

**BYRON:** When Shelley's corpse was recovered from the sea...

It was burned on the beach at Viareggio. I watched the spectacle from my carriage because the stench was revolting. Then it – fascinated me! I got out of my carriage. Went nearer, holding a handkerchief to my nostrils! – I saw that the front of the skull had broken away in the flames, and there –

And there was the brain of Shelley, indistinguishable from a cooking stew! Boiling, bubbling, hissing! In the blackening – cracked – pot – of his skull!

Trelawney, his friend, Trelawney, threw salt and oil and frankincense in the flames and finally the almost intolerable stench –

was gone and the burning was pure! As a man's burning should be... A man's burning ought to be pure! Not like mine (a crepe suzette – burned in brandy...) Shelley's burning was finally very pure! But the body, the corpse, split open like a grilled pig!

And then Trelawney – as the ribs of the corpse unlocked – reached into them as a baker reaches quickly into an oven!

And snatched out – as a baker would a biscuit! The heart of Shelley. Snatched the heart of Shelley out of the blistering corpse! – Out of the purifying – blue-flame...

And it was over! I thought

I thought it was a disgusting thing to do, to snatch a man's heart from his body! What can one man do with another man's heart?

**BYRON:** That's very true, Senor. But a poet's vocation, which used to be my vocation, is to influence the heart in a gentler fashion than you have made your mark on that loaf of bread. He ought to purify it and lift it above its ordinary level. For what is the heart but a sort of –

A sort of – instrument! – that translates noise into music, chaos into – order...

a mysterious order!

That was my vocation once upon a time, before it was obscured by vulgar plaudits! Little by little it was lost among gondolas and palazzos! Masked balls, glittering salons, huge shadowy courts and torch-lit entrances! Baroque facades, canopies and carpets, candelabra and gold plate among snowy damask, ladies with throats as slender as flower-stems, bending and breathing toward me their fragrant breath – exposing their breasts to me! Whispering, half-smiling! And everywhere marble, the visible grandeur of marble, pink and gray marble, veined and tinted as flayed corrupting flesh – all these provided agreeable distractions from the rather frightening solitude of a poet. Oh, I wrote many cantos in Venice and Constantinople and in Ravenna and Rome, on all of those Latin and Levantine excursions that my twisted foot led me into – but I wonder about them a little. They seem to improve as the wine in the bottle – dwindles... There is a passion for declivity in this world! And lately I've found myself listening to hired musicians behind a row of artificial palm trees – instead of the single – pure-stringed instrument of my heart... Well, then, it's time to leave here!

There is a time for departure even when there's no certain place to go! I'm going to look for one, now. I'm sailing to Athens. At least I can look up at the Acropolis, I can stand at the foot of it and look up at broken columns on the crest of a hill – if not purity, at least its recollection... I can sit quietly looking for a long, long time in absolute silence, and possibly, yes, still possibly – The old pure music will come to me again. Of course on the other hand I may hear only the little noise of insects in the grass... But I am sailing to Athens! Make voyages! Attempt them! There's nothing else...

**THIS WAY!**