LORD BYRON: THE PRISONER OF CHILLON
Text edited, from Byron’s rough draft, and the fair copies by Mary Shelley and Claire Claremont, by Peter Cochran.

TEXTUAL INTRODUCTION
THE PRISONER OF CHILLON:
THE CASE FOR MULTIPLE AUTHORSHIP
Albè, Percy, Mary, Clare

[A paper given on September 13th 1997 at the Anglia Polytechnic University Mary Shelley Conference, Mary Shelley: Parents, Peers, Progeny.]

I propose in this paper to refer to the four protagonists Mary Godwin, Claire Claremont, Percy Bysshe Shelley, and George Gordon, Sixth Baron Byron of Rochdale, as “Mary”, “Clare”, “Percy”, and “Albè”.

The Prisoner of Chillon was drafted, at some time between Thursday June 27th and Saturday 29th June 1816, at Ouchy, near Lausanne on the north shore of Lake Geneva, round from the Castle to which its action, or rather its inaction, is confined. The drafting was probably done in Albè’s room (westernmost, front, second floor) at the Hotel de l’Ancre, Ouchy; for Albè and Percy were detained there by heavy rain after their traumatic tour of the Castle on Tuesday June 25th. They had started their tour of the Lake – unaccompanied by Clare and Mary – on Saturday June 22nd.

The poor-quality, highly absorbent blue laid paper of which the first and fourth sheets of the draft are constituted (they seem originally to have been one) suggests Albè improvising, on the only paper the inn room could provide late at night; but the rest of the draft is on better-quality, white laid paper – albeit of two different types – perhaps provided by the landlord (although some extra stanzas to Childe Harold III are also on blue, laid paper, with the same watermark – see Manuscripts of the Younger Romantics, Byron VII, p. xi.)

Even at this early stage of composition, an element of doubt creeps in as to whose idea is whose, for several emendations are in pencil, and in a hand other than Albè’s. For example, on the first side of the fifth sheet, at received line 144, Albè’s original But why withhold the blow? – he died – is changed in another hand to But why delay the truth? – he died – and at received line 148, Albè’s original Though hard I strove but strove in vain / To break or bite my bonds in twain is changed in the same different hand to the more desperate Though hard I strove but strove in vain / To rend & gnash my bonds in twain. On the first sheet of the seventh side, (in the same pencilled hand, with more open loops on the “f”s than Albè’s) received lines 215-18, The last – the sole – dearest link / Between me & the eternal brink / Which lay between me and our race / Was broken in this fatal place – are changed to The last – the sole – the dearest link / Between me & the eternal brink / Which bound me to my failing race / Was broken in this fatal place ...

It is a commonplace of Albè criticism to say that he was at this time undergoing a Wordsworthian period: I count nine direct lifts from Wordsworth in The Prisoner, including the outrageous We were seven, who now are one at line 17. It is equally a commonplace to say that the presence of Percy would, at the very least, not have militated against such an inclination. “The presence of Percy”, in short, is a vital part of the creative scenario. Had he not been with Albè on the tour of the Castle of Chillon – had he not been, perhaps, present in the inn room where the poem was drafted – it could have been quite a different work. His Wordsworthian metaphysics and his radical politics are both felt, almost throughout; although the inert nihilism experienced by The Prisoner in Part 9 (Among the stones I stood, a stone) is neither Shelleyan nor Wordsworthian.

The two men left Ouchy on June 29th and arrived back at Diodati on the evening of June 30th. Albè seems immediately to have given his rough draft not to Clare (who had already
fair-copied *Childe Harold III* and many of his other 1816 poems) but, for some reason, to Mary. She seems to have started copying it at once, before they all went to bed in their two different houses, for it is dated, by Albè, *June 30th* at its start and *July 2nd* at the end. The notebook in which Mary makes it is identical to the one in which Percy fair-copies *Mont Blanc* and in which she fair-copies the *Hymn to Intellectual Beauty*. Both notebooks were part of the Scrope Davies find in a Barclay’s Bank vault in 1976.

Albè does not find a perfect copyist in Mary. He has to correct many small details in her work; but what is fascinating is the number of readings which alter his draft’s meaning, but which he allows, some with good reason, some without. I shall mention only the changes he allows.

At line 102, Mary prefers *Those relics of a home so dear* to Albè’s *These relics of a home so dear* and this is the reading of all editions.

At lines 115-16, Albè’s draft has *Below the surface of the bay / The dark cells lie wherein we lay* – However, Mary copies it as *Below the surface of the lake / The dark cells lie wherein we lay* – and Albè does not bother to correct, even though his rhyme has gone. The reading also stands to this day.

At line 139, Albè’s *heart & limb* is copied as *heart or limb* by Mary. Her reading stays.

At lines 156-7, Albè’s draft has a false rhyme: *That even in death his freeborn heart / In such a dungeon could not rest*: Mary substitutes *breast* for *heart* (when fair-copying *Don Juan* in later years she often does the reverse) and the reading stayed.

At line 189, Albè has *And grieved for those were left behind*. Mary dislikes *were*, and writes *And grieved for those he left behind*. This too is the received reading.

Mary underlines both the opening “I”s of lines 212-13, which in Albè’s original would run

\[
I \text{ only stirred in this black spot,} \\
I \text{ only lived – I only drew} \\
\text{The accursed breath of dungeon-dew ...}
\]

Clare, in *her* fair-copy, of which I shall soon speak, underlines all three “I”s in the same lines, and this is the received reading:

\[
I \text{ only stirred in this black spot,} \\
I \text{ only lived – I only drew} \\
\text{The accursed breath of dungeon-dew ...}
\]

Neither of the two fair copies, conversely, carries over Albè’s emphasis for *only* at line 212, and neither does any subsequent edition.

At lines 269-70, Albè’s draft has *And song that said a thousand things / And seemed to sing them all for me*. Once more Mary finds herself in creative disagreement, and copies 270 *And seemed to say them all for me*. Clare follows suit, and the reading stayed.

At 287-8, Albè has *I sometimes deemed that it might be / My brother’s soul come down for me*: but Mary changes the preposition, and the lines have always been *I sometimes deemed that it might be / My brother’s soul come down to me*, which seems to make a big difference. Albè’s bird is a harbinger of death, Mary’s not.

Mary’s would not have been a perfect printer’s copy. Several changes are made to the text by Albè, sometimes in such a way as to create serious decipherment problems. The first two of the longest passages are already present in his original – done with a pen sharper, and in an ink darker, than the matrix pen and ink. First, lines 80 to 87 (italicised in the following) which elaborate the beautiful spirit of The Prisoner’s younger brother:

\[
\text{For he was beautiful as Day} \\
\text{(When Day was beautiful to me} \\
\text{As to young Eagles being free)}
\]

80
A polar Day which will not see
A Sunset till its Summer’s gone,
Its sleepless Summer of long light
The Snow-clad offspring of the Sun;
And thus he was as pure and bright,
And in his natural Spirit gay,
With tears for nought but others’ ills,
And then they flowed like mountain rills ...

In the draft, this is written, messily and with no prior sketch in evidence, at right-angles to the matrix script, in the right-hand margin of Sheet 3 side 1. It has many erasures – Albè is creating directly on the page. It is then added vertically and with perfect neatness to the fifth page of Mary’s fair copy. The initial work on the passage should, it seems logical to think, have been done after July 2nd, when she finished work on her fair copy, and at a time when it was not available; her line-numbering, however, takes it into account. Next, lines 103-6, which elaborate the description of the rugged spirit of The Prisoner’s older brother:

He was a hunter of the hills
   Had followed there the deer and wolf
   To him this dungeon was a gulph,
   And fettered feet the worst of ills.

These lines are written, without erasure, straight down the middle of the page, at right-angles to the matrix script, on Sheet 3 side 2 of Albè’s draft. They are then written at right angles over the previous new passage, on the fifth page of Mary’s copy. Mary’s line-numbering take this insertion into account as well. Presumably she delayed doing the line-numbering for a while.

Another section (lines 279-92) is added by Albè in the draft to the end of section 10, at right angles to the first nine lines of the first side of the ninth sheet. It elaborates the description of the Bird, which suddenly appears to cheer the Prisoner’s loneliness. Here is its neat form:

I know not if it late were free,
   Or broke its cage to perch on mine,
But knowing well captivity –
   Sweet Bird! – I could not wish for thine!
Or if it were in winged guise
A visitant from Paradise,
For – Heaven forgive that thought! the while –
   Which made me both to weep and smile –
I sometimes deemed that it might be
My brother’s soul come down to me –
But then at last away it flew,
   And then ’twas mortal – well I knew,
For He would never thus have flown,
   And left me twice so doubly lone –

This section appears in sequence in Mary’s fair copy, with the lines properly numbered. Then, on the fifteenth side of Mary’s fair copy, Albè adds another section (lines 293-9) elaborating his description of the feeling of desolation The Prisoner experiences after the Bird flies away (he associates it with the soul of his dead younger brother). The line-numbers in Mary’s fair copy do not take this insertion into account, suggesting that they were written
some time after her fair-copying was done. As is the case with his first insertion into Albè’s
own draft, this section is being composed straight on to the sheet:

But then at last away it flew,
And then ’twas mortal – well I knew,
For He would never thus have flown,
And left me twice so doubly lone –
Lone as the corse within its shroud –
Lone as a solitary Cloud
A single Cloud on a sunny day
    clear,
While all the rest of Heaven is <gay>
A frown upon the Atmosphere
    to appear
That hath no business <there or here>

It is, of course, a lift from Wordsworth. Did Mary object to the horror of Lone as the corse
within its shroud, and did Albè, with her at his elbow, add a Wordsworthian passage in
mitigation of its morbidity, to please her? We shall never know.

Before we leave the first draft behind entirely, there is one final layer of composition on
it. The following erasures and emendations (and others less significant) are done with a sharp
pen in black ink, and in a hand quite like the one which makes the pencilled changes
mentioned already (here, italics signify crossings-out or overlineations in black ink):

Since Man first pent his fellow men 136
brutes
Like <beasts> within an iron den

coldly
They <loudly> laughed - & laid him there
The flat and turfless
<&sholes?>
<A foot of><ill=spread> earth above 160

hath so little
What Sovereign <yet so much hath> done? 390

Within a few days of Percy and Albè returning from their tour, Clare’s pregnancy was
announced, and Albè made it clear that she could have no part in his life – indeed, that he no
longer wished to see her. On Monday 16th July she tried to make contact, taking advantage of
the fact that Mary’s fair copy was, thanks to all the insertions, no longer perfect printer’s
copy – protesting, perhaps, at what had become a demarcation dispute between her and her
“half-step-sister”:

We go I believe in two days – Are you satisfied? –
It would make me happy to finish Chillon for you. It is said that you expressed yourself
decisively last Evening that it is impossible to see you at Diodati; If you will trust it down
here I will take the greatest possible care of it; & finish it in an hour or two. Remember
how {very} short a time I have to teize you & that you will soon be left to your
dear-bought freedom. Let me have Chillon, then pray do – and one of your own Servants
with it & some pens. Tell me one thing else? – Shall I never see you again? Not once
again.
When you had such bad news to announce <I> was it not a little cruel to behave so
harshly all the day. Pray send me an answer directly – I cannot wait. (Clare to Albè, 26th
August 1816 – John Murray Archive; Stocking I, 52).

In fact she, Mary and Percy didn’t go until August 29th. Her fair copy (for she was
allowed to make one) takes up pages 121 to 153 of the volume (now in the John Murray
Archive) containing her fair copies of Childe Harold III, Darkness, Prometheus, The Dream,
the Epistle to Augusta and other poems. This is a most interesting document, which has
received insufficient attention. It has pages 192 to 204, which obviously had been numbered
by Clare, missing. Page 191 contains the end of Darkness, copied in a hand not Clare’s,
showing that the original has been removed, with, on the reverse, the opening of the Epistle
to Augusta. Page 205 contains the last two lines of the Epistle, in Clare’s hand. thus:

slow
We are entwined; let Death come <slow> or fast
The tie, which bound the first, endures the last.

The lines are squirreled through in pencil, and “omit” is written over them. Why the pages
are cut out is not clear: the Epistle to Augusta was not printed in Poems, 1816; but it was in
Moore’s Life, using which manuscript we shall, again, never know. What Clare’s emotions
were, as she dutifully copied Albè’s love-letter to his half-sister, we can only guess. We can
also only guess what her emotions were when, expecting her ex-lover’s manuscript to work
from, she was presented by a servant with the fair copy already made by Mary. She was not,
perhaps, to know that the original draft had by now been left well behind.

Clare’s fair copy of The Prisoner is unique in one respect: it is called The Prisoners of
Chillon / a fable. – the plural does not carry over into the first or any later editions. She is a
more accurate copyist than Mary: either that, or she is advantaged in having Mary’s fair copy
to work from, rather than Albè’s confusing original. Her main creative input is to add four
terminal exclamation marks, all of which become part of the poem. They are at lines 250,
270, 378 and 387:

A Sea of stagnant Idleness
Blind – boundless – mute & motionless!

A lonely bird with azure wings
And song that said a thousand things,
And seemed to say them all for me!

These heavy walls to me had grown
A hermitage – and all my own!

And I the monarch of each race
Had power to kill, – yet strange to tell!
In quiet we had learned to dwell ...

The lines are perhaps reflections of her own feelings, now that she knows her relationship
with Albè to be over, and as such more worthy of exclamation marks than mere full-stops.

Although nothing added to the text by either of Albè’s copyists makes any major
structural or thematic difference, I hope I have shown that the process of its composition
reflects in interesting ways the social and emotional patterns existing between Mary, Clare,
Percy, and Albè at Diodati in July 1816.
[The Prisoner of Chillon and Other Poems was first published by John Murray on December 5th 1816, in an edition of 6000 copies.]

This edition is based on the rough draft at the Beinecke Library, Yale, and the fair copies by Clare Clairmont in the John Murray Archive, and by Mary Godwin in the British Library, collated with the editions of Eugen Köbling (Weimar, 1898), E.H.Coleridge (John Murray, 1922), and J.J.McGann (Oxford, 1986). In the notes, I have “borrowed generously” from all three. Many of their notes either list parallel passages, or query the poem’s topography. Where they have only indicated a text, I have given it. My own notes are in Cooper Black.
The Prisoner of Chillon
A fable. –

My hair is grey, but not with years,
    Nor grew it white
In a single night,
As Men’s have grown from sudden fears;¹
My limbs are bowed, though not with toil,
    But rusted with a vile repose,²
For they have been a dungeon’s spoil,
    And mine has been the fate of those
To whom the goodly earth and air
Are banned and barred – forbidden fare;³
But this was for my Fathers’ faith
I suffered chains and courted death;
That Father perished at the stake
For tenets he would not forsake;⁴
And for the same, his lineal race
In darkness found a dwelling-place;⁵
We were seven – who now are One,⁶
    Six in youth and one in age,
Finished as they had begun,
    Proud of Persecution’s rage;
One in fire, and two in field,
Their belief with blood have sealed
Dying as their Father died,
For the God their foes denied;
Three were in a dungeon cast,
    Of whom this wreck is left the last. –

* Note: Ludovic Sforza⁶ and others – the same is asserted of Marie Antoinette’s, the wife of Louis 16th though not in quite so short a period. Grief is said to have the same effect; to such and not to fear this change in hers was to be attributed.

1: McGann: Compare Scott’s Marmion, I xvii: (For deadly fear can time outgo, / And blanch at once the hair …)
2:… rusted with a vile repose: Kölbing: compare The Giaour, 990-3: I’d rather be the thing that crawls / Most noxious o’er a dungeon’s walls / Than pass my dull, unvarying days / Condemn’d to meditate and gaze …
3: Are banned – and barred – forbidden fare: Coleridge (from Kölbing): The N. Engl. Dict., art. “Ban,” gives this passage as the earliest instance of the use of the verb “to ban” in the sense of “to interdict, to prohibit.” Exception was taken to this use of the word in the Crit. Rev., 1817, Series V vol. iv. p. 571.
4: That Father perished at the stake / For tenets he would not forsake: Louis Bonivard died at a date before 1524, in his bed, or at any rate naturally. No particular “tenets” are ascribed to him.
5: We were seven - who now are One: Coleridge (from Kölbing): Compare the epitaph on the monument of Richard Lord Byron, in the chancel of Hucknall Torkard Church. “Beneath in a vault is interred the body of Richard Lord Byron, who with the rest of his family, being seven brothers,” etc. (Elze’s Life of Lord Byron, p. 4, note 1). Compare, too, Churchill’s Prophecy of Famine, lines 391, 392 – “Five brothers there I lost, in manhood’s pride, / Two in the field and three on gibbets died.” Churchill’s lines are, however, ironical at the expense of the dead Scotsmen to whom he refers. Bonivard had only one brother, Amblard [sic] his elder by two years. That Byron may consciously be echoing Wordsworth’s We Are Seven is a suggestion so outrageous that no editor has ever dared make it; but it should be entertained.
There are seven pillars of Gothic mold
In Chillon’s dungeons deep and old;

There are seven columns massy and grey,
Dim with a dull imprisoned ray;

A Sunbeam which hath lost its way;
And through the Crevice and the cleft
Of the thick wall is fallen and left,
Creeping o’er the floor so damp,

Like a Marsh’s meteor lamp;
And in each pillar there is a ring.

---

6: Byron’s note: Coleridge (from Kölbìng): It has been said that the Queen’s hair turned grey during the return from Varennes to Paris; but Carlyle (French Revolution, 1839, i. 182) notes that as early as May 4, 1789, on the occasion of the Assembly of the States-General, “Her hair is already grey with many cares and crosses.” Compare “Thy father’s beard is turned white with the news” (Shakespeare, I Henry IV., act ii. sc. 4, line 345; and – “For deadly fear can time outgo, / And blanch at once the hair.” Marmion, Canto I. stanza xxviii, lines 19, 20. McGann: Ludovico Sforza (1451–1508), Duke of Milan. The French imprisoned him in the Castle of Loches (1500), where he died. Compare also I Henry IV, II. iv. 345, and Thomas Carlyle, The French Revolution (1839), i 182. Sforza had called upon the French for help in repressing the allies of his nephew Gian Gallesco. He died after eight years. Marie Antoinette (1755–93) wife to Louis XVI, was imprisoned for less than a year before being guillotined.

7: There are seven pillars of Gothic mold: Coleridge: “This is really so: the loop-holes that are partly stopped up are but long crevices or clefts, but Bonivard, from the spot where he was chained, could, perhaps, never get an idea of the loveliness and variety of radiant light which the sunbeam shed at different hours of the day. In the morning this light is of luminous and transparent shining, which the curves of the vaults send back along all the hall. Victor Hugo (Le Rhin, ... Hachette, 1876, I iii pp. 123-31) describes this ... ‘Le phénomène de la grotto d’azur s’accompit dans le souterrain de Chillon, et le lac de Genève n’y réussit pas moins bien que la Méditerranée.’ During the afternoon the hall assumes a much deeper and warmer colouring, and the blue transparency of the morning disappears; but at eventide, after the sun has set behind the Jura, the scene changes to the deep glow of fire ...” – Guide to the Castle of Chillon, by A. Naef, architect, 1896, pp. 35, 36. P.B.Shelley: ... the principal dungeon is supported by seven columns (see below, received 115n).

8: Dim with a dull imprisoned ray: Kölbìng: compare The Two Foscari, III i 62-4: ... the gray twilight of such glimmerings as / Glide through the crevices made by the winds / Was kinder to mine eyes than the full sun ... Or The Island, IV 6 131-2: ... all was darkness for a space, till day / Through clefts above let in a sobred ray.

9: Like a Marsh’s meteor lamp: Coleridge: Compare – “One little marshy spark of flame.” Def. Transf., Part I scene i. Kölbìng notes six other allusions in Byron’s works to the “will-o’-the-wisp”, but omits the line in the “Incantation” (Manfred, act i sc. I line 195) – “And the wisp on the morass,” which the Italian translator would have rendered “bundle of straw” (see Letter to Hoppner, February 28th, 1818, Letters, 1900, iv. 204, note 2 et post p. 92 note 1). For the Hoppner letter, see BLJ VI 15-16; although the note on “bundle of straw” will not be found there. McGann: A frequent image in B: compare, e.g., Manfred, 1 i 195, Don Juan, XI stanza 27, Island IV 86.

10: And in each pillar there is a ring: Coleridge: This “... is not exactly so: the third column does not seem ever to have had a ring, but the traces of these rings are very visible in the two first columns from the entrance, although the rings have been removed; and on the three last we find the rings still riveted on the darkest side of the pillars where they face the rock, so that the unfortunate prisoners chained there were even bereft of light. ... The fifth column is said to be the one to which Bonivard was chained during four years. Byron’s name is carved on the southern side of the third column ... on the seventh tympanum, at about 1 metre 45 from the lower edge of the shaft.” Much has been written for and against the authenticity of this inscription, which, according to M. Naef, the author of Guide, was carved by Byron himself, “with an antique ivory-mounted stiletto, which had been discovered in the Duke’s room.” – Guide etc., pp. 39-42. The inscription was in situ as early as August 22, 1820, as Mr.
And in each ring there is a chain;
That Iron is a cankering thing,
For in these limbs its teeth remain
With marks that will not wear away
Till I have done with this new day
Which now is painful to these eyes
Which have not seen the Sun so rise
For years – I cannot count them o’er;
I lost their long and heavy score
When my last Brother drooped and died,
And I lay living by his side.

3.

They chained us each to a column stone,
And we were three yet each alone;
We could not move a single pace;
We could not see each other’s face,
But with that pale and livid light
That made us strangers in our sight;
And thus together, yet apart,
Fettered in hand, but pined in heart,
’Twas still some solace, in the dearth
Of the pure elements of earth,
To hearken to each other’s speech,
And each turn comforter to each,
With some new hope – or legend old,
Or song heroically bold;
But even these at length grew cold.
Our voices took a dreary tone,
An echo of the dungeon-stone,
A grating sound – not full and free,
As they of yore were wont to be,
They never sounded like our own.

4.

I was the eldest of the three,
And to uphold and cheer the rest

Richard Edgecumbe points out (Notes and Queries, Series V. xi. 487). P.B.Shelley: ... iron rings are fastened to these columns ... (see below, received 115n). Gavin de Beer (Shelley and his Circle IV 699) gives as his opinion that neither Byron nor Shelley ever carved their names on any pillar.

11: And we were three ... The historical Bonivard was imprisoned alone.
12: ... that pale and livid light: Kölbüng: compare Paradise Lost, I 61-3: ... on all sides round / As one great Farnace flam’d, yet from those flames / No light, but rather darkness visible ... 13: Fettered in hand – but pined in heart: McGann, from Kölbüng: After 1837 all edns. have printed ‘joined’ for the ‘pined’ of the earlier edns. But the MSS. are clearly ‘pined’ in all cases. The construction is difficult. Lines 54 and 55 have parallel oppositions: the together/apart opposition of 54 is repeated in 55. The brothers are ‘fettered’ (together), but they separately waste away with longing. This particular intransitive meaning for the verb ‘pine’ is archaic now, but was available to B: see OED. 14: Of the pure elements of earth: McGann, from Kölbüng: pure elements: i.e. fire (or light) and air.
I ought to do, and did my best,
And each did well in his degree.
The youngest – whom my Father loved,
Because our mother's brow was given
To him, with eyes as blue as heaven –
For him my soul was sorely moved,
And truly might it be distresst
To see such bird in such a nest,
For he was beautiful as Day
(When Day was beautiful to me)
As to young Eagles being free)
A polar Day which will not see
A Sunset till its Summer's gone,
Its sleepless Summer of long light
The Snow-clad offspring of the Sun;
And thus he was as pure and bright,
And in his natural Spirit gay,
With tears for nought but others' ills,
And then they flowed like mountain rills,
Unless he could assuage the woe
Which he abhorred to view below.

15: the descriptions of the two brothers, and the fraternal love between them, have a
distinguished pedigree. Leaving aside the Palamon and Arcite of Chaucer and Dryden –
who are not clearly distinguished from one another – one pair is Clorindan and Medoro,
from Orlando Furioso, Cantos XVIII and XIX:

Clorindan cacciator tutta sua vita
Di robusta persona era, ed insella.
Medoro avea la guancia colorita,
E bianca, e grata nell’età novella;
E fra la gente a quella impresca uscita
None era faccia più gioconda, e bella.
Occhi avea neri, e chioma crespa d’oro,
Angel parea di quei del sommo Coro.

[Clorindan, a hunter all his life, was robust and straight-backed. Medoro's cheek was red
and white as if in his earliest years: people said on first seeing him that none looked more
joyful or more beautiful. His eyes were black, his hair golden – he seemed an angel from
the first rank.]

16: With eyes as blue as heaven: Köbling: compare The Deformed Transformed, III i 11-12: ... she lifts
her dewy eyes of blue / To the youngest sky of the self-same hue. or To my Son, 1-2: Those flaxen locks,
those eyes of blue, / Bright as thy mother's in the ir hue ... 

17: To see a bird in such a nest: Coleridge, from Köbling: Compare, for similarity of sound – “Thou
tree of covert and of rest / For this young Bird that is distrest.” – Song for the Feast at Brougham
Castle, by W. Wordsworth, Works, 1889, p. 364. Compare, too – “She came into the cave, but it was
merely / To see her bird reposing in his nest.” Don Juan, Canto II, stanza clxviii, lines 3, 4.

18: When day was beautiful to me / As to young Eagles being free: McGann: compare Childe Harold,
III, 784-7, or Prophecy, III 70-2. (But they, / Who in oppression’s darkness caved had dwelt, / They
were not eagles, nourish’d with the day ... But few shall soar upon the eagle’s wing, / And look in
the sun’s face with eagle’s gaze, / All free and fearless as the feathered king ... )

19: A polar Day which will not see / A Sunset till its Summer’s gone: Coleridge, from Köbling:
Compare – “Those polar summers, all sun, and some ice.” Don Juan, Canto XII, stanza lxii, line 8.

20: The snow-clad offspring of the sun: compare Don Juan, XII 322-4: Köbling: For like a day-dawn
she was young and pure, / Or, like the old comparison of snows, / Which are more pure than pleasant
to be sure.

21: The addition of lines 80-6 to the fair copy means that the rhyme for line 79 does not
arrive until now.
5.

The other was as pure of mind,
But formed to combat with his kind;
Strong in his frame, and of a mood
Which 'gainst the world in war had stood,
And perished in the foremost rank
With joy; but not in chains to pine;
His spirit withered with their clank —
I saw it silently decline —
And so perchance in sooth did mine,
But yet I forced it on to cheer
Those relics of a home so dear.
He was a hunter of the hills
Had followed there the deer and wolf
To him this dungeon was a gulph,
And fettered feet the worst of ills.

6.

Lake Leman lies by Chillon’s walls;
A thousand feet in depth below
Its massy waters meet and flow;
Thus much the fathom-line was sent
From Chillon’s snow-white battlement,*
Which roundabout the wave enthralls;
A double dungeon wall and wave
Have made, and like a living grave,*
Below the surface of the bay*

---

22: And perished in the foremost rank: Köbling: compare Childe Harold III 207: He rush'd into the field, and, foremost fighting, fell; or Don Juan, VII 516-18: ... I confess / My debt in being thus allowed to die / Among the foremost ...

23: A thousand feet ... Chillon’s snow-white battlement: Coleridge: Ruskin (Modern Painters, Part IV, sect. 9, “Touching the Grand Style,” 1888, iii. 8. 9) criticizes these five lines 107-11, and points out that, alike in respect of accuracy and inaccuracy of detail, they fulfil the conditions of poetry in contradistinction to history. “Instead,” he concludes, “of finding, as we expected, the poetry distinguished from the history by the omission of details, we find it consisting entirely in the addition of details; and instead of it being characterized by regard only of the invariable, we find its whole power to consist in the clear expression of what is singular and particular!” (See Ruskin, Works, ed. Cook and Wedderburn, George Allen 1904, V pp. 24-6).

24: ... like a living grave: McGann: compare Marmion, II 569 and B’s Bride, II 1094. (Yet dread me, from my living tomb ... What recks it? Though that corse shall lie / Within a living grave?) (Bride reference should read II 612). Köbling: Compare also The Prophecy of Dante, V 147-8: ... is not love in vain / Torture enough without a living tomb?

25: Below the surface of the bay / lake: After Byron’s note: Coleridge: “Le Château de Chillon, ancien séjour des Bailiffs de Vevai, est situé dans le lac sur un rocher qui forme une presqu’île, et autour duquel j’ai vu sonder à plus de cent cinquante brasses qui font près de 800 pieds, sans trouver le fond. On a creusé dans ce rocher des caves et des cuisines au-dessous du niveau de l’eau, qu’on y introduit quand on veut par des robinets. C’est là que fut détenu six ans prisonnier François Bonnivard, Prieur de St. Victor, homme d’un mérite rare, d’une droiture et d’une fermeté à toute épreuve, ami de la liberté quoique Savoyard, et tolérant quoique prêtre. Au reste, l’année où ces dernières lettres paroissent avoir été écrites, il y avait très longtemps que les Bailiffs de Vevai n’habitent plus le Château de Chillon. On supposera, si l’on veut, que celui de ce temps-là y étoit allé passer quelques jours.” (La Nouvelle Héloïse,
The dark vault lies wherein we lay;
We heard its ripple night and day;
Sounding o’er our heads it knocked,
And I have felt the winter’s spray
Wash through the bars when winds were high,
And wanton in the happy sky;
And then the very rock hath rocked,
And I have felt it shake, unshocked,

Because I could have smiled to see The death that would have set me free.

par J.J.Rousseau, partie vi. Lettre 8, note (i); Œuvres complètes, 1836, ii 356, note). (Parts omitted by Coleridge replaced).

With Byron’s description of Chillon, compare that of Shelley, contained in a letter to Peacock, dated July 12, 1816 (Prose Works of P.B.Shelley, 1880, ii. 171, sq.). The belief or tradition that Bonivard’s prison is “below the surface of the lake,” for which Shelley as well as Rousseau is responsible, but which Byron only records in verse, may be traced to a statement attributed to Bonivard himself, who says, (Mémoires, etc., 1845, iv. 268) that the commandant thrust him “en unes croctes desquelles le fond estoit plus bas que le lac sur lequel Chillon estoit citue.” As a matter of fact, “the level [of les souterrains] is now three metres higher than the level of the water, and even if we take off the difference arising from the fact that the level of the lake was once much higher, and that the floor of the halls has been raised, still the halls must originally have been built about two metres above the surface of the lake.” – Guide, etc., pp. 28, 29. I can find no copies of Bonivard’s Mémoires in the U.K. McGann: The room is not and never was “below the surface of the lake.” B. must have taken this fact from Rousseau’s note to Julie (ibid.) and assumed that the water level was higher at an earlier period.

The relevant part of P.B.Shelley’s letter to Peacock (a part written on June 26th, 1816) goes as follows: “We passed on to the Castle of Chillon, and visited its dungeons and towers. These prisons are excavated below the lake; the principal dungeon is supported by seven columns, whose branching capitals support the roof. Close to the very walls, the lake is 800 feet deep; iron rings are fastened to these columns, and on them were engraved a multitude of names, partly those of visitors, and partly doubtless of the prisoners, of whom now no memory remains, and who thus beguiled a solitude which they have long ceased to feel. One date was as ancient as 1670. At the commencement of the Reformation, and indeed long after that period, this dungeon was the receptacle of those who shook, or who denied the system of idolatry, from the effects of which mankind is even now slowly emerging. Close to this long and lofty dungeon was a narrow cell, and beyond it one larger and far more lofty and dark, supported upon two unornamented arches. Across one of these arches was a beam, now black and rotten, on which prisoners were hung in secret. I never saw a monument more terrible of that cold and inhuman tyranny, which it has been the delight of man to exercise over man. It was indeed one of those many tremendous fulfilsments which render the ‘pernicios humani generis’ of the great Tacitus so solemn and irrefragable a prophecy. The gendarme, who conducted us over this castle, told us that there was an opening to the lake, by means of a secret spring, connected with which the whole dungeon might be filled with water before the prisoners could possibly escape!” – Letters, ed. Frederick L. Jones (Oxford 1964) i, pp. 352-3: the letter is reproduced exactly in the Shelleys’ History of a six weeks’ tour (1817) at pp. 128-30 of the first edition. The manuscript version of this passage is transcribed at Shelley and his Circle VII, ed. Reiman (Harvard 1986) p. 33. Kölbing: Compare The Two Foscari, II i 306-7: Your dungeons next the palace roofs, or under / The water’s level...

26: And I have felt it shake unshocked: Coleridge, from Kölbing: The “real Bonivard” might have indulged in and, perhaps, prided himself on this feeble and irritating paronomasy; but nothing can be less in keeping with the bearing and behaviour of the tragic and sententious Bonivard of the legend. Paronomasy: pun. The “real” Bonivard, who, for example, once called all his fellow Genevan churchmen together on pretence of having something of weight to read them, and delivered a comedy by Macchiavelli, seems indeed to have been a trickster, if not necessarily a punster. For further “puns”, see received line 106 above: ... lettered feet; or 185 below: ... so sweetly weak. The effect is inevitable in a poem like The Prisoner, written in dense octosyllabics with heavy alliteration.
*Note: The Chateau de Chillon is situated between Clarens and Villeneuve, which last is at one extremity of the lake of Geneva. On its left are the entrances of the Rhone, and opposite are the Heights of Meillerie and the range of Alps above Boveret and St Gingo.

Near it on a hill behind is a torrent – below it washing its walls the lake has been fathomed to the depth of 800 feet (French measure) – within it are a range of dungeons in which the early reformers and subsequently prisoners of State were confined. Across one of the vaults is a beam black with age on which we were informed that the condemned were formerly executed. – In the cells are seven pillars, or rather eight, one being half merged in the wall – in some of these are rings for the fetters and the fettered – in the pavement the steps of Bonnivard have left their traces – he was confined here several years. –

It is by this castle that Rousseau has fixed the catastrophe of his Heloise, in the rescue of one of her Children by Julie from the water – the shock of which and the illness produced by the immersion is the cause of her death.

The Chateau is large and seen along the lake for a great distance – The walls are white. –

7.

I said my nearer brother pined –
I said his mighty heart declined –
He loathed and put away his food;
It was not that ’twas coarse and rude,
For we were used to hunters’ fare,
And for the like had little care;
The milk drawn from the mountain goat
Was changed for water from the moat,
Our bread was such as captive’s tears
Have moistened many a thousand years,
Since Man first pent his fellow men
Like brutes within an iron den –
But what were these to us or him?
These wasted not his heart or limb.

My brother’s soul was of that mold
Which in a palace had grown cold,
Had his free breathing been denied
The range of the steep mountain’s side;

But why delay the truth? – he died –
I saw, and could not hold his head
Nor reach his dying hand – nor dead;

Though hard I strove, but stroke in vain,
To rend and gnash my bonds in twain,
He died – and they unlocked his chain,
And scooped for him a shallow grave.

27: McGann: Read Rousseau’s Julie on his sailing tour of the lake with Shelley (BLJ v. 82). This note recalls Rousseau’s last note to Part VI, Letter 8.
28: My brother’s grief was of that mold ...: McGann: compare DJ II st. 87 and Dante, Inferno, XXXIII 4-75. (The deaths of The Prisoner’s two brothers anticipates the deaths of the two boys on board the wreck of the Holy Trinidad in Don Juan, and echoes those of Ugolino’s sons in the Inferno.)
29: The range of the steep mountain’s side: Coleridge, from Kölbing: Compare – “... I’m a forester and a breather / Of the steep mountain-tops.” Werner, act iv. sc.i.
30: I saw – and could not hold his head: Kölbing: compare Manfred, II i 120-1: ... – and yet her blood was shed – / I saw – and could not stanch it.
31: And scooped for him a shallow grave: Coleridge: Compare “With the aid of Suleiman’s ataghan and my own sabre, we scooped a shallow grave upon the spot which Darvell had indicated” (A
Even from the cold earth of our cave;
I begged them as a boon to lay
His corse in dust whereon the day
Might shine – it was a foolish thought,
But then within my brain it wrought,
That even in death his freeborn breast
In such a dungeon could not rest.
I might have spared my idle prayer –
They coldly laughed, and laid him there;
The flat and turfless earth above
The being we so much did love;
His empty chain above it leant –
Such murder’s fitting monument!

8.

But he, the favourite and the flower
Most cherished since his natal hour,
His mother’s image in fair face,
The infant love of all his race,
His martyred Father’s dearest thought,
My latest care, for whom I sought
To hoard my life that his might be
Less wretched now – and one day free,
He too – who yet had held untired
A Spirit natural or inspired –
He too was struck – and day by day
Was withered on the stalk away

---

Fragment of a Novel by Byron, Letters, 1899, iii. Appendix IX. p. 452). McGann: Compare B’s A Fragment of a Novel (LJ iii. 452): "we scooped a shallow grave upon the spot ... The piece, entitled by Andrew Nicholson (CMP, p. 63, line 26) Augustus Darvell: A Fragment of a Ghost Story (1816) was not published until 1819, when it appeared with Mazeppa.

32: ... it was a foolish thought: McGann, from Kübling: Compare Macbeth, II ii 21. (Lady Macbeth: A foolish thought to say a sorry sight.)

33: But there within my brain it wrought: Coleridge: Compare – “And to be wroth with one we love / Doth work like madness in the brain.” / Christabel, by S.T.Coleridge, part ii. lines 412, 413. McGann: Compare Christabel, II 412 et. seq.

34: His martyred father’s dearest thought: Coleridge: It is said that his parents handed him over to the care of his uncle, Jean-Aimé Bonivard, when he was still an infant, and it is denied that his father was “literally put to death.” (See above, 13-14n.)

35: Was withered on the stalk away: Kübling quotes parallel uses of the same expression in Werner, act iv. sc. i; Churchill’s The Times, line 341, etc.; but does not give the original – “But earthlier happy is the rose distill’d, / Than that which, withering on the virgin–thorn,” etc. Midsummer Night’s Dream, act i. sc. i, lines 76, 77 Coleridge, from Kübling. McGann: Echoing Churchill’s The Times, 341-5. (She, hapless maid, born in a wretched hour, / Wastes life’s gay prime in vain, like some fair flow’r, / Sweet in its scent, and lively in its hue, / Which withers on the stalk from whence it grew, / And dies uncropp’d ... ) More relevant is the death of Euryalus from Aeneid IX; Byron’s version runs thus:

He pray’d in vain, the dark assassin’s sword,
Pierc’d the fair side, the snowy bosom gor’d;
Lowly to earth, inclines his plume-clad crest,
And sanguine torrents, mantle o’er his breast;
As some young rose, whose blossom scents the air,
Languid in death, expires beneath the share;
Or crimson poppy, sinking with the shower,
Oh God! – it is a fearful thing
To see the human soul take wing
In any shape – in any mood;\textsuperscript{36}
I’ve seen it rushing forth in blood,
I’ve seen it on the breaking Ocean
Strive with a swoln convulsive motion,
I’ve seen the sick and ghastly bed
Of Sin delirious with its dread;\textsuperscript{37}
But these were horrors – this was woe
Unmixed with such – but sure and slow;
He faded – and so calm and meek,
So softly worn, so sweetly weak,\textsuperscript{38}
So tearless – yet so tender, kind,
And grieved for those he left behind,
With all the while a cheek whose bloom
Was as a mockery of the tomb,\textsuperscript{39}
Whose tints as gently sunk away
As a departing rainbow’s ray,
An eye of most transparent light
That almost made the dungeon bright;
And not a word of murmur – not
A groan o’er his untimely lot\textsuperscript{40}
–
A little talk of better days,
A little hope my own to raise,
For I was sunk in silence, lost
In this last loss of all the most!
And then the sighs he would suppress,
Of fainting Nature’s feebleness,\textsuperscript{41}

\textit{Declining gently, falls a fading flower;}
\textit{Thus sweetly drooping, bends his lovely head,}
\textit{And lingering Beauty hovers round the dead. (CPW I 189)}

\textsuperscript{36}: Oh, God! it is a fearful thing / To see the human soul take wing / In any shape – in any mood: Compare – “The first, last look of Death revealed.” The \textit{Giaour}, line 89, note 2. Byron was a connoisseur of the incidents and by-play of “sudden death,” so much that Goethe was under the impression that he had been guilty of a venial murder (see his review of \textit{Manfred} in his paper \textit{Kunst und Alterthum}, Letters, 1901, v. 506, 507). \textit{A year after these lines were written, when he was at Rome (Letter to Murray, May 30, 1817) he saw three robbers guillotined, and observed himself and them from a psychological standpoint (see BLJ V 229-30).}

\textsuperscript{37}: I’ve seen it on the breaking Ocean: \textit{McGann:} Compare E.B.S.R., 680-6 and n. (The death of Lord Falkland, referred to by Coleridge in his note to 176-8.)

\textsuperscript{38}: So softly worn – so sweetly weak: \textit{McGann, from Köhling:} Byronic expression: compare \textit{Giaour}, 92. (So coldly sweet, so deadly fair ...)

\textsuperscript{39}: With all the while a cheek whose bloom / Was as a mockery of the tomb: \textit{McGann:} A favourite juxtaposition of images in Byron: compare, e.g., CHP IV. sts. 26-9 and 72. \textit{Köhling:} Compare also \textit{Manfred}, II iv 98-100: \textit{Can this be death? There’s bloom upon her cheek; / But now I see it is no living hue, / But a strange hectic ...} The Shakespearean parallel would be Romeo over the apparently dead Juliet: see \textit{Romeo and Juliet}, V iii 92-105.

\textsuperscript{40}: And not a word of murmur – not / A groan o’er his untimely lot: \textit{Köhling:} compare \textit{The Two Foscari}, I i 347-8: ... but he did not cry for pity; / Not a word or groan escaped him.
More slowly drawn – grew less and less;
I listened – but I could not hear –
I called – for I was wild with fear,
I knew 'twas hopeless, but my dread
Would not be thus admonished.
I called, and thought I heard a sound;
I burst my chain with one strong bound
And rushed to him – I found him not;
\textit{I only} stirred in this black spot,
I only lived – I only drew
The accursed breath of dungeon-dew,
The last – the sole – the dearest link
Between me and the eternal brink\textsuperscript{32}
Which bound me to my failing race
Was broken in this fatal place.
One on the earth – and one beneath –
My brothers; both had ceased to breathe;
I took that hand which lay so still –
Alas! – my own was full as chill,
I had not strength to stir, or strive,
But felt that I was still alive,\textsuperscript{43}
A frantic feeling when we know
That what we love shall ne’er be so;
\begin{itemize}
  \item I know not why
  \item I could not die;\textsuperscript{44}
\end{itemize}
I had no earthly hope – but faith;
And that forbade a selfish death.

What next befell me then and there
I know not well – I never knew,
First came the loss of light and air,
And then of darkness too;
I had no thought, no feeling – none;
Among the stones I stood – a Stone,\textsuperscript{45}
And was – scarce conscious what I wist –
As shrubless Crags within the mist,\textsuperscript{46}
For all was blank, and bleak, and grey;

\textbf{9.}

\begin{itemize}
  \item What next befell me then and there
  \item I know not well – I never knew,

\textit{41: ... fainting Nature's feebleness compare Johnson, On the Death of Dr Robert Levet, 13: When fainting nature call'd for aid ...}
\textit{42: The last – the sole – the dearest link / Between me and the eternal brink: McGann, from Kölbing: Compare If that the High World Stanza 2 and Childe Harold, III Stanza 14. (... 'tis not for self / That we so tremble on the brink ... the link / That keeps us from yon heaven which woos us to its brink.)}
\textit{43: I had not strength to stir or strive / But felt that I was still alive: McGann: These are frequent Byronic thoughts.}
\textit{44: I know not why / I could not die: Coleridge: Compare – “And yet I could not die.” Ancient Mariner, Part IV line 262. McGann: Compare Coleridge’s \textit{The Rime of the Ancient Mariner}, IV 262.}
\textit{45: Among the stones I stood – a Stone: Coleridge: Compare – “I wept not; so all stone I fell within.” Dante’s \textit{Inferno}, xxxiii. 47 (Cary’s translation). McGann: Compare Dante’s \textit{Inferno}, XXXIII 49. (Io non piangea, s dentro impetrai – another reference to Ugolino: see above, 140 et. seq. n).}
\textit{46: As shrubless Crags within the mist: Kölbing: compare Manfred, II ii 64-5: Where the birds dare not build, nor insect’s wing / Flit o’er the herbless granite ...}
It was not night – it was not day –
It was not even the dungeon-light
So hateful to my heavy sight,
But vacancy – absorbing space,
And fixedness – without a place;
There were no stars – no earth – no time
No check – no change – no good – no crime –
But Silence – and a stirless breath
Which neither was of life, nor death;
A Sea of stagnant Idleness

10.

A Light broke in upon my brain;
It was the carol of a bird;

47: There were no stars – no earth – no time / No check – no change – no good – no crime; McGann: Compare The Rime of the Ancient Mariner, esp. Part II. sts. 6-8 and Part IV, st. 3. The relevant verses are as follows:

Down dropt the breeze, the sails dropt down,
'Twas sad as sad could be;
And we did speak only to break
The silence of the sea!

All in a hot and copper sky,
The bloody Sun, at noon,
Right up above the mast did stand,
No bigger than the Moon.

Day after day, day after day,
We stuck, nor breath nor motion;
As idle as a painted ship
Upon a painted ocean.

Water, water, every where,
And all the boards did shrink;
Water, water, every where,
Nor any drop to drink ...

... Alone, alone, all, all alone,
Alone on a wide wide sea!
And never a saint took pity on
My soul in agony.

There are several further echoes of The Ancient Mariner in Mazeppa and in Don Juan II. 48: The un-Wordsworthian, and un-Shelleyan, nature of these lines is striking, given the borrowings from Wordworth noted elsewhere. Where a Shelleyan protagonist might derive hope from contemplating the landscape, Byron’s Prisoner finds in it only a reflection of the horrible blankness of his own life. Compare the last entry in Byron’s Alpine Journal, also written in 1816: ... I am a lover of Nature – and an Admirer of Beauty – I can bear fatigue – & welcome privation – and have seen some of the noblest views in the world. – But in all this – the recollections of bitterness – & more especially of recent & more home desolation – which must accompany me through life – have preyed upon me here – and neither the music of the Shepherd – the crashing of the Avalanche – nor the torrent – the mountain – the Glacier – the Forest – nor the Cloud – have for one moment – lightened the weight upon my heart – nor enabled me to lose my own wretched identity in the majesty & the power and the Glory – around – above – & beneath me. (BLJ V 104:5)
It ceased and then it came again –
The sweetest song ear ever heard;
And mine was thankful till my eyes
Ran over with the glad surprize,
And they that moment could not see
I was the mate of misery;
But then by dull degrees came back
My senses to their wonted track;
I saw the dungeon walls and floor
Close slowly round me as before,
I saw the glimmer of the Sun
Creeping as it before had done;
But through the crevice where it came
That bird was perched, as fond and tame,
And tamer than upon the tree;

A lovely bird with azure wings,
And song that said a thousand things,
And seemed to say them all for me!
I never saw its like before,
I ne’er shall see its likeness more;
It seemed like me to want a mate,
But was not half so desolate,
And it was come to love me when
None lived to love me so again,
And cheering on my dungeon’s brink
Had brought me back to feel and think.
I know not if it late were free,
Or broke its cage to perch on mine,
But knowing well captivity –
Sweet Bird! – I could not wish for thine!
Or if it were in winged guise
A visitant from Paradise,
For – Heaven forgive that thought! the while –
Which made me both to weep and smile –
I sometimes deemed that it might be
My brother’s soul come down to me –

49: *That bird was perched, as fond and tame: compare Stanzas to Augusta, 4-8: And a bird in the solitude singing, / Which speaks to my spirit of thee.*
50: *A lovely bird with azure wings: Coleridge: Compare “Song by Glycine” –

“A sunny shaft did I behold,
From sky to earth it slanted;
And poised therein a bird so bold –
Sweet bird, thou wert enchanted,” etc.

Zapolya, by S.T.Coleridge, act ii, sc. i.
51: *It seemed like me to want a mate / But was not half so desolate: Coleridge: Compare – “When Ruth was left half desolate, / Her father took another Mate.” Ruth, by W. Wordsworth, Works, 1889, p. 121. McGann: Compare Wordsworth’s Ruth, 1-2.
52: *I sometimes deemed that it might be / My brother’s soul come down for me: Coleridge, from Kölbinger: “The souls of the blessed are supposed by some of the Mahomedans to animate green birds in the groves of Paradise.” – Note to Southey’s Thalaba, bk. xi. stanza 5, line 13. (See The Poetical Works
But then at last away it flew,
And then 'twas mortal – well I knew,
For He would never thus have flown,
And left me twice so doubly lone —
Lone as the corse within its shroud –
Lone as a solitary cloud.

A single cloud on a sunny day,
While all the rest of heaven is clear –
A frown upon the atmosphere,
That hath no business to appear.

When skies are blue and earth is gay.

11.

A kind of change came in my fate –
My keepers grew compassionate;
I know not what had made them so –
They were inured to sights of woe,
But so it was – my broken chain
With links unfastened did remain,
And it was liberty to stride
Along my cell from side to side,
And up and down – and then athwart,
And tread it over every part,
And round the pillars one by one,
Returning where my walk begun;
Avoiding only as I trod
My brothers’ graves without a sod,
For if I thought with heedless tread
My step profaned their lowly bed,
My breath came gaspingly and thick,
And my crushed heart fell blind, and sick.

12.

I made a footing in the wall,
It was not therefrom to escape,

_of Robert Southey, Longman 1850, p. 301: Southey’s bird is, as the bird here may be, a ministering departed spirit._

53: And left me twice so doubly lone: _McGann, from Kölbing:_ Compare Scott’s _Marmion_, ‘Introduction to Canto II’, 134-5. (When, musing on companions gone, / We doubly feel ourselves alone ...)

54: Lone as a solitary cloud: _Coleridge, from Kölbing:_ Compare – “I wandered lonely as a cloud.” _Works of W. Wordsworth, 1889, p. 205. McGann, from Kölbing:_ Compare Wordsworth’s _I wandered lonely as a Cloud._

55: That hath no business to appear: _Coleridge, from Kölbing:_ Compare – “Yet some did think that he had little business here.” _Works of W. Wordsworth, 1889, p. 183. Compare, too, The Dream, line 166, vide post, p. 39 – “What business had they there at such a time?” _McGann, from Kölbing:_ Compare _The Dream, 166_, and Wordsworth’s _Stanzas Written in ... Thomson’s “Castle of Indolence”_.

56: I made a footing in the wall: the windows of the dungeon are at head-height; but the thickness of the walls would make it hard to see through them for any distance with one’s feet on the floor. _See Byron’s Works: Poetry, IV, ed. Coleridge, illustration opposite page 14._
For I had buried one, and all,
Who loved me in a human shape;
And the whole Earth would henceforth be
A wider prison unto me—
No child — no Sire — no kin had I—
No partner in my misery;
I thought of this, and I was glad,
For thought of them had made me mad,
But I was curious to ascend
To my barred windows, and to bend
Once more upon the mountains high
The quiet of a loving eye.

I saw them — and they were the same;
They were not changed like me in frame;
I saw their thousand years of snow

57: And the whole earth would henceforth be / A wider prison unto me: Coleridge, from Köllbing: Compare – “He sighed, and turned his eyes, because he knew / ‘Twas but a larger jail he had in view.” Dryden, Palamon and Arcite, bk. i lines 216, 217. Compare, too – “An exile — / Who has the whole world for a dungeon strong.” Prophecy of Dante, iv. 131, 132. McGann, from Köllbing: Compare Dryden’s Palamon and Arcite, 1:216-17. The most striking passage from the Dryden fable (his retelling of Chaucer’s The Knight’s Tale) seems to be this:

It happen’d Palamon the Pris’n er Knight,
Restless for Woe, arose before the Light,
And with his Jaylor’s leave desir’d to breathe
An Air more wholesom than the Damps beneath.
This granted, to the Tow’r he took his way,
Cheer’d with the Promise of a glorious Day:
Then cast a languishing Regard around,
And saw with hateful Eyes the Temples crown’d
With golden Spires, and all the Hostile Ground.
He sigh’d, and turn’d his Eyes, because he knew
’Twas but a larger Jail he had in view:
Then look’d below, and from the Castles height
Beheld a nearer and more pleasing Sight:
The Garden, which before he had not seen,
In Springs new Livery clad of White and Green,
Fresh Flow’rs in wide Parterres, and shady Walks between.
This view’d, but not enjoy’d, with Arms across
He stood, reflecting on his Country’s Loss;
Himself an Object of the Publick Scorn,
And often wish’d he never had been born.
At last (for so his Destiny requir’d)
With walking giddy, and with thinking tir’d,
He thro’ a little Window cast his Sight,
Tho’ thick of bars, that gave a scanty Light:
But ev’n that Glimmering serv’d him to descry
Th’inevitable Charms of Emily.

(Dryden, Palamon and Arcite, I 207-32)

Although the mood of Dryden’s protagonist, his views, and his freedom of manoeuvre, are quite different from those of the Prisoner (see sections 12 and 13).

On high – their wide long lake below,
And the blue Rhone in fullest flow;
I heard the torrents leap and gush
O’er channelled rock and broken bush,
I saw the white-walled distant town,
And whiter sails go skimming down...

59: I saw their thousand years of snow: compare what Alp sees at The Siege of Corinth, 319 et. seq.;... on the brow / Of Delphi’s hill, unshaken snow, / High and eternal, such as shone / Through thousand summers brightly gone....

60: And the blue Rhone in fullest flow: Coleridge: This, according to Ruskin’s canon, may be a poetical inaccuracy. The Rhone is blue below the lake at Geneva, but “les embouchures” at Villeneuve are muddy and discoloured. McGann, from Kölbinger: This inaccurate detail is unusual for B: he is not thinking of the muddy glacial water which entered the lake at Villeneuve but of the clear blue water which leaves at Geneva. The dungeon is too close to the level of the lake for the colour of the Rhone’s entrance to be visible from it. The Rhone can be seen from the castle battlements. See Hobhouse’s journal: ... saw view of the lake from the upper part of the castle where Rhone comes into the lake ... (BL.Add.Mss. 56536 f.123r: quoted Clubbe and Giddiey, Byron et la Suisse, p. 40). Neither Rousseau nor Shelley were guilty of the error. See Julie, ou la Nouvelle Héloïse, Part IV, Letter XVII (St. Preux is boating with Julie, in the absence of her husband): Là j’expliquois à Julie toutes les parties du superbe horizon qui nous entouroit. Je lui montrois de loin les embouchures du Rhône dont l’imptueux cours s’arrête tout à coup au bout d’un quart de lieue, et semble craindre de souiller de ses eaux bourbeuses le cristal azuré du lac. (Julie, ou la Nouvelle Héloïse, ed. Mornet, vol. 3, pp. 279 – 280). Shelley, who admits to having been reading the novel all day, echoes the section: We passed from the blue waters of the lake over the stream of the Rhone, which is rapid cp. Byron’s “fullest flow” even at a great distance from its confluence with the lake; the turbid waters mixed with those of the lake, but mixed with them unwillingly. (Letters, ed. Jones, vol. 1 p. 353). Kölbinger refers us to maternal imagery at Childe Harold III, Stanza 71: ... like the Rhone by Leman’s waters washed, Where mingled and yet separate appears The river from the lake, all bluely dashed Through the serene and placid glassy deep, Which fain would lull its river-child to sleep.

61: I saw the white-walled distant town: Coleridge: Villeneuve. McGann: Probably not Villeneuve but either St. Gingolph or Meillerie. St. Gingolph and Meillerie would be more clearly in the line of view from Chillon, on the opposite side of the lake. To try to see Villeneuve (closer, but to the south) would make one’s neck ache. Two other possibilities are Vevey and Bouvert. Kölbinger comments sensibly, Welcher Ortschaft Byron hier im Auge gehabt hat, lässt sich nicht mit Sicherheit sagen ... Wir verstehen, mit wie Schmerzlichen Gefühlen unser Gefangener nach der white walled distant town hinschaut, die ihm gleichsam die menschliche Gesellschaft repräsentiert, von welcher er ausgeschlossen ist. He also mentions Lambro, who at Don Juan III Stanza 27 ... saw his white walls shining in the sun, and the cliffs of Dover at Don Juan X Stanza 65, which rose, like a white wall along / The blue seas border. The white walls seen by the Prisoner are a sign for Byron of a home destroyed.

62: And whiter sails go skimming down Compare Letter to John Murray Esqre.: But what seemed the most “poetical” of all – at the moment – were the numbers (about two hundred) of Greek and Turkish Craft – which were obliged to “cut and run” before the wind – from their unsafe anchorage – some for Tenedos – some for other isles – some for the Main – and some it may be for Eternity. – – The Sight of these little scudding vessels darting over the foam in the twilight – now appearing – and now disappearing between the waves in the cloud of night – with their peculiarly white sails – (the Levant sails not being of “coarse canvas” but of white cotton) skimming along – as quickly – but less safely than the Sea-Mew which hovered over them – their evident distress – their reduction to fluttering specks in the distance – their crowded succession – their littleness as contending with the Giant element – which made our stout 44’s teak timbers (she was built in India) creak again, – their aspect – and their motion – all struck me as something far more “poetical” than the mere broad – brawling – shipless Sea and the sullen winds could possibly have been without them (CMP 131).
And then there was a little isle*
Which in my very face did smile,

The only one in view;
A small green Isle – it seemed no more63
Scarcely broader than my dungeon floor;
But in it there were three tall trees,
And o’er it blew the mountain breeze,
And by it there were waters flowing,
And on it there were wild flowers growing,
Of gentle breath and hue.

The fish swam by the castle wall,
And they seemed joyous each and all,64
The Eagle rode the rising blast65 –
Methought he never flew so fast,
As then to me he seemed to fly,
And then new tears came in my eye
And I felt troubled – and would fain
I had not left my recent chain,
And when I did descend again,
The darkness of my dim abode
Fell on me as a heavy load;
It was as is a new-dug grave
Closing o’er one we sought to save,
And yet my glance too much opprest
Had almost need of such a rest.

* Note: Between the entrances of the Rhone and Villeneuve, not far from Chillon, is a very small Island – the only one I could perceive in my voyage round and over the lake within its circumference – it contains a few trees (I think not above three) and from its singleness and diminutive size has a peculiar effect upon the view.

14.

63: A little isle – it seemed no more: in fact there are two small islands visible from the cell window. However, see Hobhouse’s journal: ... saw ... – also the little islet with a few trees on it [...] the only islet in the lake ... (BL.Add.Mss.56536, f.125r: printed Clubbe and Giddey, Byron et la Suisse, p. 40).

64: And they seemed joyous each and all: Coleridge: Compare the Ancient Mariner on the watersnakes –

“O happy living things! no tongue
Their beauty might declare.”

Ancient Mariner, Part IV, lines 282, 283.

There is, too, in these lines (352-4), as in many others, an echo of Wordsworth. In the Song at the Feast of Brougham Castle it is told how the “two undying fish” of Bowscale Tarn, and the “eagle lord of land and sea” ministered to the shepherd-lord. It was no wonder that the critics of 1816 animadverted on Byron’s “communion” with the Lakers. “He could not,” writes a Critical Reviewer (Series V vol. iv. pp. 567-81), “carry many volumes on his tour, but among the few, we will venture to predict, are found the two volumes of poems lately republished by Mr. Wordsworth. ... Such is the effect of reading and enjoying the poetry of Mr. W., to whose system (ridiculed alike by those who could not, and who would not understand it) Lord Byron, it is evident, has become a tardy convert, and of whose merits in the poems on our table we have a silent but unequivocal acknowledgement”.

65: The Eagle rode the rising blast compare above, 80-1.
It might be months, or years, or days –
I kept no count – I took no note,
I had no hope my eyes to raise
And clear them of their dreary mote. 66

At last Men came to set me free –
I asked not why, and recked not where –
It was at length the same to me
Fettered, or fetterless to be –
I learned to love Despair. 67

And thus when they appeared at last,
And all my bonds aside were cast,
These heavy walls to me had grown
A hermitage – and all my own! 68

And half I felt as they were come
To tear me from a second home;
With Spiders I had friendship made,
And watched them in their sullen trade;
Had seen the Mice by moonlight play –
And why should I feel less than they?
We were all inmates of one place,
And, the Monarch of each race,
Had power to kill – yet, strange to tell!
In quiet we had learned to dwell;
Nor slew I of my subjects one –
What Sovereign hath so little done? 69

My very chains and I grew friends,
So much a long Communion tends
To make us what we are: even I
Regained my freedom with a sigh. 70
When the foregoing poem was composed I was not sufficiently aware of the history of Bonnivard – or I should have endeavoured to dignify the subject by an attempt to celebrate his courage and his virtues – some account of his life will be found in a note appended to the “Sonnet on Chillon” with which I have been furnished by the kindness of a citizen of that Republic, which is still proud of the memory of a man worthy of the best age of antient Freedom. — — —

The following, mostly in an unidentifiable hand, but with the title in Byron's, is placed in Claire Clairmont’s fair copy between pages 152 and 153:

+ Note to the Sonnet on Chillon. —

François de Bonnivard, fils de Louis de Bonnivard, originaire de Seyssel & Seigneur de Lunes, naquit en 1496; il fit Ses études à Turin; en 1510 Jean Aimé de Bonnivard Son oncle lui resigna le Prieuré de St. Victor, qui aboutissoit aux murs de Geneve, & qui formait un benefice considerable.

Ce grand homme (Bonnivard mérite ce titre par la force de Son âme, la droiture de Son coeur, la noblesse de ses intentions, la Sagesse de Ses conseils, le courage de ses démarches, l’étendue de ses connaissances & la vivacité de Son esprit), ce grand homme, qui excitera l’admiration de tous ceux qu’une vertue héroïque peut encore émouvoir, inspirera la plus vive reconnaissance dans les cœurs des Genevois qui aiment Geneve. Bonnivard en fut toujours un des plus fermes appuis: pour assurer la liberté de nôtre République, il ne craignait pas de perdre Souvent la sienne; il oublia Son repos; il méprisa Ses richesses; il ne négligea rien pour affermir le bonheur d’une patrie qu’il honora de Son choix: dès ce moment il la chérit comme le plus zélée de ses Citoyens; il la servit avec l’intrépidité d’un héros, et il écrivit son Histoire avec la naïveté d’un Philosophe & la chaleur d’un Patriote.

Il dit dans le commencement de son histoire de Geneve, que, dès qu’il eut commencé de lire l’histoire des nations, il Se Sentit entrainé par Son goût pour les Républiques, dont il épousa toujours les interêts; c’est ce goût pour la liberté qui lui fit sans doutes adopter Geneve pour sa patrie.

Bonnivard, encore jeune, S’annonça hautement comme le défenseur de Geneve contre le Duc de Savoye et l’Evèque.

En 1519, Bonnivard devient le martyr de sa patrie: Le Duc de Savoye etant entré dans Geneve avec cinq cent hommes, Bonnivard craint le ressentiment du Duc; il voulut se retirer à Fribourg pour en éviter les Suites; mais il fut trahi par deux hommes qui l’accompagnoient, & conduit par ordre du Prince à Grolée, où il resta prisonnier pendant deux ans. Bonnivard étoit malheureux dans ses voyages: comme ses malheurs n’avoient point ralenti Son zêle pour Geneve, il étoit toujours un ennemi redoutable pour ceux qui la menaçoient, & par conséquent il devoit être exposé à leurs coups. Il fut recontré en 1530 Sur le Jura par des

70: Regained my freedom with a sigh: perhaps a recollection of these lines from Francis Hodgson's Prologue to his translation of Juvenal (see BLJ II 95 or III 150):

- When sly Octavius seiz'd th'imperial reins,
- And hid in flow'rs the despot's iron chains,
- Afflicted Rome, worn out with warlike toils,
- And the long bloodshed of domestic broils,
- Beheld, unmov'd, her ancient honour die,
- And gave her freedom up without a sigh. (The Satires of Juvenal, tr. Hodgson, London 1807 p. xxxvii)
Voleurs, qui le dépouillèrent, & qui le mirent encore entre les mains du Duc de Savoye: ce Prince le fit enfermer dans le Château de Chillon, où il resta Sans être interrogé jusques en 1536; il fut alors livré par les Bernois, qui s’emparèrent du Pays de Vaud.

Bonnivard, en sortant de Sa captivité, eut le plaisir de trouver Geneve libre & reformée; la République s’empressa de lui témoigner Sa reconnaissance et de le dédommager des maux qu’il avait Soufferts; elle le reçut Bourgeois de la ville au mois de Juin 1536; elle lui donna la maison habitée autrefois par le Vicaire–General, et elle lui assigna une pension de 200 écus d’or tant qu’il sejourneroit à Geneve. Il fut admis dans le Conseil des Deux–Cent en 1537.

Bonnivard n’a pas fini d’être utile: après avoir travaillé à rendre Geneve libre, il réussit à la rendre tolérante. Bonnivard engagea le Conseil à accorder aux Ecclesiastiques & aux paysans un temps suffisant pour examiner les propositions qu’on leur faisoit; il réussit par sa douceur: on prêche toujours le Christianisme avec Succès quand on le prêche avec charité.

Bonnivard fut Savant; Ses manuscrits qui sont dans la Bibliothèque publique, prouvent qu’il avoit bien lu les auteurs classiques latins, & qu’il avoit approfondi la théologie & l’histoire. Ce grand homme aimoit les Sciences, et il croyoit qu’elles pouvoient faire la gloire de Geneve; aussi il ne negligea rien pour les fixer dans cette ville naissante; en 1551 il donna sa bibliothèque au public, elle fut le commencement de notre bibliothèque publique; & ces livres sont en partie les rares & belles editions du quinzième siecle qu’on vois dans notre Collection. Enfin, pendant la même année, ce bon patriote institua la Republique Son héritière, à condition qu’elle employeroit Ses biens à entretenir le College dont on projettoit la fondation.

Il paroit que Bonnivard mourut en 1570; mais on ne peut l’assurer, parcequ’il y a une lacune dans le Nécrologe depuis le mois de Juillet 1570 jusques en 1571.  

71: “François de Bonnivard, son of Louis de Bonnivard, Lord of Lunes, was born in Seyssel in 1496; he studied at Turin; in 1510 Jean Aimé de Bonnivard, his uncle, bequeathed him the Priory of St. Victor, which abutted on the walls of Geneva, and which formed a considerable benefice.

This great man (Bonnivard deserves this title, by the strength of his soul, the righteousness of his heart, the nobility of his motives, and the wisdom of his counsels, the bravery of his deeds, the width of his knowledge and the vivacity of his spirit), this great man, who will excite the reverence of everyone who can still be moved by the sight of a heroic virtue, inspires the most lively admiration in the hearts of those Genovese who love Geneva. Bonnivard was always one of its stoutest pillars; in order to ensure the freedoms of our republic, he was not averse to losing his own, which he often did; he forgot his rest; he despised his riches; he left nothing alone in order to affirm the goodness of a fatherland which he honoured from choice: from the moment he chose it he cherished it as zealously as did the most zealous of its citizens; he served it with the bravery of a hero, and wrote its history with the innocence of a philosopher and the warmth of a patriot.

At the start of his History of Geneva, he writes that ever since he began to read the history of nations, his taste has led him towards republics, the interests of which he often espoused; it is doubtless this taste for liberty which led him to adopt Geneva as his homeland.

While still young, Bonnivard publicly proclaimed himself as the defender of Geneva against the Duke and Bishop of Savoy.

In 1519, Bonnivard became the martyr of his country: the Duke of Savoy having entered Geneva with five hundred men, Bonnivard feared his hostility, and wanted to retire to Fribourg in order to avoid him; but he was betrayed by two of his companions, and conveyed on the Duke’s command to Groëlée, where he remained prisoner for two years. Bonnivard was unlucky in his travels; as his misfortunes had in no way lessened his love for Geneva, he remained at all times an enemy to those who threatened it, and was in consequence exposed to their violence. In 1530, in the Jura, he encountered some robbers, who stripped him and placed him once again in the hands of the Duke of Savoy: that Prince imprisoned him in the Castle of Chillon, where he remained without charge or questioning until 1536; he was then delivered by the Bernese, who were securing the Pays de Vaud.
On leaving his captivity, Bonnivard had the pleasure of finding Geneva free and reformed; the Republic went out of its way to show him its gratitude, and to make good the ills which he had suffered; he was made a Burgess of the city in June 1536; he was given the house occupied previously by the Vicar-General, and a pension of two hundred gold écus for as long as he stayed in Geneva. In 1537 he was admitted on to the Council of Two Hundred.

Bonnivard had not ceased to be useful; after having worked to make Geneva free, he succeeded in making it tolerant. Bonnivard persuaded the Council to allow priests and peasants enough time to examine the propositions put to them; he succeeded by his gentleness; Christianity is never preached with greater success than when it is preached with charity.

Bonnivard was a scholar; his manuscripts, which are in the Public Library, prove that he had read the classical Latin authors thoroughly, and that he had a profound knowledge of theology and history. This great man loved the sciences, and believed that they could prove to be the glory of Geneva; he neglected no means by which they could be cultivated in this growing city; in 1551 he donated his library to the state, and it laid the foundations of our Public Library; from these books come in part the rare and beautiful fifteenth-century editions which can be seen in our collection. Finally, in the same year, this excellent patriot made the Republic his heirs, on condition that they should invest his wealth in the maintenance of the college, the foundation of which was being planned.

It seems that Bonnivard died in 1570; but we cannot be sure, because there is a gap in the records between July 1570 and 1571.”

Byron knew none of this when he wrote the poem; but discovering that Bonnivard had been a highly-repectable martyr for Republican liberty, a foe of Dukes and bishops, and a pattern of charity and tolerance, will not have done his feelings on his choice of subject any harm. To place it – even behind the discreet veil of its original tongue – in a publication of the Tory John Murray, would have added to his pleasure. E.H.Coleridge traces the passage to the 1786 work Histoire Littéraire de Genève by Jean Senebier (1741–1809) I 131-7. With some adjustment of the uppercasing of the “s”s, it is placed in the first edition, as note to line 13 of the Sonnet on Chillon:

Eternal Spirit of the chainless Mind!
   Brightest in dungeons, Liberty! thou art,
   For there thy habitation is the heart –
The heart which Love of thee alone can bind;
And when thy Sons to fetters are consigned,
   To fetters, and the damp vault’s dayless gloom,
   Their Country conquers with their Martyrdom,
And Freedom’s fame finds wings on every Wind. –
Chillon! thy prison is a holy place,
   And thy sad floor an Altar – for ’twas trod
Until his very steps have left a trace
   Worn, as if thy cold pavement were a Sod,
By Bonnivard! – May none those marks efface!
   For they appeal from Tyranny to God. –

The text of the poem here is from Byron’s own fair copy, in the John Murray Archive, where it is on page 120 of Claire Clairmont’s book, just before The Prisoners of Chillon. Byron’s decision to append the Swiss academic note to the Sonnet rather than to the main poem may be his way of signalling the “Fable” nature of the latter.