probable and logical.

In the prison cell a new scene of the drama is being enacted. Gulnara steals into the cell and proposes that Conrad should kill Seyd in his sleep and effect his escape. This criminal proposal is refused by Conrad straightaway. But Gulnara is not deterred. She kills Seyd in his sleep, bribes the guards and effects their escape.

Meanwhile, Medora, Conrad's love left on the island, learns of Conrad's capture from the pirates who could return after the battle. After waiting for some days she takes her own life thinking that Conrad has been put to death by Seyd. Conrad returns and finding her dead takes a boat one night and gets himself lost in the wide world.

Treatment: Though Conrad is the hero his name is held back until we have finished 156 lines of the 1st Canto; but the poet hints, rather ominously, "But who that chief? his name on every shore/ Is famed and
fear'd - they ask and know no more" (I/81-82). The report of the spy is handed over to Conrad but we are not told what is there but we see what it leads to. The reading of the report at once prompts Conrad to action. He orders an all-out preparation for an attack to be led by himself, which proves the gravity of the situation. But again we are not told whom the attack is against who is Spyd, who does not appear until we arrive at the 586th line of the 1st Canto. But we are made aware of his importance by the feverish urgency of the preparation, "My corselet, cloak - one hour and we are gone" (I/180). Thus by showing only a tip of the chief's character, by not revealing the contents of the report of the spy but showing us what action follows its perusal and by not saying who is Conrad's enemy but showing his importance by the urgency of the preparation the poet is able to keep the reader guessing.

But the most intense dramatic incident takes place in the prison cell of Conrad. Gulnara's criminal proposal and Conrad's refusal of it, and Gulnara's subsequent actions that lead to their escape, reveal the Central character of both. The tragic disappearance of the hero takes the story to its climax.

Composition: With a few short strokes Byron builds up the character of his hero, speaking of his unquestioned
and firm leadership, " 'Steer to that shore! ' - they
sail. 'Do this! ' 'tis done; 'New form and follow me! ' the
spoil is won" (I/77-78); of his fierce personality,
"That dozzles, leads, yet chills the vulgar heart"
(I/178) which turns him to be, "That man of loneliness
and mystery/ Scarce seen to smile and seldom heard to
sigh! " (I/173-174). As an enemy he is the very devil,
"And where his frown of hatred darkly fell,/Hope wither­ing
fled, and Mercy sighed farewell" (I/225-226). When
the pirates fight their last ditch battle Byron becomes
still more brief for time is short. Finding his men
encircled Conrad thinks, "One effort - one- to break the
circling host'/They form - unite - charge - waver - all
is lost" (II/143-144). "Hemmed in, cut off, cleft down,
and troampled over,/But each strikes singly, silently,
and home, (II/247-248).

In moments of mellow tenderness Byron is differ­
ent,

"Deep in my soul that tender secret dwells,
Lonely and lost to light for evermore,
Save when to thine my heart responsive swells,
Then trembles into silence as before
'There is its centre, a sepulchral lamp
Burns the slow flame, eternal, but unseen;
Which not the darkness of despair can damp
Though vain its ray as it had never been.

(I/after 346th line)

This is a part of Medera's song sung before Conrad departs for his mad venture. This is quite lyrical and there is a wonderful blending of Passion with Pathos but the imagery is plain.

During the action the language and diction change completely. We see Conrad and the pirates winning their first round of the battle,

"The Corsairs pouring, haste to where within
Invited Conrad's bugle, and the din
Of groaning victims, and wild cries for life,
Proclaim'd how well he did the work of strife.
They shout to find him grim and lonely there,
A glutted tiger mangling in his lair"

(II/186-191).

When Conrad is left alone in the prison cell he is in the grip of a serious mental disturbance. He begins to ponder if he acted wisely in attacking the Pasha's regular army with his small band of dare-devils, which has endangered not only his own life but also the lives of his comrades. This terrible mental conflict is expressed in a long, passionate sentence of 24 lines. The voice of repentance is, however, but a.
Vain voice! the spirit burning but unbent,
May writho, rebel - the weak alone repent!
Even in that lonely hour when most it feels,
And, to itself, all, all that self reveals, -
No single passion, and no ruling thought
That leaves the rest, as once, unseen, unsought,
But the wild prospect when the soul reviews,
All rushing through their thousand avenues -
Ambition's dream expiring, love's regret,
Endanger'd glory, life itself beset;
The joy untasted, the contempt or hate
'Gainst those who fain would triumph in our fate;
The hopeless past, the hastening future driven
Too quickly on to guess of hell or heaven;
Deeds, thoughts, words, perhaps remember'd not
So keenly till that hour, but ne'er forgot;
Things light or lovely in their acted time,
But new to stern reflection each a crime;
The withering sense of evil unreveal'd,
Not cankerling less because the more conceal'd -
All, in a word, from which all eyes must start,
That opening sepulchre - the naked heart
Bares with its buried woes, till Pride awake,
To snatch the mirror from the soul - and break."

(II/334-357).
Wards and images are carefully chosen for their plainness, this and their high emotion content make the whole passage forcefully passionate.

Characters: In the absence of any action in the 1st Canto the portrayal of Conrad's character is taken up by the poet himself and it is done on a lavish, romantic scale. He is a teetotaller, lives a life of abstinence, is feared like the fiend by his followers but is loved and obeyed by them unflinchingly. This attitude of his followers reveals the two extremes of Conrad's character, his violence and ferocity, and his inherent tenderness.

We are assured, however, that Conrad was not born that way, his violence is only a reaction, "His soul was changed before his deeds had driven/ Him forth to war with man and forfeit heaven,/ Warp'd by the world in Disappointment's school" (I/251-253). So, in a way, Conrad is not responsible for what he is; he is only giving back what the world gave him.

But this product of darkness and frustration, of sin and cruelty, has also his relieving feature. It is his all-consuming love for Medora. Conrad knows only two things in life, his job as a pirate-chief and his love for Medora. In the former he acts like a machine and with
a vengeance where he is an anti-social, and only in the
letter he behaves like a social being, but in both he
acts without control because of his impassioned nature.

As the action starts we see the first signs of
virtue in Conrad. His saving of Gulnere from the flames
makes him a gentleman; his refusal to buy his freedom
in the shady manner as proposed by Gulnere, gives his
character a touch of nobility.

"To make the saltet with the scimiter;
Such is my weapon - not the secret knife;
Who spares a woman's seeks not a Slumber's life".

(III/363-365).

Of this quality Byron says in the end, "He left a Corsair's
name to other times, /Linked with one virtue and a thou­
sand crises". (III/695-696).

Conrad has no roots in society. Byron insists
that Conrad's villainy is the result of social forces,
"Yes, strange indeed - that heart hath long been changed;
/Herm - like 'twas trampled, adder-like avenged" (I/398-
401) but his nobility is his own. This conflict within
the man makes him not only lonely but baffling and mys­
terious, a typical Byronic hero of the middle period. It
is his restlessness in society that explains his behavi­
our in the end. His disappearance can only be explained
when we understand that the only bond that holds Conrad
to life and society is Medora. When that bond snaps he
has nothing to fall back upon and he disappears — a
romantic but not an illogical end. Juliet's death leads
Shakespeare's Romeo to take his own life. But Byron's
'Romeo' does not take his own life for he knows no
surrender; shocks unbalance him, which makes him human,
but they can't strike him down.

Of the two female characters Medora is rather
a shadowy figure and is quite passive. The supposed death
of Conrad only leads her to a weak submission to fate —
suicide. Gulnare, on the other hand, is more active and
functional in the movement of the story. She appears as
soon as the real action begins and helps the movement
of the story till the end. Conrad's behaviour is totally
incomprehensible to her, "The Corsair vow'd protection,
soothed affright,/ As if his homage were a woman's
right" (II/267-268). The first humane treatment — she
was never more than a bed-mate to Sayd — that she ever
meets in life makes her fall for it. It is gratitude that
first draws her to Conrad but it turns into love as she
meets him in his cell, a love so passionate that she sheds
all her feminine nature for its sake. When Conrad gently
tells her that he is not for her, she accepts it, appa-
rently with a calm resignation, "Thou lovest another
then? - but what to me /Is this - 'tis nothing - nothing e'er can be" (II/491/492). The knowledge shocks her but it can add no more suffering to what she has already experienced in life. The 'loss' of Conrad leads Medora to commit suicide, but the loss of Conrad, his refusal of her love, leads Gulnara to a daring unwomanly act. Her love is selfless and hence noble and it is more tragic too. Medora dies and escapes from life, Gulnara lives and suffers.

The story is fictitious but there is little 'fiction' in it. The characters are attractive because they do not fall into any formula. Conrad is a pirate, but he is first a gentleman then a pirate. Gulnara, who is the pivot of the dramatic elements in the story, is more than a woman. But though they are not of the ordinary type, they are neither unreal nor improbable. The poem is essentially romantic in character but of an unusual kind. The stage is a rocky island, the characters are outlaws who defy society, but they are mainly without meanness; there are no cozy homes but caves with bare necessities of existence; the leader is a silent, lonely man, whom no body understands, and the language and pace of the story is kept at the levels of the setting and the characters.
The Siege of Corinth (1816).

Background:

The siege of Corinth, a city-state of Greece, is a fact of history. Byron had always been troubled by the enslavement of Greece and its liberation from the Turks was in his thoughts to his dying day. Here he celebrates that dark episode of its history.

For a long time Corinth was under Venetian, hence Christian domination, when in 1715, its fortress was besieged by the Turks and eventually subjugated. Around this historic incident Byron weaves a plausible story without distorting historical facts. To prove the authenticity of the incident Byron quotes a short passage from "History of the Turks" Vol. III. P. 151, in the advertisement to the poem. In the same place he gives us the time when he visited the place, which is 1810-11.

Plot Construction:

The plot is about a renegade Christian who is instrumental in the destruction of the fortress of Corinth. Apart from this crisis of history the poem is about the personal crisis of Alp, the hero, which makes it a good story.

Alp, a Venetian Christian, is an accused person but neither the charge nor the names of the accusers are disclosed. We are not sure if Alp and Francesca, the heroine, the daughter of Minotti, the governor of Corinth, are historical characters, as Minotti is. By not disclosing the charge and the names of accusers Byron avoids distortion of facts and takes history into fiction. The charge, however, is serious and to escape the long hands of the law Alp flees Venice, embraces Islam and joins the Turks. Alp and Francesca were known to each other in Venice but though Francesca loved Alp deeply they could not be united in marriage for Minotti’s decided wish against it.

By these events Byron makes Alp’s purpose in the participation in the siege, dual. On the one hand, he is resolved to wreak vengeance upon his Christian enemies, and on the other, to rescue Francesca from her inexorable father. A plausible decision for a man of implacable character.

Alp meets Francesca the night before the last day of the battle outside the fortress walls. She tries to persuade Alp to forsake Islam and come back to the fold of Christianity which is refused by him, sadly but firmly. Unable to reconcile her love and her faith, she
takes her own life. During the course of the battle the next day, Alp comes to know of this from Minotti, for a moment he is totally unbalanced and in that unguarded moment he is killed by a chance shot. Minotti sets fire to the main magazine and the fortress of Corinth passes into history.

Treatment: The Alp - Francesca episode occupies the major part of the poem which makes the siege itself of secondary interest.

Like Conrad, Alp is a troubled man and suffers from an inner conflict. His conversion to Islam is not due to a spiritual necessity but a material need, a shrewed step taken with a definite object in view. He knows that he is an outcast in the Christian society and so far as his new Islamic faith is concerned, he has the same uncertain and uneasy feeling of the first converts. He has burnt his bridges behind and finds the road blocked before him, and we find a lonely man. He is no longer a Christian nor a true-born Islam and feels like an outsider in both. The reader is made to realise this crisis and he feels that as far as Alp is concerned his life is a total blank, being uprooted from society, but for the hope of Francesca, who alone can give him a foothold in life.
The Alp - Francesca meeting outside the fortress wells where she tries to persuade Alp to forsake his new faith, is treated more dramatically. Her handling of the whole situation is psychological. She knows Alp's deep love for her so she begins by reiterating their love, "I come from my rest to him I love best, /That I may be happy, he may be bless'd" (563-564). She makes it clear that though she loves him deeply, her happiness depends upon Alp's renunciation of Islam and coming back to the fold of Christianity. She then gives a sort of warning, "I come - and if I come in vain, /Never, oh never we meet again" (573-574). This veiled threat surely makes Alp start thinking about her mission which she brings out in the open in her next move,

"Thou hast done a fearful deed
In falling away from thy fathers creed:
But dash that turban to earth, and sign
The sign of the cross, and for ever be mine."

(575 - 578).

She reminds him, rather sternly, that by renunciating Christianity Alp has committed a double sin, a sin against his religion and a sin against his ancestors who respected it. She knows that one of the chief causes of Alp's joining in the siege was Francesca herself and hence she makes their union conditional. She allows her words to work upon the mind of Alp to have the desired
Alp, however, cleverly side tracks the main issue, he completely ignores Francesca's suggestion, being sure of his own ground, his victory in the siege and achieving Francesca.

Francesca's next move is more interesting for it is more psychological.

"Upon his hand she laid her own -
Light was the touch, but it thrilled to the bone,
And shot a chillness to his heart,
which fix'd him beyond the power to start.
Though slight was the grasp as mortal cold,
He could not loose him from its hold"; (595-600)

She rightly thinks that a physical touch will be more telling than her arguments which may be mere words to Alp. As time is running out she gives him a time limit to come to a decision and ends it rather ominously, "Dark will thy doom be, darker still / Thine immortality of ill" (649 - 650).

But neither the threat of his doom for his 'immortality of ill' nor the impending loss of Francesca for whose love he has changed his faith and even risked his life, can move him - his ego blocks the way.
The climactic stage is reached when to Alp's enquiry of Francesca, Minotti answers, "She is safe' - 'Where? Where? ' - 'In heaven; /From whence thy traitor soul is driven - /Far from thee and undefiled" (855-857). Before Alp can recover from this staggering blow he gets killed.

Composition: The Alp - Francesca episode is sandwiched between the first and the last phase of the battle which are worth noting for the change in the tone and the character of the imagery. As the battle begins,

"The walls grew weak; and fast and hot
Against them pour'd the ceaseless shot,
With unabating fury sent
From battery to battlement;
And thunder - like the pealing din
Rose from each heated culverin;
And here and there some crackling dome
Was fired before the exploding bomb;" (159-186), and the sentence continues for 17 lines in the same exploding tone. The tone is tuned down to a much lower pitch as the Corinthians put up a gallant but fruitless fight.

"As the spring-tides, with heavy plash,
From the cliffs invading dash
Hugs fragments, sapp'd by the ceaseless flow,
Till white and thundering down they go,
Like the avalanche's snow
On the Alpine vales below;
Thus at length, outbreathed and worn,
Corinth's sons were downward borne,
By the long and oft renew'd
Charge of the Moslem multitude" (739-748).

But though the tone changes the character of the words
does not.

We come across a different kind of imagery when
Byron describes the external demeanour of Francesca as
she argues with Alp. It is much softer for its purpose
is different. He has to show on the outside what is going
on in the inside. The objects of comparison are of ordi-
nary experience and the rhetorics are mostly plain
similes,

"As he look'd on the face, and beheld its hue,
So deeply changed from what he knew;
Fair but faint - without the ray
Of mind, that made each feature play
Like sparkling waves on a sunny day;
And her motionless lips lay still as death,
And her words came forth without her breath,
And there rose not a heave o'er her bosom's swell,
And there seem'd not a pulse in her vein to dwell,
Though her eyes shone out, yet the lids were fix'd,
And the glance that it gave was wild and unmix'd
With aught of change, as the eyes may seem
Of the restless who walk in a troubled dream;
Like the figures on arses, that gleamily glare
Stirr'd by the breath of the wintry air,
So seen by the dying lamp's fitful light,
Lifeless but life-like, and awful to sight;
As it seem, through the dimness, about to come
down

From the shadowy wall where there images frown;
Fearfully flitting to and fro,
As the gusts on the tapestry come and go".

(607 - 627)

Two sentences of 9 and 12 lines each. In a single image
'Lifeless but life-like' Byron is able to reveal her
whole aspect as she confronts Alp.

We can look at some detail. This is a description
of the battle scene inside the fortress and the sentence
continues unbroken for 21 lines,

"The vaults beneath the mosaic stone
Contain'd the dead of ages gone;"
- i(187); -

Their names were on the graven floor,
But now illegible with gore;
The served crests, and curious hues
The varied marble's vein diffuse,
Were smeared and slippery, - stain'd, and stream
With broken swords, and helms o'erthrown;
There were dead above, and the dead below
Lay cold in many a coffin'd rev" (985 -974).

Characters: There are but two principal characters in the story, Alp and Francesca, and whatever development they have, they have it in their meeting. The characters do not develop through their actions but through their arguments, opinions and decisions. There is but little action in which even Alp himself takes part, they are described by the poet himself. By restricting himself to limited action Byron adopts a method of characterization which goes together with plot development.

The bane of Alp is his everbearing pride and self-esteem. Francesca's caustic warning of his impending doom cannot daunt Alp. She tells him point blank that she cannot accept a man who is a traitor to his faith and to his ancestors, "Or thou are lost; and never shalt see - / Not earth - that's past - but heaven or no" (833 - 834). But neither the lure of heaven nor the arms of
Francesca can move Alp, his ego blocks the way.

"But his heart was swollen, and turn'd aside,
By deep interminable pride.
The first false passion of his breast
Roll'd like a torrent o'er the rest.
He sue for mercy! 'He' dismay'd
By wild words of a timid maid!
'He' wronged by Venice, vow to save
Her sons, devoted to the grave!
No - though that cloud were thunder's worst,
And charged to crush him - let it burst!"

(653 - 662).

By keeping the three 'He's in italics Byron lays stress on Alp's egotism and shows that it is his 'false passion' that becomes his final road-block. Not that Alp is une­ware of the gravity of the situation but as far as he is concerned he thinks himself helpless in the circumstances. Hence his last words are stamped with deep sorrow but uttered with equal firmness,

"Whatever my fate,
I am no changeling - 'tis too late!
The reed in storms may bow and quiver,
Then rise again; the tree must shiver".

(667 - 670).
His pride does not even allow him to imagine that the 'tree' may not only 'shiver' but may be blown away. Like Coriolanus of Shakespeare he becomes a victim of his pride. But Coriolanus' pride is an aristocratic disdain of the ignorant rabble, Alp's pride springs from his ego; Coriolanus has everything in the world; his success, his friends to extol him, his mother to encourage him, his wife to wait for him; Alp has nothing, and he kicks away the last plank - Franceses - that could take him ashore. Both change sides with a calculated plan to wreak vengeance upon their enemy, but Coriolanus does it as a protest against his unjust banishment, against the People's failure to understand him; Alp does it to gain his own ends, to win Franceses.

Elsewhere in the poem we hear him musing over death as he wanders in the battlefield strewn with the dead,

"There is something of pride in the perilous hour,
Whate'er be the shape in which death may lover;
For fame is there to say who bleeds,
And Honour's eye on daring deeds".

(485 - 488).

So the motto of his life seems to be, "No, better death than dishonour'. We understand Alp's unreasonable pride,
his 'false passion', but we also understand the peculiar
strength in his unreason and admire his guts. He dies
unforgiven but remains faithful to himself to the end.

Francesca, though she takes her own life, is no
vexiting like Madera. She has to choose one of the two
alternatives, her love and her faith, and both being
equally important to her, she solves her problem in that
way. Both Alp and Francesca being unyielding, reach an
impasse, and a point of no return. Even their deep mutual
love fails to create a common meeting ground; for, one's
respect for faith and the other's respect for self stand
in the way. But for Francesca respect for faith is not a
blind allegiance to her religious creed. In her eyes Alp
is no better than a traitor and she cannot accept a
traitor for her husband, "Again I say - that turban tear/
From off thy faithless brow" (630). Both Alp and Francesca
are right in their own way for they remain true to their
principles of life and remain unyielding to the end. For
Alp, his pride is his creed and he pays the highest price
for it.

This is a story within a story. Into a dry fact
of history, which is the professed theme of the poem,
Byron has wonderfully weaved a story which gives it a
human character and fact merges into fiction without losing
its authenticity. The fusion of fact with fiction is done by making Alp and Francesca the prime movers of the siege itself; and by keeping the cause and effect issues within the limits of probability he does not jump the bounds of reality and land it in the field of total fiction.

Parisina (1816).

Background: The story is based on a fact of history. In the advertisement to the poem Byron tells us that he collected the materials of the poem from Gibbon's "Antiquities of the House of Brunswick". The incidents of the story happened in the month of May, 1405.

Plot Construction:

The Plot: Byron's plots are always very simple but this is one of the simplest. Azo's illegitimate son Hugo is in love with his step mother Parisina. When Azo finds this out he holds a summary trial and passes the sentence of death on both. By executing Hugo and Parisina whom he held nearest to his heart, he gives to himself a life of prolonged and intense suffering.

Treatment: Parisina is wandering alone in the garden but the wonderful charm of the evening, even the

song of the nightingale does not affect her for she is anxious to meet her lover. The lovers meet and they are seen deeply and passionately in love. But there is something more in their love than a mere intensity of passion. "With many a lingering look they leave/ The spot of guilty gladness past" (49-50) and "The heaven she fears will not forgive her" (56). With the introduction of this guilty secret of the lovers an element of suspense is introduced and the story begins to move.

Though the hero is introduced he remains anonymous and Parisina is still unidentified. "And Hugo is gone to his lonely bed, /To covet there another's bride" (63-64). With this Byron removes the anonymity of the hero and also hints that their love is an adulterous one. This, on the one hand, explains the mystery of their 'guilty gladness' and Parisina's fear of heaven, and on the other add a new one, by withholding the identity of the cuckold.

Parisina, who is sleeping fitfully, murmurs in her sleep. This and Parisina's warm embrace lead her husband to the fool's paradise that even in her sleep Parisina's love for him does not sleep. But he is rudely awakened from his day-dream when he listens carefully, "He hears - Why doth prince Azo start?" (63) We now know the name of the cuckold but why does he start?
"That sleeping whisper of a name/ Bespeaks her guilt and
Azo's shame" (81 - 82).

We understand his shock but why the shame? Is there something more in it than his being a cuckold? The reader is not kept in suspense for long. "And whose that name? 'tis Hugo's, - his -/In sooth he had not
doon'd of this! " (88 - 100). But the reader is still in a fog, for the disclosure of the name does not fully explain Azo's shock and shame. The pronoun 'his' in line 88 and the pause after it deepens the mystery instead of clearing it. But it is obvious that so far as Azo is concerned the events have reached a crisis. He has a dual responsibility — as an individual he should avenge his shame and vindicate his honour, but more important than that, as the head of state he must punish the criminals. He must act and act quickly. Hence it becomes unnecessary for the purpose of the story to hold the suspense any longer. So Byron comes up with the identity of Hugo,

" 'Tis Hugo's — he, the child of one
He loved — his own evil son —
The offspring of his wayward youth,
When he betray'd Bianca's truth."

(101 - 104).
Hugo is the fruit of Aza's betrayal of Blanca, the maid—his own illegitimate son. With this revelation the love of Hugo and Parisina turns from an adulterous one into an incestuous one—a criminal love between a step-son and a step-mother. With the exposition of this fact Byron takes the story to a point of intense dramatic conflict. The father and the husband, Aza, is faced with the problem of punishing his own son and wife or by not punishing them face the criticism of murdering justice for selfish motives. The reader, on the other hand, is faced with a problem of morality. How for Aza, the beggar of an illegitimate son, the betrayer of an innocent woman, is morally justified in punishing the son? Is not Aza guilty of nearly the same offence as Hugo? As Byron is concerned with history he cannot but relate what actually happened. But it is mainly the problem of incest and illegitimacy and incidentally the crisis of Aza, that Byron wants to deal with in this poem.

After this shocking revelation Aza almost decides to kill Parisina at once but checks himself at the last moment, but he is resolved, "while in his thought, her days are numbered". (119). Next morning Aza collects all the evidence against the offenders and upon he is certain of their guilt he calls the nobles of the Court and holds a trial immediately.
Hugo's appearance in the story is gradual. At first he is an anonymous lever, then we knew his name and then his identity is disclosed which brings the story to a point of conflict. But though he remains in the background he plays his unseen role in the development of the plot. By deliberately keeping the hero in the background up to the point of conflict Byron is able to keep alive the interest of the reader to the highest pitch. The reader knows what he has done, and now he is curious to know what he will do in facing the trial.

Hugo demands an audience and as we hear him a whole new act of the drama gets on the stage. It appears that Azo's wrong was not confined to Hugo's mother alone, he also betrayed Hugo personally.

"But wrong for wrong :— this, — deem'd thy bride,
The other victim of thy pride, —
Thou know'est for me was destined long;
Thou saw'est and coveted'st her charm;"

(253 - 256)

So Parisina was Hugo's chosen bride, but Azo, in his lust, fell for her charms and married her, for he considered Hugo, "A match ignoble for her arms". (259). Thus Parisina also was made a victim of his lust and pride. This is the climactic stroke of the drama and the reader is shocked
beyond belief. He is inevitably led to choose between Apex and Hugo as to whose offence is more serious. If Hugo is guilty of incest, is Apex better? For he also took away his son's chosen bride. Hugo bitterly reminds Apex that he is only reaping the fruit of his own sowing, getting his loan back with interest.

"See what thy guilty love hath done:
Repaid thee with too like a son!"

(294 - 295)

However, the sentence of death is passed, but though Hugo's end is shown Parisina's end is kept shrouded in mystery,

"Hugo is fallen; and from that hour,
No more in palace, hall or bower,
Was Parisina heard or seen"

(502 - 504)

So it is not difficult to guess what happened to her. Perhaps a sense of decency stopped Byron from showing the execution of a woman.

Composition :- The poem begins with a brief 14 line introduction of two sentences which tells us of the feel of the atmosphere of the time which is evening,

"It is the hour when from the boughs
The nightingale's high note is heard;
It is the hour when lover's vows
Seem sweet in every whisper'd word;"
And gentle winds, and trees near
Make music to the lonely ear. (1-6)

It is romantic and its lyrical quality lends it a charming musical effect. The imagery is mainly of sight and sound; and the one, "As twilight melts beneath the moon away" (14) is wonderfully expressive without being involved.

Huge and Parisina meet and they are so deeply in love that the external world does not exist for them.

"And headless as the dead are they
Of aught around, above, beneath;
As if all else had pass'd away
They only for each other breathe". (33 - 38).

Within these four lines Byron has condensed a world of love, its intensity and its passion.

When in her sleep Parisina reveals her guilty secret the shock of Aza is expressed with a different kind of imagery which goes in tune with Aza's mental state.

"And where that name? that over his pillow
Sounds fearful as the breaking billow,
Which rolls the plank upon the shore,
And dashes on the pointed rock
The wretch who sinks to rise no more,-
So came upon his soul the shock". (93 - 98).
The characteristic quality of Byron's imagery does not lie alone in the use of words like 'fearful', 'breaking billow', 'dash', 'Pointed rock', etc; it also lies in his preference for the wild aspect of nature whenever he wants to infuse passion into his poetry.

As Parisina stands the trial the nobles and the servants who were at her command the day before burn haughty and hostile. "Now, - what is she? and what are they?/ Can she command, or these obey?" (160 - 161). With these three most brief questions Byron is able to carry all the emptiness and humility of her present situation. And as she stands in that hall of insult and dishonour her dream-like eyes,

"Now seem'd with hot and livid glow
To press, not shade, the orbs below;
Which glance so heavily, and fill,
As tear on tear grows gathering still".

(179 - 182)

This detailed visual imagery is so vivid that the image of the unfortunate Parisina seems to leap out of the page.

Characters: Hugo is not a romantic, Gothic hero like Conrad, nor he is an egotist like Alpemar does he have the teen-age romantic dash like Selim. Conrad and
Ali are social outcasts for one reason or another, Gellu
has no faith in society, Hugo becomes an outcast for a
deed for which it is difficult to hold him responsible.
He is a perfectly natured individual who thinks reasonably
and though talks bitterly but without anger and has his
emotions under control. He is proud without being arrogant,
fiercely humble and remains unyielding to his bitter end.

We do not see Hugo until the trial opens which
he faces, haughty and defiant,

"His sorrow, if he felt it, slept;
Stern and erect his brow was raised;
What' er the grief his soul avow'd,
He would not shrink before the crowd.

(165 - 188).

He does not go under the shock of the sentence but with
perfect humility looks out at his father holding him
responsible for his ignoble birth and his betrayal of his
mother,

"Nor are my mother's wrong forgot,
Her slighted love and ruined name,
Her offspring's heritance of shame

(242 - 244)

... ... ... ...

"Her broken heart - my sever'd head -
'Neath witness for thee from the dead
How trusty and how tender were
He frankly admits his guilt, "'Tis true that I have done thee wrong" (252), but tells him point blank that he was wronged first, "With thy very crime - my birth" (257). His life is as noble as any one else's but for the blot of illegitimacy stamped on it by Azo himself.

But Hugo is not trying to shift the responsibility of his offence on to his father's shoulders, for when all is said and done he says humbly,

"For though thou work'dst my mother's ill,
And made thine own my destined bride,
I feel thou art my father still;
And harsh as sounds thy hard decree,
'Tis not unjust, although from thee".

(307 - 311).

'although from thee' is not an insinuating appeal of mercy of an erring son to the heart of a loving father, for he openly admits that the sentence is not unjust. Hugo questions the moral right of Azo to sentence him, not his legal right. This is also Byron's question. This is the question that torments Hugo and he intends this to torment Azo also. In the eyes of man-made law he is a criminal, but is there any difference between the father and the son in the eyes of God?
"As err'd the sire, so err'd the son
And thou must punish both in one
My crime seems worst in human view
But God must judge between us two".

(312 - 317)

There is a tone of calm resignation in his voice and though he throws the bitter truth in his father's face he has a deep sympathy for him. He is aware of the deep love that Aza bears him and knows well that in executing him Aza is going to destroy his own world.

Hugo's spirit remains unflagged and undaunted as ever and he dies, like all the heroes of Byron, proud and defiant till the end,

"No, - yours my forfeit blood and breath;
These hands are chain'd, but let me die
At least with an unshackled eye -
Strike 1"  (449 - 452)

There is little in him that is extraordinary, but there is everything in him that deserves respect. His offence does neither make him ignoble or noble, it only makes him normal.

The way in which Byron deals with Parisina shows his little sympathy for her. He says directly, "She stood, I said, all pale and still, /The living cause of Hugo's ill"
Azo also puts the blame squarely on Parisina for Hugo's fate; "Go! woman of the wanton breast; Not I, but thou his blood dost shed" (219 - 220). As the fatal hour approaches her eyes which were full of tears of humiliation are stricken with terror and panic. Unable to bear the agony any longer she faints but comes round only in a state of total mental unbalance. Frail, weak and helpless she dies unloved and lonely in a hostile atmosphere. Hers is a greater tragedy for she needs sympathy the most but gets the least.

With the trial of Hugo and Parisina also begins the trial of Azo,

"But yesterday
I gloried in a wife and son;
That dream this morning pass'd away;
Ere day declines, I shall have none.
My life must linger on alone;" (196-202).

It is not difficult to notice the tone of despair in Azo's voice - the last line rings prophetically with it. But he believes that in this tragic drama he is only an instrument, the offenders are getting what they rightly deserve for their crime and justifies his action, "There breathes not one/ Who would not do as I have done". (203 - 204).
After the execution of Hugo and Parisina a life of torment begins for Azo. Azo not only executes Hugo and Parisina but also, as far as his own life in this world is concerned, himself. For the sake of justice he has to punish the offenders when he holds nearest to his heart and by so doing bestrides on himself the curse of a life of total void. Hugo and Parisina's punishment is seen over and done with, but his own punishment is long, lacerating and cruel. He is the ideal judge who suffers not equally but more than the offenders by his own verdict.

He was past all birth and vyce;
Nothing more remain'd below
But sleepless nights and heavy days,
A mind all dead to scorn or praise". (548–549)
Azo's tragedy is more bitter and poignant and so in spite of the terrible justice of Hugo's words the reader feels a deep sympathy for his too.

Byron has little regard for the cant of either illegitimacy or incest which are the subject matters of the poem. We are not sure if Byron was prompted to write this story as an answer to the rumour of his incest with his half-sister Augusta, for he wrote this in January 1816, just before, he left England for ever, after his separation with his wife. For Byron, a child born in 18
is not necessarily a sinful child and incest in the mind
is more vicious than incest of the body. Hugo's words "I
am no bastard in my soul" (296), is a great truth which
the hypocritical society ignores to keep up the face of
a hollow virtue. Byron judges men by their real intentions
than what they profess; he is more interested in the cause
behind the deeds than the deeds themselves. So he can free
himself from the shackles of established prejudices and
has the free and liberal outlook of a modern.

This is an extremely well constructed and well-
knit story. There is virtually no action, the events de- 
scribed have to be felt and realized. All the events happen
in closed places, in a garden, in a bed-room and in a
hall, where the protagonists act but little. In such a
story there is every chance of its getting tiresome and
boring. So here Byron carefully avoids all digressions
and there is no description which has no direct bearing
on the plot movement. By shifting the focus alternately
on Parisina, Hugo and Aze. Byron is able to avoid a
tiring narration which moves dramatically to its appointed
goal.

These poems of Byron are representative of his
other short narratives so far as the nature of subject
matter, the type of characters, and the style of composit-
tion are concerned. The heroes of his imagination are
lonely and mysterious; all the heroes, whether of history
or of his imagination are socially alienated, either because
they are victims of social injustice, or because they rebel against the established codes, or because they act daringly in order to assert their identity, but all of them remain proud and defiant till the end. But it will be an injustice to Byron if we do not mention what he thought about his early Eastern Tales in his mature years. Commenting on the opinions of the critics about his dramas and Don Juan he says, "You see what it is to throw pearls to swine. As long as I write the exaggerated nonsense which has corrupted the public taste, they applauded to the very echo, and, now that I have really composed, within these three or four years, some things which should 'not willingly be let die', the whole herd snort and grumble and return to wallow in their mire. However, it is fit I should pay the penalty of spoiling them, as no man has contributed more than me in my earlier compositions to produce that exaggerated and false taste". This proves the moral worth of Don Juan, that he can attack himself without mercy if the cause is just. It may appear that Byron found lyric inadequate for the expression of his adventure-loving temperament and his proud defiance of all establishments. So he turned to the narrative form

and in all his narrative poems the central character is
Byron himself, in disguise, as its hero.

These 'criminal' heroes of Byron are not meant
to serve as models of behaviour but are records of their
guilt and suffering. He said to Lady Blessington, "We
are all the creatures of circumstance, the greater part
of our errors are caused, if not excused, by events and
situations over which we have had little current, the
world sees the faults, but they see not what led to them." He sympathises with his heroes not because he excuses
their faults but because of the fact that they are also
'creatures of circumstance'. He asks his readers not to
excuse their faults but to find out the circumstances
that led to the faults and by that have a proper underst-
anding of them.

Here we have had a look at the narrative poems
of the romantic Byron of the middle period. They are
definite stories having their own distinctive character-
istics. The satirical narrative poems of his last period,
our next field of study - are however, a class by them-
selves. Here there are heroes without any heroic quality,
no romance, no melodrama and they are narratives without

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any real story. Their interest lies as much as in how
he says as in what he says. They have to be read at two
levels of understanding: as a criticism of life expressed
in savage satire and as an enjoyment of life expressed
in the form of a highly entertaining, conversational kind
of poetry which takes away much of the bite of the
former.

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