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BYRON AND THE MODERN WORLD

By Bertrand Russell

The nineteenth century, in comparison with the present age, appears rational, progressive, and satisfied; yet the opposite qualities of our time were possessed by many of the most remarkable men during the epoch of liberal optimism. When we consider men, not as artists or discoverers, not as sympathetic or antipathetic to our own tastes, but as forces, as causes of change in the social structure, in judgments of value, or in intellectual outlook, we find that the course of events in recent times has necessitated much readjustment in our estimates, making some men less important than they had seemed, and others more so. Among those whose importance is greater than it seemed, I shall maintain that Byron deserves a high place. On the Continent such a view would not appear surprising, but in the English-speaking world it may be thought strange. It was on the Continent that Byron was influential, and it is not in England that his spiritual progeny is to be sought. To most of us, his verse seems often poor and his sentiment often tawdry, but abroad his way of feeling and his outlook on life were transmitted and developed and transmuted until they became so wide-spread as to be factors in great events.

The aristocratic rebel, of whom Byron was in his day the exemplar, is a very different type from the leader of a peasant or proletarian revolt. Those who are hungry have no need of an elaborate philosophy to stimulate or excuse discontent, and anything of the kind appears to them merely an amusement of the idle rich. They want what others have, not some intangible and metaphysical good. Though they may preach Christian love, as the medieval communist rebels did, their real reasons for doing so are very simple: that the lack of it in the rich and powerful causes the sufferings of the poor, and that the presence of it among comrades in revolt is thought essential to success. But experience of the struggle leads to a despair of the powers of love, leaving naked hate as the driving force. A rebel of this type, if, like Marx, he invents a philosophy, invents one solely designed to demonstrate the ultimate victory of his party, not one concerned with values. His values remain primitive: the good is enough to eat, and the rest is talk. No hungry man is likely to think otherwise.

The aristocratic rebel, since he has enough to eat, must have other causes of discontent. I do not include among rebels the mere leaders of factions temporarily out of power; I include only men whose philosophy requires some greater change than their own personal success. It may be that love of power is the underground source of their discontent, but in their conscious thought there is criticism of the government of the world, which, when it goes deep enough, takes the form of Titanic cosmic self-assertion, or, in those who retain some superstition, of Satanism. Both are to be found in Byron. Both, largely through men whom he influenced, became common in large sections of society which could hardly be deemed aristocratic. The aristocratic philosophy of rebellion, growing, developing, and changing as it approached maturity, has inspired a long series of revolutionary movements, from the Carbonari after the fall of Napoleon to Hitler's *coup* in 1933; and at each stage it has inspired a corresponding manner of thought and feeling among intellectuals and artists. It is obvious that an aristocrat does not become a rebel unless his temperament and circumstances are in some way peculiar. Byron's circumstances were very peculiar. His earliest recollections were of his parents' quarrels; his mother was a woman whom he feared for her cruelty and despised for her vulgarity; his nurse combined wickedness with the strictest Calvinist theology; his lameness filled him with shame, and prevented him from being one of the herd at school. At ten years old, after living in poverty, he suddenly found himself a Lord and the owner of Newstead. His great-uncle the "wicked Lord," from whom he inherited, had killed a man in a duel thirty-three years before, and been ostracized by his neighbors ever since. The Byrons had been a lawless family, and the Gordons, his mother's ancestors, even more so. After the squalor of a back street in Aberdeen, the boy naturally rejoiced in his title and his Abbey, and was willing to take on the character of his ancestors in gratitude for their lands. And if, in recent years, their bellicosity had led them into trouble, he learned that in former centuries it had brought them renown. One of his earliest poems, "On leaving Newstead Abbey," relates his emotions at this time:

> Through thy battlements, Newstead, the hollow winds whistle;
> Thou, the hall of my fathers, art gone to decay;
> In thy once smiling garden the hemlock and thistle
> Have choked up the rose which late bloomed in the way.

Of the mail-covered Barons, who proudly to battle
Led their vassals from Europe to Palestine's plain,
The escutcheon and shield, which with every blast rattle,
Are the only sad vestiges now that remain.

And so on, through Cressy and Marston Moor, until he comes to the moral:

Shades of heroes, farewell; your descendant, departing
From the scene of his ancestors, bids you adieu!
Abroad or at home, your remembrance imparting
New courage, he'll think upon glory and you.

Though a tear dim his eye at this sad separation,
'Tis nature, not fear, that excites his regret;
Far distant he goes, with the same emulation,
The fame of his fathers he ne'er can forget.

That fame and that memory still will he cherish:
He vows that he ne'er will disgrace your renown:
Like you will he live, or like you will he perish:
When decay'd, may he mingle his dust with your own.

This is not the mood of a rebel, but it suggests "Childe" Harold, the modern peer who imitates medieval Barons. As an undergraduate, when for the first time Byron had an income of his own, he wrote that he felt as independent as "a German Prince who coins his own cash, or a Cherokee Chief who coins no cash at all, but enjoys what is more precious, Liberty. I speak in raptures of that Goddess because my amiable Mama was so despotic." He wrote, in later life, much noble verse in praise of freedom, but it must be understood that the freedom he praised was that of a German Prince or a Cherokee Chief, not the inferior sort that might conceivably be enjoyed by ordinary mortals.

In spite of his lineage and his title, his aristocratic relations fought shy of him, and he was made to feel himself not of their society. His mother was intensely disliked, and he was looked on with suspicion. He knew that she was vulgar, and darkly feared a similar defect in himself. Hence arose that peculiar blend of snobbery and rebellion that characterized him. If he could not be a gentleman in the modern style, he would be a bold Baron in the style of his crusading ancestors, or perhaps in the more ferocious but even more romantic style of the Ghibelline chiefs, cursed of God and

Man as they trampled their way to splendid downfall. Medieval romances and histories were his etiquette books. He sinned like the Hohenstaufen, and like the Crusaders he died fighting the Moslem.

His shyness and sense of friendlessness made him look for comfort in love-affairs, but as he was unconsciously seeking a mother rather than a mistress, all disappointed him except Augusta. Calvinism, which he never shook off—to Shelley, in 1816, he described himself as "methodist, Calvinist, Augustinian"—made him feel that his manner of life was wicked; but wickedness, he told himself, was a hereditary curse in his blood, an evil fate to which he was predestined by the Almighty. If that were indeed the case, since he *must* be remarkable, he would be remarkable as a sinner, and would dare transgressions beyond the courage of the fashionable libertines whom he wished to despise. He loved Augusta genuinely because she was of his blood—of the Ishmaelite race of the Byrons—and also, more simply, because she had an elder sister's kindly care for his daily welfare. But this was not all that she had to offer him. Through her simplicity and her obliging good-nature, she became the means of providing him with the most delicious self-congratulatory remorse. He could feel himself the equal of the greatest sinners—the peer of Manfred, of Cain, almost of Satan himself. The Calvinist, the aristocrat, and the rebel were all equally satisfied; and so was the romantic lover, whose heart was broken by the loss of the only earthly being still capable of rousing in it the gentler emotions of pity and love.

> She was like me in lineaments—her eyes,
> Her hair, her features, all to the very tone
> Even of her voice, they said were like to mine;
> But softened all, and tempered into beauty:
> She had the same lone thoughts, and wanderings,
> The quest of hidden knowledge, and a mind
> To comprehend the universe: nor these
> Alone, but with them gentler powers than mine,
> Pity, and smiles, and tears—which I had not;
> And tenderness—but that I had for her;
> Humility—and that I never had.
> Her faults were mine—her virtues were her own—
> I loved her, and destroyed her!

But if not humility, he still has pride to comfort him. When the fiend begins: "Thy many crimes have made thee," he interrupts:

What are they to such as thee?
Must crimes be punished but by other crimes,
And greater criminals? Back to thy hell!
Thou hast no power upon me, *that* I feel;
Thou never shalt possess me, *that* I know;
What I have done is done: I bear within
A torture which could nothing gain from thine. . . .
Thou didst not tempt me, and thou could'st not tempt me;
I have not been thy dupe, nor am thy prey—
But was my own destroyer, and will be
My own hereafter—Back, ye baffled fiends!
The hand of death is on me—but not yours!

Byron, though he felt himself the equal of Satan, never quite ventured to put himself in the place of God. This next step in the growth of pride was taken by Nietzsche, who says: "If there were Gods, how could I endure it to be no God! *Therefore* there are no Gods." Observe the premise of this reasoning: "whatever humbles my pride is to be judged false." Nietzsche, like Byron, and even to a greater degree, had a pious upbringing, but having a better intellect, he found a better escape than Satanism. He remained, however, very sympathetic to Byron: "The tragedy is that we cannot believe the dogmas of religion and metaphysics if we have the strict methods of truth in heart and head, but on the other hand we have become through the development of humanity so tenderly sensitively suffering that we need the highest kind of means of salvation and consolation; whence arises the danger that man may bleed to death through the truth that he recognizes. Byron expresses this in immortal lines:

Sorrow is knowledge: they who know the most
Must mourn the deepest o'er the fatal truth,
The Tree of Knowledge is not that of Life."

Sometimes, though rarely, Byron approaches more nearly to Nietzsche's point of view. For example, in Cain, where Lucifer says:

He as a conqueror will call the conquered
Evil: but what will be the *good* He gives?
Were I the victor, *His* works would be deemed
The only evil ones.

But in general Byron's ethical theory, as opposed to his practice, remains strictly conventional.

The great man, to Nietzsche, is godlike; to Byron, usually, a Titan at war with himself. Sometimes, however, he portrays a sage not unlike Zarathustra:

> He who ascends to mountain tops, shall find
> The loftiest peaks most wrapped in cloud and snow;
> He who surpasses or subdues mankind,
> Must look down on the hate of those below.
> Though high *above* the sun of glory glow,
> And far *beneath* the earth and ocean spread,
> *Round* him are icy rocks, and loudly blow
> Contending tempests on his naked head,
> And thus reward the toils which to those summits led.

The Corsair, in his dealings with his followers,

> Still sways their souls with that commanding art
> That dazzles, leads, yet chills the vulgar heart.

And this same hero "hated man too much to feel remorse." A footnote assures us that the Corsair is true to human nature, since similar traits were exhibited by Genseric, King of the Vandals, by Ezzelino the Ghibelline tyrant[1] and by a certain Louisiana pirate.

Byron was not obliged to confine himself to the Levant and the Middle Ages in his search for heroes, since it was not difficult to invest Napoleon with a romantic mantle. The influence of Napoleon on the imagination of nineteenth-century Europe was very profound; he inspired Clausewitz, Stendal, Heine, the thought of Fichte and the acts of Italian patriots. His ghost stalks through the age, the only force which is strong enough to stand up against industrialism and commerce, pouring scorn on pacifism and shopkeeping. Tolstoy's "War and Peace" is an attempt to exorcise the ghost, but a vain one, for the spectre has never been more powerful than at the present day. Just after Waterloo, Byron summed him up:

> Quiet to quick bosoms is a hell,
> And *there* had been thy bane; there is a fire
> And motion of the soul, which will not dwell
> In its own narrow being, but aspire

[1] Whom Dante finds in hell, among the "tyrants who took to blood and plunder." *Inferno,* Canto XII.

Beyond the fitting medium of desire;
And, but once kindled, quenchless evermore,
Preys upon high adventure, nor can tire
Of aught but rest; a fever at the core,
Fatal to him who bears, to all who ever bore.

During the Hundred Days, he proclaimed his wish for Napoleon's victory, and when he heard of Waterloo he said "I'm damned sorry for it." Only once, for a moment, did he turn against his hero: in 1814, when (so he thought) suicide would have been more seemly than abdication. At this moment, he sought consolation in the virtue of Washington, but the return from Elba made this effort no longer necessary. In France, when Byron died, "it was remarked in many newspapers that the two greatest men of the century, Napoleon and Byron, had disappeared almost at the same time."[2] Carlyle, who, at the time, considered Byron "the noblest spirit in Europe," and felt as if he had "lost a brother," came afterwards to prefer Goethe, but still coupled Byron with Napoleon:

For your nobler minds, the publishing of some such Work of Art, in one or the other dialect, becomes almost a necessity. For what is it properly but an altercation with the Devil, before you begin honestly Fighting him? Your Byron publishes his *Sorrows of Lord George,* in verse and in prose, and copiously otherwise: your Bonaparte presents his *Sorrows of Napoleon* Opera, in an all-too stupendous style; with music of cannon-volleys, and murder-shrieks of a world; his stage-lights are the fires of Conflagration; his rhyme and recitative are the tramp of embattled Hosts and the sound of falling Cities.[3]

It is true that, three chapters further on, Carlyle gives the emphatic command: "Close thy *Byron;* open thy *Goethe.*" But Byron was in his blood, whereas Goethe remained an aspiration.

To Carlyle, Goethe and Byron were antitheses; to Alfred de Musset, they were accomplices in the wicked work of instilling the poison of melancholy into the cheerful Gallic soul. Most young Frenchmen of that age knew Goethe, it seems, only through the "Sorrows of Werther," and not at all as the Olympian. Musset blamed Byron for not being consoled by the Adriatic and Countess Guiccioli—wrongly, for after he knew her he wrote no more "Manfreds." But Don Juan was as little read in France as Goethe's

[2] Maurois, *Life of Byron.*

[3] *Sartor Resartus,* Book II, Chap. VI.

more cheerful poetry. What Musset says about the pair is interesting:

Or, vers ce temps-là, deux poètes, les deux plus beaux génies du siècle après Napoléon, venaient de consacrer leur vie à rassembler tous les éléments d'angoisse et de douleur épars dans l'univers. Goethe, le patriarche d'une littérature nouvelle, après avoir peint dans Werther la passion qui mène au suicide, avait tracé dans son Faust la plus sombre figure humaine qui eût jamais représenté le mal et le malheur. Ses écrits commencèrent alors à passer d'Allemagne en France. Du fond de son cabinet d'étude, entouré de tableaux et de statues, riche, heureux et tranquille, il regardait venir à nous son oeuvre de ténèbres avec un sourire paternel. Byron lui répondit par un cri de douleur qui fit tressaillir la Grèce, et suspendit Manfred sur les abîmes, comme si le néant eût été le mot de l'énigme hideuse dont il s'enveloppait.

Pardonnez-moi, ô grands poétes, qui êtes maintenant un peu de cendre et qui reposez sous la terre! pardonnez-moi! vous êtes des demi-dieux, et je ne suis qu'un enfant qui souffre. Mais, en écrivant tout ceci, je ne puis m'empêcher de vous maudire.

And he proceeds to tell them that they ought to have made poetry out of their joys as well as their sorrows. But most French poets, ever since, have found Byronic unhappiness the best material for their verses.

It will be observed that, to Musset, it was only after Napoleon that Byron and Goethe were the greatest geniuses of the century. Born in 1810, Musset was one of the generation whom he describes as "conçus entre deux batailles" in a lyrical account of the glories and disasters of the Empire. In Germany, feeling about Napoleon was more divided. There were those who, like Heine, saw him as the mighty missionary of liberalism, the destroyer of serfdom, the enemy of legitimacy, the man who made hereditary princelings tremble; there were others who saw him as Antichrist, the would-be destroyer of the noble German nation, the immoralist who had proved once for all that Teutonic virtue can only be preserved by unquenchable hatred of France. Bismarck effected a synthesis: Napoleon remained Antichrist, but an Antichrist to be imitated, not merely to be abhorred. Nietzsche, who accepted the compromise, remarked with ghoulish joy that the classical age of war is coming, and that we owe this boon, not to the French Revolution, but to Napoleon. And in this way nationalism, Satanism, and hero-worship, the legacy of Byron, became part of the complex soul of Germany.

Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein,* written under the inspiration of conversations with Byron in the romantic scenery of the Alps, contains what might almost be regarded as an allegorical prophetic history of the development of romanticism. Frankenstein's monster is not, as he has become in proverbial parlance, a *mere* monster: he is, at first, a gentle being, longing for human affection, but he is driven to hatred and violence by the horror which his ugliness inspires in those whose love he attempts to gain. Unseen, he observes a virtuous family of poor cottagers, and surreptitiously assists their labours. At length he decides to make himself known to them:

> The more I saw of them, the greater became my desire to claim their protection and kindness; my heart yearned to be known and loved by these amiable creatures: to see their sweet looks directed towards me with affection, was the utmost limit of my ambition. I dared not think that they would turn from me with disdain and horror.

But they did. So he first demanded of his creator the creation of a female like himself, and, when that was refused, devoted himself to murdering, one by one, all whom Frankenstein loved. But even then, when all his murders are accomplished, and while he is gazing upon the dead body of Frankenstein, the monster's *sentiments* remain noble:

> That also is my victim! in his murder my crimes are consummated: the miserable series of my being is wound to its close! Oh, Frankenstein! generous and self-devoted being! What does it avail that I now ask thee to pardon me? I, who irretrievably destroyed thee by destroying all that thou lovedst. Alas! he is cold, he cannot answer me. . . .
>
> He (he continued, pointing to the corpse) he suffered not in the consummation of the death—oh! not the ten-thousandth portion of the anguish that was mine during the lingering detail of its execution. A frightful selfishness hurried me on, while my heart was poisoned with remorse. Think you that the groans of Clerval were music to my ears? My heart was fashioned to be susceptible of love and sympathy; and, when wrenched by misery and vice and hatred, it did not endure the violence of the change, without torture such as you cannot even imagine. . . . When I run over the frightful catalogue of my sins, I cannot believe that I am the same creature whose thoughts were once filled with sublime and transcendent visions of the beauty and the majesty of goodness. But it is even so; the fallen angel becomes a malignant devil. Yet even that enemy of God and man had friends and associates in his desolation; I am alone.

Robbed of its romantic form, there is nothing unreal in this psychology, and it is unnecessary to search out pirates or Vandal kings in order to find parallels. To an English visitor, the ex-Kaiser, at Doorn, lamented that the English no longer loved him. Dr. Burtt, in his book on the juvenile delinquent, mentions a boy of seven who drowned another boy in the Regent Canal; his reason was that neither his family nor his contemporaries showed him affection. Dr. Burtt was kind to him, and he became a respectable citizen; but no Dr. Burtt undertook the reformation of Frankenstein's monster.

It is not the psychology of the romantics that is at fault: it is their standard of values. They admire strong passions, of no matter what kind, and whatever may be their social consequences. Romantic love, especially when unfortunate, is strong enough to win their approval, but most of the strongest passions are destructive—hate and resentment and jealousy, remorse and despair, outraged pride and the fury of the unjustly oppressed, martial ardour and contempt for slaves and cowards. Hence the type of man encouraged by romanticism, especially of the Byronic variety, is violent and anti-social, an anarchic rebel or a conquering tyrant.

This outlook makes an appeal for which the reasons lie very deep in human nature and human circumstances. By self-interest man has become gregarious, but in instinct he has remained to a great extent solitary; hence the need of religion and morality to re-inforce self-interest. But the habit of foregoing present satisfactions for the sake of future advantages is irksome, and when passions are roused the prudent restraints of social behaviour become difficult to endure. Those who, at such times, throw them off, acquire a new energy and sense of power from the cessation of inner conflict, and, though they may come to disaster in the end, enjoy meanwhile a sense of god-like exaltation which, though known to the great mystics, can never be experienced by a merely pedestrian virtue. The solitary part of their nature re-asserts itself, but if the intellect survives, the re-assertion must clothe itself in myth. The mystic becomes one with God, and in the contemplation of the Infinite feels himself absolved from duty to his neighbour. The anarchic rebel does even better: he feels himself not one with God, but God. Truth and duty, which represent our subjection to matter and to our neighbours, exist no longer for the man who has become God; for others, truth is what *he* posits, duty what *he* commands. If we could all live solitary and without labor, we could all enjoy this

ecstasy of independence; since we cannot, its delights are only available to madmen and dictators.

The romantic movement is, in essence, a revolt of our solitary instincts against the difficult precepts of social co-operation. Such social relations as we share with gorillas—sexual love and family affection—are spared by the earlier forms of romanticism, because their hold upon our instincts is very strong; but other restrictions imposed by society are loosened one by one. First comes the revolt against etiquette and the formal manners of Courts, the "return to nature" and the belief in the simple virtues of the peasant. With this (not from observation of peasants) goes the belief that sexual relations should be based on love, and an attack upon the custom of making marriage an economic contract. At the same time there is admiration for pastoral scenery as opposed to that of Fleet Street, which Dr. Johnson preferred, and there is a revolt against artificial forms in art and literature. All this had happened before Byron's time, and since it attacked nothing essential to the social structure it was not open to serious criticism.

But, under the stimulus of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic wars, revolt went deeper. The change is typified by the change in scenery. Byron no longer writes of mossy glades and sylvan rivulets; he writes of deserts and Alps, of thunderstorms and shipwrecks:

> O night
> And storm, and darkness, ye are wondrous strong. . . .
> Far along,
> From peak to peak, the rattling crags among,
> Leaps the live thunder!

All this, he says, is like "the light of a dark eye in woman"; love, for him, is not gentle, but violent like a thunderstorm. What Byron says of Rousseau is applicable to himself. Rousseau was, he says,

> He who threw
> Enchantment over passion, and from woe
> Wrung overwhelming eloquence . . .
> yet he knew
> How to make madness beautiful, and cast
> O'er erring deeds and thoughts, a heavenly hue.

But there is a profound difference between the two men. Rousseau is pathetic, Byron is fierce; Rousseau's timidity is obvious, Byron's

is concealed; Rousseau admires virtue provided it is simple, while Byron admires sin provided it is elemental. The difference, though it is only that between two stages in the revolt of unsocial instincts, is important, and shows the direction in which the movement is developing.

Revolt of solitary instincts against social bonds is the key to the philosophy, the politics, and the sentiments, not only of what is commonly called the romantic movement, but of its progeny down to the present day. Philosophy, under the influence of German idealism, became solipsistic, and self-development was proclaimed as the fundamental principle of ethics.[4] As regards sentiment, there has to be a distasteful compromise between the search for isolation and the necessities of passion and economics. D. H. Lawrence's story, "The Man Who Loved Islands," has a hero who disdained such compromise to a gradually increasing extent, and at last died of hunger and cold, but in the enjoyment of complete isolation; but this degree of consistency has not been achieved by the writers who praise solitude. The comforts of civilized life are not obtainable by a hermit, and a man who wishes to write books or produce works of art must submit to the ministrations of others if he is to survive while he does his work. In order to continue to *feel* solitary, he must be able to prevent those who serve him from impinging upon his ego, which is best accomplished if they are slaves. Passionate love, however, is a more difficult matter. So long as passionate lovers are regarded as in revolt against social trammels, they are admired; but in real life the love-relation itself quickly becomes a social trammel, and the partner in love comes to be hated all the more vehemently if the love is strong enough to make the bond difficult to break. Hence love comes to be conceived as a battle, in which each is attempting to destroy the other by breaking through the protecting walls of his or her ego. This point of view has become familiar through the writing of Strindberg, and, still more, of D. H. Lawrence.

Not only passionate love, but every friendly relation to others, is only possible, to this way of feeling, in so far as the others can be regarded as a projection of one's own Self. This is feasible if the

[4] Papini, in his youth a disciple of William James, and afterwards one of the philosophic champions of Fascism, wrote, in his early period, an essay called "L'Imitazione d'Iddio," in which he urges that we should henceforth take, not Christ, but God the Father, as our model.

others are blood-relations, and the more nearly they are related the more easily it is possible. Hence an emphasis on race, leading, as in the case of the Ptolemys, to endogamy. How this affected Byron, we know; Wagner suggests a similar sentiment in the love of Siegmund and Sieglinde. Nietzsche, though not scandalously, preferred his sister to all other women: "How strongly I feel," he writes to her, "in all that you say and do, that we belong to the same stock. You understand more of me than others do, because we come of the same parentage. This fits in very well with my 'philosophy.' "

The principle of nationality, of which Byron was a protagonist, is an extension of the same "philosophy." A nation is assumed to be a race, descended from common ancestors, and sharing some kind of "blood-consciousness." Mazzini, who constantly found fault with the English for their failure to appreciate Byron, conceived nations as possessed of a mystical individuality, and attributed to them the kind of anarchic greatness that other romantics sought in heroic men. Liberty, for nations, came to be regarded, not only by Mazzini, but by comparatively sober statesmen, as something absolute, which, in practice, made international co-operation impossible.

Belief in blood and race is naturally associated with antisemitism. At the same time, the romantic outlook, partly because it is aristocratic, and partly because it prefers passion to calculation, has a vehement contempt for commerce and finance. It is thus led to proclaim an opposition to capitalism which is quite different from that of the socialist who represents the interest of the proletariat, since it is an opposition based on dislike of economic pre-occupations, and strengthened by the suggestion that the capitalist world is governed by Jews. This point of view is expressed by Byron on the rare occasions when he condescends to notice anything so vulgar as economic power:

> Who hold the balance of the world? Who reign
> O'er congress, whether royalist or liberal?
> Who rouse the shirtless patriots of Spain?
> (That make old Europe's journals squeak and gibber all).
> Who keep the world, both Old and New, in pain
> Or pleasure? Who make politics run glibber all?
> The shade of Buonaparte's noble daring?
> Jew Rothschild, and his fellow Christian Baring.

The verse is perhaps not very musical, but the sentiment is quite of our time.

To sum up:

The romantic movement, in which Byron was the most romantic figure, aimed at liberating human personality from the fetters of social convention and social morality. In part, these fetters were a mere useless hindrance to desirable forms of activity, for every ancient community has developed rules of behavior for which there is nothing to be said except that they are traditional. But egoistic passions, when once let loose, are not easily brought again into subjection to the needs of society. Christianity had succeeded, to some extent, in taming the Ego, but economic, political, and intellectual causes stimulated revolt against the churches, and the romantic movement brought the revolt into the sphere of morals. By encouraging a new lawless ego it made social co-operation impossible, and left its disciples faced with the alternative of anarchy or despotism. Egoism at first, as in Frankenstein's monster, made men expect from others a parental tenderness; but when they discovered, with indignation, that others had their own ego, the disappointed desire for tenderness turned to hatred and violence. Man is not a solitary animal, and, so long as social life survives, self-realization cannot be the supreme principle of ethics.

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