~ Deception~

A novella

By Abbey Coleridge

~ The Lord ~

3:00 pm

"So I hear Lord Byron will be making an appearance," queries Albert, his excited eyes brimming with jealousy – though one could hardly blame him. It was I, Lord George who will be hosting the social event of the season; a reading of the celebrated *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* by the author himself! Little did these simple people realise that I will be giving them something so much better instead.

"Yes, he's coming as a personal favour for my help with Childe Harold," I fabricate in an attempt to placate my companion. His eyes sparkle and retain their lustre of jealousy through their sheer happiness at the thought of meeting that pompous overrated Lord Byron. I fathom his joyful expression knowing instead will witness something far superior. I walk towards the man with my exaggerated limp, a replica of the affliction suffered by Byron himself that I had employed for this night.

"Oh dear heavens! I don't believe I'll be able to contain my excitement!" my old friend needlessly surmises, he never was any good at controlling his emotions. To keep from snickering at Albert's obliviousness, I direct my eyes around the drawing room of my manor. The regal manor had been decorated in un-paralleled sophistication for the occasion. The candles flicker enthusiastically – while the oil lamps brim with sweet smelling extracts that left a beautiful scent wafting through the dimly lit room. The energy is palpable. The colossal door that hangs in the entrance stir, as two young women glide through followed by the butler.

Introductions are quickly made; the eldest sister is the lovely Miss Henrietta Thorpe. A beautiful socialite with a reputation of charisma and intelligence – though I do not mind that, for the searching expression suddenly comes to a halt as it met mine. It is clear that we will become fast companions tonight. Her younger sister is Miss Catherine Thorpe, a pretty girl in her own right; but her eyes lack the depth and classic beauty that her sister's hold. As the elder sister, Henrietta will inherit a large sum of her family's money, not comparable to mine of course, but still a fair amount. This is not the main motivation behind my attraction to the young lady of course! But a union between the Thorpe family and my own could be fruitful for both parties.

Conversation flows easily between me and Henrietta, though Albert eyes seem unfocussed when I tried to catch them. He writhes incessantly, and mutters random nothings about nature or some other pointless point. I largely ignore his actions though, as it was his norm to lapse into his insanity during social gatherings. We chat of simple matters; the state of the economy, the manor, Lord Byron's reading; but neither of us has our full attention on the conversation. We instead focus on the waves of desire hidden beneath her facade of interest in Byron's work.

The younger Thorpe sister sits petulantly in the room. Her obvious jealousy over the attention I am giving her sister forces her lips into a pout and her eyes cast to the floor. I ask a polite question concerning the weather, or some other mundane occurrence, to momentarily placate her jealousy. Her enthused reaction at our small conversation reminds me of just how considerate I am, and after indulging for a moment in the thought, I return to my conversation with Miss Henrietta.

As the clock nears 4 o'clock, the maddened Freddy enters with the eccentric David Charlesworth. Charlesworth's beard is 'decorated' with its usual components of twigs and dirt. His eyes bulge upon

entering the manor; grazing the room as he twists in a manner that would replicate one of those disgusting creatures he studies. His mouth pulls a tight grimace; his contempt for the room is as obvious as it is humorous. The man was invited for my entertainment, not for decoration advice. After the introduction I greet the two men, and brace myself for their tiresomely repetitive questions about Lord Byron's appearance.

In the breaks between bombardments of questions, I am drawn to Freddy in the corner. There is no point bothering him, his body is contorted in what looks like the foetal position, shaking and violently muttering what appears to be English – but is indecipherable. He is perhaps an ill choice to attend such a social occasion. Though there are people who were invited for their pure absurdity, he is so caught in his dystopic imaginings that it provides very little room for conversation.

Now that my motley crew of guests are assembled, I turn to my butler to ask the question we had rehearsed earlier that day. The hour is growing late, where is Lord Byron? His response is that a letter had arrived, after a short glance on the page and a brilliantly delivered shocked expression – I tell my guests that Lord Byron was involved in an accident and could not make it. Displeasure resonates from them, but my announcement that I will instead be reading *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* considerably cheers them all. As I slowly limp to my rightful place on the podium, I glance into the eyes of Henrietta before launching into the woes of Childe Harold.

~ The Artist ~

3:00 pm

"So I hear the magnificent Lord Byron will be making an appearance this evening," I propose to my great friend Lord George, pleading within myself that he will respond as I expect.
"Yes," he states nonchalantly, as I feel my heart beat faster. "He's coming as a personal favour for all my help with *Childe Harold*."
"Oh dear Heavens!" I boom enthusiastically. "I do not believe I will be able to contain my excitement!" I proceed to further question Lord George, but he insists he has to continue preparations for the arrival of his guests, and limps away.

Flustered with anticipation, I retire to the exquisite chaise lounge in the corner of Lord George's lavishly decorated drawing room. The room is generously sized, and a spectacle to the eye. Shelves of glorious books line the walls; the knowledge they hold begging to be extracted. Truly unable to withhold my excitement, I am ecstatic at the possibility of the extremely talented Lord Byron coming to read *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*. How I desperately yearn to hear Byron's picturesque descriptions of the landscapes at Waterloo, Belgium, the Alps and the Rhine, that I had heard many great things about. I find Byron's poetry to transcend the awe and wonderment of the epic poetry that preceded his fine work, seldom am I able to create picturesque artwork without the inspiration of Lord Byron's astounding imagery.

Transporting myself from the drawing room, I become engulfed by an organic setting. Majestic flowers bloom sporadically around me, overwhelming my senses with the sweet, sweet scent they contrive – euphoria. Uncorrupted joy paralyses my mortal conscience as the branches of trees above me oscillate, clearing the societal filth that poisons my mind.

*How does the Meadow flower its bloom unfold? Because the lovely little flower is free down to its root, and in that freedom bold. **

I, a product of nature, was confined within the monstrosity of industrial culture - never to be as free as the Meadow flower.

Much to my displeasure, an interesting looking fellow protracts me from my internal illusions. The tall figure imposes his shadow over me, peering down through dark, inquisitive eyes at my splayed position upon the chaise.
"Good evening, good sir," booms the interesting man of high intellect and status, I suspect from his conversation and appearance, thrusting his hand forward to be shaken.
"My name is David Charlesworth," he states, while we shake hands.
"Hello, I am Albert Ross," I respond "Very nice to meet you."

Regular introductory motions are concluded, and we begin to discuss our passions and education. However, upon Charlesworth's expression of his theories on evolution, I couldn't help but argue.
"How can one possibly understand such a wonderful thing as nature, like you "natural" philosophers claim to?" I question. I was flummoxed as to why the natural philosopher attempts to classify all forms of life into various categories and stages of "evolution", confining the beauty of nature within the rigidity of science. Did he really wish to impose the foul constrictions of class structures,

emerging from the despicable industrialists, upon the natural beauty of nature? Rebutting his thoughts, I propose my argument.
"You try to know nature, but nobody can know nature like those who immerse themselves within it and record its beauty."

Sir David Charlesworth struggles to force further disagreement through his matted, straggly beard. For the sake of manners, I pretend that I was still listening, but as he becomes increasingly inaudible, I no longer care for his company or opinions – rather becoming entranced by his dishevelled beard. Small twigs and leaves are woven throughout, and I believe I even spy several bugs journeying within to find a home. Sir Charlesworth's beard was a perplexed juxtaposition to his stately manner, but it certainly did indicate his immense passion for nature. Nevertheless, I am still confused as to how someone who shares a similar love for the organic as I, has beliefs such as he.

Forgetting that the masterpiece that was Sir Charlesworth's beard was indeed attached to his face, I was rather shocked when he began abusing me for attempting to touch his beard, hitting my interrogational hand away and blustering off to examine the approaching storm that has necessitated his attention.

*William Wordsworth

~ The Philosopher ~

3:15 pm

The wind is awful. It isn't there where it should be. It isn't there. I had hoped for more power to the weather but all Nature can conjure for our amusement is some gathering clouds and the hope of a storm later into the evening. I do cling to that hope, and I'll confess here that I do not wish to be disappointed by Her showing. Disappointment wracks me terribly. Surely She will give us a little of what we need and for that I will, as always, give my thanks to Her.

I must give some brief detail of my impression of Lord George's manor. As always – and by purposeful design of course – I have traveled solitary in my Phaeton pulled only by the loyal young Doyle, my last remaining friend. Doyle is a Percheron with strong Arabian blood as thick as his midnight black coat and a proud countenance. He is of stout character and astute mind; I know this as oftentimes I catch him staring at me with his bright large eyes boring deep into my spirit. Indeed he most likely perceives the hollowness of that spirit and yet he never mocks me, merely giving a flick of his small ears to indicate his perception of my Truth. Oh, I've lost myself. Where was I? Indeed, Lord George. He is a man I have known for quite some time however the reasons for our acquaintance I can no longer finger, something to do with his uncle and a desire to see the young George schooled in the classics. A foolish proposition it was then, as foolish as the invitation that the new Lord extended to me to attend this reading.

The artist (one Baron? No, Byron?) does interest me somewhat as rumour has it he possesses the qualities of a true 'artist-tyrant' yet I have been disappointed so often by artists and their feigned existential boredom. I see through it all – a veneer of paralysis when in fact they long for nothing but the love of the crowd and lack the true torture of the individual. Poets have long frustrated me. I do wish to see them focus more on the lyric, the sound, the music of which poetry should and must be constituted for it is only truly in music that Man can console his suffering; that eternal suffering that is unbearable Life.

Unbearable Life --

And there I have lost myself and my focus and my head. It is not uncommon these days as ideas and experiences and visions mash into one heap of seething, fetid dung trying to extricate itself from my pen. Lord George? His manor is just another building clad in creeping vines of the ages hoping to shout itself as something more than what it is. To confess truly, I am more fascinated by Doyle and his disinterest in the manor. Look at him as he stands there focusing his attention entirely on the ground below his giant hooves. Bashing at the ground -- does he anticipate the storm I long for? I do seek it out like a madman, *for lightning and tempest are different worlds, free powers, without morality.* In light of Doyle's devotion to Nature, I feel obliged to share with him my as yet under-developed thesis on the Will and its relationship to Nature, after all my muscular equine friend partially inspired my vision of what Man could and should be in defiance of this Unbearable Life.
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An unnerving thing has just happened as I was speaking my part to young Doyle. A light emerged from the rather untidy wood behind the manor. A thing. A being. It distracted me and drew me to it. A kind of shooting of bright energy effused from this being and yet immediately I worked it out to be a trick of the late afternoon light playing off the spectacles of a dark-haired man emerging from the wood. Who is he?

I must confess it is a strange happening and one I endeavour to think of more closely some day soon. His clothes appear to be slightly damp and he gives off a sweet Earthy smell like freshly cut wet grass. His eyes give voice to an alert and interested mind.
'My name is David Charlesworth, are you here for the reading?'
'Frederick. Ah, yes I am. And you?'
'As a man of Science, I find the reading of poetry or narratives of any variety hold no fascination for me. I do like a social gathering however. I find the coming together of people, especially on nights promising a tempest of sorts, to be quite attractive to the Natural Philosopher. Wouldn't you agree?'
Such a frank description of one's own motivations was both confronting and compelling especially so given this man's self-professed interest in that so-called enlightened doctrine, Science. The supposition of those who place Science above Nature weaken themselves in their denial of emotion. Reason? Ha! The discoveries of Science hold nothing in store for Man but more false prophets seeking to capitalise on the herd-instinct of the many. But this David Charlesworth, he speaks with confidence and yet his genial tone and relaxed posture belie no arrogance. My reply is confounding for us both, simply a muttered, 'A tempest' and we two begin to walk towards the gaudy front of the manor where the Lord's time-beaten butler awaits us.

A tempest, indeed.

~ Natural Philosopher ~

3.00 pm

Twilight surrounds me with a wisp of a nippy breeze. Gliding ever so slowly across the canopy of the elm trees are whiffs of calming cream coloured clouds. Cleansing southerly winds are exacerbated by the iciness of the blue sky while it lifts the natural perfume of the forest and creates an explosion of pure sweetness which only makes my longing for my home in Plymouth harder to bear. Sweeping rays of the almighty Sun stretch down through the leaves of the elm and lightly peck my cheek while the wind plays through the branches, swinging them from side to side. I smoothly stride through the woodland while a couple of brown Brambling finches swoop up and down around me, gliding over the grass at such a staggering speed that it wakes me from the Natural seduction.

I'm not very far from the manor – I can see the white pebble drive, when I heard the trotting hooves of a horse drawing a small phaeton containing a single man with quite a dishevelled look, resembling that of the enlightened philosopher François Voltaire. Then again, if anyone happened to look at me, they would, perhaps, say the same about my appearance. I am wearing my best brown leather breeches with my double-breasted white waistcoat and my black greatcoat. However, my grey and tangled mass of hair and my white bushy beard usually catapults people away with repulsion.

I resentfully emerge from my beloved woodland and make my way around the large yet overgrown turn-about on the drive to where the phaeton and the man had stopped. Lord George's manor is quite majestic in size and grandiose in design, hitherto it would have been extraordinarily beautiful. However, this 'Lord' did not live up to his title through the presentation of his yard and the exterior of his house. It is as dishevelled as the strange man in the phaeton!

"Hop to it, David!" I think to myself and go in search of the driver. I initially think it is a servant or stable boy grooming the horse, but in fact, it is the driver himself! Stroking the beast gently across the mane with his hands while soothingly whispering into its erect ears seemed to be the man's natural talent. The beast is unnaturally at ease with the man so I assume he must be some kind of horse-breaker.

"Good evening sir. My name is David Charlesworth."

I receive no reply except more mumbles.
"Ah, sir, are you here for the poem readings by Lord Byron?"

He continues to mumble nervously however I caught a few words such as "Doyle", "science" and "irritating". I try to usher him inside by placing my hand gently on his shoulder.

"Not to worry good sir, I am not enthused about the poem reading either. I'm sure you must be here for the reading. After all, this is your carriage I saw you emerge from. Come, come! Let us enter the house together, shall we?"

I lead him up the creamy-brown marble steps to a magnificent carved wooden door. I am having some difficulty restraining the man from turning back towards his horse but the chief butler answers my call and leads us graciously into the drawing room, where Lord George, a man and two young ladies await us. We are announced by the butler to Mr Albert Ross, Miss Henrietta Thorpe

and her younger sister, Miss Catherine Thorpe. My acquaintance, Mr Frederick, as introduced by Lord George, immediately seeks the protection of the corner in the darkest part of the room. The drawing room itself is the size of a ballroom but looks as drab as the exterior of the house. It has been well decorated with dark maroon wallpaper, gold rimmed armchairs and marble tables however the entire atmosphere of the room gives off a pang of rejection and desperation.

The clock strikes thirty five minutes past the hour of three as I am introduced by Lord George to a mentally removed and very untidy looking man, who is no dissimilar to Freddy (as I am told he prefers to be called) in mannerisms and attire.

“Good evening good sir, my name is David Charlesworth.”

He seems to awake from a thought while he replied, “I am Albert Ross; very nice to meet you.”

After I introduce my profession in Natural Philosophy to Mr Ross, I begin to express my passion for the study of living organisms and how I am developing my own theory on how man has evolved over millions of generations from hairy beasts such as chimpanzees and gorillas. Blasphemous as it may be to some, especially those from the biological Linnaean Society of London, it is still quite fascinating in its premise. My mentioning of my fascination with Erasmus Darwin and his work on evolution, and the zoologist John Townsend, who shared my adoration for living things, stirrs within me an impulse to elaborate on my small theories on the origin of humanity. I explain the accuracy of Townsend’s most famous notion, "None but a naturalist can appreciate a naturalist's feelings, his delight amounting to ecstasy, when a specimen he has never before seen, meets his eye,” and how I believe that the origin of all species originates just as Mr Darwin had proposed, by means of “survival of the fittest” in the population of all organisms. At that instant, I have finally captured the attention of my hitherto empty minded acquaintance. He is not interested in my proposition but enraged at the thought of natural selection. He curses me and criticises my work and the work of all in my trade.

“How can one possibly understand such a wonderful thing as nature, like you ‘natural’ philosophers attempt to? You try to know nature, but nobody can know nature like those who record its beauty,” said he. This bold and unexpected comment baffles me. “That Romantic, that so called ‘artist’ – how intellectually inferior he is to doubt the truth of science!” are my immediate thoughts. However his sudden change in countenance drives no philosophical rebuttal from me. He seems quite occupied by some irrelevant thought, then he reaches out to grab at my beard with urgent desire! I smack his hand away and, humiliated and disappointed with the lack of interesting guests, I leave the conversation and retire to a window seat. Black and green thunder-clouds roll ferociously towards the manor, covering the distant hills in shadow. Weighted by the coming storm, the chill of the air wafts through the open glass window became thicker with every breath. I retract my glance from the approaching monster to the reflection of my melancholy self. My eyes brim with longing for home, for Plymouth, for my two wonderful boys. Why am I here, with all these abominable people? None of them appreciate what I have to stay. None of them even understand what I have to say! My ideas and theories have ruined my chance of scientific notability and destroyed my life with my family. Nature is a continuous cycle, and therefore, perhaps, all evil shall pass with the coming storm.

~ The Sister ~

3:15 pm

After a lot of effort on my part, Henrietta finally agreed to take me with her to Lord George's poetry reading. I just know it will be incredibly elegant; the boredom of the long ride to Lord George's manor can only be compared to the mind numbing dullness of church on Sundays! And, to make it worse Henrietta is acting sullen and has been ignoring me the entire ride, I can always tell her mood by how her shoulders slump and her usually bright intelligent eyes fix solidly on her toes, but I reassure her that I won't be embarrassing or rude; I plan on getting close to Lord George. As a lord he is definitely the kind of man one wishes to connect with. Oh! I do hope he is handsome. When I ask Henrietta about him she gives only abrupt answers, and she describes him as a "pompous, egocentric pig". But that couldn't possibly be the case; he is surely polite and dignified - as a lord should be.

Arriving at the lord's home is underwhelming - I was expecting something much more impressive than this. The manor is large but the garden unkempt and the facade faded and neglected, yet I'm sure there is a good explanation for the shabby, unimpressive structure. Perhaps Lord George doesn't want to overshadow the visiting poet Byron. Although his poems have become so immensely popular, the life of any poet must be so dull if all they can do to entertain themselves is write some uninteresting, garbled verse. Yes, I am absolutely sure that this is one of Lord George's less impressive dwellings, used for when he doesn't want to appear overbearing or intimidating.
My sister and I are greeted at the door and the butler leads us into the drawing room; whilst the introductions are made I allow myself a chance to take in Lord George's impressive appearance. The lord is incredible, he holds himself strong and proud despite an awkward limp in his left leg. His striking features and piercing grey blue eyes give him a sense of power and passion. He hasn't even looked at me yet! Henrietta is dragging him into conversation about poetry, but he seems extremely uninterested. I attempt to involve myself in conversation and steer it into a more arousing direction, Lord George smiles down at me gratefully and in that smile I see that I may have a chance to win him over (despite my sister's perplexing allure). My selfish sister again steers the conversation in a poetry driven direction, and uninvolved and uninterested my mind begins to wander. I look around, taking in the unkempt grandeur of the lord's manor and realising there was a third guest who must have arrived before my sister and I. I study the fourth occupant of the room, this bizarre individual Albert Ross; he is a small thin man, his dark hair receding into a large forehead. His eyes seem not to fix on any one place and hold a crazed and outlandish expression. I wonder if the other guests will be as odd as this one.

~ The Woman ~

3.15 pm

What an eventful evening it is going to be. Thoughts eagerly buzz through my mind, as I try to sustain a composed position for myself in the horse and cart. Lord Byron! My mind is racing at the thought. As I grew up, I read Byron's work in my father's library; I believed this was the reason to that influenced me to my beliefs of the economic statuses in our society. Was that the influence which led me to still be unmarried at my age of 22? Lord Byron is a man of revolutions and ideas! He is an idealist and all I want is his attendance to go to plan, so I can share my ideals on nature and its beauty, and idealism upon our society's very environment.

The wind blows in from the carriage window and my hair blows into my face, which leaves me to my thoughts as shadows in the back of my mind. Catherine, my youngest sister, sitting opposite me, in the horse carriage, as we were driving up the road towards Lord George's grand manor. I looked across and saw Catherine, she seems to be confined in her own thoughts. I looked out the window, and comprehended within moments of nature's beauty. It drew me closer together with its serenity. Man and nature, I was thinking in depthly. Oh, how I connected through plain sight of one another. I felt emotional and free just looking at it. Catherine was looking excitedly out the carriage window with anticipation, as I turned to face her. And i'm sitting next to her with a neutral facial expression, my thoughts too intrigued by nature's beauty.

We arrived outside the manor upon arrival, and the disappointment settles in. My face, is confounding with discontent. I contemplate the old manor which is completely dilapidated. Catherine's face is beaming with enthusiasm. I'm wondering what this Lord actually invests his money on. Picking up my dress at the hips and escorting Catherine, we walk up the front steps of Lord George's shabby manor. The manor's wooden panels were weather beaten and the paint is chipping off, the verandah is dirty with leaves everywhere. My first impression of the place is not very ideal. Then the front doors are opening for us.

I walk into Lord George's manor and Catherine's by my side. The manor's interior shows he did have some investment towards furniture, as they are old and worn down, some even looked too broken to sit upon. No wonder he is a bachelor at such an age, he doesn't seem appealing to anyone through his lack of display in society – especially through his home. Females deserve more than what they receive, Catherine and I, however are lucky to receive such wealth. I understand as a woman of higher class of our role in society, with what we have to do in life, through marriage, but I am not one to become this.

I came back into the conversation, after being in deep thought with the thought of my sister's over-excitement, as a butler escorts us into a drawing room. Catherine's mood lightens once she recognises other men are at this gathering. She wants men to surround her with attention, thinking of her shallowness, I slyly roll my eyes. I stand there, being formally introduced to the guests as Catherine wanders off. I'm left there to encounter vibrant conversations to the whereabouts of Lord Byron. After a short period of time, Lord George begins to recite some of Lord Byron's work. I stand there uncouthly, as I begin listening to George's reason to why Byron is absent, I become frustrated and discouraged from that moment onwards. George begins to read out excerpts from Byron's work, as I am utterly dissatisfied due to his absence, I become disinterested. Many others are also in the room with me, to hear the words of Byron being read aloud in admiration, however I am not.

Then, a man walks into the drawing room, without an announcement. Despite listening to my favourite work of Byron, Lord George seems to make me disregard it and this man catches my attention immediately.

He walks over to the piano in the drawing room, and sits down and starts to play music, and completely ignored how Lord George was reciting the work of Byron. However, I take notice to Lord George's further displeasure as this musician of a sort continues to play. Lord George begins to recite what seem to be his own poems with an overly enthusiastic mood, which instantly loses my attention and I continue studying the musician as he plays the piano. His music seemed to memorise me, I couldn't focus on anything else. In the other side of the drawing room however within moments, a man starts to mumble and yell verses of Byron's work from what Lord George had reversed. It caught everyone in the room's attention as he seemed to be varied dream of some sort, which took some guests back with fear.

After he concluded himself, I remained my attention to the musician and his music. I tried to impede myself from hearing George's poems. It must have been some time that the musician had been playing for, for that reason the he tore up the music sheets to what the musician had been playing from. As Lord George finally appeared to be concluding the recital of his own writings, I noticed my sister Catherine listening intriguingly, with the musician's music in the background. I envied him to be able to have the bravery to continue what he wanted to do, however, as a woman, I was not so lucky to have this ability. To have the ability to show my society as an upper class room of my own personal rights, in which I was restrained from in my society.

~ The Artist ~

3:45 pm

Lord Byron wasn't coming? But… Lord George had said he would!
The latest development in my evening of emotional dissimilarity has thrown me into yet another fit of rage. Blood boils wrathfully under the surface of my skin once again, like lava waiting to erupt from a volcano to wreak havoc. I have no choice but to exile myself into the corner of the now crowded drawing room and reflect upon the stupidity and ignorance of my friend, or rather, acquaintance. Why was he so calm and unaffected by the non-appearance of the superlatively talented Lord Byron? Was he not just as devastated as I?

Peering into the centre of the room, I examine the group of strangers who have travelled to hear Lord Byron speak, gather around Lord George. Two young women dressed in fashionable gowns, gaze enthusiastically upon Lord George, fervently awaiting the moment he will begin the reading. The natural philosopher appears distracted by phenomena approaching outside, and a bewildered man tentatively approaches the exterior of the group.

In Lord George's hands he holds the superb book that I can only recognise as my favourite poetry – *The Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*. How can he possibly have this within his possession? I have travelled for hours to experience Lord Byron's stupendous literature! My countenance was taken hostage by my emotions, displaying pure shock and intrigue. I was aware of Lord George's wealth, but I was not aware that it is THAT large!

Lord George clears his throat, signalling to his guests that he is ready to begin the reading, demanding everyone's attention. As his tender voice begins reading excerpts from the poem, the ferocious beast within me settles into hibernation – I will most certainly not taint the perfect literature with my sublime anger.

"Not in those climes where I have late been straying,
Though Beauty long hath there been matchless deemed,
Not in those visions to the heart displaying
Forms which it sighs but to have only dreamed,
Hath aught like thee in truth or fancy seemed"

Throughout the reading, I have somehow immersed myself within the group, fully absorbed by the fantastical poetry emerging from Lord George's mouth. As he approaches Canto the Second, I find it hard to control my unadulterated elation.

"He that has sailed upon the dark blue sea,
Has viewed at times, I ween, a full fair sight;
When the fresh breeze is fair as breeze may be,
The white sails set, the gallant frigate tight,
Masts, spires, and strand retiring to the right,
The glorious main expanding o'er the bow,
The convoy spread like wild swans in their flight,
The dullest sailer wearing bravely now,
So gaily curl the waves before each dashing prow.

The scent of salty ocean water whips around me – I am becoming fully entranced by the magical properties of Lord Byron's incomparable poetry. The words and their power over my heightened imaginative state fully immersing me within the world created by Lord Byron's wonderful imagery. I am rocking with the boat. I can feel the fresh breeze violently caressing my face.

To my bewilderment, wild swans fly across my vision – their grace and perfection embody the precision of nature. Wind whirls underneath me, catapulting me upwards to be with the swans, flying as one with natural creatures. No longer carrying my weight, the wind drops me, allowing me to plummet back into the boat below, and I continue on my journey upon the sea.

And oh, the little warlike world within!
The well-reeved guns, the netted canopy,
The hoarse command, the busy humming din,
When, at a word, the tops are manned on high:
Hark to the boatswain's call, the cheering cry,
While through the seaman's hand the tackle glides
Or schoolboy midshipman that, standing by,
Strains his shrill pipe, as good or ill betides,
And well the docile crew that skilful urchin guides."

Lord George concludes this section and horrific claps of thunder erupt in the sky. Magnificent beams of lightning intermittently illuminate the dully-lit drawing room and shrieks echo from the two young women, as the natural philosopher (whom I had quarrelled with before) runs fervently through the font door, and into the courtyard to observe the wonderous powers of nature.

Surely this has to be an act of, or warning from a higher power, perhaps the Lord is expressing his acceptance of the words just read. The natural world is reacting to the magnificence of the written word; the inspiration, and the representation of imagination acting coherently, aided by God, to create a sensational performance for the eyes and the ears.

I grasp my leather-bound sketchpad from my jacket and begin to record the breathtaking images that are portrayed before my eyes. My tools were limited, but I set forth to do the wondrous sight mere justice with just charcoal and paper. My hands spring into motion, capturing the rapid strikes of light, the shading of the sky and the shadows created by the fantastical flashes.

The beams of lightning significantly alter the natural world surrounding me, creating brilliant images unconceivable by my mortal imagination alone. Elongated, brisk strokes scatter the page. Infuriated at the lack of justice this did to the awe-inspiring scene before me, I rip the page irately from my sketchpad, throwing it robustly to the ground.

Beginning a new representation, my entire body, once again, becomes devoted to the grandeur of the natural world surrounding me, and I strive to capture it in order to share and discuss its phenomenon with those back at home in London.

Thunder and lightning alternate spectacularly, with a drizzle of rain for added emphasis. My intensified imaginative and spiritual state increases the severity of the storm to me, resulting in the most fantastic piece of action artwork I believe I have ever created. Glancing down at my masterpiece, I immediately perceive the 'little war-like world within'. Varying shades of my

charcoal swirl precariously around the page, separated by the sudden, harsh flashes splaying from the heavens. A small boat sails across the temperamental waters below, and swans navigate through the treacherous skyline. God is the true artist, and nature his masterpiece – my works will never compare.

~ The Sister ~

4.15 pm

Several more guests have arrived now: the erratic and unbalanced David Charlesworth and an equally unbalanced philosopher who introduced himself as Freddy. Lord George announces that in the absence of Byron he will entertain us by performing the reading himself. He reads an excerpt from Childe Harold's Pilgrimage and at first I show interest, simply because I find him so handsome. I'm not a fan of poetry in general, but this begins nicely enough. Yet, as the reading progresses the poetry becomes particularly horrid, filled with tacky rhymes and ridiculous metaphors. Looking around I survey the occupants of the room: Lord George standing in the centre of the room, confident despite the obvious air of disinterest in the room, his eyes examining the reactions of those around him and despite the boredom showing on all the faces (except Albert Ross who seemed particularly inspired by this work) pride helps him continue his dramatic reading. To his left sit my sister and I, followed by the unsettling presence of Albert Ross. His cock-eyed gaze fixed, at least with one of his eyes, on Lord George's dramatic butchering of what was meant to be beautiful words. Ross's mouth is agape and drooling slightly, salivating obviously amazed by the incredibly dull poetry. Breaking his maniacal trance he begins to quiver and shake, pulling out his pad and sketching fervently. I don't understand why the lord associates with these people! He's obviously unstable, and the other guests aren't much better! Opposite me is the mad philosopher "Freddie", what is a philosopher anyway? Whatever it is it can't be a very successful profession, he looks like a vagabond, and I'll be honest his random muttered outbursts are frightening to say the least; his personality is reflected in his crazed appearance, and nauseating odour. The final occupant of the table is David Charlesworth, who for some reason has bits of plant in his wild hair, and sticking out of the holes in his shirt. I noticed a small bug in his moustache, and the philosopher seemed to have noticed too because his attention seemed to be drawn to Charlesworth's upper lip. Watching all these odd events it is extremely difficult to comprehend how these people were deserving of a place in high society when my sister and I who appeared to be the only respectable guests here. I compose myself and gave the Lord my full attention when I heard the large wooden doors open with a loud interrupting creak and a seventh eccentric entered the party.

~ The Musician ~

4.30pm

Standing outside the doors to Lord George's manor, I know even without a watch that I am late. Of course I am. It is unnatural not to be. I look down at my bare wrist, where my watch is supposed to be. Time is not logical, just as God is not logical. It cannot be measured. I have often reflected on the astounded looks of people as they wonder how time has seemed to pass so quickly after sitting for hours on end listening to my music. Does this not prove that time is purely an experience, and not a measurable, logical force? It is characteristic of our civilisation to try and measure everything, to try and label something from measurements and laws deduced by natural philosophy, as they follow in the footsteps of people akin to Isaac Newton and his Principia Mathematica, his attempt in vain to explain the universe through a series of laws and rules. If he and other people would only open their minds past the restraints of rules and laws, they would quickly see that the world is beyond this, all it takes is a song to explain this concept. I stare up at the extravagantly carved wooden door with huge brass handles and think how these too are designed and used in order to measure. To measure Lord George's status as above ordinary, as aristocracy.

I enter the room, and immediately hear Lord George's voice booming supercilious words of poetry. A few faces turn towards me their countenances all puzzled. I cannot be explained through logic. I cannot be measured as all the other people in the room so easily can be. My unkempt hair, unruly beard and my unfashionable, crinkled straight black vest and pants make me completely immeasurable in the social class system. I live in splendid isolation from society, free from Rousseau's chains, and as a result I am closer to the natural, closer to freedom and closer to God. The other persons have all constrained themselves in their appearance, chained themselves to the social structure, allowing others to measure them. They have chosen logic and measurement over expression so as to keep their designed mask. This is made obvious by their clearly feigned interest in the horrible poetry.

Man was born free and everywhere he is in chains.

I progress to the only true tool of expression in the entire room, the piano. How I hate to taint the piano, and also myself with the repulsive letter Lord George has sent me, a predetermined list of songs. How can music, the voice of Dionysus, pure expression and revelry, be tempered by a pre-constructed list? Expression (music) should not be chosen by lists, it should be chosen by whim. Nonetheless I am forced to conform to the want of Lord George, to the disciple of Apollo, bound by my precarious economic state.

I play a few chords and take a sideways, disinterested glance at Lord George, exuberantly reading his poetry. His emotions and ecstatic readings are obviously feigned, or greatly over-exaggerated. His visibly feigned limp, as he dramatically staggered across his stage, is clearly a pure imitation of Lord Byron's limp. Once again Lord George's lack of understanding of art is exposed behind his carefully worn mask. Appealing to the masses through replication is not what art is about, rather expression of the soul and by extension God. However, this level of pure emotion can never be channelled through poetry. It is too structured, too formed, and the complexities of the words veil the emotion in its pure form. Words are not designed to express, they are designed to lie and mask expression. This is why there are so many words that mean things so similar, so as a person can choose the right ones to hide behind, to maintain their designed 'social image' and to remain

measured and rationalise themselves. Music however is created purely to express. It is the language of God, a pure, irrational, and extremely natural form of communication. Each time music is performed it can be played and interpreted differently, purely to express the natural emotion of the performer, unlike words which are just ink on a page. Music defies logic, and so amplifies emotion. Thus I cannot understand Lord George's insistence on premeditated music. It should be left to the impulse of the performer, the natural link to the voice of God, and not the want of the audience as he so unmistakably abides by, evident in his limp and feigned eccentrics.

Glancing over the room, it is obvious that my music, whilst not moving myself in anyway whatsoever thanks to the list, is clearly affecting at least one in the room. In my previous quick appraisal of the room I must have missed this man because he is clearly unlike the others I collectively described. His tousled hair and unfashioned clothes, still traced with the out-dated embroidery and lace suggested someone who perhaps is not so conforming, not so calculated. His sallow skin is contorted into twisted lines, his brow curled, his lips quivering and his eyes twitching, but so evidently alive with raw emotion, raw anger. I can tell he was not at all trying to contain himself; rather he gave himself up to the feeling. He approached and I can see in his grey eyes the flickers of anger, the twists of madness. The most undeniably pure display of emotion - the self. He shred the music up in his frenzy and a wave of liberation hit me. Liberation by emotion. Sweet and pure emotion. In his mad dash to nature, to God, this man has spurred me to unshackle myself from the list and play naturally. I play a melancholic and beautiful song that reflects my emotions, and does not emphasise the words of the poem, as that is not the point of music. Music bears no relation with poetry. The man made this very clear to me in his beautiful rage. Expression transcends language and form, it is natural, from God.

The room seems to sink into the beauty of the piece. People begin to sway slightly and subconsciously to the music, their dignified and controlled positions momentarily broken. They can feel the purity of it, its transcendence above society and its connection to the natural, to nature, to God. As I meditated on the spirituality of music I once again glanced over at Lord George and noticed a very smug look on his face. He must also be noticing the charged atmosphere of the room, however it seems as though he believes it to be his structured words. Whatever the reason, he is taking great pleasure in his apparent popularity. As I meditate further I realise however, that the reason he is conceited is because his position is being elevated in society, and is it not my music that is allowing him to achieve this? Allowing the people in this room to be moved by his poetry further because of the expression in my music? I begin to wonder whether I am here purely to boost his position in society, and to act as a symbol, a measurement of his wealth, of his power. Lord George is actively abusing the purpose of music; music is expression, a connection to God. God speaks through the voice of music, but only in its most pure form, only when the musician can play simply to express, and to express only. This is when the connection between God and man is made most obvious, most understandable, as music poses a very audible spirituality. It is evident even in these circumstances, as the feeling of the room is so dynamically changed. Music is not a symbol of power and wealth. Am I also abusing music, by playing for Lord George's lesser purposes? Lord George finished and the audience cheered.

~ Natural Philosopher ~

4:30pm

Never have I enjoyed poetry, not even the infamous pieces by Erasmus Darwin in his final volume The Temple of Nature, ergo I have no intention of answering Lord George's call to listen to Lord Byron recite his poems. I came to the gathering out of interest as to who would come and whether they would share any of my passions. George announces that Byron is not appearing and that instead he will read his own poetry; all are annoyed and disappointed besides me as I was disinterested in the worthless poetry to begin with. I notice that Lord George has the smug and egotistical countenance of a lion gorging on a zebra recently killed by his harem of lionesses.
Lord George has begun to read his disgraceful poetry as I catch a glimpse of a seventh figure in the room out of the corner of my eye. It is a man with rather interesting features: he wears clothes that suggest neither money nor poverty and he has this unexplainable aura about him, which catches my fascinated attention. He is casting judging eyes across the room at the variety of bored, angry and interested faces of Lord George's audience. The unusual creature sits down at the grand piano and begins to play what sounds like the mastery of Beethoven but I am not certain. Everyone turns around to listen; some with relief on their faces and some in utter shock. The most amusing response is Lord George's as he kept reading his awful poetry with a determined and irritated countenance.

We all gaze with awe at his flawless fingers flying across the keys. The extreme passion flows from the tips of the Musician's fingers which remind me of my two sons and their complete compassion in returning their father to society in Plymouth. It takes me back to a time where happiness pumped her joy into my heart, and my wife and little sons played around me in the shade of my orchard of Plane-trees.

Freddy suddenly leaps up in anger and frustration, ranting in some unknown language to us English men and women. All in a glance, Freddy bolts towards the piano in a contemptuous rage. He snatches the Musician's music and with his fingers acting like a pair of scissors, snips it into pieces and then fled the manor. I scramble through the seated audience and dart out of the drawing room, with a confused yet thankful look towards the Musician who did not take notice of the recent debacle.

I follow Freddy out into the full force of the rain storm. Flashes of lightening alert me that Freddy has climbed up a tree and is staring at me with confused yet wary eyes. Flashbacks of my beloved sons swinging joyfully in the Plane-tree branches with bubbles of laughter fill my dark, tired eyes. I jerk my head away from the tree, whipping the saturated ends of my hair onto my frozen cheek. The booms and clashes of the thunder-clouds quicken my pulse. I don't know where to look, where to run. Freddy begins to howl, "Doyle! Doyle!" The tempest pushes icy torrents of rain and wind onto my dripping body. Unbearable remorse and sadness force me for the safety of the black trees. Launching myself further and further away from Lord George's manor, the sublime melody of the Musician slowly fades as the forest engulfs me in darkness.

~ The Lord ~

5:00 pm

With the final words of my 'edited' version of Childe Harold I step from the podium. Despite the numerous interruptions and the manic display of insanity by Freddy, I still somehow manage to give a performance that these people will be talking about for an eternity. A quick glance at the faces of the three remaining audience members: Miss Henrietta, Miss Catherine and Albert – show sustained awe and wonder at my reading. Miss Henrietta is even attempting to ignore my gaze as she struggles to retain her composure.

After minutes of heavy silence, I find myself again drawn to the lovely Miss Henrietta. We speak of matters of little importance, though she repeatedly asks the same incessant questions of Lord Byron's work. My thoughts on them, what they could mean, how they differed from the work of Samuel Taylor Coleridge; as if any of it has any meaning! These authors, though inexplicably celebrated by many, write nothing more than fanciful tales about daffodils and drug induced hysteria. They deviate from standards set long before they were conscious, let alone writing, who are they to question the hierarchy of literature? Who are they to question the upper classmen at all? We, being the most educated and most worldly are the most appropriate to judge what is agreeable and what is just plain pretentious poppycock.

To avoid any more pointless questions I put forward "Miss Thorpe, shall I do you the honour of asking you to dance with me?" expecting a quick yes at what is obviously the culmination of her hopes for the night. Her response: "Oh that is very kind sir, but I would not want to aggravate your limp. Though I would like to enquire on the whereabouts of Lord Byron?" Realising that I had forgotten my 'limp' for the past 15 minutes causes my eyes to flit, though I quickly smother my reaction with a reassuring smile. I mutter a vague reply to her questioning of Lord Byron's whereabouts, and bid her good night. It is obvious the woman is unstable.

Her unnatural obsession over the man's works is enough to drive me away, despite her perfectly crafted exterior. Why does such a perfect creature aspire to a man who not only is physically deformed, but whose ideas on philosophy are morally lax tales of debauchery and arrogance? He is not even truly upper class!

I resplendently hobble to the farthest chair, happily collapsing in the folds of fabric and wood. With tired eyes I skim the room; it has indeed been a long night. My eyes lay to rest on the true mistake of the night, the musician. His obscene hair coils over his face. His beard twists in a maniacal bid for freedom. His arms are an extension of his mind, walking between keys with arrogant assuredness. The music is terrible, some slow depressing tale that numbed the mind with sheer boredom. His links to the likes of Byron are obvious, his blatant disregard for the company around him, his depressing art and arrogance. Despite my willingness to honour Byron through my conjured limp, I will never be a true fan of his work; and as such, I will never enjoy the emotional discharge that is the work of that musician.

With a pronounced limp, I waltz over to Miss Catherine to visit my earlier charity in talking to her. She immediately brightens upon my presence, and casual conversation ensues. Her conversation is more mild mannered than her sister's, and it is a great relief to not have to endure endless questions. After complimenting the obvious brilliance of my manor, I decide to ask her to dance with me.

With a swift motion, I guide the young woman to the centre of the room, where we twirl and dance all the while exchanging pleasantries and compliments. I have decided that I find the younger Miss Thorpe very agreeable. Her delighted expression grows with every passing minute, as does my enjoyment of the night.

Upon the beginning of the next piece of music, Miss Catherine's pretty forehead creases and her eyes quizzically examine my feet. Before I could recall why, she exclaims "Oh! Your foot seems to be feeling much better!"

It was only then that I remember my falsified limp. The loss of my facade strips my bravado and leaves me vulnerable to criticism in a way that I have never felt before. Panic rips through my normally assured demeanour, forcing me to abruptly reply "Oh...yes, it comes and goes with the weather; would you excuse me for a moment?" I flee the drawing room as fast as one can with a ridiculously exaggerated limp and find solace in the location of my butler. "Inviting those people was an absurd notion; they were far too unstable to even provide comic relief!" We draw plans for the next social event, a reading of Samuel Taylor Coleridge's Rime of the Ancient Mariner and the storm rages on outside and in.

~ The Philosopher ~

4:45 pm

The air is thickening with the excrement of civilized veneer. The din being beaten from the piano punishes my ears and tells the story of an artist weakening to the force of Apollo. How can he bear to deny the true master of his soul, Dionysus? I see it in him. The wine-god clouding above him in his midnight suit of solitude. He, the musician. He, the artist-tyrant. In his disregard for the snorting arrogance and puffing poetry of Lord George with his feigned 'mark of Cain', I see the melancholy of Young Werther but yet greater still. Those eyes that scuttled around the dull room and rested upon his instrument sung of his understanding: *Life is unbearable but music, incredibly, allows us to see it as beautiful.* And yet he plays this piece, this homage to Apollo. The pain of it lurches up my spine and shoots me straight to his side – right to the musician/artist. It is not my intention to create a scene or disrupt the reading of Lord George. The Will, you see, overpowers all. To see this young man begin to play the songs of the herd, I cannot abide it, for an artist like him must rise above morality. The world is a violent struggle and we must fight or perish. He must fight.

I feel the paper coming to pieces in my hands and the reading comes to a halt. My only escape is into the wild, and I rush to exit the manor swiftly, seeking the solace and solitude of the evening. The promise of rain has been delivered and with it cracks and shards of lightning colour and enliven the dark sky. Doyle. I can not see my Doyle. He must be locked away in the stables. My Doyle is surely comforting himself with the honey of fine straw and possibly sugar. I cannot call for him to come to my aid. The Will of that young man inside, that musician with the spirit of music manifest in himself – it has caught me off guard. The tree. I begin to climb into the strong arms of a planetree. Its heavy leaves are yellowing and I can see them through the darkness, falling in great tufts about me. Autumn is here and being beaten by the wind - late to the party. The ecstasy of this moment - the very climax of the flux and chaos of the world - is being christened by fresh sheets of cold rain. An ecstasy of sublime.

The lights of the manor are not obscured by my tempest and I can make out Charlesworth running with his excited step out into the courtyard, neatly dodging growing puddles. He stops and puts his hands to his face, sheltering his eyes from the increasing rain. I can hear him call my name … or is that the planetree calling 'Freddy' to reassure me of the Truth of this moment? Below Charlesworth flicks his head back in a jerking movement much like that of Doyle when he is irritated by a horse fly. He is standing there for longer than a sensible man should, allowing Nature to share her soul with him for a moment. I do fear he will catch his death tonight. He does not seek me further than that one call. There he goes, scurrying back into the wood in precisely the direction he emerged earlier in the evening.

He is gone. Swallowed by the blackness of the trees and the night and the storm.

What is that? That's it! The music. He is playing loud and heavy now. An exultation of the Unbearable Life! He plays loud and heavy.

His Will is sublime.

~ The Woman ~

5:00pm

When Lord George concluded himself the reading of both Byron's and his writings, he sauntered up to me, with what appeared to be a limp, as others decide to leave the manor. From this, I enquire to the whereabouts of Lord Byron on multiple occasions, unfortunately Lord George was interested in other topics, which he continued to leave me unanswered and discontented.
'Miss Thorpe, shall I do you the honour of asking you to dance with me?' he asked suddenly, as a topic change.

'Oh, that is very kind sir, but I do not wish to aggravate your limp. Though I would like to enquire on the whereabouts of Lord Byron?' I declined politely.

I know as a woman of my position should've accepted his dance, however, I don't wish to be a woman infatuated with men all my life. I want to be a woman of modern society, where we can illustrate to individual's our own freedom of speech and ideas.

'Oh perhaps later, excuse me I have business to attend to...' Lord George leaves then I see him in the short distance engaging in conversation with my sister, Catherine. There I was, alone in the party, thinking about how my wealth was soon to disperse with my age.

I was a woman of logic, not a woman of need; from this I was quite modern for my era of society. Marriage wasn't a priority for me; unfortunately Catherine was unaware of this, and was quite opposite. So there I was, fixed in a gathering, where my plan to meet Byron had failed upon me, as well as declining probably my only offer from a gentleman here. After the event with Lord George, he had quickly moved from me to my dear sister. Being as young and naive as she is, I couldn't interfere with whatever that ghastly man was thinking.

Within a period of time, they were dancing together. I couldn't help but feel anguish over her decision to say yes to such a man. Regardless of the events, I was experiencing that night, that mysterious man who continued to play his music had me memorized like no one has ever done before. As a woman of my status, I wanted nothing of being a part of a man, as I wanted to be a free liberated woman of my society. This was the first experience I had ever had where a man, had completely memorized me and my thoughts towards him.

I walked over to this musician and his piano and introduced myself.
'You play wonderful music,' I told him eagerly.
He looked at me perplexed.
'Am I still playing music, or am I playing structured sounds?' he then asked me.
'What's the difference?' I asked. This man seemed a lot deeper, than even the sound of his music. He looked at me with a sombre expression across his face, and replied,
'Expression is the difference'. I stood there for a moment and tried to take in our short conversations, before my sister politely interrupted us, as it seemed her dance with Lord George had ended. She wished to leave, as others had and Lord Byron was absent, for my utter misfortune. We bid our farewells and were escorted out to our carriage and drove away from the dilapidated old manor.

~ The Sister ~

5.00pm

After the reading we disperse and my sister and Lord George were again deep in conversation, but I was intent on capturing the Lords attention. I overhear his requests to dance and Henrietta's excuses to decline; I do not understand my sister at all. She's so lucky to have the attention of a man like Lord George and she just brushes him off. I go to talk to the pianist to get some more cheerful music to dance to, once I dance with Lord George I will surely win his affections.
The musician has been sitting at his wretched piano from the moment he arrived playing dejecting music. Even after the philosopher's fit he continues to play oblivious to the role he is being paid to perform here. I catch his attention by tapping him on the shoulder.

"Could you please play a more upbeat song? I have the urge to dance and do something active, otherwise I shall go out of my mind with boredom at the horrid poetry, it's almost as bad as going to church and learning religion."

As I speak I see his face transform from an expression of aloof detachment to something more confused and difficult to read.

His reply is simply "Church is not religion." Well what could he possibly mean by that? The musician seem deep in thought, his brow furrowed and his fingers stumbling over several notes on the piano breaking the fluid stream of music than he had been creating the entire evening. He has obviously lost his focus on the music and I want to try to understand what was going on in his mind, I'm used to being able to read a person purely from their appearance and behaviours. But this man was a mystery, he seemed to belong to a class of his own and his emotions are hidden well behind a mask of indifference,
"What do you mean?"
"Church is not religion". Church and religion go hand in hand don't they? I mean, my mother has always taught me that to be a good person all you need do is visit church regularly and say grace before every meal and pray every night before bed.

He turns back to his music and began to play a commonly known tune that is perfect for a couples dance. I glance around the room and watched a smiling Lord George approached me. Was that smile for me? Could I be so lucky that he realised I am the better sister? The questions running through my mind evaporate at the sound of the lord's honeyed voice.

We danced and we spoke about his poetry and his travels and he continued to tell me many stories meant to impress. I smiled and stroked his ego, not that he needed it - his confidence was his most attractive feature. His face framed by dark hair and those startling eyes instantly grabbing my attention; I revelled in the feel of his hand on my shoulder and his bright smile shining down on me. He is an incredibly handsome man and I could definitely imagine us hand in hand together as a couple, although walking together when he had a limp could be quite difficult, although his leg does appear to be feeling much better, the limp had been awkward to dance with at first but now as he leads me through a series of steps and twirls his limp is becoming less and less noticeable until it seemingly disappears. When I mention this he mumbles something unintelligible about the weather and excuses himself, leaving me standing humiliated in the centre of the room.
Where is Henrietta? I can't stand this embarrassment.

~ The Musician ~

5.00pm

Everyone stood up from his or her spots and conversation ensued. A young woman approached me and introduces herself as Catherine. She inquires,
"Could you please play a more upbeat song. I have the urge to dance and do something active, otherwise I shall go out of my mind with boredom at the horrid poetry, it's almost as bad as going to church and learning religion."
"Church is not religion," I reply, with a bemused countenance, both amused and disturbed by her lack of understanding of religion.

A church cannot institutionalise religion and God; religion cannot be assigned a measured code of dogma. God is natural, God is expression. I reflect on my isolation, the mode of transport that propelled me beyond society and to the natural, to God. I know this woman will not become a true disciple as I have. Her clothes and her earlier feigned interest in Lord George's poetry so clearly suggested a conformist. It was much more likely she would just learn to assume an interest in the teachings of the church.

"What do you mean?" she asks quizzically.

I can tell from the tone of her voice that she will never truly understand. The walls of church do not embrace God, but rather block him out! God is not in the bricks and mortar of man, he is in the perfection of nature.

So will I build my altar in the fields, And the blue sky my fretted dome shall be.

"I will play a song you can dance to," I reply.

She hurried away with a confused look and my words triggered a feeling of guilt. The words seemed to reinforce my recent thoughts as to the true motifs of my being here. My music is being used commercially, not expressively. It is no longer being listened to, the voice of God ignored, rather it is being used for naïve and arrogant men and women to woo a partner and boost their social status. I play the upbeat, commercial music and the piano very quickly separated itself from me. I am no longer speaking through it, my fingers are merely artificially dancing on top, in the same way Catherine and Lord George are dancing their artificial, highly constructed dance. No longer is this music, it is cold, measured and constructed logic. I am no longer a musician; I am a tool of society. These thoughts plague my mind and bring feelings of guilt as I am effectively abandoning my ideals, perhaps even my isolation from society.

Busy reflecting on my own guilty sins, I barely noticed Catherine's sister approach. She introduced herself as Henrietta and stated "You play wonderful music". Her compliment means very little to me. From overhearing fragments of her conversation with Lord George, I wonder if this compliment is merely the start of a ploy in an attempt to further elevate herself up the hierarchy of social respectability.

"But am I still playing music, or am I playing structured sounds?" I inquire.
"What's the difference?" she asks in a way that sounded legitimately curious.

I look over at her. Her evening dress, extravagantly trimmed with lace, netting and ribbon is so clearly suggestive of aristocracy. Everything about her physical appearance is calculated, measured and logical, from her clothes to her make-up, to her carefully and neatly placed hair, weaved into tight ringlets over the ears. Of course a person such as this will not recognise the difference between music and logic. In her attempt to fashion herself in society she has detached herself from expression, from emotion which is so clear in her appearance, and replaced it instead with rationality.

"Expression is the difference".
My answer causes a somewhat confused look on her face, which is almost immediately masked by a poised, measured look. The accepted look for gentry.
Talking to this creature of reason returns my confidence in my own ideals. She reminded me that I am different from the people in the room. I have a stronger understanding of what is really important, of expression, of the natural, of religion, of God. While I may have come to this gathering and performed, I have retained my 'splendid isolation'. In order to allow myself this isolation, I of course must be self-sufficient and so require funds, funds collected from events like this one. However it is merely a means to an end. The means by which I am capable of funding my isolation from society, and connection to God. In my return to enlightenment, I excuse myself from the conversation and leave the manor.

In nature. The natural ring of uninterupted space connected with the music in my mind and it sounded magnificent. This is truly the house of God, the sound of God. I have returned to isolation and I am spiritually connected to the world.

And trace in leaves and flowers that round me lie,
Lessons of love and earnest piety.