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**Byron and God**  
**Representations of Religion in the Writings of Lord Byron**

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A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of  
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## Abstract

Although Lord Byron's poetry has been studied in some depth over the last two hundred years, one particular aspect of that poetry has often been slighted: his representation of religion. Religion is a major feature of Byron's poetry, both as a source of imagery and as a subject of commentary. In the early nineteenth century, readers could be expected to understand and to respond to a range of biblical references and theological concepts, and this thesis explores those representations.

Ten of Byron's major poems are considered in detail here: *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, *Don Juan*, *The Giaour*, *The Bride of Abydos*, *The Corsair*, *Lara*, *The Siege of Corinth*, *Manfred*, *Cain*, and *Heaven and Earth*. These are the works which focus most heavily upon religious topics, whereas other writings by the poet are discussed only where particularly relevant. While most of these ten concern Christianity, *The Giaour*, *The Bride of Abydos*, *The Corsair*, *Lara*, and *The Siege of Corinth* deal in more detail with Islam, and some other religious systems are occasionally mentioned.

In the consideration of such representations of religion, crucial considerations are the characterization of God, the differences between depictions of the clergy and depictions of the laity, the respect afforded to sacred texts, and especially the comparison of orthodoxy ('correct opinion') with orthopraxy ('correct practice'). Many of these points vary considerably throughout the corpus of Byron's poetry, but certain consistencies are evident. One is the generally-respectful representation of the figure of God. Another is the frequent condemnation of heteropraxy and the careful avoidance of criticism of orthodoxy, even to the extent of criticizing heteropraxy from an orthodox viewpoint. A third is the resistance to dogmatism, coupled with a scepticism or even a hostility towards ecclesiastical authority.

Throughout his work, then, the poet validates a devout but unconventional faith, one which failed to please his more conservative contemporaries but which was nonetheless far from the atheism with which he is often charged.

## Acknowledgements

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First are the people whose previous study has made this task much easier. These include many scholars of Byron's works, but particularly E H Coleridge, for producing the best-annotated collected edition, Leslie Marchand, for producing the best collection of Byron's letters, Donald Reiman, for reproducing the contemporary reviews, and Jerome McGann, for producing the variorum edition of Byron's poetry.

Second are the librarians who have assisted along the way. Special thanks are owed to Rachel Beattie and the other curatorial staff of the Byron Collection in the John Murray Archive, housed in the National Library of Scotland. Invaluable assistance has also been provided by the librarians of the Rare Books Room of Cambridge University Library. Most significantly, the University of Auckland Library has provided access to the vast majority of the texts used in this thesis, including dusty volumes which no one else has read for decades, and esoteric volumes which have been sourced through the Interloans system.

Third are the many individuals who have contributed personally. Associate-Professor Joanne Wilkes has performed magnificently as the supervisor of this project, providing thorough reading and useful advice at all stages. A considerable number of people have read the thesis in whole or in part, including the English Department PhD Group in general, but particularly Maria Prozesky, Dominic Griffiths, Kevin Veale, and John Bevan-Smith. The most valuable personal contribution has been by my beloved wife, Kerry, who has read and commented upon this work throughout the project, and without whom none of this would matter.

## Notes

The referencing of this thesis is adapted from the MHRA style, modified in some respects for greater clarity. Only the most commonly quoted sources are given in-line citations. For such in-line citations, the canto, stanza, chapter, section, and line numbers are given in Arabic numerals, separated by points; the same procedure is followed in footnotes. When discussed in sentences, cantos are given Roman numerals. In-line and footnote citations of others' notes are referenced by volume, page, and then their designated line number after a colon. Byron's dramatic poems are referred to both as "poems" and as "dramas", although they were never meant for actual performance.

All quotations of Byron's poems are from McGann's edition, and quotations of the Bible are taken from the King James Version, since that was the translation which Byron was most often reading.<sup>1</sup>

As is usual with the transliteration of words, there are several different ways of transliterating Arabic names and terms. I will use the more currently-prevalent "Allah", "Qu'ran", "Muhammad", and "Muslim" in my own commentary, while eighteenth- and nineteenth-century spellings will be left as written in quotations.

## Abbreviations

When discussed outside of their own chapters, works by Byron and by others will be referenced by in-line citations prefixed by the initials of the title of the work. Certain other works are commonly abbreviated also:

BLJ	Marchand's <i>Letters and Journals of Lord Byron</i>
Coleridge	E H Coleridge and R E Prothero's thirteen-volume collected poetry and prose
McGann	McGann's seven-volume variorum edition of Byron's poetry

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<sup>1</sup> Q.v. Travis Loper, *Byron and the Bible: A Compendium of Biblical Usage in the Poetry of Lord Byron* (Metuchen, N.J. and London: The Scarecrow Press, 1978), p.13.

Greek text is presented without diacritics because the diacritics on the only font available to me were practically illegible in ten or twelve point characters. All quotations from all English sources have been presented *sicut scriptum*, including capitalisation, italicisation, underlining, Georgian spelling, and original typographical errors.

<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b><i>Childe Harold's Pilgrimage: the Quest for Belief</i> .....</b>	<b>22</b>
Reception .....	22
Contemporary Response .....	22
Moral Teacher .....	30
Recent Response .....	33
The Text .....	37
Entropy.....	40
The Death of Religion.....	43
Questioning Religion .....	46
Clerical Hypocrisy .....	47
Sin .....	48
The Sabbath .....	51
'Glory' .....	52
Pluralism and Tolerance .....	58
Faith .....	64
The Deity .....	66
Imagining .....	70
Conclusion .....	75
<b><i>Don Juan: the Virgin Ideal</i>.....</b>	<b>80</b>
The Poem's Reception .....	81
The Poet's Defence .....	85
Teleology .....	93
Rhetoric.....	97
Satire .....	108
Religion.....	115
War.....	123
The Bible.....	129
The Decalogue .....	132
Agnosticism .....	134
Fall .....	145
Idealism.....	150
Marian Devotion .....	157
Conclusion .....	167
<b><i>The Eastern Tales: Islam versus Christianity</i> .....</b>	<b>169</b>
Eurocentrism .....	169
Religious and Ethnic Tension .....	173
Islam.....	183
Islam and Violence .....	188
Islam and Women .....	201
Love and Religion.....	213
The Byronic Hero and Religion .....	216
The Satanic Hero.....	227
The (para-)Muslim hero .....	230
Conclusion .....	235
<b><i>Manfred: Transcending the Real</i> .....</b>	<b>238</b>
Faith .....	240
Power .....	249
Knowledge .....	255

Mortality .....	259
Despair .....	263
Astarte .....	267
Self .....	273
Conclusion .....	278
<b><i>Cain, Heaven and Earth, and Piety</i> .....</b>	<b>280</b>
<i>Cain</i> .....	280
Lucifer .....	291
Sympathy .....	295
Romantic Advice .....	300
Lies and Contradictions .....	302
Cowardice, and Sympathy Flawed .....	307
Demand for Worship.....	309
Evil.....	313
Not Byronic Heroes .....	314
Romantic Advice Flawed.....	315
Adah.....	318
Romanticisms.....	321
God.....	325
The Question of Evil and Omnipotence.....	328
Subjective Views of God .....	332
<i>Heaven and Earth</i> .....	334
Orthodoxy .....	336
Unorthodoxy .....	337
Exogamy .....	339
Love .....	346
Dogmatism.....	349
Theodicy .....	353
<i>Cain versus Heaven and Earth</i> .....	359
<b>Conclusion .....</b>	<b>363</b>