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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  
Philosophy in English, the University of Auckland, 2010.

## 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

Thanks are due to three categories of people.

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.

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## Introduction

The poetry of George Gordon Noel, Lord Byron, is replete with references to religion, and religious imagery. This is a thesis about Byron's representations of religion, not about his views of religion, and yet the latter must factor into the discussion because they necessarily influence the former. Like most people's, the poet's views changed over time, and not in a simply linear progression.<sup>2</sup> This study, nonetheless, traces a consistency of representations of religion through ten of Byron's major poems: *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*.

In the context of Byron's work, the religion most commonly referenced is Christianity, and particularly the Catholic and Protestant variants. Islam also features in his poetry, especially in the poetic tales set in the eastern Mediterranean. Some other faith systems, including pre-Christian Greek polytheism, and Zoroastrianism, also appear sometimes. 'Religion' here includes beliefs and behaviours focussed upon metaphysical propositions, but these two areas operate quite separately, and Byron's poetry frequently touches upon precisely the fact that behaviour does not always match belief. The difference between orthodoxy and orthopraxy is significant.

The difference between institutional orthodoxy and popular heterodoxy is also significant. The beliefs and practices of the ecclesiastical centre are rarely the beliefs and practices of the lay margins, and the whole body of believers typically span a spectrum of variations. In the larger religions in particular, the ecclesiastical centre are tied to certain elements of the historic faith, especially the traditions and the texts. Christianity operates thus in relation to the Bible: although different denominations hold different views of Original Sin, the virginity of Mary, and even the nature of salvation, all such views exist in relation to the sacred text and interpretations thereof. As a result, every biblical idea is, in some form, a Christian idea.

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<sup>2</sup> E W Marjarum's 1938 study *Byron as Skeptic and Believer* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1962) remains the only comprehensive study of the poet's own views.

Regarding that sacred text, one ubiquitous myth ought to be laid to rest here. The God of the Hebrew Scriptures, the ‘Old Testament’, is not simply a god of violence and judgement. The God of the Christian Scriptures, the ‘New Testament’, is not simply a god of love and mercy. The text does not support so simple a dichotomy: “Love your neighbour as yourself” comes from Leviticus 19:18; a third of the population of the world are slaughtered in Revelation 9:15. Instead of this neat divide, there are starkly contrasting discourses of mercy and of judgement running throughout the canon. The intricate entanglement of these discourses makes them a useful point of examination for any subject’s specific religious position. Whether the subject prefers judgement or mercy or some synthesis of the two is revealing as regards that subject’s views on God and even on the place of religion in society.

In a study of a facet of culture, such as religion, enculturation is always an important consideration. The artist is always an ideological subject in Louis Althusser’s terms, someone whose ideas are influenced or even conditioned by the ideologies of the surrounding culture.<sup>3</sup> The culture thus provides a background against which the art should be viewed, so as to see its contrasts and correspondences. This requires an inherently historicist and critical reading of contemporary expressions of belief also, since those expressions are similarly products of the cultural environment.

The religious culture of early nineteenth century Britain was complex. The previous century had been inflected by rationalist belief, the subjection of doctrine to logical rationalisation, opposing dogmatism.<sup>4</sup> Heterodoxy was widespread, and deism was both practised and preached, with sermons explicitly rejecting the divinity of Jesus of Nazareth. Indeed, Byron’s list of his early reading includes, under ‘Divinity’, Hugh Blair and John Tillotson, the first Presbyterian, the second Anglican, but both preaching clergymen and Deists.<sup>5</sup> This radical rationalism persisted well into the

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<sup>3</sup> Q.v. Althusser, ‘Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses’, in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. by Ben Brewster (London: New Left Books, 1971), 127-86.

<sup>4</sup> Elie Halévy, *A History of the English People in the Nineteenth Century*, trans. by E I Watkin and D A Barber, 6 vols (London: Ernest Benn, 1961), I, 392ff; Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: a History of the Development of Doctrine*, 5 vols (Chicago and London: the University of Chicago Press, 1971-89), V, 106.

<sup>5</sup> Thomas Moore, *The Life, Letters, and Journals of Lord Byron* (London: John Murray, 1901), 5.47; Thomas Ahnert, ‘The Soul, Natural Religion and Moral Philosophy in the Scottish Enlightenment’, *Eighteenth-Century Thought*, ed. by James G Buickerood, 3 vols (New York: AMS Press, 2004), II,

nineteenth century,<sup>6</sup> and the powerful dogmatism of the Victorian middle-class was yet to achieve hegemony. Such dogmatism was nonetheless on its way,<sup>7</sup> and its construction is visible in the responses of the some of the contemporary (i.e. Georgian)<sup>8</sup> critics of Byron's work, responses whose monological discourse was aimed towards that hegemony. In stark contrast, some of the more liberal religious positions are evident among other contemporary critics and private individuals. Acknowledgement of this diversity of perspective and the politics of the struggle between factions is crucial to understanding the contemporary context: the words of contemporary critics are not merely innocent revelations of personal belief, but rhetorical manoeuvres within cultural campaigns. It is thus necessary to interrogate the claims which such critics make regarding Byron's poetry and its representation of religion. While these claims do not simply establish the position of the poetry relative to an imaginary, unified, late Georgian orthodoxy, they do act as indicators of the campaigns being waged over religion in the period.

For this reason, this study considers a range of contemporary materials, including published letters and journals by Byron, John Cam Hobhouse, Thomas Moore, John Murray, Walter Scott, and Percy Bysshe Shelley, in addition to unpublished letters to and about Byron, and also contemporary accounts of Byron, such as those by Countess Blessington, James Kennedy, and Thomas Medwin. The purpose in studying such materials has not been to create a biographical image of the poet, but rather to create a historical image of the variety of responses to religious matters. The poet's letters lend support to readings of the poetry, but cannot determine them.

The more general comments of critics tend to focus upon the writer's own views rather than upon the works. In Byron's time, John Galt believed that the poet "had

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233-54 (p.234); David Pailin, 'Rational Religion in England from Herbert of Cherbury to William Paley', in *A History of Religion in Britain*, ed. by Sheridan Gilley & W J Shiels (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), 211-33 (p.221).

<sup>6</sup> Q.v. Claude Welch, 'Samuel Taylor Coleridge', in *Nineteenth Century Religious Thought in the West*, ed. by Ninian Smart, John Clayton, Patrick Sherry, Steven T Katz, 3 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), II, 29-68.

<sup>7</sup> Q.v. Claude Welch, *Protestant Thought in the Nineteenth Century*, 2 vols (New Haven and London: Yale UP, 1972), I, 115n15.

<sup>8</sup> Throughout this thesis, "contemporary" is used for 'contemporary to Byron', as opposed to "recent" or "modern".

but loose feelings on religion – scarcely any”, lacking any firm belief or any concerted scepticism, and “he varied through the whole compass of religious opinions”.<sup>9</sup> He also records William Fletcher’s letter, after his patron’s death, to the effect that Byron evinced “many more and more favourable proofs of a religious mind”.<sup>10</sup> Other contemporaries, and particularly those who knew Byron less well personally, regarded him as an “infidel”, as is often seen in their reviews, but this perception is not as well supported by the poems as many people have assumed.

While this study follows current practice in using Jerome McGann’s variorum edition of Byron’s works for textual referencing, the historical focus of this thesis has meant that two other editions have also proven useful. The first of these is the 1835 collected poems edition published by Galignani in Paris, which includes critical commentary by numerous literary figures of the day. The second is the 1898-1903 edition of collected poetry and letters, edited by Ernest Hartley Coleridge and Rowland Edmund Prothero. E H Coleridge’s annotations, in particular, constitute an invaluable resource, and his description of Byron’s religious position is interesting: “He was, no doubt, from first to last a *heretic*, impatient, not to say contemptuous, of authority, but he was by no means indifferent to religion altogether” (Coleridge 5.199).

Like the contemporary critics, modern critics have been divided not only about the nature of Byron’s representations of religion, but also about the worth of critical consideration of such representations. In some cases, a prejudice against religion is apparent: thus, for example, Peter L Thorslev Jr can make the sweeping comment that “in the religious mind ambition and inventiveness, attributes which demonstrate an aggressive and analytic attitude toward the universe, are associated with rebellion against God”.<sup>11</sup> Such a prejudice might be the cause of the general lack of reference to religion in Byron criticism of the twentieth and the twenty-first centuries. There are exceptions to this: G Wilson Knight’s *Lord Byron: Christian Virtues* (1952), Travis Looper’s *Byron and the Bible: A Compendium of Biblical Usage in the Poetry*

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<sup>9</sup> Galt, ‘Life of Byron’, in *The Complete Works of Lord Byron* (Paris: Galignani, 1835), hereafter ‘Galignani edition’, pp.lxxi, cxviii.

<sup>10</sup> Galignani Edition, Fletcher to James Kennedy, 19/5/24, p.civ.

<sup>11</sup> Thorslev, *The Byronic Hero*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1961), pp.93-4.

of *Lord Byron* (1978), and also the essays collected in *Byron, the Bible and Religion: Essays from the Twelfth International Byron Seminar*, edited by Wolf Z Hirst (1991), have all gone some way towards redressing this general lack. Knight's work, however, is dedicated to reading Byron from his biography, and taking the poetry as support to that enterprise. Looper's compendium is useful, but it is a compendium, not a commentary. *Byron, the Bible and Religion*, on the other hand, is a very useful collection of essays, especially those by Hirst, Thorslev, and Ray Stevens, and particularly in regard to *Cain* and *Heaven and Earth*.

The critics whose work has been most useful to this study are spread across a considerable span of time. Samuel Chew's *Dramas of Lord Byron* (1915), Michael Kennedy Joseph's *Byron the Poet* (1964), and Robert M Ryan's *The Romantic Reformation: Religious Politics in English Literature 1789-1824* (1997) are all valuable to this study not just for the depth of their scholarship in general, but in particular for the consideration of the religious aspects of Byron's work. They examine much of what others slight. Ryan is one of the very few to realise, for example, the role which Lucifer actually plays in *Cain*.

All too frequently, the critics who slight the religious aspects of Byron's works adopt into their reading such presumptions as Byron's "Calvinist background", which is a critical issue in its own right. Annabella, Lady Byron, claimed that the poet "had the gloomiest Calvinistic tenets",<sup>12</sup> and William Harness asserted that "Byron, from his early education in Scotland, had been taught to identify the principles of Christianity with the extreme dogmas of Calvinism".<sup>13</sup> A number of subsequent critics have thus read Calvinism into his depictions of faith.

These critics include E W Marjarum, on Byron being "haunted" by his "Calvinistic training",<sup>14</sup> Lovell, on Byron's "Calvinistic concept of deity",<sup>15</sup> and Marchand, on

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<sup>12</sup> Annabella, Lady Byron, 5/3/55, quoted in Coleridge 13.262n.

<sup>13</sup> A G L'Estrange, *The Literary Life of William Harness* (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1871), p.13.

<sup>14</sup> Marjarum, p.21.

<sup>15</sup> Ernest J. Lovell, Jr, *Byron: The Record of a Quest* (Hamden, Connecticut: Archon Books, 1966), p.213.

Byron having “deeply ingrained in his unconscious mind a gloomy Calvinism”.<sup>16</sup> Bernard Beatty comments that “It remains customary to nod to Byron’s Calvinist upbringing and, with varying degrees of emphasis, to allow for its influence even in Byron’s later life.”<sup>17</sup> Ryan, however, notes that “Byron’s Calvinism [...] is more often asserted than documented”,<sup>18</sup> and Jerome McGann also takes the idea to task.<sup>19</sup> Paul D Barton, on the other hand, strives to defend Calvin from Byron’s “seething” anger, and his defence is a response to this trend of placing too much weight on Calvinism as an influence on Byron’s thought.<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, Barton himself is too concerned with Calvin to see that Byron’s poetry contains more than despair, and more than just anger at Calvin’s God. Some conflate moderate Presbyterianism with Calvinism, when “moderate” was a label “never applied to strict Calvinism”.<sup>21</sup> This last mistake is made by Edward E Bostetter, who, like Marjarum, describes Byron as “haunted” by Calvinism, viewing Byron’s works as assaults upon Christianity in general and upon Calvinism in particular.<sup>22</sup> Wolf Z Hirst rather more broadly says that “at least *some* residual Calvinism, feelings derived from his early Bible reading, or primal religious impulses, repeatedly find their way into his work”.<sup>23</sup> Calvinism is certainly an ideology with which Byron’s poetry interacts, and not simply a source from which it borrows.

Daniel P Watkins, in a decidedly Marxist fashion, consistently reads religion as a tool of oppression, devoid of its own intrinsic meaning.<sup>24</sup> He thus describes religion in

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<sup>16</sup> Marchand, *Byron: A Biography*, 3 vols (London: John Murray, 1957), II, 515.

<sup>17</sup> Bernard Beatty, *Byron’s Don Juan* (London: Croom Helm, 1985), p.190.

<sup>18</sup> Robert M Ryan, *The Romantic Reformation: Religious Politics in English Literature 1789-1824* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p.125.

<sup>19</sup> McGann, *Fiery Dust: Byron’s Poetic Development* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), p.249ff.

<sup>20</sup> Barton, *Lord Byron’s Religion – A Journey into Despair* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 2003), p.9, et passim.

<sup>21</sup> Hoxie Neale Fairchild, *Religious Trends in English Poetry*, 3 vols (New York: Columbia University Press, 1949), III, 395; see also pp.395-7. Fairchild nonetheless later calls Byron “a more orthodox Calvinist” than Annabella was expecting (p.411). As Halévy points out, Calvinism was not a moderate position even in Dissent: “It would seem that the eighteenth-century Dissenters [...] were ashamed of the extravagant and savage features of the Calvinistic creed” (I, 402ff).

<sup>22</sup> Bostetter, *The Romantic Ventriloquists: Wordsworth, Coleridge, Keats, Shelley, Byron* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1963), pp.254, 256, 258.

<sup>23</sup> Hirst, Introduction to *Byron, the Bible, and Religion*, ed. by Hirst (Delaware: University of Delaware Press, 1991), p.16.

<sup>24</sup> Watkins, *Social Relations in Byron’s Eastern Tales* (London and Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1987).

*The Giaour* as “a separate, disembodied set of values, independent of the actual pressures of human existence”,<sup>25</sup> despite the fact that much of the poem is set in a monastery, a physical space in which human existence is entirely about religion. He further claims of Francesca’s faith in *The Siege of Corinth* that “it clearly supports pursuits of territorial acquisition (in this instance, the occupation of the Morea)”,<sup>26</sup> despite the fact that the poem does not express any such support by the church for the occupation, particularly because the poem acts to represent Islam as the invading, occupying force. A similar ideological prejudice is the Freudian pathologisation of religion, an error most thoroughly refuted by Nancy Easterlin’s work on Wordsworth.<sup>27</sup>

A recent study by Peter A Schock includes an egregious misreading of the poet’s work as a “Satanist” enterprise, a misreading which might have been avoided had he read Marchand or Joseph.<sup>28</sup> He alleges that “In Milton’s fallen angel, Byron and Shelley found an adequate vehicle for the ideological backlash”,<sup>29</sup> conflating Shelley’s and Byron’s quite distinct ideological positions and artistic productions, and wholly misunderstanding Byron’s usage of the figure of the Devil.

Moving from religion to philosophy, Andrew Rutherford dismissively declares that Byron “was incapable of ever becoming a philosopher or theologian”, a statement which risks gravely underestimating an individual celebrated as a “genius” in his own time.<sup>30</sup> On the other hand, Terence Allan Hoagwood enrols him in a project of “anti-philosophy”, resting “untroubled” between affirmation and denial.<sup>31</sup> However, the

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid, p.46.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, p.112.

<sup>27</sup> Easterlin, *Wordsworth and the Question of "Romantic Religion"* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1996), pp.15-23. For Freudian readings, see especially John W Ehrstine, *The Metaphysics of Byron: A Reading of the Plays* (The Hague: Mouton, 1976).

<sup>28</sup> Schock, *Romantic Satanism: Myth and the Historical Moment in Blake, Shelley, and Byron* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003). Neither Marchand nor Joseph is referenced anywhere, including Schock’s bibliography, despite Joseph having pointed out in 1964 that *Cain*, upon which Schock focuses, is “far more than the naïve exercise in Satanism that it was sometimes taken to be” (M K Joseph, *Byron the Poet* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1964), p.117).

<sup>29</sup> Schock, p.26.

<sup>30</sup> Rutherford, *Byron: A Critical Study*, (Edinburgh and London: Oliver and Boyd), p.91. Paul West similarly claims that “Byron was little given to sustained thought” (*Byron and the Spoiler’s Art* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1960), p.12.

<sup>31</sup> Hoagwood, *Byron’s Dialectic: Skepticism and the Critique of Culture* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1993), p.89.

sheer degree of concentration expended upon religion by Byron's works belies the assertion that he was "untroubled" by this issue. Showing a more perspicacious comprehension of the multiple contradictory positions which the poet alternately affirms in his work, Michael Cooke comments upon the patterns in Byron's thought:

Truth for him carries little of the idea of tradition and authority, of standard and systematic values which are available and beneficial to the individual; it means candor and resolution in facing the voluminous problems of knowledge and experience.<sup>32</sup>

The poet's mobilit  includes his responses to religion. Thus, Cooke notes, "Byron's skepticism has its limits", and he later calls Byron "Skeptic and zealot".<sup>33</sup> This last oxymoron especially is an accurate picture of Byron's demonstrated attitude to religion, indicating the passionate nature of his religious oscillations. That Byron's poems constantly employ religious images and address religious issues is evident from the most cursory reading, but the positions which the poems take upon those images and issues are rather complex.

Hoagwood does have a useful comment upon religious considerations in Byron criticism. While the comment is particularly directed at "the faithful", it is equally true of others:

Because Byron writes often of religion, including the doctrine of immortality and a Supreme Being in the Great Beyond, the mental habits of religion often arise at this point in interpretations of Byron's statements. Almost always, the result is a severe distortion of the issues. The particular binary opposition that governs the mentality of certain religious believers involves the exclusive distinction between theists and atheists; one is with us or one is against us. Faced with that false dichotomy, and concerned only with that question, some among the faithful in the audience of *Cain* or *Don Juan*, or among all

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<sup>32</sup> M G Cooke, *The Blind Man Traces the Circle: On the Patterns and Philosophy of Byron's Poetry* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), p.13.

<sup>33</sup> Cooke, pp.181, 204.



generations since, have been inclined to construe Byron's skepticism as atheism.<sup>34</sup>

Others have been inclined to accept the word of "the faithful" on this, and sceptical critics like Bostetter have been similarly inclined to enrol Byron into their own party. Interestingly, Hoagwood validates Leslie Marchand's statement that Byron "never made up his mind" about religion (BLJ 1:14, introduction), but then proceeds to write, "I would add this point: Byron's sentences that I have quoted which seem to be about religion are not about religion; they are, like all skeptical discourse, about the human acts of believing and doubting."<sup>35</sup> Of course, a considerable proportion of religious literature, including much of the Bible, focuses upon precisely this dyad.

Hoagwood's comment is an exemplar of secularisation, an oversimplification of Byron's struggles with religious issues as being exercises within a sceptical dialectic: that Byron never made up his mind is not evidence that he ever stopped trying to do so. As Marchand notes in the same passage, "he latterly came to doubt aspects of his own scepticism" (BLJ 1:14, introduction).

The secularising assumption which co-opts Byron under the antireligious banner, and even the slighting of religion as a critical category, may be symptoms of a wider issue. Gavin Hopps and Jane Stabler see a recent cultural trend *away from* a religious perspective, a repetition of Hoagwood's action: "For several decades now, the dominant presuppositions of literary criticism have been secular." The analysis of modern criticism for this study bears out this claim: modern Byron criticism frequently slights religion as a critical category. Hopps and Stabler regard this pattern not as an improvement, a liberation of criticism from the shackles of a dogmatic ideology, but rather as an exchange of one dogmatism (religion) for another (secularism). They single out Jerome McGann, and particularly his work on *The Romantic Ideology*, as an example of this secularism: "McGann's radical Marxist project is predicated upon an unargued assumption that the claims of 'vatic'

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<sup>34</sup> Hoagwood, p.42.

<sup>35</sup> Hoagwood, p.43. The sentences are from Byron's letters, *Cain*, and *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*.

Romanticism are invalid.”<sup>36</sup> They do, however, describe McGann’s more recent work *The Poetics of Sensibility: A Revolution in Literary Style* as “more open to different sorts of faith”, but this is an aside within the condemnation of *The Romantic Ideology*. Hopps and Stabler’s assertion places the recent lack of consideration of the religious aspects to Byron’s work not within the natural, logical, due course of criticism, but rather as an unnatural, unreasoned product of an ideological position. They continue in this mode, describing responses to Byron’s work as “recent attempts to recruit the poet for the cause of ‘radical unbelief’”.<sup>37</sup> Whether or not “recruitment” is taking place, it does appear that there has been a significant lack of consideration of the religious aspects of Byron’s work in particular, a lack which is peculiar in the light of the poet’s frequent employment of religious references and images.

There is also an issue of modern critics’ familiarity with religious references. In an Oxford Guide to Romanticism, Wordsworth’s usage of the phrase “the dog /Returning to his vomit”, for France returning to absolute monarchy, is referred to as “powerfully” describing the event, without any acknowledgement of the fact that Wordsworth is actually quoting Proverbs 26:11, and so that powerful description predates the poet by millennia.<sup>38</sup> Similarly, Watkins refers to Byron’s journal containing “bits of public wisdom from Gentleman Jackson”, including “Whoever is not for you is against you” (BLJ 3.213), an epigram which is actually from Jesus of Nazareth.<sup>39</sup> In fact, Byron’s letter quotes his boxing coach as appending to Jesus’ comment the instruction to “*mill* away right and left”, and yet Watkins omits what is actually Jackson’s own. Such situations support Arthur Bradley’s claim that “religion is (arguably!) the repressed or excluded other of contemporary Romantic studies”.<sup>40</sup>

At this point, it would be worthwhile to include part of M H Abrams’ preface to *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature*. Therein,

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<sup>36</sup> Gavin Hopps and Jane Stabler, ‘Introduction: Grace Under Pressure’, in *Romanticism and Religion from William Cowper to Wallace Stevens* (Hampshire: Ashgate, 2006), 1-23 (p.1).

<sup>37</sup> Hopps and Stabler, p.9.

<sup>38</sup> Simon Bainbridge, ‘The Historical Context’, in *Romanticism: An Oxford Guide*, ed. by Nicholas Roe (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 15-26 (pp.19-20).

<sup>39</sup> Q.v. “He that is not with me is against me” (Matthew 12:30, Luke 11:23; see also Mark 9:40 for the inverse).

<sup>40</sup> Bradley, “‘Until Death Tramples It to Fragments’: Percy Bysshe Shelley after Postmodern Theology”, in *Romanticism and Religion from William Cowper to Wallace Stevens*, 191-206 (p.204).

he describes a significant trend in Romanticism, namely “the secularization of inherited theological ideas and ways of thinking”, identifying secularization as “displacement from a supernatural to a natural frame of reference”.<sup>41</sup> While this certainly happened in some cases, it did not happen in all, and, as McGann thoroughly demonstrates in *The Romantic Ideology*, dependence upon a singular description of Romantic works is always dangerous. In addition, there is a crucial, often overlooked aspect to this secularisation, identified by Abrams:

It is a historical commonplace that the course of Western thought since the Renaissance has been one of progressive secularization, but it is easy to mistake the way in which that process took place. Secular thinkers have no more been able to work free of the centuries-old Judaeo-Christian culture than Christian theologians were able to work free of their inheritance of classical and pagan thought. The process – outside of the exact sciences at any rate – has not been the deletion and replacement of religious ideas but rather the assimilation and reinterpretation of religious ideas, as constitutive elements in a world view founded on secular premises.<sup>42</sup>

Some critics make exactly the mistake which Abrams mentions, and such a failure to grasp the essentially gradual, even glacial, process of the secularisation of Western thought can result in the idea that Byron’s work was secular, and non-religious, because of its questioning of orthodox dogmatism. Critics operating within a thoroughly secular culture have, naturally, been influenced by their own non-religious views and have produced non-religious readings of what were, in fact, religiously-influenced texts. For all that such readings have brought useful perspectives, the historic dominance of major critics could draw subsequent criticism away from an appreciation of how religious concerns function for the poet and the original audience. Such readings have brought useful perspectives, but they are readings from well outside the original ideological context of the poetry.

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<sup>41</sup> Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* (New York and London: Norton, 1971), pp. 12, 13.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid*, p.13.

The purpose of this study is to recover the place of religion in Byron's poems, focussing particularly on those works in which it plays a major role. The project began as an analysis of the representations of religion, and it was only through that analysis that the particular pattern of representation was discovered. Connections are identified between Byron's poetic expressions and theological concepts derived from the Bible and from other sources. Most importantly, the complexities of Byron's representations of religion are considered, given that his poetry frequently discriminates not only between different faith positions, but also between claimed belief and actual practice.

In order to recover something of the reception of the texts at the time, this thesis deals with whole works by the poet, rather than working through individual themes. This allows for a closer analysis of each work, including a careful consideration of the contemporary reception, revealing some views of the work in its own time. The overlapping chronologies of the works made a simply chronological sequence of chapters impractical: cantos of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* were written both before and after the Eastern Tales and *Manfred*; cantos of *Don Juan* were written both before and after the Biblical Dramas. The two meditative travelogues are thus covered before the narrative poems, those two sets constitute coherent groups in regard to both their style of composition and their reception, and since their representations of religion vary significantly. This also allows for only the *Don Juan* chapter to be noticeably out of chronological sequence.

*Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* ("CHP") is the topic of the first chapter, which pays special attention to the contemporary critics in order to highlight the sorts of comments which continue to appear, and the sort of cultural politics within which such criticism was enmeshed. The major focus of the chapter is upon the subtleties of the presentation of religious belief and of religious behaviour, and how the poem discriminates between the two. One significant textual feature is the tendency to editorial commentary and direct address to the audience (parabasis), both of which alter the nature of its representations of religion.

The second chapter considers *Don Juan*. Although this is the most famous of Byron's works, and the most popular with modern critics, it says comparatively little about religion, utilising considerably less religious imagery than CHP. Nonetheless, it is still Byron's longest work, and so its length bears a number of representations of religion which need to be treated in some depth. Like CHP, it is meditative in form, and displays a particularly rhetorical turn which is significant. It also most clearly demonstrates a late movement in the poet's own religious position.

Byron's representations of Islam are the particular subject of the third chapter, on the Eastern Tales. This sets it apart from all of the others, and the Tales' representation of Islam is noticeably different from their representation of Christianity in a way which has implications for the views of Christianity elsewhere in the poet's work. This chapter also includes the consideration of the Byronic Hero character, and the interactions of this figure with religion.

*Manfred* receives its own short chapter, as the link between the Byronic Hero and the metaphysical dramas. It also deals with magic, an activity related to, but not exactly part of, religion, and thus presents something of an exterior perspective on religious issues.

The final chapter focuses upon the biblical dramas, *Cain* and *Heaven and Earth*. This chapter tackles ideas of orthodoxy much more directly than do the others, which tend to be more focussed, as their texts are, upon orthopraxy. This is the most radical section of the thesis, as its analysis demonstrates significant aspects of these two dramas which have received scant consideration in previous scholarship, and so it presents a reading diametrically opposed to the most common views of these works.

These ten poems are the texts most central to representations of religion in Byron's work, and the limited scope allowed for such a project regrettably meant that a considerable number of his works could only receive limited attention here. Most noticeably, this includes the whole set of historical dramas: *Parisina*, *The Prisoner of Chillon* (more precisely a dramatic monologue), *Mazeppa*, *Marino Faliero*, *Sardanapalus*, *The Two Foscari*, and *The Island*.

While the *Hebrew Melodies* might seem a natural inclusion in such a study, their usefulness with respect to the poet's representations of religion is rather limited. Several of the poems in that collection, such as 'She Walks in Beauty', are neither religious nor Hebrew. Others, such as 'The Destruction of Sennacherib', are certainly biblical, but thus constitute a commissioned work rather than the poet's independent choices. They would nonetheless be an integral part of a book-length treatment of the topic.

Also absent are *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*, *Beppo*, *Werner*, *The Vision of Judgement*, *The Deformed Transformed*, and *The Age of Bronze*. The historical dramas do contain some religious references, albeit typically of a piety appropriate to their cultural setting; the others include some scattered references, but all are so firmly focused upon aspects besides religion, especially including literary and political satire, that there was simply insufficient space to treat them in any detail.

## *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage: the Quest for Belief*

The first two cantos of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* were published in 1812, the third in 1816, and the fourth in 1818. Despite their spacing in time, and the development of Byron's poetics across this period, there remains a considerable degree of consistency of thought between the three instalments. Like *Don Juan*, CHP is at least as much a meandering meditation as it is a travelogue. As a meditative travelogue, it refers quite frequently to religious sites, religious figures, and religious concepts. Religion is a fundamental element of its discourse. A determination of the nature of that discourse requires a consideration of the reception of the poem in its own day, as well as later views, and a detailed analysis of the text itself.

### **Reception**

Contemporary responses to *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* provide some idea of the ideological context within which the work was produced, and upon which it was commenting. A crucial element of this context is the classical conception of the poet as having influence upon, and thus responsibility for, the morality of the audience. This conception operated within the cultural politics of the day to produce certain readings of Byron's poetry.

### **Contemporary Response**

When originally published, the poem was analysed for its religious content, with many of the contemporary reviews seeing it as an *anti*-religious work. The reviewers' responses show two consistent themes: praise for the poem's artistic virtues and condemnation of its ideological faults. What is most significant is the precise nature of the condemnation, which demonstrates the values, and thus the ideological bases, of the critics. One such ideological basis is the role attributed to poetry in affecting the morals of British society.

Although moral censure is consistent amongst contemporary reviews, the specific degree does vary considerably, as does the justice of the judgement. A useful example is the *Anti-Jacobin Review*'s fulminating response to the first two cantos, by far the harshest critique of those within Reiman's comprehensive collection: "We object, then, to the political prejudices, to the unpatriotic defects, and to the irreligious principles, of this bastard of the imagination".<sup>43</sup> The reviewer takes great exception to a perceived attack upon Christianity, and particularly Protestantism, within the poem, and occasionally broadens this out to a perception of a general attack upon religious belief:

The creed of the Christian is here put on a footing with the dogmas of Jupiter and of Mahomet; *man* is affirmed to be the "child of *doubt* and *death*;" and, to *whatever* religion he belongs, we are assured, his "*hope is built on reeds*."<sup>44</sup>

The reviewer first establishes a hierarchy of value by complaining against the alleged equation of religions within the poem, contrasting Christianity as a "creed", something believed, against the "dogmas", things taught, of Jupiter and Mahomet. This representation is most interesting because CHP describes all faiths as "creeds" in the passage in question, and none as 'dogma':

Even gods must yield – religions take their turn:  
'Twas Jove's – 'tis Mahomet's – and other creeds  
Will rise with other years, till man shall learn  
Vainly his incense soars, his victim bleeds;  
Poor child of Doubt and Death, whose hope is built on reeds. (2.3.23-7).

The poem does not equate Christianity with other religions, and does not say "to whatever religion he belongs". In fact, by leaping from Jove to Mahomet and thence to the future, CHP's comment ignores a thousand years of Christian control over Greece. It also refers to sacrificial victims, elements of Greek pre-Christian worship

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<sup>43</sup> *Anti-Jacobin Review*, XLII (August 1812), 343-365, in *The Romantics Reviewed: Contemporary Reviews of British Romantic Writers*, ed. by Donald H Reiman, 5 vols (New York and London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1972) [cited hereafter as RR], I, 10-21: *Anti-Jacobin* p.11 (Reiman p.345).

<sup>44</sup> *Anti-Jacobin Review*, August 1812, p.15 (353).



as of Islamic worship, but not of Christian worship.<sup>45</sup> Further, the ‘hope built on reeds’ is a recurrent image in the Hebrew Scriptures, consistently referring to hopes placed upon entities other than the Israelites’ god.<sup>46</sup> The allusion thus reinforces Judaeo-Christian monotheism, adopting the language of orthodoxy. Through all of this, the poet is giving his Christian audience more than enough opportunity to remain exclusivist in their religion and to thus ascribe the ‘hope built on reeds’ to every faith other than their own.

The reviewer’s belligerent sectarianism is also visible earlier, in taking exception to a comment in the poem’s scathing attack on the Convention of Cintra. In a note to 1.24.288, the poet says, of the Duke of Wellington, “he has perhaps changed the character of a nation, reconciled rival superstitions, and baffled an enemy who never retreated before his predecessors” (McGann 2.188:288). The reviewer asks,

what does his Lordship mean by designating the Papal and the Protestant religions, as rival *superstitions*? That the primitive Church was disfigured by the superstitions introduced into it, for worldly purposes, by the Popes, we are very well aware [...] But, on what authority, or on what grounds, does this young peer presume to prefer the same charge against that reformed church which first exposed and abolished the superstitious practices which disgraced the church of Rome [...]?

The reviewer accepts ‘superstition’ as an accurate description of ‘dogmatic’ Roman Catholic belief, but not of ‘creedal’ Protestant belief. Similarly, on the contemporary issue of Catholic Emancipation, this reviewer opines, “We cannot suspect him [Byron] of *understanding* the Catholic Question, for it is evident that either he has paid little attention to religious subjects, or that his attention has been productive of very little effect.”<sup>47</sup> This dismissal of the poet’s claims as irrelevant and ignorant (diasyrm) constitutes an *ad hominem* attack, and was most likely inspired by the position demonstrated in Byron’s speech, calling for emancipation, delivered in the

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<sup>45</sup> The absence of these is a fundamental part of Christian doctrine: q.v. Hebrews 7:27, et al.

<sup>46</sup> Q.v. 2 Kings 18:21, Isaiah 36:6, Ezekiel 29:6.

<sup>47</sup> *Anti-Jacobin Review*, August 1812, p.13, 19 (pp.349, 360).

House of Lords on April 21, 1812, four months earlier. Contemporary religious politics affect the reviewer's reading of the text, which is to say that the review is only representative of one contemporary position, not of all.

A milder example of sectarianism appears in another review, this of Canto IV, which prefers polite irony (asteism) to outright polemic in objecting to the poem's description of Italy as "Parent of our Religion" (4.47.419), riposting, "It may be the parent of his own religion, for aught we know to the contrary; but it certainly is not of ours".<sup>48</sup> The critic's usage of the third person plural pronoun constructs a community of critic and reader which excludes the poet and Catholicism, reinforcing Protestant exclusivism by opposition and by *argumentum ad populum*. However, the poet did the same: by apostrophizing Italy as "Parent of our Religion", the poet identifies himself and his audience as a community of shared belief.<sup>49</sup> This inclusion of Protestantism and Catholicism together within Christianity is evident throughout Byron's work, but this ecumenicalism and its accompanying view of the necessity for Catholic Emancipation were not shared by all, and the validation of 'the other side' was regarded by some as a form of treachery.

Thus, in reviewing Canto III, the *Dublin Examiner*<sup>50</sup> and the *Christian Observer*<sup>51</sup> represent the poem's positive depiction of Islam as proof of a preference for Islam over Christianity, such that Harold might be on the way to converting. The reaction against the poem's religious tolerance also engaged other values, as demonstrated in *Portfolio*'s description of Canto III as "Anti-Christian, anti-patriot, anti-social", conflating religion, nationalism, and morality.<sup>52</sup> These reviews demonstrate the contemporary strict partisanship which made any deviation immediately suspect as a vehicle of a competing affiliation.

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<sup>48</sup> *British Critic*, 2nd Series, IX (May 1818), 540-554, RR, I, 284-9: p.545 (287).

<sup>49</sup> The description of Rome, which might qualify for such a place on account of being the first-placed of the five patriarchates (q.v. the canons of the First and Second Ecumenical Councils), may well have been motivated by Byron's growing inclination towards Catholicism, but it is nonetheless political and provocative.

<sup>50</sup> *Dublin Examiner*, II (November 1816), 41-50, RR, II, 688-693: p.43 (689).

<sup>51</sup> *Christian Observer*, XVI (April 1817), 246-259, RR, II, 595-602: p.258 (601).

<sup>52</sup> *Portfolio*, November 23, 1816, pp.73-77; November 30, 1816, pp.97-102, RR, V, 1966-1976: p.102 (1976).

Not all reviews or reactions were so extreme, but religion remained a significant category of criticism even for the less hostile. Thus, the *Belle Assemblée* notes in CHP what was a common target for reviewers: “some relaxed ideas on religion, and a kind of doubt of a future state.”<sup>53</sup> This sort of doubt was deemed improper by such commentators as George Ellis, whose expression of the standards of taste includes the censorship of heterodoxy: “The common courtesy of society has, we think, very justly proscribed the intrusive introduction of such topics as these [death, unlikely immortality, and bodily decay] into conversation”.<sup>54</sup>

Part of the reason for the reaction against unorthodox opinion lay in the equation of orthodoxy with moral behaviour, which was a common basis for objection to CHP,<sup>55</sup> and, later, to *Don Juan*. Reviewing Cantos I and II for the *Edinburgh Review*, Francis Jeffrey announces that Byron is being aberrant both in his religious and in his political expressions:

Neither are his [Byron’s] religious opinions more orthodox, we apprehend, than his politics; for he not only speaks without any respect of priests, and creeds, and dogmas of all descriptions, but doubts very freely the immortality of the soul, and other points as fundamental.

In contrast to how artistically insignificant Byron’s non-dogmatic views might seem in a later, more sceptical age, Jeffrey describes them as “some of the disadvantages” of the poem, a description which he reiterates within the same sentence.<sup>56</sup>

What is particularly noteworthy in these comments is the degree of unorthodoxy which is being censured. The contemporary critics were not identifying any extreme heresy, only “relaxed ideas” and “doubt”.

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<sup>53</sup> *Belle Assemblée*, 2nd Series, VI (Supplement for 1812), 349-354, RR, I, 81-86: p.351 (84).

<sup>54</sup> Ellis, *Quarterly Review*, VII (March 1812), 180-200, RR, V, 1984-1995: p. 198 (1994).

<sup>55</sup> Q.v. *Christian Miscellany*, II (June 1817), 270-277; (July 1817), 317-324, RR, II, 543-558: p. 272 (545); *Town Talk*, III (August 1812), 217-222; (September 1812), 302-305; (October 1812), 372-377, RR, V, 2289-2297: pp.2291-2 (222); p.223 (2293).

<sup>56</sup> Jeffrey, *Edinburgh Review*, XIX (February 1812), 466-77, RR, II, 836-42: p.467 (837).

For the *British Review*, William Roberts wrote articles on the initial two cantos and also on Canto IV. In each, he praises the poetic art but censures the moral position. On the first two cantos, Roberts says that Harold “has chosen to abuse the capacities of his nature, and to despise the dictates of reason and religion”. The final pairing is revealing, as is the concern for the audience expressed in Roberts’ consideration of the poem’s flawed moral position:

It condemns vice because it is a very losing game to play in this world, – because it is destructive of its own purposes, – and because moral prudence forbids it; a mode of confutation from which some persons, not acquainted with the writer, might rashly conclude him to mean, that if it could be reconciled to our interests in a worldly view, it might be safely practised.<sup>57</sup>

Roberts sees the moral failure of the first two cantos of CHP as lying in its failure to present the correct condemnation of immoral activity, that proper correction being dogmatic rather than pragmatic. This is an interesting reaction in the light of such pragmatic valuations of moral behaviour as those contained in the Hebrew Scriptures, and especially in the book of Proverbs. It is also noteworthy that Tillotson, whom Byron had read, took the same pragmatic view as CHP does.<sup>58</sup> Roberts makes a related comment about Canto IV, his reception of it almost matching the *Anti-Jacobin Review* for vigour, except that he carefully directs the invective away from the poet himself, denouncing the poem’s

wrong and diseased and perverted view of life, its substantial felicities and its real obligations; an unholy and presumptuous consideration of spiritual objects, the purposes of our creation, and the conditions of futurity[.]<sup>59</sup>

He places the moral failure in the context of the ideological freedom of the Enlightenment, via a long discourse upon the nature of “*enlightened* men”. This type,

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<sup>57</sup> Roberts, *British Review*, III (June 1812), 275-302, RR, I, 394-408: pp. 280, 284-5 (397, 399-400).

<sup>58</sup> Q.v. Welch, *Protestant Thought in the Nineteenth Century*, p.34.

<sup>59</sup> Roberts, *British Review*, XII (August 1818), 1-34, RR, I, 459-475: p.2 (459).

Roberts claims, is philanthropic to the “vagrant, mendicant, and predatory”, and liberal in a way which is

intolerant towards whatever is tried, approved, and ordained, but full of courtesy towards every tenet, proposition, and theory that tends to loosen the secret holds of opinion, and the foundations of necessary authority; – lastly, by a charity which pardons every crime, except that of holding preferment, exercising office, maintaining order, practising devotion, advocating decorum, and suppressing tumult.<sup>60</sup>

This is a comment of value to this study not only in its demonstration of the existence of its own, very conservative and reactionary viewpoint, but in its identification, howsoever prejudiced, of the existence of the competing liberal or even radical viewpoint, highlighting the political conflict being waged by the reviewers.

Proper morality, within these critics’ ideology, is wholly identified with ‘proper’ religious behaviour: strict adherence to conservative rules. Much the same censure was directed against a number of Byron’s subsequent works, most notably *Cain* and *Don Juan*, and it operates the same way, as an attempt to produce the ideological-cultural state which it represents as correct.

Byron did not fail to anticipate this, as he wrote to Robert Charles Dallas, “I fear Murray will be in a Scrape with the Orthodox, but I cannot help it” (BLJ 2.75, 21/8/11), demonstrating an awareness of conservative Christian (“Orthodox”) opinions and therefore of the imminent reaction against the work, but determinedly refusing to alter his words to appease their sensibilities.

Part of his willingness to ignore the complainants might have been supplied by the fact that not all of the religious criticism was condemnatory. One alternative reading was that Harold provided a salient, negative example. The *Eclectic Review* thought as much, and felt that “There is much truth and force in the picture of this unhappy being

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<sup>60</sup> *British Review*, August 1818, RR, I, pp.8-9 (462-3).

[Harold], and the moral to be deduced from it is exceedingly valuable".<sup>61</sup> This same response was also voiced later by supporters of *Don Juan*.

Criticism was not restricted to published reviews, of course. When CHP was first published, Walter Scott and Byron were not friends: in fact, Scott had been one of the targets of *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*.<sup>62</sup> Scott notes in a letter to Joanna Baillie in April of 1812,

it is I think a very clever poem but gives no good symptoms of the writers heart or morals. [...] Vice ought to be a little more modest [...]. There is a monstrous deal of conceit in it too for it is informing the inferior part of the world that their little old-fashioned scruples and limitation are not worthy of his regard.<sup>63</sup>

Notably, the poem is described as an act of communication, and social interaction, not merely an expression of individual thought. Nevertheless, in May of 1812, to J B S Morrith, Scott qualifies this position somewhat, saying,

I agree very much in what you say of *Childe Harold*. Though there is something provoking and insulting both to morality and to feeling in his misanthropical ennui it gives nevertheless an odd poignancy to his descriptions and reflections.<sup>64</sup>

Here, we see Scott's love for the artistic virtues of the work warring with his hatred for its moral vices. This attitude reappears in his published reviews for the *Quarterly*, discussed below, and became a common feature of critical commentary upon Byron's poetry.

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<sup>61</sup> *Eclectic Review*, VIII (June 1812), 630-641, RR, II, pp.705-710: pp. 631-2 (705-6).

<sup>62</sup> EBSR 171-188, 278, 514, 911-4.

<sup>63</sup> In *Byron: The Critical Heritage*, ed. by Andrew Rutherford (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970), p.36.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid*, p.37.

So strong was the monologic about morality that Henry Crabb Robinson, recording in his diary his 1812 conversations with William Wordsworth, notes, “Of his moral qualities we think the same. He [Wordsworth] adds that there is insanity in Lord Byron’s family”. The comment is not expanded upon, but the implication is clear.<sup>65</sup>

The most extreme contemporary responses cast the poem as evidence of irreligion, immorality, insanity, or treachery, a danger to the public on various grounds, all of them essentially stemming from a failure to uphold a rigidly conservative viewpoint. The monologic of many of the reviews is political and propagandistic, not merely demonstrative of a universal state of belief, and reveals the struggle for discursive dominance between different political-ideological factions.

### **Moral Teacher**

It is within such an intracultural struggle that a poet is seen as an agent of social change, one whose teachings would be followed. Crucially, these critics were well aware of the effects of discourse upon culture. This is evident in Roberts, who says, “Perish poetry, live the moral principle – the virtuous constitution of the soul! May genius rather be dumb than endanger the hopes of an hereafter, or even disturb the righteous dispositions of our present existence!”<sup>66</sup> Because genius is capable of endangering not only transient mortal life but also permanent post mortem existence, the poet has a great responsibility for the effect of the work.

The same conception of morality did exist within the more positive responses. John Wilson Croker, in a letter to John Murray, has a very interesting comment amidst his validation of Canto III, in which he says, “It is an old and highly absurd phrase to say that poetry deals in fiction; alas, *history*, I fear, deals in fiction, but good poetry is concerned only with *realities* either of visible or moral nature.”<sup>67</sup> As he evidently classes *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage* within “good poetry”, he is implying that it deals with such “realities”. From such an absolutist perspective, a challenge to morality is

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<sup>65</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>66</sup> *British Review*, August 1818, RR, I, p.460 (3).

<sup>67</sup> *Byron: The Critical Heritage*, p.82. Croker is following Aristotle’s valuation in *Poetics*, 9.

not merely a difference of opinion, but a resistance to *reality*, and thus does constitute the very basis of insanity.

When morality is reality, a poet who fails to represent the ‘correct’ moral view is propagating falsehoods, and so, writing on Canto III, Jeffrey admonishes Byron with respect to a responsible use of his role:

as a great poet is necessarily a Moral Teacher, and gives forth his ethical lessons, in general, with far more effect and authority than any of his grave brethren, he is peculiarly liable to the censures reserved for those who turn the means of improvement to purposes of corruption.<sup>68</sup>

Walter Scott expresses the same idea of moral responsibility when reviewing Canto IV.<sup>69</sup> If the poet can change the hearts of the populace, and especially if he can lead them into potentially self-destructive behaviour, he no longer has the right to act without consideration of “the inferior part of the world” with “their little old-fashioned scruples”, as Scott wrote to Baillie: Byron’s power begets his responsibility.

That responsibility is a prevalent feature of the reviews. The *Anti-Jacobin* says, “we should entreat him for his own sake, and for that of the younger part of the public, who are most likely to be misled by his sophistry, to change the course of his studies”.<sup>70</sup> *Belle Assemblée*’s comment, particularly regarding the “kind of doubt of a future state” blames suicide upon a lack of orthodoxy, and lays the responsibility for combating these upon the poet:

In this age, where deism, and indeed, infidelity, are making rapid strides, as may be seen by the frequent suicides amongst our dissipated youth, the pen of an admired bard cannot be too cautious of publishing what may disseminate error, and aid the cause of vice[.]<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Jeffrey, *Edinburgh Review*, XXVII (December 1816), 277-310, RR, II, pp.864-81: p.280-1 (866).

<sup>69</sup> Scott, *Quarterly Review*, XIX (April 1818), RR, V, 2048-56: pp. 218-9 (2049-50).

<sup>70</sup> *Anti-Jacobin Review*, August 1812, p. 346 (12).

<sup>71</sup> *Belle Assemblée*, VI (Supplement for 1812), RR, I, p. 351 (84).



The *Christian Observer* pithily expresses this obligation of instructive and beneficial poetry, saying “he is a defective poet whose lessons rather revolt than improve the mind.”<sup>72</sup> This condemnation of a poet as “defective” makes the didactic aspect a necessary element of the poetic office. This is not the poet as independent *vates*, prophet, but the poet as institutional *sacerdos*, priest, guardian of morals. The religious, metaphysical concerns are presented as having secular effects.

Throughout the contemporary responses, then, the same charges are levelled against Byron and his creation Harold: impiety, dubious morality, irresponsibility, and insufficient respect for church, creed, and country. The poet is alleged to have failed in his role as Moral Teacher. Byron’s work is ‘unpatriotic’ because it fails to automatically acknowledge the self-evident superiority of England; it is ‘irreligious’ because it fails to automatically acknowledge the self-evident superiority of English Protestantism; it is ‘immoral’ because it fails to teach these dogmata. There is a totalising monologic at work here: morality is religious, religion is political, and only the insane would question the obvious rightness of the established order, especially in the wake of the French Revolution. Heterodoxy then becomes a threat to public safety, an incitement to crime, possibly including suicide. From such a perspective, Byron did not need to be truly anti-religious, in the sense of being opposed to religion, in order to be condemned upon religious grounds: he stood condemned merely by being unorthodox.

None of this upset Byron. The ‘Addition to the Preface’ to CHP, published with the fourth edition of Cantos I and II in September 14, 1812, after the reviewers had given their responses, is consistent with the characterization of Harold in the text, and does claim that Harold was meant in such a way as “to show that early perversion of mind and morals leads to satiety of past pleasures and disappointment in new ones” (McGann 2.6:95-6). The poet, like his supporters and his critics, explicitly acknowledged the role of morality as a value in poetics. The ‘Addition’ also states that the initial publication received a “very slight degree of censure” (McGann 2.5:48). However, it does address concerns about the character of the protagonist,

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<sup>72</sup> *Christian Observer*, XI (June 1812), 376-386, RR, II, pp.559-570: p. 384 (568).

noting that it would have been “more agreeable, and certainly more easy” to have made Harold more amiable, and claiming for Harold the role of negative example already mentioned (85-90). Of course, Byron is here responding to the criticism, but not responding to it upon the terms in which it is presented, nor, indeed, is he resisting those directly: he neither admits culpability for having produced a ‘wrong’ character in Harold, nor denies responsibility as a poet-preacher. In fact, in stating that Harold’s purpose was “to show that early perversion”, Byron is actually assuming that didactic role, and claiming to be fulfilling it in presenting the negative example. The fact that he was not fulfilling it in the particular way which the critics preferred is not a sign of simple, direct opposition to their ideological position, but rather evidence of an intention to subvert it, by accepting its forms only to apply them to different ends. Byron is preaching, but he is not preaching orthodoxy; instead, he is reconstructing the standards of orthodoxy.

### **Recent Response**

Recent criticism has paid much less attention to Childe Harold’s ‘moral failings’, and it has not expended much effort upon analysis of the religious features of the work. Addressing this omission, Stuart Curran notes that the appreciation of CHP’s religious aspects is “curiously absent from the voluminous critical literature” on the poem.<sup>73</sup> The consistent omission of a certain topic from a discourse can be self-reinforcing, producing a self-perpetuating ‘discourse of silence’.

Alan Rawes, discussing CHP as a ‘confessional’ text, identifies a general secularisation of Romantic Studies as Hopps and Stabler do, and connects this with readings of Byron. While Rawes extends the period considerably farther back, he does also acknowledge a particular, recent trend:

readings of the poem as secular confession have a long history, going back at least as far as Walter Scott’s claim, in his anonymous 1817 review of *Childe Harold III*, that there are so many allusions to the author’s personal feelings

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<sup>73</sup> Curran, *Poetic Form and British Romanticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), p.153.

and private history, that it becomes impossible to divide Lord Byron from his poetry.

The application of the term ‘confessional’ to *Childe Harold* by McGann and Bloom, however, is also part of a much wider reading of Romanticism that sees it as defined by ‘the secularization of inherited theological ideas and ways of thinking’ [Abrams].

[...]

Such a secular reading of the poem’s confessionalism enables us to situate *Childe Harold* in relation not only to Rousseau’s *Confessions* and *The Prelude*, but also to a longer, pan-European, literary tradition of confession extending forward through *Confessions of an English Opium Eater* to George Sand’s *La Confession d’une jeune fille*.<sup>74</sup>

However, Rawes analyses this confessional tradition, notes that it begins ultimately with Augustine, finds that “In [CHP], confession is not only appropriated for ‘use in a non-religious way’, but also employed in religious ways”, and ultimately decides that “Byron’s ‘revolutionary confessional poem’, then, does not belong, in any comfortable way, with secular confessions such as *Confessions of an English Opium Eater* and *La Confession d’une jeune fille*.”<sup>75</sup> He concludes against a non-religious reading of the poem.

In *Fiery Dust*, McGann presents a starkly contrasting view in his few comments about religion. What he does say generally lies less in the area of explicitly denying religious significance than in the area of configuring religious references as being something else. Where McGann most noticeably steps away from an acknowledgement of the significance of religion to the text is in his descriptions of the denouement of CHP:

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<sup>74</sup> Rawes, ‘Byron’s Confessional Pilgrimage’, in *Romanticism and Religion from William Cowper to Wallace Stevens*, 121-136 (p.121).

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.122, 133.

Part of the meaning of the poem's great conclusion [...] is that the narrating poet has come at last to a complete understanding of what it means to be a pilgrim – for him, what it means to be a man.<sup>76</sup>

For McGann, then, the pilgrimage is not a religious pursuit: it is not about the pilgrim's quest to connect himself with something outside of and greater than himself. Instead, it is an exercise in self-discovery, an introverted pursuit to connect him with himself, a process of secular humanism. This alleged concluding, humanist realisation by the poet, described earlier in *Fiery Dust*, is interestingly configured: "Later, at St. Peter's, the perception of the union of Nature and Supernature, which he sought and partially achieved on the Alp, is finally given to him."<sup>77</sup> However, in the text of the poem, it is not Supernature in the abstract at St Peter's, but God as a person, with whom the pilgrim is offered the hope of connection:

But thou, of temples old, or altars new,  
Standest alone – with nothing like to thee –  
Worthiest of God, the holy and the true,  
Since Zion's desolation, when that He  
Forsook his former city  
[...]

and thou  
Shalt one day, if found worthy, so defined,  
See thy God face to face, as thou dost now  
His Holy of Holies (4.154.1378-82, 155.1392-5).

The poem includes God as a person, and even validates that person as "the holy and the true". This much, at least, McGann is secularising, eliding the figure of God from the poet's work. As Hopps and Stabler note, *The Romantic Ideology* follows a similar trend, in as much as McGann argues constantly against Byron's work showing any

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<sup>76</sup> McGann, *Fiery Dust*, p.36.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid*, p.37.

faith in anything, claiming instead that it “has to be defined in negative terms: nihilism, cynicism, anarchism.”<sup>78</sup>

To an extent, the secularisation which Rawes claims is apparent in others’ work also: for Gleckner, CHP is “a pilgrimage without faith or shrine”; for Rutherford, “The build-up of his character seems more important than the actual “religion” he asserts here” in 3.72, 74-5, and “When he turns to scenery he is not searching for a refuge or religion – he is interested in Nature simply for its beauty”.<sup>79</sup>

This secularising aspect of some recent criticism is quite at odds with the views of Byron’s contemporaries, for whom religion was a critical consideration in CHP. They typically regarded its religion as flawed, but, even when they did accuse it of “irreligious principles”, as in the case of the *Anti-Jacobin Review*, or of “infidelity”, as did the *Town Talk*, they were referring to the presence of religious commentary within the poem, not the absence of it. To Byron’s own culture, the work was religious, if unorthodox.

The question is not whether *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage* is sceptical with regard to religious ideas, but rather how sceptical it is, and how it is sceptical, and particularly whether it seeks to resolve the problems which it highlights. Its representation of the world is of a corrupt world, a world decaying, beset by sin. This plague affects religion, and especially the clergy, but it also affects common people and their ideas. Against this devastation, the poem preaches pluralistic tolerance, and denounces violence. It does so by adopting religious discourse and values, and it speaks of the soul and of the Deity in varying, but sometimes quite orthodox, ways. All of this operates within an idealisation of religion.

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<sup>78</sup> McGann, *The Romantic Ideology: A Critical Investigation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), p.110.

<sup>79</sup> Gleckner, *Byron and the Ruins of Paradise* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1967), p.230; Rutherford, *Byron: A Critical Study* (Edinburgh and London: Oliver and Boyd, 1961), pp.62-3, 96. However, see also M K Joseph, *Byron the Poet*, and Bernard Blackstone, *Byron: A Survey*, for readings which do take more of the religious material into account.

## The Text

One of the initial questions for CHP concerns its title, and how it qualifies as a 'pilgrimage' when no particular shrine is sought. The narrative begins with Harold departing from his ancestral home, and the reason given for the departure is his dissatisfaction with the life of dissoluteness, a dissatisfaction figured as a rejection of the religious rigour of the anchorite:

He felt the fulness of satiety:  
Then loath'd he in his native land to dwell,  
Which seem'd to him more lone than Eremite's sad cell.  
[...]  
And now Childe Harold was sore sick at heart,  
And from his fellow bacchanals would flee (1.4.34-6, 6.46-7).

From there, Harold becomes a pilgrim in search of something different, something better: he is reacting against dissatisfaction, and thus is seeking the happiness which he lost. Rather than making his way towards any predetermined shrine, Harold meanders across Europe in an apparently aimless fashion. This 'lack of direction' on the part of the central character is, in the views of some critics, true for the poem as a whole. Thus, for example, William H Marshall comments that "neither *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers* nor the first *Childe Harold* [Cantos I and II] reveals a sustained structure, either intellectual or dramatic."<sup>80</sup> In this, he follows the view of Byron's contemporary, William Roberts, who describes Canto IV in particular as being "without integrity of plan, or progress of action, with no development of the leading idea, without point",<sup>81</sup> a complaint also issued against *Don Juan*.

The poem's self-representation contributes to this appearance of aimlessness, repeatedly suggesting an absence of any firm goal. In the prefatory piece 'To Ianthe', the poet refers to "straying" in other climes (McGann 2.6:1), neither mentioning nor implying any specific destination. Similarly, in Canto I, Harold is described not as

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<sup>80</sup> Marshall, *The Structure of Byron's Major Poems* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1962), p.27.

<sup>81</sup> Roberts, *British Review*, XII (August 1818), 1-34, RR, I, 459-475: p.469 (p.22).

travelling towards anything in particular, but rather as travelling away from his home and his former life: loathing his native land (1.4.35), fleeing his fellow revellers (1.6.47), “from his native land resolv’d to go [...] The Childe departed from his father’s hall” (1.6.51, 7.55). The closest statement to a declaration of purpose is the description of Harold’s departure from England: “Without a sigh he left, to cross the brine, /And traverse Paynim shores, and pass Earth’s central line” (1.11.98-9). However, this purpose remains unfulfilled: while Harold does go on to visit the western end of the Ottoman Empire, which could qualify as ‘Paynim shores’, he never passes ‘Earth’s central line’, nor does he later demonstrate any intention to do so. Eventually, the poet admits the absence of a destination: “Onward he flies, nor fix’d as yet the goal /Where he shall rest him on his pilgrimage” (1.28.328-9).

In his original preface to the first-published section, Cantos I and II, the poet comments upon the role of Harold in the poem: “A fictitious character is introduced for the sake of giving some connexion to the piece; which, however, makes no pretension to regularity” (McGann 2.4:11-13). While this excuses the lack of uniformity in the poem, it does announce the existence of at least internal connection, of some form of design if not a complete plan.

If there is a design, but no specific goal for the pilgrimage, then one hypothesis is that the journey is exilic rather than progressive, a retreat rather than an advance. Thus, speaking particularly of Cantos I and II, Marshall says, “Harold is essentially fleeing rather than searching; he seeks only to escape.”<sup>82</sup> Marshall is certainly not alone in this view. In a similar vein, Gleckner comments, “The pilgrimage is away from rather than to a shrine, the journey itself a journey of death in life.”<sup>83</sup> Instead of the traditional act of hope expressed in a pilgrimage towards a focus of belief, Gleckner sees *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage* as an act of despair, a departure for nowhere. Edward Burns also concurs, writing, “The pilgrimage is, paradoxically, one away from the ghost of a religious institution, unblessed by it, and with no defining aim.”<sup>84</sup> Gleckner and Burns see the *Pilgrimage* as an inversion of the religious quest, a

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<sup>82</sup> Marshall, p.38.

<sup>83</sup> Gleckner, p.43.

<sup>84</sup> Burns, ‘Byron’s Monk-y Business: Ghostly Closure and Comic Continuity’, in *Romanticism and Religion from William Cowper to Wallace Stevens*, pp. 167-179 (p. 170).

deliberate movement away from a focus of belief. Harold Bloom connects this with a general Romantic trend: “The theme of a quest away from alienation toward an unknown good is recurrent in the Romantics”.<sup>85</sup>

Resisting Gleckner and Burns’ conclusion, Curran states, in the full expression of a passage quoted earlier, “The pilgrimage is a religious quest, and it visits literally dozens of shrines, a fact curiously absent from the voluminous critical literature on *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage*”.<sup>86</sup> The structural significance of the religious sites is particularly demonstrated, Curran claims, in the use of the Hagia Sophia and of St. Peter’s as the termini of the two halves of the pilgrimage. However, although Curran is correct regarding the great number of shrines, none is the end point of the pilgrimage: Harold moves on from them all, including both the Hagia Sophia (2.79) and St. Peter’s (4.153-9). This does not mean that the pilgrimage is not religious, but it does demonstrate that it is not simply a journey to an established religious site.

It appears, then, that CHP begins as a pilgrimage without a specific shrine, despite having many from which to choose. This, of course, raises the question of why it should then be a ‘pilgrimage’, a religious journey, at all. In Gleckner, Bloom, Marshall, and Burns’ view of the retreating *anti*-pilgrimage, the journey might not need to be so prolonged. Once a refugee had moved away from the locus of negative value, whatever that was, the anti-pilgrimage would be complete: an escape is achieved not upon reaching a destination, but upon leaving the source of trouble. Childe Harold’s pilgrimage, on the other hand, does not end with his departure from England, but instead continues on, through the Iberian Peninsula, the Mediterranean, Greece, Albania, and then, in the later cantos, the Low Countries, Germany, Switzerland, and Italy. The west to east and then north to south journeys cross Europe, both literally and figuratively. Given the title, the great length of his travels, the admission of some design to the poem if not to Harold’s journey, and, ultimately, the fact that the poem ends, it is reasonable to presume that some form of destination did exist, even if not one found within a traditional, physical shrine.

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<sup>85</sup> Bloom, *The Visionary Company: A Reading of English Romantic Poetry* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1971), p.239.

<sup>86</sup> Curran, p.153. He does earlier describe it as at least initially exilic, however: p.151.



Significantly, in the wake of announcing that the poem has no fixed destination, the poet reveals more about the ‘connexion’ provided by Harold, saying,

And o’er him many changing scenes must roll  
Ere toil his thirst for travel can assuage,  
Or he shall calm his breast, or learn experience sage. (1.28.330-2).

This places the end of Harold’s journey not at a physical location, but at a psychological one: the terminus is connected with the cessation of his wanderlust, which is tied to him ‘calming his breast’, or learning wisdom. The three possibilities in lines 331-2 are too close to be independent of one another. If the “fulness of satiety” (1.4.34), which drives Harold from home, is the initial, expulsive motivation, the continuing, propulsive motivation is this quest for inner peace. Such a quest moves the poem into the realm of personal moral development, a standard feature of the most enduring religions, which could explain how this is a ‘pilgrimage’. Notably, the Eremites to whom CHP refers (1.4.36) were engaged in just this type of quest, with no need for a physical shrine.

### **Entropy**

The problem which Harold faces at the beginning is a problem which recurs throughout the Pilgrimage, and is one of its major themes: corruption. For all the joy originally brought by Harold’s revels (1.4.28-30), they eventually pall and become no longer a source of happiness. That Harold begins thus by turning away from his ‘life of sin’ makes the Pilgrimage appear to commence as an orthodox morality tale, and it is quite possibly in this sense that the *Eclectic Review* read and validated its “exceedingly valuable” moral. However, while the poem does configure this corruption in religious terms, it is not as simple as the piety of a morality tale.

The most recurrent proximate source of corruption mentioned in CHP is the entropic force of Time, the “central theme” of the poem, according to Joseph.<sup>87</sup> This theme contributes to the morality of the poem, as is noted in regard to Servius Sulpicius’ travelogue contemplating the decay of Greece,

The Roman saw these tombs in his own age,  
These sepulchres of cities, which excite  
Sad wonder, and his yet surviving page  
The moral lesson bears, drawn from such pilgrimage. (4.45.402-5).

The moral lesson of Harold’s pilgrimage is not identical, although entropy does constitute one part of it. The first appearance of entropic effect is early in the first canto, which describes

how  
Vain are the pleasaunces on earth supplied;  
Swept into wrecks anon by Time’s ungentle tide! (1.23.285-7).

Again, the apparent form of the simple morality tale is suggested in the comment on the vanity of earthly pleasures. What troubled contemporary critics was the difficulty of finding validation of any moral alternative to such pleasures. The poem seemed to them to be a lament without an accompanying promise, Gleckner’s “journey of death in life”.<sup>88</sup> This same idea of Time’s obliteration of pleasure is the final one to be expressed in the first-published pair of cantos: it appears at the very end of Canto II, in 98.925-6. The destroyer of pleasures is also a destroyer of lands, and love: “Paphos fell by Time – accursed Time! /The Queen who conquers all must yield to thee” (1.66.666-7); “Can man its [Greece’s] shattered splendour renovate, /Recall its virtues back, and vanquish Time and Fate?” (2.84.799-800); “Time, which hath wronged thee [Italy] with ten thousand rents /Of thine imperial garment” (4.55.489-90). In addition, it destroys temples, and thus the poet fails in re-imagining Zeus’ temple on the Acropolis, for “nor even can Fancy’s eye /Restore what time hath laboured to deface”

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<sup>87</sup> Joseph, p.14.

<sup>88</sup> Q.v. Roberts, *British Review*, June 1812, p.400 (285).

(2.10.87-8). Lastly, it brings decay upon people, including Harold (3.8.69-71). The destructive pattern is quite ubiquitous. Thus, speaking on the ruins of the Forum Romanum, the poet says,

There is the moral of all human tales;  
'Tis but the same rehearsal of the past,  
First Freedom, and then Glory – when that fails,  
Wealth, vice, corruption, – barbarism at last.  
And History, with all her volumes vast,  
Hath but *one* page (4.108.964-9).

The “same rehearsal”, the “one page”, and even the present simple tense of “fails” all work to construct a nearly universal, unrelenting process of degradation. Almost nothing escapes this general trend of decay, which is propagated by Time and its partner Chance, or Circumstance:

Circumstance, that unspiritual god  
And miscreator, makes and helps along  
Our coming evils with a crutch-like rod,  
Whose touch turns Hope to dust (4.125.1122-5).

The language is explicitly religious. The negating prefixes of “unspiritual” and “miscreator”, by so emphatically declaring their difference from the positive values, necessarily reiterate those positive values by implication: a god ought to be spiritual, and ought to be a creator of good. While this does not take the ontic step of theism and assert that there *is* such a God, it does take the deontic, idealist step of expressing the wish for same. Simultaneously, this passage makes the despairing declaration that, eventually, mischance is inevitable. This pairing of Time and Chance, and the assertion of their ubiquity, is biblical, and comes from a passage well worth quoting in full because of its relevance to CHP in particular and Byron’s thought in general:

I returned, and saw under the sun, that the race *is* not to the swift, nor the  
battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of

understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill; but time and chance happeneth to them all.<sup>89</sup>

This statement of fatalism is part of the sacred text of Christianity, and it is resolved no more simply there than Byron's pessimism is resolved in *CHP*. Byron's expressions of the same attitude ought not to be considered determined demonstrations of anti- or non-Christian belief simply for their apparent fatalism or scepticism.

This fatalism even extends to Time, as an agent, destroying human creations, and expressing scorn of human attempts at permanence:

Whose arch or pillar meets me in the face,  
Titus or Trajan's? No – 'tis that of Time:  
Triumph, arch, pillar, all he doth displace  
Scoffing; and apostolic statues climb  
To crush the imperial urn, whose ashes slept sublime (4.110.986-90).

If a religion can be employed to displace an empire, its own permanence is hardly certain, and that "imperial urn" harks back to the urn amidst the temple ruins in 2.4.36, and its religiously-configured image of entropy: "That little urn saith more than thousand homilies."

### **The Death of Religion**

Like the first, the second canto begins with an invocation, albeit an abortive one to Athēna, which commences the explicit discussion of the fall of religions. At this point, the fall is introduced not simply as a product of time, but of

the dread sceptre and dominion dire  
Of men who never felt the sacred glow  
That thoughts of thee and thine on polish'd breasts bestow (2.1.7-9).

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<sup>89</sup> Ecclesiastes 9:11.

Despite Byron himself having been called “irreligious” for his unorthodox religious ideas, the poet here represents a *non*-religious attitude as “worse than steel, and flame, and ages slow” (2.1.6) in its destructive capacity. Byron’s note on the passage links it to the appropriation of the statuary by Lord Elgin and his agents, attacking that activity on religious grounds, albeit by the valuation of devotion to a ‘pagan’ deity. Such piety is configured as a positive value. The note on this passage then takes the same value of piety and extends it farther:

The Parthenon, before its destruction in part, by fire during the Venetian siege, had been a temple, a church and a mosque. In each point of view it is an object of regard: it changed its worshippers, but still it was a place of worship thrice sacred to devotion: its violation is a triple sacrilege. But –

“Man, vain man,  
Drest in a little brief authority,  
Plays such fantastic tricks before high heaven  
As makes the angels weep.” (McGann 2.190:6).

The poet’s claim is not that Elgin is not a Christian, but rather that Elgin lacks a proper veneration of Athēna and so does not honour “the sacred shrine” (2.12.106) in the way that he should. It is sacred to the poet not because it is a site holy to Christianity, but because it is a site “sacred to devotion”. This pluralism is not strictly Christian, in that it is not exclusively so, but it is devoutly religious, and stands in sharp contradiction to the *Anti-Jacobin Review*’s claims.

The consideration of time’s effect upon religion continues in the meditation upon how “Even gods must yield” (2.3.23), which so disturbed many of his contemporary critics. Of course, that to which even gods must yield is Time: “religions take their turn” (3.23). Time and chance happeneth to them all, and even gods die (2.53.475). Nevertheless, it is not time which is the immediate cause, but the decay of the sanctifying faith which proves fatal to gods and religions. This can be evaded if faith is built not upon the ephemera of human construction, but upon the lasting forms of

Nature: “Age shakes Athena’s tower, but spares gray Marathon” (2.88.836), because the plain is invested with a feeling irrespective of human edifices. Eventually, when the faith is gone, time will have destroyed the meaning with which Marathon, too, is invested.

This element of time is also vitally important in regard to what has often, and mistakenly, been described as the end of the Pilgrimage, St. Peter’s Cathedral:

lo! the dome – the vast and wondrous dome,  
To which Diana’s marvel was a cell –  
Christ’s mighty shrine above his martyr’s tomb!  
I have beheld the Ephesian’s miracle –  
Its columns strew the wilderness, and dwell  
The hyaena and the jackal in their shade;  
I have beheld Sophia’s bright roofs swell  
Their glittering mass i’ the sun, and have survey’d  
Its sanctuary the while the usurping Moslem pray’d;

But thou, of temples old, or altars new,  
Standest alone – with nothing like to thee –  
Worthiest of God, the holy and the true.  
Since Zion’s desolation, when that He  
Forsook his former city[.] (4.153.1369-154.1382).

These are some of the most oft-quoted lines in critical works upon CHP, and yet there is a certain, very pertinent element which is frequently overlooked. St. Peter’s is described as being the temple “Worthiest of God [...] /Since Zion’s desolation”. This limitation raises an important question: if the Temple in Jerusalem was at least as worthy, but Zion was eventually desolated, what reason does St. Peter’s have to expect not to suffer the same fate? It is a stop on the path of Time, which means that

it may not be the final such stop. This is underlined by “The hyaena and the jackal in their shade”, an echo of Isaiah 34 and its prophecy of Zion’s desolation.<sup>90</sup>

A frequent comment in critical works is that this is the climax of Harold’s journey for self-realisation, the attainment of “complete understanding of [...] what it means to be a man” in McGann’s words, in that “growing with its growth, we thus dilate /Our spirits to the size of that they contemplate” (4.158.1421-2). However, the instruction, “pause, and be enlightened” (4.159.1423) is followed by “Or, turning to the Vatican, go see /Laocoon’s torture dignifying pain” (4.160.1432-3), and then by “Or view the Lord of the unerring bow” (4.161.1441). Far from being the end, it is the first of a set of alternatives. St. Peter’s is not the ultimate destination. Also, while many have noticed that Harold “fades away” (4.164.1476), he does not end here. The Pilgrimage continues, and Time continues to corrupt.

### **Questioning Religion**

CHP is not simply and singularly orthodox, and yet its unorthodoxy is not extreme. There is an important, unpublished note to an unpublished stanza, which would have been 1.89, in a passing reference to a comment on travelogue-author Sir John Carr. The note reads, “Porphyry said that the prophecies of Daniel were written after their completion,” (McGann 2.281:891-9 variant c2).<sup>91</sup> While this comment may not seem significant now, and particularly to a non-Christian reader, it represented at the time the offensive suggestion that the texts of the Bible had not been, as the 1646 *Westminster Confession of Faith* had defined it, “kept pure in all ages [...] therefore authentic”,<sup>92</sup> but had misrepresented themselves. This suggestion questions the authenticity of the accepted text, but not theism itself, or even Christianity, since the urgent dependence upon the absolute literalism of the *Bible* has always been an issue of contention within Christianity. The note undermines the monologic of ultra-conservative Christianity without attacking Christianity in general.

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<sup>90</sup> E.g. Isaiah 34:14, “The wild beasts of the desert shall also meet with the wild beasts of the island, and the satyr shall cry to his fellow; the screech owl also shall rest there, and find for herself a place of rest.”

<sup>91</sup> As Welch notes (*Protestant Thought in the Nineteenth Century*, p.40), a similar view had been expressed by Hobbes in *Leviathan* (1681). It was not a new conception.

<sup>92</sup> *Westminster Confession of Faith*, 1.8.

Religion is further questioned as the condemnation of tyrants includes the condemnation of religious misrule, with the poem continuing on from Napoleon to speak generally of

the madmen who have made men mad  
By their contagion; Conquerors and Kings,  
Founders of sects and systems, to whom add  
Sophists, Bards, Statesmen, all unquiet things  
Which stir too strongly the soul's secret springs (3.43.379-83).

It is important to note that the religious part of the attack here is upon the “Founders of sects and systems”, not the founders of whole religions, and thus it is not a generalised attack upon religion. A sect is a division within a religion, and “systems”, in Byron’s idiom, belong to philosophy. Thus, when the poem proceeds to say of these people that “Their breath is agitation, and their life /A storm whereon they ride” (3.44.388-9), it is speaking of the people who brought about “the seventy-two villainous sects who are tearing each other to pieces for the love of the Lord and hatred of each other”, which Byron also condemned in his epistolary dialogue with Francis Hodgson regarding Christianity during September of 1811 (e.g., BLJ 2.88, 3/9/11). The values by which such behaviours are judged are fundamentally Christian values: orthodoxy, ‘correct’ belief, is taken as the basis for the condemnation of heteropraxy, ‘incorrect’ behaviour. In so doing, an ideal of orthopraxy is signalled, a perfect version of the practice of religion. In itself, this indicates a valuing of religion, because ideals are sought only for objects of value.

### **Clerical Hypocrisy**

As religion in general can be corrupted, so the individual practice of religion can be corrupted, and the poem targets the hypocrisy of the priesthood in particular, again drawing upon essentially orthodox values to condemn heteropraxy. This motif is introduced with “our ‘Lady’s house of woe’”, near which the monk Honorius dwelt, “In hope to merit Heaven by making earth a Hell” (1.20.255, 60). Christianity’s self-



representation as a source of hope is inverted by the associations with “woe” and “Hell”; from the example of Honorius, it might well be assumed that suffering is the only route to a later joy for which one can hope, but which is unknown. The target here is not, as in some sectarian Protestant works, monasticism in general: the Orthodox monastery at Zitza in Albania is “holy ground” (2.48.425), and, as the *Anti-Jacobin* and the *British Critic* complained, CHP is not anti-Catholic. The criticism is rather that Honorius’ is not ideal Christianity, a differentiation made again in regard to Spanish revelry, as “in lieu /Of true devotion monkish incense burns” amidst the revels in Cadiz (1.67.681-2). The target of this is apparently not the incense or the monastics per se, but the monks’ lack of an idealised “true devotion”.

Another comment comes closer to being anti-monastic. In the third canto, in a note on St. Gingo (3.99), Byron makes reference to the “Bosquet de Julie”, a wood which he says was “long ago cut down by the brutal selfishness of the monks of St. Bernard, (to whom the land appertained), that the ground might be inclosed into a vineyard for the miserable drones of an execrable superstition” (McGann 2.312-3: 927). Benita Eisler notes that the grove which Byron thought that the monks had erased “had been invented”,<sup>93</sup> but the main interest here is the fact that Byron used such language in reaction against what he saw as a crime: the destruction of a site which had been sanctified by art only to be turned to a purpose which was merely institutional. What makes the site sacred is the feeling invested in it via the appreciation of art, just as a religious site could be made sacred by the feeling invested there via faith, as with the Parthenon, “thrice sacred to devotion”. The “superstition” is more likely to be the monks’ belief that the site was unimportant than it is to be their belief in God, the Church, or their order’s rule.

## Sin

The adoption of orthodox values is also evident in the poem’s consideration of sin. There has been a great deal of modern critical discussion about this theme, and particularly about stanza 126 of Canto IV:

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<sup>93</sup> Benita Eisler, *Byron: Child of Passion, Fool of Fame* (NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 1999), p.525.

Our life is a false nature – 'tis not in  
The harmony of things, – this hard decree,  
This uneradicable taint of sin (4.126.1126-8).

Gleckner secularises this, claiming that “The theological overtones of the third line seem to me drowned here in the universal cry of a humanity doomed not by its sin but by its very humanness.”<sup>94</sup> Nonetheless, the poem refers to a religious concept, sin, and its description of the operation of sin is quite orthodox, in the sense of the Christian doctrine of the tainting of the world via the Fall. Such a tainting is in harmony with the discourse, throughout CHP, of corruption via Time. Thus, sin is made part of the process of corruption in this poem, for the poet individually as for the world:

I look upon the peopled desert past,  
As on a place of agony and strife,  
Where, for some sin, to Sorrow I was cast,  
To act and suffer[.] (3.73.690-3).

As mentioned, Calvinism is often assumed as the source of such expressions, but a Calvinist view would naturally hold the speaker's participation in Original Sin as the reason here, rather than expressing the uncertainty about the particular sin which caused this situation. Further, this passage cannot be taken as a representation of the basis of Calvinist Total Depravity, given the immediately succeeding words:

but remount at last  
With a fresh pinion; which I feel to spring,  
Though young, yet waxing vigorous, as the blast  
Which it would cope with, on delighted wing,  
Spurning the clay-cold bonds which round our being cling. (3.73.693-7).

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<sup>94</sup> Gleckner, p.276.

The poet promises to escape the effect of sin. The fact that the next stanza discusses the afterlife, introducing its topic with “And when, at length, the mind shall be free” (3.74.698), suggests that this ‘remounting’ is to occur within mortal existence. The self-engineered escape from the effect of the sin appears fundamentally humanist, and such self-validation is a frequent part of Byronic discourse. Nonetheless, the escape only constitutes an endurance of the suffering wrought by sin, not a removal of the suffering, nor a redemption of the sin, nor an improvement of the self to any supernatural status. This is not humanist sanctification. Earlier in the same canto, the poet speaks of himself and his difficulties, saying,

My springs of life were poison’d. ’Tis too late!  
Yet am I chang’d; though still enough the same  
In strength to bear what time can not abate[.] (3.7.60-2).

The poet continues to suffer, but is unbowed by the suffering. At another point, he boldly proclaims, “there is that within me which shall tire /Torture and Time, and breathe when I expire” (4.137.1229-30). Time can be resisted by sufficient force of will.<sup>95</sup> In addition, there is Harold, who “would not yield dominion of his mind” (3.12.105), and the poet who proudly proclaims,

I have not loved the world, nor the world me;  
I have not flattered its rank breath, nor bow’d  
To its idolatries a patient knee[.] (3.113.1049-51).

The slightly-varied repetition of the same sentence form (exergasia) is further reinforced by the first line being repeated (an extended form of epanastrophe) at the beginning of the next stanza. The poem emphasizes this antipathy between the world and the poet. Interestingly, in orthodox Christian discourse, ‘the world’ is typically

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<sup>95</sup> Similarly, in *Marino Faliero*, the Doge proclaims, “There’s that within my heart shall strain your engines” (MF 5.1.304), and Angiolina declares, “I have that within which shall o’ermaster all” (MF 5.1.475). This endurance is also one of the traits of the Byronic Hero.

the fallen world, and separation from it is enjoined upon the believer.<sup>96</sup> Once more, the discourse of CHP echoes Christian discourse.

### **The Sabbath**

Perhaps one of the best-known passages on the corruption of religion is the apparently-sceptical section on the Sabbath-day activities of the inhabitants of Cadiz and London. This passage on the Sabbath attracted the same criticism which was to later be directed against *Don Juan*, the charge of profaning a sacred or sublime subject by placing it in a base context (tapinosis). Moore describes it as ‘disfiguring the poem’:

In thus mixing up the light with the solemn, it was the intention of the poet to imitate Ariosto. But it is far easier to rise, with grace [...] than to interrupt thus a prolonged tone of solemnity by any descent into the ludicrous or burlesque.<sup>97</sup>

Once more like *Don Juan*, this passage draws its rhetorical effect from the juxtaposition, the parallel between English and Spanish, and the contrast between Sabbath and revelry:

The Sabbath comes, a day of blessed rest;  
What hallows it upon this Christian shore?  
Lo! it is sacred to a solemn feast;  
Hark! heard you not the forest-monarch’s roar?  
[...]  
The throng’d arena shakes with shouts for more  
  
[...]  
The seventh day this; the jubilee of man.  
London! right well thou know’st the day of prayer:

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<sup>96</sup> E.g., Romans 12:2, “And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what *is* that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.”

<sup>97</sup> Moore, *The Life, Letters and Journals of Lord Byron*, 14.151.

[...] why?  
 'Tis to the worship of the solemn Horn,  
 Grasp'd in the holy hand of Mystery,  
 In whose dread name both men and maids are sworn,  
 And consecrate the oath with draught, and dance till morn. (1.68.684-7, 690;  
 69.692-3; 70.706-10).

The poet begins by talking about the Spanish bull-fight on the “day of blessed rest”, giving his English audience the opportunity to judge the Spanish for their failure to act as they ought to act “upon this Christian shore”. Having done so, he reverses the lens of the narrative (an implicit antistrophon) and shows them English behaviour at the same time, in the same light. However, this all occurs within a poem which spends a great deal of time upon the beauties and comforts of women, and so moralistic propriety is hardly the aim. The error which the poem highlights is not ‘sin’ in general, but judgementalism in particular: “It is not ours to judge” (3.108.1006), or, in other words, “And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother’s eye, but perceivest not the beam that is in thine own eye?” (Luke 6:41).

CHP presents a world corrupted, primarily as a result of the entropic effect of Time, which touches the societies, religions, and individuals alike. This perverts religious belief and behaviour. In considering these, the poet’s scepticism and condemnation are directed not at all religion, but at flawed religion. Orthodox Christian values are employed to critique Christians’ unchristian behaviour. While these values are certainly not exclusive to Christianity, they are fundamental to it, and would have found immediate agreement in the poem’s original audience. Nonetheless, CHP does move outside of orthodoxy, in its pluralistic tolerance. Right religion, which is humble devotion, is validated, regardless of the particular form of faith which is chosen. None of this supports a thesis of secularism in the poem.

### **‘Glory’**

Christian values are also deployed against war. One of the most oft-addressed subjects in CHP is the idea of martial glory, which is denounced thoroughly and

repeatedly throughout the poem, a situation paralleled by the criticism of war in *Don Juan*. The first such appearance presents a significant juxtaposition of ideas. Byron's note to 1.24.288, the same note whose mention of "rival superstitions" so incensed the *Anti-Jacobin Review*, also says in one MS, "With regard to my observations on armies, however unpopular, I have religion on my side against armies in particular" (McGann 2.278:377). In saying this, the poet is not only claiming religious sanction for his ideas, but is also pitting two of his culture's values against one another: adherence to religion, and pursuit of glory in war. Further, he is validating the position of religion in this regard, while not specifying a particular religion. The note appears in a description of the Guadiana River, and the battles which it has seen:

Here ceas'd the swift their race, here sunk the strong;  
The Paynim turban and the Christian crest  
Mix'd on the bleeding stream, by floating hosts oppress'd (1.34.384-6).

As McGann notes (2.278:384), the first line alludes to Ecclesiastes 9:11, the verse which refers to the destructive powers of Time and Circumstance.

Thus, when the poem begins its extended meditation upon battle (stanzas 34-44), this meditation is prefaced by the statement that religion is opposed to war, which sets the ideological context, pitting practice against belief, reality against ideal. From the sectarian discrimination of "Paynim turban and Christian crest" (1.34.385), the poem moves to "that standard which Pelagio bore" (1.35.387), which, as McGann notes, was "said to have fallen to him from heaven just before the battle" (2.278:388), and so presumably was understood to have demonstrated divine favour for his campaign. Later, the poem says, "Red gleam'd the cross, and wan'd the crescent pale," (1.35.394), a comment all the more ironic when one considers the symbolic function of the cross in Christianity, as a symbol of innocent suffering. By this juxtaposition, the involvement of religion in the warfare of the Crusades of the Reconquista questions not the validity of religion per se, but rather the validity of religion as it has been practised: the carnage is condemned, and religion is taken as an authority for this judgement. This makes religious warfare not a crime of religion, but a crime *against* religion.

The disassociation of orthodoxy from violence is further underlined as the poem adopts a religious value by which to damn war, configuring it as idolatry:

Awake, ye sons of Spain! awake! advance!  
Lo! Chivalry, your ancient goddess, cries,  
But wields not, as of old, her thirsty lance,  
[...]  
Now on the smoke of blazing bolts she flies (1.37.405-7, 409).

If Chivalry is a goddess, then the worship which makes her ‘yours’ is a violation of the first of the Ten Commandments. Further, that the goddess possesses a “thirsty” lance is testimony that this is no benevolent deity, and is an image reminiscent of pre-Christian figures such as Morrigan or Athēna. To emphasize that this is a violent polytheism, her companion soon appears in the form of Red Battle:

Lo! where the Giant on the mountain stands,  
His blood-red tresses deep’ning in the sun,  
With death-shot glowing in his fiery hands,  
And eye that scorcheth all it glares upon;  
[...]  
  and at his iron feet,  
Destruction cowers to mark what deeds are done;  
For on this morn three potent nations meet,  
To shed before his shrine the blood he deems most sweet. (1.39.423-6, 28-31).

As if he were not awful enough in himself, Destruction cowers before him. Sacrifices are made to him, and prayers are addressed to him. Like Chivalry, he is a god. Like Chivalry, he is thirsty for blood, a direct contrast with the biblical representation of God:<sup>98</sup> the condemnation of war, and religion in war, continues to be sharply discriminated from ‘proper’ religion. The armies nonetheless pursue their explicitly

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<sup>98</sup> “If I were hungry, I would not tell thee: for the world *is* mine, and the fulness thereof. Will I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats?” (Psalm 50:12-13).

idolatrous course: “Three hosts combine to offer sacrifice; /Three tongues prefer strange orisons on high” (1.41.441-2). The exergasia emphasizes the fact that, rather than competing for the god’s attentions, the nations are united in common worship, and thus the differences between French Catholicism, Spanish Catholicism, and English Protestantism all disappear as their regular beliefs are displaced by a bloodlust which the poem represents as wholly non-Christian and anti-Christian, taking religious orthodoxy as the standpoint from which the violence is condemned.

The poem moves thence to the personalisation of the victims of slaughter, as introduced by an ironic inversion of the idea of ‘glorious battle’, in which the spectator’s sport is made to depend upon an absence of any connection to those who suffer: “By Heaven! it is a splendid sight to see/ (For one who hath no friend, no brother there)” (1.40.432-3). This extension of Pindar’s comment about personal involvement<sup>99</sup> to the involvement of loved ones calls into question the sympathy, and the mandatory Christian love for one’s neighbour, of those who do praise warfare. The poet continues on to a closer discussion of the soldiers, saying,

Yes, Honour decks the turf that wraps their clay!  
Vain Sophistry! in these behold the tools,  
The broken tools, that tyrants cast away  
By myriads, when they dare to pave their way  
With human hearts – to what? – a dream alone (1.42.451-5).

In this, both the sacrifice of the soldiers and the plans of the tyrants who lead them to slaughter are neatly reduced to vanities. This idea is echoed later, when the poet exclaims “Imperial anarchs, doubling human woes! /GOD! was thy globe ordain’d for such to win and lose?” (2.45.404-5). The direct apostrophe to God, rather than to Heaven, is unusual for Byron, but the Deity is contrasted with the paradoxical “Imperial anarchs”, who clearly do not deserve to govern. The only other appearance

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<sup>99</sup> Pindar’s “Γλυκὺ δ’ ἀπειροὶ πολέμοις”, “Sweet is war to the one who has no experience of it.” (Fragment 110, in *Pindari Carmina Cum Fragmentis*, ed. by Bruno Snell, 2 vols (Berlin: Academia Scientiarum Germanica, 1964), II, 98n110) was much later translated (and pluralized) by Desiderius Erasmus as the title of his *Dulce Bellum Inexpertis* (1515), and often attributed to him. Pindar is mentioned in passing in DJ 3.85.679-80.



of such a direct appeal to the Deity in CHP (the “Oh, Christ!” of 1.15.207 being more exclamation than apostrophe) is in a Juvenalian description of one of these tyrants, Napoleon, who

would be all or nothing – nor could wait  
For the sure grave to level him; few years  
Had fix’d him with the Caesars in his fate,  
On whom we tread: For *this* the conqueror rears  
The arch of triumph! and for this the tears  
And blood of earth flow on as they have flowed,  
An universal deluge, which appears  
Without an ark for wretched man’s abode,  
And ebbs but to reflow! – Renew thy rainbow, God! (4.92.820-8).

Again, the slaughter and the tyrant’s efforts are vain; and, again, God is invoked as a higher authority, to address the injustice. The framework of cosmic governance is explicitly religious, and the faith which motivates the appeal to the Deity here is strong enough to exist in spite of the recognition that this situation is endlessly recurrent, as it “ebbs but to reflow”. Nature is also a figure in this passage, the reference to “the tears /And blood of earth” possibly including not only the tears and blood of the children of earth, i.e., humans, but also the tears and blood of the world itself. The concern expands out to include the whole *κοσμος*, in proper biblical fashion.<sup>100</sup> In the same vein, the armies who devastate the paradisiacal Portugal do so “with an impious hand” (1.15.211), and will face the wrath of the Almighty (1.5.212) for doing so. Nature is sacrosanct. Similarly, the Rhine has

banks whose beauty would endure for ever  
Could man but leave thy bright creation so,  
Nor its fair promise from the surface mow  
With the sharp scythe of conflict, – then to see  
Thy valley of sweet waters, were to know

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<sup>100</sup> Q.v. John 3:16, “For God so loved the world [τον κοσμον]”.

Earth paved like Heaven (3.50.444-9).

War thus prevents Earth, the realm plagued by sin, from being like Heaven, the realm free of sin; violence is both a symptom and a cause of corruption. Throughout the poem, then, there is a consistent discourse on the evil of war, and the vanity of conquest and its alleged attendant glory, and this discourse is consistently founded upon religious values.

Such a treatment of the pursuit of martial glory did not pass without comment. Francis Jeffrey objected to the poet's criticism,<sup>101</sup> and George Ellis questioned Byron's very suitability for a peerage, as well as his patriotism, because of it.<sup>102</sup> Their arguments failed to dissuade Byron. Four years later, the poet comments, speaking of those left behind by the dead, that

The Archangel's trump, not Glory's, must awake  
Those whom they thirst for; though the sound of Fame  
May for a moment soothe, it cannot slake  
The fever of vain longing (3.31.275-8).

This is not only a reassertion of his point from the earlier cantos, but a direct refutation of the simplistic valuation of glory presented by his critics. The hierarchy of values here is strictly orthodox, with the Last Judgement placed well before the views of mere society. The poet does validate one form of martial glory, nonetheless: Morat and Marathon are contrasted with the carnage of Waterloo and Cannae, and described as "true Glory's stainless victories" (3.64.610). The glory of the valiant defence of a homeland, not imperialistic conquest, is validated. The poem also reasserts the vanity of the conqueror's enterprise, addressing Napoleon and telling him that "'Tis but a worthless world to win or lose" (3.40.359), a comment which immediately calls to mind Jesus' question, recorded in all three of the Synoptic Gospels, "For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his

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<sup>101</sup> Jeffrey, *Edinburgh Review* (February 1812), p.467 (837).

<sup>102</sup> Ellis, *Quarterly Review* (March 1812), p.195 (1992).

own soul?”<sup>103</sup> Far from being unorthodox, the poet is, at this point, following one of the most basic values of Christianity.

In CHP, religious language is part of the language of opposition to warfare and tyranny. For example, the poet denounces “the blasphemy of laws /Making kings’ rights divine, by some Draconic clause” (3.64.615-6), which uses the language of religion in part to represent the activity as wrong, but also to place it within a specific hierarchy: blasphemy is speech against a god, and, while the doctrine of the Divine Right of Kings places the monarchs above everyone else, it is specifically predicated upon even the kings’ rights descending from God. The orthodoxy of this is consistent with the appeal to God in 2.45.405. CHP repeatedly presents a monotheistic view.

### **Pluralism and Tolerance**

Certain religious beliefs are validated. “I speak not of men’s creeds – they rest between /Man and his Maker”, the poet declares (4.95.847), implicitly reaffirming the idea of a Maker while refusing to engage with the sectarian arguments between creeds. Still, the poet’s pluralism, and, in particular, his concern for a balanced representation, extends to the faults of religions, as well as to their virtues. This is another vital factor for consideration of his scepticism, because the desire for balance of the good and the bad of both sides demonstrates an absence of hostility towards either, as much as it demonstrates a lack of submission to either.

In talking about Constantinople, the poem says, “The city won for Allah from the Giaour, /The Giaour from Othman’s race again may wrest” (2.77.729-30).

Massimiliano Demata suggests that this is almost an incitement to ‘Holy War’,<sup>104</sup> but the poet’s note immediately connects it with a reference to the Fourth Crusade in 1204: “When taken by the Latins, and retained for several years. – See Gibbon. [ch. 60]” (McGann 2.290:732). The Venetian-led armies of Western Christianity took the capital of Eastern Christianity, in what can aptly be described as a spectacular own goal. This is then balanced by an account of an analogous action within Islam,

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<sup>103</sup> Mark 8:36, also Matthew 16:26 and Luke 9:25.

<sup>104</sup> Demata, ‘Byron, Turkey and the Orient’, in *The Reception of Byron in Europe*, ed. by Richard A Cardwell (London: Thoemmes Continuum, 2004), pp.439-52: 442.

regarding “Wahab’s rebel brood who dared divest /The prophet’s tomb of all its pious spoil” (2.77.733), a reference to the sacking of the holy cities of Islam by Muslims in 1803-4: “Mecca and Medina were taken some time ago by the Wahabees, a sect yearly increasing” (McGann 2.290:734). The pairing is neither anti-Christian nor anti-Muslim, but an acknowledgement of the vicissitudes of time, with particular reference to the religious failings on both sides.

As noted earlier, both the *Dublin Examiner* and the *Christian Observer* felt that there was a possibility that Childe Harold might convert to Islam. This was a result of his praise for the virtues which he saw in Islam, a praise which appeared treacherous within the zero-sum game of religious competition, wherein any advantage to one side is a disadvantage to the other. The passage which the *Christian Observer* noted as the basis of its idea of Childe Harold’s preference is as follows:

The Mussulmans, whose erroneous devotion (at least in the lower orders) is most sincere, and therefore impressive, are accustomed to repeat their prescribed orisons and prayers where-ever they may be at the stated hours[.] (McGann 3.311:853).

The poem’s enthusiastic validation of their sincerity is subsequently contrasted with various Christian and the Jewish practices which Byron had witnessed. This contrast was enough to disturb the contemporary reviewers, although the Muslims’ sincerity is still to a devotion which is “erroneous”, in some unspecified fashion. The attribution of the parenthetical adverbial prepositional phrase is unclear: the devotion might be wrong not because it is Islamic belief, but because it is folk belief rather than orthodox Islam. The note goes on to describe African “idolaters” engaged in “Pagan” rites which are “not very agreeable”. This discrimination demonstrates definite limits to the poet’s pluralism, as do other parts of the poem. For example, “the usurping Moslem” (4.153.1377) prays in Hagia Sophia, a Christian church changed into a mosque by the Muslim Turks who conquered Constantinople, whereas the Roman temples converted to Christian churches are not described as having been ‘usurped’. “Spain’s dark-glancing daughters” are equated with “your wise Prophet’s paradise” and “His black-eyed maids of Heaven” (1.59.609, 10, 11). The image is colourful,

but, from a Muslim perspective, blasphemous, and thus the pluralism extends to tolerance but not to validation of Islamic views. The bias of the poem in these passages is slightly in favour of Christianity.

Nonetheless, the poet evidently has a very inclusive religious position, considering his earlier description of the Parthenon as “thrice sacred to devotion”, allowing pre-Christian Hellenistic belief, Christianity, and Islam all to sanctify a site. Similarly, speaking of the Pantheon, he calls it

Simple, erect, severe, austere, sublime –  
Shrine of all saints and temple of all gods,  
From Jove to Jesus  
[...]

sanctuary and home

Of art and piety – Pantheon! – pride of Rome! (4.146.1306-8, 1313-4).

Since Jesus is not a saint, and especially because of the collocation with Jove, this directly implies that Jesus is divine, and thus is the Incarnation. This is the most orthodox of all Christian tenets. That he is associated with Jove, a god commonly regarded as only a myth, might potentially raise doubt about his historicity, but a god does not need to be real to be a god, a focus of belief. What matters is the noumenal, not the ontic. For a religious pluralist, being the “temple of all gods” is reason to make it the “home /Of [...] piety”. For an exclusivist, this is not the case, because ‘true’ piety only belongs to the ‘true’ faith. It is also worth noting that this pluralist shrine is one of the few things which has escaped the forces of corruption, so vividly powerful in CHP: “Time’s scythe and tyrants’ rods /Shiver upon thee” (4.146.1312-3).

The poem’s pluralism naturally prompts a call for tolerance. The ‘Additional Note, on the Turks’ at the end of Canto II compares the Turkish treatment of the Greeks, which is expected to engage the sympathy of an English audience, with the English treatment of the Catholics:

The Greeks also – a kind of Eastern Irish papists – have a college of their own at Maynooth – no, at Haivali; where the heterodox receive much the same kind of countenance from the Ottoman as the Catholic college from the English legislature. Who shall then affirm that the Turks are ignorant bigots, when they thus evince the exact proportion of Christian charity which is tolerated in the most prosperous and orthodox of all possible kingdoms? [...] And shall we then emancipate our Irish Helots? Mahomet forbid! We should then be bad Mussulmans, and worse Christians; at present we unite the best of both – jesuitical faith, and something not much inferior to Turkish toleration. (McGann 2.211).

The basis of the poet's criticism here is the failure of "Christian charity". This is pointed both because it is presented in contrast and in competition with Islam, and because it is that fundamental requirement of Christianity. The English are called to love their neighbours.

In a similar vein, there was originally a note to "Poor child of Doubt and Death, whose hope is built on reeds" (2.3.23-7), but, according to George Ellis, it was "withdrawn, "from a fear," says the poet, "that it might be considered rather as an attack, than a defence of religion"". <sup>105</sup> It was preserved in Richard Charles Dallas' *Recollections* (q.v. McGann 2.283:27). That the poet wished to present such a note as "a defence of religion" suggests that religion is defensible and worthy of defence. The note is a passionate advocacy of Christian tolerance, and is couched in decidedly religious language throughout:

In this age of bigotry, when the puritan and priest have changed places, and the wretched catholic is visited with the 'sins of his fathers,' even unto generations far beyond the pale of the commandment, the cast of opinion in these stanzas will, doubtless, meet with many a contemptuous anathema. But let it be remembered, that the spirit they breathe is desponding, not sneering, scepticism; that he who has seen the Greek and Moslem superstitions

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<sup>105</sup> Galignani Edition, p.99.

contending for mastery over the former shrines of Polytheism, – who has left in his own country ‘Pharisees, thanking God that they are not like publicans and sinners’, and Spaniards in theirs, abhorring the heretics, who have holpen them in their need, – will be not a little bewildered, and begin to think, that as only one of them can be right, they may most of them be wrong. With regard to morals, and the effect of religion on mankind, it appears, from all historical testimony, to have had less effect in making them love their neighbours, than inducing that cordial christian abhorrence between sectaries and schismatics. The Turks and Quakers are the most tolerant: if an Infidel pays his heratch to the former, he may pray how, when, and where he pleases; and the mild tenets, and devout demeanour of the latter, make their lives the truest commentary on the Sermon of the Mount. (McGann 2.283.27).

Religious figures, religious activities, and Bible references abound,<sup>106</sup> setting the note firmly within a framework of religious discourse and highlighting the religious aspects of the bigotry in question. By such highlighting, and especially by the reference to the love of neighbours, the passage juxtaposes the behaviour of Christians with fundamental Christian values. Byron’s note, then, adopts orthodoxy to attack heteropraxy.

Catholicism was certainly not the only form of religion which attracted the poet’s favour, and perhaps the clearest validation of Right Religion in CHP is the description of the state of religion in Albania, where the poet says that Christianity is scorned, but pure:

Here the red cross, for still the cross is here,  
Though sadly scoff’d at by the circumcised,  
Forgets that pride to pamper’d priesthood dear;  
Churchman and votary alike despised.  
Foul superstition! howsoe’er disguised,

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<sup>106</sup> The reference to ‘sins of his fathers’ is from Exodus 20:5; the Pharisee thanking God is in Luke 18:11; loving their neighbours is from Luke 10:27, which is located explicitly with reference to ethno-religious toleration in the parable of the Good Samaritan, 10:30-37.

Idol, saint, virgin, prophet, crescent, cross,  
For whatsoever symbol thou art prized,  
Thou sacerdotal gain, but general loss!  
Who from true worship's gold can separate thy dross? (2.44.388-96).

The Orthodox Christianity under Muslim rule does share, with Catholicism in Britain and in British-ruled Ireland, the role of an oppressed faith, but this stanza says much more as well. The contrast with the bloody red cross of the Reconquista in 1.35.394 is vivid, the earlier passage being immediately associated with warfare and violence, whereas the later is associated with the oppression of Christians by the circumcised, ruling Muslims. Significantly, the pathos is not attached simply to Christianity as contrasted with Islam, but Christian believers as opposed to Christian hypocrites. The poet asserts the existence of a “true worship”, like the “true devotion” of 1.67.682 and valued as “gold” here. This “true worship” is contrasted with the self-interest of the priests, the “Foul superstition” and “sacerdotal gain” which represent a cost to humanity in general. The two different motivations to religion are differently valued, and the apparent distinction between the two forms is the alliteratively-emphasized pride, which is repeatedly condemned in the Bible.<sup>107</sup> Once more, the value adopted is a religious one.

As an example of such priestly pride, in the ‘Papers referred to by Note’ at the end of the first two cantos, appears this story from Byron’s travels:

We found at Livadia, an ‘esprit fort’ in a Greek bishop, of all freethinkers!  
This worthy hypocrite rallied his own religion with great intrepidity (but not  
before his flock), and talked of mass as a ‘Coglioneria’ [a taboo slang epithet].  
It was impossible to think better of him for this (McGann 2.199).

Far from finding a sympathetic ear, the freethinking bishop is condemned as a hypocrite. This was part of the poet’s own experience of irreverent clergy, and it adds

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<sup>107</sup> Q.v. especially in the widely-misquoted “Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall” (Proverbs 16:18).



the note of real-life experience, and real-life feeling, to the poem's position on such anti-religiousness.

The criticisms of religion in CHP are consistently attacks upon heteropraxy, not upon orthodoxy, and many of them employ orthodox values in their judgements against heteropraxy. This is essentially orthodox behaviour, although some of the expressions of value within such criticisms are not entirely orthodox. What is clear throughout the poem is a valuation and validation of religion, and of religious belief, alongside a condemnation of hypocrisy.

## **Faith**

Some of the comments upon religion are more singularly positive, and present a discourse of belief. While this belief is not wholly orthodox, it does show religious aspects.

There is a passage which challenges the idea of an afterlife, in the poet's contemplation of Sappho:

Could she not live who life eternal gave?  
If life eternal may await the lyre,  
That only Heaven to which Earth's children may aspire (2.39.349-51).

This survival only through art presents the claim that no afterlife exists, at least for "Earth's children", whereas other passages in the same canto allow at least the possibility of post-mortem life. This ambiguity raises the question of precisely who the children are, given that the Bible ascribes eternal life only to Christians, and often describes them as God's children, not Earth's.

Another passage which appeared frequently in contemporary criticism as an "attack upon the immortality of the soul" was the fourth stanza of the same canto, in which the poet asks,

Is't not enough, unhappy thing! to know  
Thou art? Is this a boon so kindly given,  
That being, thou wouldst be again, and go,  
Thou know'st not, reck'st not to what region, so  
On earth no more, but mingled with the skies? (2.4.29-33).

Rather than asserting anything at all about a future state, this questions the response to the sufferings of the current life. At most, it rejects the idea of an *effective* beneficent Providence, or a God who is both omnipotent and benevolent, a matter which Byron dealt with in more detail in such later works as *Cain* and *Heaven and Earth*. Its position is essentially agnostic. Later, the poet represents the possibility of post-mortem existence as a positive value:

Yet if, as holiest men have deem'd, there be  
A land of souls beyond that sable shore  
To shame the doctrine of the Sadducee  
And sophists, madly vain of dubious lore.  
How sweet it were in concert to adore  
With those who made our mortal labours light! (2.8.64-9).

Although this idea is presented as speculation, and that ambivalent presentation drew the wrath of the contemporary critics who did not want resurrection questioned, the speculation nevertheless avoids any rejection of the doctrine. This is not Voltaire. Further, the association of the idea of an afterlife with “holiest men”, and its contrast with those deluded by “dubious lore”, places it in a positive and religious context. The case against the afterlife is clouded by the statement that the unbelieving sophists are believers in unreliable ideas. An earlier variant of the same stanza demonstrates some interesting alterations:

Frown not upon me, churlish Priest! that I  
Look not for life, where life may never be;  
I am no sneerer at thy phantasy;  
Thou pitiest me, – alas! I envy thee,

Thou bold discoverer in an unknown sea,  
Of happy isles and happier tenants there;  
I ask thee not to prove a Sadducee;  
Still dream of Paradise, thou know'st not where,  
But lovest too well to bid thine erring brother share. (McGann 2.46:64-72).

The “churlish Priest” has been replaced by the “holiest men” as the believers in the afterlife, strengthening the positive connotations of that position, while the Sadducee remains, as does the negative valuation of that viewpoint. While Joseph describes this draught as expressing “a Lucretian contempt for the idea of an after-life”,<sup>108</sup> that reading is somewhat at odds with the appeal against disbelief in line 70. The stanza describes the priest’s concept of an afterlife as a “phantasy”, but also speaks of “envy” of that very fantasy, demonstrating not contempt of such an idea but desire for it. The modal “may” in line 65 could as easily be speculative as dynamic, referring only to the possibility that no afterlife will occur.<sup>109</sup> In both versions of this stanza, the idea of an afterlife is represented in positive terms, even though it is far from certain: this uncertainty is decidedly unorthodox, from a dogmatic perspective, but also decidedly not secularist. The final line is a criticism of hypocrisy, and, yet again, of a lack of love for one’s neighbour.

### **The Deity**

The validation of belief is stronger with respect towards the deity. Gleckner describes the narrator of CHP as having an “orthodox Christian bias”, a bias which Gleckner’s own position configures as “provincial”.<sup>110</sup> A bias at least towards theism is evident. In addition to general comments on religious belief and practice, there are singularly monotheistic statements in CHP, ranging from the reference by Harold’s page to having no friend apart from his parents, and Harold, and “one above” (1.13.4.149), to explicit statements by the narrator, such as the apostrophe to God in appeal for justice to 2.45.404, and the address at the beginning of the description of Portugal: “Oh,

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<sup>108</sup> Joseph, p.15; see also p.26.

<sup>109</sup> This is coherent with the idea of conditional immortality, explored in more detail with respect to the Eastern Tales.

<sup>110</sup> Gleckner, p.59.

Christ! it is a goodly sight to see /What heaven hath done for this delicious land!” (1.15.207-8). Many of these statements are more explicitly monotheistic, and potentially Deist, than specifically Christian, however, such as the statement that “man with his God must strive” (4.33.297), or the reference to “the Power that man adores” (1.53.553), or the description of the narrator’s religious feeling in the stillness of night:

All is concentered in a life intense,  
Where not a beam, nor air, nor leaf is lost,  
But hath a part of being, and a sense  
Of that which is of all Creator and defence[.] (3.89.838-41).

Although this Creator is not named, and although it might, then, be identified with Nature, that would merely represent the apotheosis of Nature: it is still a *singular* entity which creates and defends everything, and so this is still monotheism, or at least the decided preference of one god over others (henotheism). Shortly thereafter, the poem refers to “The Spirit, in whose honour shrines are weak” (3.91.855), recalling the assertion that “the most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands” (Acts 7:48), and bids the reader

Come, and compare  
Columns and idol-dwellings, Goth or Greek,  
With Nature’s realms of worship, earth and air,  
Nor fix on fond abodes to circumscribe thy prayer! (3.91.856-9).

The reference to “The Spirit” is not non-Christian, since “God is a Spirit”,<sup>111</sup> but the forbiddance of a reliance upon “fond abodes” is a direct challenge to church-worship, and the regularity of institutional religion. Nonetheless, “Nature’s realms of worship” here are not identified as places for the worship *of* Nature, but places of worship *in* Nature, and thus Byron’s note on the passage discusses open-air preaching, explicitly connecting it with Jesus:

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<sup>111</sup> John 4:24.

It is to be recollected, that the most beautiful and impressive doctrines of the Founder of Christianity were delivered, not in the *Temple*, but on the *Mount*. (McGann 2.310: 853).

The poem is directing its audience away from the Church, but not away from Christianity; it separates faith in the ideals from adherence to the forms of the religion, and validates only the former. Later, the poet returns to the idea of an individual Creator, saying, “let me quit man’s works, again to read /His Maker’s, spread around me” (3.109.1013-4). There is a Maker, and Nature is part of the creation.

This is not to say that the representation of Nature is simple: there are the “wonder-works of God and Nature’s hand” (3.10.90); “Maternal Nature” produces “a work divine” (3.46.408, 410); as an agent, “Nature can decree” (4.26.229), and so “Nature’s heavenly hand” moulded Italy (4.25.223). The division between God and Nature is not absolute in the poem. However, given a monistic or panentheistic perspective, in which everything is a derivation of the One, this would not be at all surprising, since Nature is then a manifestation of God. The discourse of the poem is theistic.

The God of CHP is decidedly benevolent and forgiving. Speaking about Rousseau and Gibbon, the poet says that

their steep aim  
Was, Titan-like, on daring doubts to pile  
Thoughts which should call down thunder, and the flame  
Of Heaven, again assail’d, if Heaven the while  
On man and man’s research could deign do more than smile. (3.105.981-5).

Thus, Heaven, a metonym for God, is first represented as being “assail’d” by the “daring doubts” of mortals, this assault being likened to the war between the Titans and the Greek Gods. In this war, Zeus dealt with the assault by employing the

“thunder, and flame” of the thunderbolts made for him by the Cyclopes.<sup>112</sup> Here, however, Heaven only smiles on man’s efforts. This is not the wrathful Zeus of Classicism, nor the wrathful God of some versions of Christianity, but is rather closer to the merciful God represented within one of the discourses of the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures. This is a positive, idealised theism, and its image of a smiling God also calls into question Romantic Prometheanism, the idea of humans having to fight against the gods in order to live.<sup>113</sup> Commenting further on Gibbon, the poet represents humans as being considerably less forgiving than the Deity:

The lord of irony, – that master-spell,  
Which stung his foes to wrath, which grew from fear,  
And doom’d him to the zealot’s ready Hell,  
Which answers to all doubts eloquently well. (3.107.1000-3).

As, elsewhere, the desired orthopraxy is an ideal of which human heteropraxy falls short, so here God’s character is an ideal of which human character falls short. This is further underlined by the subsequent blessing for the dead writers:

Yet, peace be with their ashes, – for by them,  
If merited, the penalty is paid;  
It is not ours to judge, – far less condemn;  
The hour must come when such things shall be made –  
Known unto all, – or hope and dread allay’d  
By slumber, on one pillow, – in the dust,  
Which, thus much we are sure, must lie decay’d;  
And when it shall revive, as is our trust,  
’Twill be to be forgiven, or suffer what is just. (3.108.1004-1012).

This still presents ‘sceptical doubt’, but, again, only in the sense that it does not unquestioningly accept dogmatic orthodoxy. While “such things” may or may not be

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<sup>112</sup> Q.v. “βροντον και αστραπην και κεραυνον”, ‘thunder and lightning and thunderbolt’, Apollodorus, *The Library*, trans. by J G Frazer (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001), 1.2.1.

<sup>113</sup> Q.v. Bloom, pp.239-42.

made known, because unending “slumber [...] in the dust” is presented as a possibility, and thus the monologic of dogmatic orthodoxy is rejected, the orthodox afterlife is granted as another possibility, in that “it shall revive, as is our trust”. This last, in particular, is an expression of faith, of trust in an unknowable hope, and, notably, the only options considered for the afterlife are forgiveness or at least justice: there is no contemplation of a vengeful or vicious god, only of the idealised figure of mercy or righteousness. The target of the poem’s scepticism is not Christianity’s metaphysical ontology, which is allowed as a possibility, but only dogmatism’s unreflective epistemology, which is rejected.

### **Imagining**

In the Pilgrimage, certainty has been dismissed. Considering that ““All that we know is, nothing can be known”” (2.7.56), an idea which recurs in DJ 7.5.33-4, the individual has a choice as to whether or not to believe in an afterlife. This is both the point of rejection of dogmatic epistemology, and the point of possible acceptance of an unorthodox belief. For the poet of CHP, the idea of post-mortem happiness for oneself and for others proves encouraging, and so he proclaims, “I will dream that we may meet again [...] /For me ’twere enough to know thy spirit blest!” (2.9.77, 81). The poet chooses to believe, and opts for the ideal.

In comments upon CHP, it is commonly noted that the poet speaks sceptically of love and religion in Canto IV. He says,

Oh, Love! no inhabitant of earth thou art –  
An unseen seraph, we believe in thee,  
A faith whose martyrs are the broken heart,  
But never yet hath seen, nor e’er shall see  
The naked eye, thy form, as it should be;  
The mind hath made thee, as it peopled heaven,  
Even with its own desiring phantasy  
And to a thought such shape and image given,

As haunts the unquench'd soul – parch'd – wearied – wrung – and riven.  
(4.121.1081-9).

While it is simply true that this represents religion, the vehicle for the metaphor about love, as an imaginative construction, that is not all that it does. First, it should be noted that “we believe in” Love, despite the fact that it remains unseen, a fact reinforced by the tautology in which the same idea is presented thrice in three lines (1082-4). Second, this belief in spite of a lack of evidence is also carried out in spite of the long list of sufferings in the final line. All of this bespeaks a very strong motivation to believe. As Joseph points out, the poet earlier describes Clarens, in a note to 3.99, as having “a sense of the existence of love in its most extended and sublime capacity” (McGann 2.312), and Rousseau’s love embodied in Julie as being “not the love of living dame [...] /But of ideal beauty” (3.78.738, 40).<sup>114</sup> This is Love as a Platonic Ideal, the archetype of all manifestations of love. Rousseau’s characters are “the mind’s purified beings” (3.104.971), made pure in the realm of pure thought. Given such an Idealist construction of Love, it is worthwhile considering that an imaginative creation is only ‘false’ from a pragmatic or realist perspective, not from an Idealist one. If the true world is the noumenal, the world inside a person’s head, then imagination can shape life itself, for good or ill:

Of its own beauty is the mind diseased,  
And fevers into false creation: – where,  
Where are the forms the sculptor’s soul hath seized?  
In him alone. Can Nature shew so fair?  
Where are the charms and virtues which we dare  
Conceive in boyhood and pursue as men,  
The unreach’d Paradise of our despair,  
Which o’er-informs the pencil and the pen,  
And overpowers the page where it would bloom again?  
[...]  
Nor worth nor beauty dwells from out the mind’s

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<sup>114</sup> Joseph, pp.77-8.



Ideal shape of such; yet still it binds

The fatal spell, and still it draws us on[.] (4.122.1090-8, 123.1102-3).

The Ideal, the purified form, exists only in the mind. The creation, the entelechy of the Ideal within the non-ideal universe, is false, and flawed, doomed to be ever unreached while nonetheless sought (1095). The inaccessibility of the Ideal does not devalue it, and this despair, which continues for several stanzas, wheels abruptly into determination:

Yet let us ponder boldly – 'tis a base

Abandonment of reason to resign

Our right of thought – our last and only place

Of refuge; this, at least, shall still be mine[.] (4.127.1135-9).

The poet does not, as McGann claims, 'apotheosize the mind',<sup>115</sup> especially not as a substitute for theism. There remains, in the poem, a God outside of the poet, whom the poet can address. An antireligious reading might claim this as an antireligious position because of its rationalistic focus, and yet rationalism was part of contemporary religion. Further, there is no mention of the mind being diseased by religion here at all, despite the obvious fact that religion, being primarily a noumenal event, potentially belongs also to this process. So, the mind is diseased of its own beauty, and its creations, and yet thought is "our last and only place /Of refuge", and the poet determinedly asserts that it shall be his. This attitude was deemed entirely proper by a number of Christian philosophers; thus also Immanuel Kant, in considering the relationship of reason to religion, writes,

She [Reason] even holds that, if in the inscrutable realm of the supernatural there is something more than she can explain to herself, which may yet be necessary as a complement to her moral insufficiency, this will be, even though unknown, available to her good will. Reason believes this with a faith which (with respect to the possibility of this supernatural complement) might

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<sup>115</sup> McGann, *Fiery Dust*, p.126.

be called *reflective*; for *dogmatic* faith, which proclaims itself as a form of *knowledge*, appears to her dishonest or presumptuous[.]<sup>116</sup>

While it is unlikely that Byron ever read Kant himself, Kant's ideas did reach Regency England,<sup>117</sup> and CHP constantly presents this rejection of the dishonesty or presumptuousness of dogmatism. At the same time, the poem develops a version of this reflective faith, particularly in the creative power of the imagination: "the forms the sculptor's soul hath seized" are "In him alone" (4.122.1092, 93), and yet, speaking of the Apollo Belvedere, the poet says,

in his eye  
And nostril beautiful disdain, and might,  
And majesty, flash their full lightnings by,  
Developing in that one glance the Deity. (4.161.1446-9).

If the form of statue develops the Deity, it does so not in the sculptor, but in the observer. Likewise, in speaking earlier of the Venus de Medici, he says,

We can recal such visions, and create  
From what has been, or might be, things which grow,  
Into thy statue's form, and look like gods below. (4.52.466-8).

This creation within the mind is not the "false creation" of the sculptor: it is constructive rather than destructive. The poet represents the mind as potentially enslaved to its own creations, but also potentially liberated by the same, being inspired by art, or by architecture (as at St. Peter's), or by its conceptions of Nature. As "we thus dilate /Our spirits to the size of that they contemplate" in St Peter's (4.158.1421-2), so also "we become a part of what has been, /And grow unto the spot, all-seeing but unseen" in the Coliseum (4.138.1241-2). The failure of creation is in

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<sup>116</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*, trans. by Theodore M Greene and Hoyt H Hudson (New York: Harper & Row, 1960), p.48.

<sup>117</sup> Q.v. G N G Orsini, *Coleridge and German Idealism* (Carbondale and Edmondsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1969), especially pp.47-9 on Coleridge's study of Kant throughout the first two decades of the nineteenth century.

the entelechy, not in the Ideal. By imagining the Ideal, the mind can escape into it, transcending the merely real, in the process which Bloom describes as “a therapeutic aesthetic idealism”.<sup>118</sup>

The mind is sometimes capable of likewise rescuing what could have been the victims of all-destroying Time. Troy and Venice “are names no time nor tyranny can blight” (4.14.126), and, asserts the poet,

I can repeople with the past – and of  
The present there is still for eye and thought,  
And meditation chasten’d down, enough;  
And more, it may be, than I hoped or sought;  
And of the happiest moments which were wrought  
Within the web of my existence, some  
From thee, fair Venice! have their colours caught:  
There are some feelings Time can not benumb,  
Nor Torture shake, or mine would now be cold and dumb. (4.19.163-71).

Time is not all-powerful, nor is everything corrupted. The next stanza is the description of the tannen tree, growing on the “loftiest and least shelter’d rocks [...] a giant tree; – the mind may grow the same” (4.20.173, 80). Even in the bleakest places, hope remains, and hope not only of survival, but of prospering and flourishing.

Clearly, then, for the poet, the mind *can* be diseased of its own images, but it does not need to be so. In fact, this is the same poet who writes,

The beings of the mind are not of clay;  
Essentially immortal, they create  
And multiply in us a brighter ray  
And more beloved existence; that which Fate  
Prohibits to dull life, in this our state

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<sup>118</sup> Bloom, *Visionary Company*, p.240.

Of mortal bondage, by these spirits supplied  
First exiles, then replaces what we hate;  
Watering the heart whose early flowers have died,  
And with fresher growth replenishing the void. (4.5.37-45).

The attitude towards religion, then, is complex. The poet roundly condemns hypocrisy, bigotry, and dogmatism. However, he also praises devotion, speaks repeatedly of the divine, addresses God directly, and condemns disrespect of religion. He describes the world as corrupted, and acknowledges that this corruption can certainly be found within the mind, and thus within its conceptions. Nevertheless, he presents the mind as capable of improving its own existence, peopling its own world, and preserving pure Ideals. Thus, when he describes religious ideas as existing in the mind, he is identifying the very simple fact that metaphysical ontology cannot be demonstrated, and so a choice remains regarding whether or not to believe.

## Conclusion

Finally, it is appropriate to move to the end of the Pilgrimage, for the poet's own resolution. As noted earlier, Harold disappeared in stanza 164; he reappears as the poet comes to the ocean, and Harold with him:

But I forget. – My pilgrim's shrine is won,  
And he and I must part, – so let it be, –  
His task and mine are nearly done;  
Yet once more let us look on the sea;  
The midland ocean breaks on him and me (4.175.1567-71).

This is “the scene /Which is his last” (4.186.1668-9). The point at which the poet says that the pilgrim's shrine is won is not at St. Peter's (4.153), or at the Vatican (4.160), or at Nemi (4.173), but at the ocean.<sup>119</sup> At that last location only is the shrine won,

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<sup>119</sup> As noted by Marchand (p.59). Bernard Blackstone (*Byron: A Survey*, London: Longman, 1975) comments that “Byron returns” to the Ocean “after all the deserts and caves, physical and spiritual” (p.80), but he also claims that “logically, the whole poem should have come to an end” at St Peter's (p.223). Also, as Yaşar Nuri Öztürk notes, “For sufis the sea has long been a symbol of God” (*The Eye*

and the final task for the pair is to look upon the sea. The reason for this lies in the beginning of the pilgrimage, and its motivation: Harold sets out dissatisfied, his joys corrupted by Time. As he travels, he sees many things which people value, but all are corrupted, or, at best, corruptible. In the end, he finds the ocean, and the ocean is incorruptible, despite the concerted efforts of humanity, and even of all-destroying Time:

Man marks the earth with ruin – his control  
Stops with the shore; – upon the watery plain  
The wrecks are all thy deed, nor doth remain  
A shadow of man’s ravage  
[...]  
His steps are not upon thy paths, – thy fields  
Are not a spoil for him, – thou dost arise  
And shake him from thee; the vile strength he wields  
For earth’s destruction thou dost all despise,  
And send’st him, shivering in thy playful spray  
And howling, to his Gods  
[...]  
Time writes no wrinkle on thine azure brow –  
Such as creation’s dawn beheld, thou rollest now. (4.179.1605-8, 180.1612-7,  
182.1637-8).

The poet has, at last, something utterly pure, and permanently so, something which can withstand all ravages of human society and of time. As Bernard Blackstone notes, even in Byron’s day, it was not accurate to claim that “The wrecks are all thy deed” (4.179.1607), since war sank so many ships.<sup>120</sup> This is not simply a naturalistic portrayal of the ocean, however, but an idealisation of the ocean as *Οκεανος*, the water which contains the world. This pure entity CHP then describes in singularly religious terms:

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*of the Heart: an introduction to Sufism and the Tariqats of Anatolia and the Balkans*, trans. by Rickard Blakney (Istanbul: Redhouse Press, 1988), p.23. Turkish Sufism may well have had some influence upon Byron, as discussed further in relation to the Eastern Tales.

<sup>120</sup> Blackstone also rightly comments that the ocean is no longer proof against human pollution (p.225).

Thou glorious mirror, where the Almighty's form  
Glasses itself in tempests; in all time,  
Calm or convuls'd – in breeze, or gale, or storm,  
Icing the pole, or in the torrid clime  
Dark-heaving; – boundless, endless, and sublime –  
The image of Eternity – the throne  
Of the Invisible (183.1639-1645).

The end of the pilgrimage is the focus of religious belief. However, instead of being something built by human hands, or constructed around human bones, i.e., something which exists in a form determined by other people, the ocean is something which resists all human control. It is the ultimate image of freedom, and therefore the ideal focus for the reinvention of belief. Further, its ontic stability apparently provides a secure basis onto which to build the idealisation of the ocean as “The image of Eternity – the throne /Of the Invisible”. The appearance of physical permanence lends itself to the conception of eternity; the phenomenal aspect supports the noumenal.

The course of Harold's pilgrimage proceeds through the acknowledgement of the lack of sure proof to traditional values, including traditional religion. Nonetheless, the end of the pilgrimage is the choice of hope instead of despair. This is not to say that the speaker of CHP believes that there is a God, or that he believes in an afterlife, but rather that he wants to, and he chooses to imagine that they exist, over the top of his ever-present but never-dominant doubts. The belief is tentative, but present nonetheless.

The reception history of CHP presents an interesting challenge, in that consideration of the religious attitudes of the contemporary reviewers is both valuable and potentially misleading. Politics played such a significant part in the reading of the text that the words of contemporary reviewers cannot be taken as simply representative of the time, a fact amply demonstrated by the disagreements over the morality of the text, as by the weakness of the frequently-hostile readings. What is

most significant, however, is the fact that Byron was engaged with the ideologies of the time, and that he does play the role of Moral Teacher which the critics demanded, although not quite in the way that many of them wanted. Some more recent criticism has slighted all of this, and read too quickly and too simply the subtleties and variations not only within Byron's own presentation of religious matters in *CHP* but also within the contemporary critics' presentation of such matters.

In *CHP*, religion is a victim of corruption. As such, it is criticised not merely for its existence, but for its failure to be what it should, an idea which establishes a distinct valuation of religion in its idealised form. The questioning of religion is primarily a questioning of practice rather than of the purely noumenal aspects of belief, the metaphysical propositions. Most importantly, the value-system under which this questioning is performed is entirely coherent with orthodox Christianity. Even the pluralism, which opposes dogmatic Christian exclusivism, does so on a philanthropic basis found within Christianity itself.

The thought of *CHP* never disentangles itself from Christian ideas, and the conception of an afterlife is presented as unknown, yet desirable, while a similarly-vague Deity is asserted and appealed to as a figure of virtue and value. Belief is the choice implicitly made throughout *CHP*, an implicit choice is made to believe, albeit not to believe in a simply traditional, dogmatic way. The religious position which the text consistently presents is an idealistic theism, with God functioning as an Ideal, a pure archetype unsullied by the world. Connected with this archetypal being is archetypal behaviour, the poet's conception of orthopraxy against which the failures of human religious misbehaviour are measured. The belief position is certainly theistic, plausibly Deist, but most likely Christian, given the assertion of the divinity of Jesus. It is not orthodox, and yet orthodoxy is a measure of its conformity with official belief, not of its sincerity.

The adoption of orthodox values being coupled with unorthodox ideas, and particularly unorthodox uncertainties, suggests not a resistance to religion, but a resistance to the monologic of orthodoxy, and to imposed dogmata. As the mind is the home of imagination, reinvention, and the pure Ideals which escape the corruption

of the world, it is the home of faith. The religion of CHP is an essentially Romantic one: an idealised image of faith, and of God, existing as a pure value which, while an acknowledged product of the mind, is no less capable of providing escape from and even transcendence of the decaying world. This religion is not fully articulated, and yet it is consistent throughout the four cantos, and is further reflected in Byron's other poems.



## Don Juan: the Virgin Ideal

Owing largely to the perceived impropriety of the poem, *Don Juan* had a rather complex publication history. John Murray published the first two cantos in 1819, but without the Dedication, which did not appear until 1832, or the Preface, which did not appear until 1901, and with numerous omissions from the cantos themselves. Cantos III, IV, and V were published by Murray in 1821. John Hunt published most of the rest: VI to XIV in three instalments in 1823, XV and XVI in 1824. XVII, the unfinished canto, was not published until 1903, in E H Coleridge's Collected Works edition.<sup>121</sup>

The cause of the omissions, and of the change of publisher, was the potential for scandal in the work, and Murray's fears were somewhat justified by the contemporary reaction. If *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* was the work which made Byron famous, *Don Juan* did much to seal his infamy.

Like CHP, *Don Juan* discourses upon religion in a variety of contexts, but the religious aspects of the poem have generally been slighted by modern critics, albeit with more justification here. The general consensus is that the poem is a satire, and thus that it "ridicules [...] all the finer sensibilities and ideals",<sup>122</sup> necessarily including religion. In Marchand's words, Byron's "ridicule of cant, political, religious, sexual, and social, is the most persistent theme in *Don Juan*."<sup>123</sup> The ridicule is so persistent and so powerful that, as Ryan notes, along with *Cain*, *Don Juan* "to many readers offered conclusive evidence of Byron's infidelity and even atheism".<sup>124</sup> Marshall follows this same line, peculiarly claiming that *Don Juan* "is not satire, for it ultimately offers, in its description of the absurdities of the real, no suggestion of the ideal."<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> For these publishing details, see McGann 5.666, 715-6, 736-7, 762, 770.

<sup>122</sup> William J Calvert, *Byron: Romantic Paradox* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1962), p.187.

<sup>123</sup> Marchand, 'Byronic Attitudes', in *Rereading Byron*, ed. by Alice Levine and Robert N Keane (New York: Garland Publishing, 1993), 239-51: p.240.

<sup>124</sup> Ryan, p.123.

<sup>125</sup> Marshall, p.177. Satire often does not explicitly present the superior alternative, but its existence is necessarily implicit in the judgement which makes satire meaningful. In *Don Juan*, the ideal is present.

Religion itself does not play a major part in *Don Juan*, although it is a source of references and images for the poem. Joseph notes that “just as the variety of *Don Juan* comprehends Byron’s earlier romanticism better than ever before, [...] it comprehends without necessarily destroying Byron’s earlier religious attitudes.”<sup>126</sup> Religion’s most notable presence is in relation to its contraries, those here being agnosticism and philosophy. Where *Don Juan* differs most sharply from *CHP* is in the tone, the later poem being much more jocular, and yet this jocularitas serves both to entertain the reader and to provide a venue for the discussion of serious topics. A crucial component of this is the fundamentally rhetorical nature of the jocularitas, and the careful construction of the work as a whole.

## The Poem’s Reception

*Don Juan* caused considerable shock upon its first appearance, although not much more than the reactions to *CHP*, or to the *Byronic Hero*, and less than the subsequent reaction to *Cain*, against which legal action was threatened. The nature of the scandal was somewhat different in this case, however, as a primary component of the critical complaint was now directed at the claimed presence of ‘obscenity’ in the work.

Like many of his other works, this poem was described as “vice”, “debauchery”, “infidelity”, “libertinism”, “iniquity”, and “blasphemy”.<sup>127</sup> It was claimed to be an assault upon morality and upon religion.<sup>128</sup> The conjunction of these two elements is a central feature of the contemporary criticism of *Don Juan*: proper morality was widely seen as a product of correct religious opinion, and so the apparent immorality of the poem was often considered to be irreligious and antireligious.

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<sup>126</sup> Joseph, p.305.

<sup>127</sup> *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine*, V (August 1819), 512-18, RR, I, 143-49: p.512 (143); *British Critic*, second series, XII (August 1819), 195-205, RR, I, 296-301: p.197 (297); *Edinburgh Monthly Review*, II (October 1819), 468-86, RR, II, 791-801: p.482 (799); *Gentleman’s Magazine*, LXXXIX - ii (August 1819), 152, RR, III, 1119; *Investigator*, III (October 1821), 353-60, RR, III, 1166-70: p.353 (1166); *Miniature Magazine*, III (October 1819), 236-9, RR, IV, 1643-4: p.238 (1644).

<sup>128</sup> John Thelwall, *Champion*, July 25, 1819, pp. 472-3 and August 1, 1819, pp. 488-90, RR, II, 538-42: p.472 (538); *Literary Chronicle*, July 17, 1819, pp.129-30; July 24, 1819, pp.147-9, RR, III, 1280-4: p.149 (1284).

However, as with CHP, the contemporary response was not unanimous, and a modern assumption of the contemporary complaints as the whole of the poem's reception would be invalid. Some critics found the poem, and especially its later cantos, less objectionable.<sup>129</sup> Most notably, the *Monthly Review* censured Cantos XII to XIV only for "The sin of punning",<sup>130</sup> the very expression of which demonstrates the freedom that some employed with respect to religious discourse.

Thomas Campbell's articles in the *Monthly Magazine* are particularly interesting in their consideration of the poem's morality vis-à-vis that of the society which it satirizes, describing *Don Juan* as an honest representation of human nature. Further, Campbell compares the morality of Byron's work with that of Milton, Swift, and Thomas Blackmore.<sup>131</sup> In a later article, Campbell returns to the association of Byron with Milton:

The manner in which the Ithuriel touch of the noble author's satire lays bare the visage that hypocrisy had so gracefully covered, must incur the high displeasure of the many who have experienced the benefit of adopting that convenient mask[.]<sup>132</sup>

The reference to the cherub who unmasks the disguised Satan in the Garden of Eden (*Paradise Lost* 4.810-11) very clearly represents Byron as being on the side of the angels, not the devils with whom other critics had chosen to place him: the *Gentleman's Magazine*, for example, describes the poet "in his moving form, as an Archangel ruined".<sup>133</sup> Campbell's article further demonstrates a more liberal perspective on the moralising opposition to *Don Juan*:

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<sup>129</sup> Q.v. *Gentleman's Magazine*, XIII-ii (September 1823), 250-2, RR, III, 1142-4: p.250 (1142); *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, August 1819, p.512 (143); *Champion*, July 25, 1819, p.472 (538); *Edinburgh Monthly Review*, October 1819, p.470 (793); *New Bon Ton Magazine*, III (August 1819), 234-9, RR, V, 1842-4: p.238 (1844).

<sup>130</sup> *Monthly Review*, 2nd Series, CIII (February 1824), 212-5, RR, IV, 1831-2: p.213 (1831).

<sup>131</sup> *Monthly Magazine*, LII (September 1821), 124-9, RR, IV, 1680-5: pp.125-7 (1681-3); *Monthly Magazine*, LVI (December 1823), 414-7, RR, IV, 1709-12: pp.416-7 (1711-12).

<sup>132</sup> *Monthly Magazine*, LVI (September 1823), 112-5, RR, IV, 1705-8: p.115 (1708).

<sup>133</sup> *Gentleman's Magazine*, XCII-I (January 1822), 48-50, RR, III, 1128-30: p.48 (1128).

Its poetical merits have been extolled to the skies by its admirers, and the Priest and the Levite, though they have joined to anathematise it, have not, when they came in its way, “passed by on the other side.”<sup>134</sup>

Strikingly, John Gibson Lockhart’s article on Cantos IX to XI in *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine* acknowledges the cantos’ questioning of religion, and disagrees with it, but nonetheless validates its usefulness: “Who can deny, that that is valuable in a certain way which paints the prevailing sentiment of a large proportion of the people of any given age of the world?” Despite his disagreements with its metaphysical ontology, Lockhart defends *Don Juan*’s representative nature, acknowledging the prevalence of heterodoxy amongst “a large proportion of the people”. This acknowledgement is useful in the same way that William Roberts’ comments on CHP are useful: as demonstrations of the heterogeneity of the contemporary religious context, and thus the unrepresentative nature of the conservative religious views espoused by some. Going on to talk about *Don Juan*’s alleged obscenity, Lockhart compares it with the ‘obscenity’ of *Tom Jones* and ‘blasphemy’ of Voltaire, to declare,

it is not within fifty miles of either of them: and as to obscenity, there is more of that in the pious Richardson’s pious Pamela, than all the novels and poems that have been written since.<sup>135</sup>

This is the argument which Byron had been making about *Don Juan* and *Cain* since their inception. Interestingly, the reviewer uses “pious” as Byron does, including often within *Don Juan*, to mean ‘religious in appearance’, rather than ‘devoted in intention’, and thus the reviewer highlights hypocrisy and validates the poet’s attacks upon it. In the poem, the “pious reason /For making squares and streets anonymous” (13.26.201-2) is to conceal the identities of the perpetrators of scandalous acts, and, in regard to the slaughter at Ismail, the reader is alliteratively directed to “ponder what a pious pastime war is” (8.124.992). Steel and lead, for blades and bullets, are “The

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<sup>134</sup> *Monthly Magazine*, September 1823: pp.112, 113-14 (1705, 6-7). Identified as Campbell in Galignani Edition, p.778B.

<sup>135</sup> John Gibson Lockhart, *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine*, XIV (September 1823), 282-93, RR, I, 210-21: p.283 (211).

pious metals most in requisition /On such occasions” (8.81.644-6). As Lockhart’s usage of ‘pious’ is not an attack upon piety, but upon hypocrisy, so is Byron’s.

The *Literary Examiner* acquits the poet more firmly, dismissing the poem’s religious commentary as any basis for criticism: “What is the crime of Lord Byron with this crew – the boldness of his occasional scepticism? – Not a jot.” Instead, it finds the cause of other critics’ hostility in the very hypocrisy which the poem attacks, and claims that Byron’s contempt “is as it should be”.<sup>136</sup> In terms similar to those used by Lockhart, it declares the moral worth of the poem, referring to London as

a field altogether uncultivated by the Society for the Suppression of Vice, and therefore peculiarly demanding the attention of an inflexible and impartial moralist like the author of *Don Juan*. [...] people of quality swallow doses of Don Juan with more avidity than religious tracts, or even Mr Irving’s sermons.

The article goes on to describe the “inflexible and impartial” poet as uniquely gifted for this role.<sup>137</sup> In a later issue, the serial says that, in DJ 14.3-6, “the subject of Suicide is finally, and begging pardon of the exclusively pious, usefully illustrated, in regard to the moral and physical weakness which may lead to it”.<sup>138</sup> The later cantos in particular were coming to be seen as socially-valuable satire.

E H Coleridge lists further contemporary positive responses, including those from Scott, Goethe, and Shelley.<sup>139</sup> The last, writing to Byron on October 21, 1821, describes his own “wonder and delight” over Cantos III to V, opining that “Nothing has ever been written like it in English”, and describing Canto V in particular as “something wholly new and relative to the age, and yet surpassingly beautiful”.<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> *Literary Examiner*, July 5, 1823, 6-12; July 12, 1823, 23-7, RR, III, 1358-64: p.7 (1359), p.9 (1360), p.11 (1361).

<sup>137</sup> *Literary Examiner*, August 2, 1823, 65-8; August 9, 1823, 81-5; August 16, 1823, 105-10; August 23, 1823, 120-3, RR, III, 1370-9: pp.65 (1370), 105-6 (1375).

<sup>138</sup> *Literary Examiner*, November 8, 1823, 289-94; November 15, 1823, 305-9; November 22, 1823, 321-5; November 29, 1823, 337-41, RR, III, 1380-90: p. 337 (1388).

<sup>139</sup> E H Coleridge’s ‘Introduction’ to vol 6, p. xix.

<sup>140</sup> *The Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, 2 vols, ed. by Frederick L Jones (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966), II, 357.

## The Poet's Defence

Much of the scandal resulted from the stark difference between how Byron thought and how the conservative critics thought. More recently, M K Joseph has laid the blame for the scandal upon Byron's failure to grasp how English society had changed, as the poet lived within a sector of society which was "impervious to the moral changes which the Methodist and Evangelical movements had fostered in the rest of English society".<sup>141</sup> However, Joseph also cites John Gibson Lockhart's "opposite contemporary opinion" on Byron's ability to represent contemporary English society accurately.<sup>142</sup> As Joseph suggests, a transformation of public morals had indeed begun,<sup>143</sup> but, as Lockhart acknowledges, the old licentiousness was not gone. A significant factor in the contemporary critical reception of *Don Juan* was precisely this struggle between politicized moral positions, as a pre-Victorian moralism strove against a late-Georgian libertinism.

Such politics formed part of the context of the poem's reception, and also of its production. The first instalment of the poem was written with the explicit acknowledgement that some might not accept it as a moral work:

If, after all, there should be some so blind  
To their own good this warning to despise,  
Led by some tortuosity of mind,  
Not to believe my verse and their own eyes,  
And cry that they 'the moral cannot find,'  
I tell him, if a clergyman, he lies;  
Should captains the remark or critics make,  
They also lie too – under a mistake.

The public approbation I expect,  
And beg they'll take my word about the moral (1.208.1657-209.1666).

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<sup>141</sup> Joseph, p.284.

<sup>142</sup> Joseph, p.313n3, referring to *John Bull's Letter to Lord Byron*.

<sup>143</sup> E D H Johnson's 'Don Juan in England' (in *ELH* 11:2 (June 1944), 135-53), one of Joseph's sources, covers some of the progression of this ideological trend.

According to the speaker, only by mental illness and a denial of self-evident truth can the moral be overlooked, a position reminiscent of the claims made by conservative contemporary reviewers of CHP.

When announcing this poem to Moore (BLJ 6.67-8, 19/9/18), Byron describes it as being “meant to be a little quietly facetious upon everything”, albeit perhaps “too free for these very modest days.” Joseph’s claim notwithstanding, the poet shows some awareness that the cultural standards have changed since the time of Swift, and that discourse has become more constrained. *Don Juan* did indeed prove “too free”, and Byron was affected by the hostile response to the first two cantos, despite having correctly anticipated it. At first, the criticism appears to have given him pause: “I have finished the third canto, but the things I have read and heard discourage all further publication – at least for the present. The cry is up, and cant is up” (BLJ 6.256, 10/12/19). He also notes that “The outcry has not frightened but it has *hurt* me, and I have not written *con amore* this time” (BLJ 7.35, 7/2/20). He was not writing to scandalize.

Later, after the publication of Cantos III to V, he became more defiant, declaring, “I care nothing for outcry &c” (BLJ 10.121, to Kinnaird 10/3/23), having earlier represented the outcry as evidence of the failings of English society (BLJ 10.72, to Kinnaird 30/12/22). Byron then describes Murray’s note regarding possible subsequent cantos as “an evasion to get out of what you thought perhaps a bad business – either for fear of the Parsondom – or your Admiralty patrons – or your *Quarterlyers*” (BLJ 10.22, to Murray (b) 31/10/22, repeated in 10.27, to Kinnaird 2/11/22), the poet’s homophonic emphasis demonstrating his conception of the role which the reviews might play. Byron, however, refused to bow to ‘the cant’, and part of his motivation might be apparent in his comment to Thomas Moore, regarding the similar outcry against his *The Loves of the Angels*: “it is *you*, not the poem, they are at” (BLJ 10.105, to Moore 20/2/23). Byron had cause to believe that their campaign was motivated by personal hatreds, cause to doubt the sincerity of what they said about morality and religion. Thus, having seen Bishop Reginald Heber’s review of *Sardanapalus*, *The Two Foscari*, and *Cain*, which includes comments upon *Don Juan*, Byron comments,

what the Writer says of D[on] J[uan] is harsh – but it is inevitable – He must follow – or at least not directly oppose the opinion of the prevailing & yet not very firmly seated party [...] – D[on] Juan will be known by and bye for what it is intended a *satire* on *abuses* of the present *states* of Society – and not an eulogy of vice; – it may be now and then voluptuous – I can’t help that – Ariosto is worse – Smollett (see Lord Strutwell in vol 2d. of R[oderick] R[andom]) ten times worse – and Fielding no better. – – No Girl will ever be seduced by reading D[on] J[uan] – no – no – she will go to Little’s poems – & Rousseau’s romans – for that – or even to the immaculate De Stael – – they will encourage her – & not the Don – who laughs at that – and – and – most other things. (BLJ 10.68, to Murray 25/12/22).<sup>144</sup>

The idea that Heber’s comments are only the result of political constraint is quite possibly merely wishful, but the poet’s comment on the Don being understood “by and bye” is one which he had also applied shortly earlier to *The Vision of Judgement* (BLJ 10.59, to Kinnaird 16/12/22). In both cases, Byron demonstrates a faith in the vindication of history, a faith which underpins the discussion of poetic immortality in the Dedication to *Don Juan*.<sup>145</sup> With his own adoration of past poets, it is unsurprising that he should trust in time to prove the worth of his generation.

History is also his defence with the reference to previous writers’ works being ‘immoral’, as with Ariosto, Smollett, and Fielding, above. This was a common tactic: he applied it insistently to Cantos I and II of *Don Juan*, pointing to earlier authors and their freedoms, especially including Ariosto, Pope, Fielding, and Moore (BLJ 6.91, to Hobhouse and Kinnaird 19/01/19 (a); 6.95, to Murray 25/1/19; 6.95, to Hobhouse 25/1/19; 6.234, to Richard Belgrave Hoppner 28/10/19; 6.253, to Murray 4/12/19), and again four years later, in a letter to Kinnaird, citing Christopher Anstey’s *New*

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<sup>144</sup> The claim of *Don Juan* being a satirical revelation also appears in James Kennedy’s *Conversations*, where Byron is recorded as saying in 1823 that the intent of the work is to “To remove the cloak, which the manners and maxims of society throw over their secret sins, and shew them to the world as they really are.” (Kennedy, *Conversations on Religion, with Lord Byron and others* (Philadelphia: Carey & Lee, 1833), p.92).

<sup>145</sup> There he warns the Lakers that that “He that reserves his laurels for posterity [...] / Has generally no great crop to spare it” (Dedication 9.65, 67).



*Bath Guide*, Smollett's *Roderick Random* again, and Fielding's *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones* (BLJ 10.98, to Kinnaird 12/2/23). He used this tactic with all the consistency and vehemence of actual sincerity. The same claim also appears in the work itself:

I'm fond of yielding,  
And therefore leave them to the purer page  
Of Smollett, Prior, Ariosto, Fielding,  
Who say strange things for so correct an age[.] (4.98.777-80).

I say no more than hath been said in Dante's  
Verse, and by Solomon and by Cervantes;

By Swift, by Machiavel, by Rochefoucault,  
By Fenelon, by Luther, and by Plato;  
By Tillotson, and Wesley, and Rousseau[.] (7.3.23-4.27).

In a marginal note to the discussion of adultery in 1.172, Byron responds to Hobhouse's doubts over the propriety of the topic, by listing examples of works with a similar subject, including one of Hobhouse's own poems, a reworking of Chaucer by Pope, and also works by Matthew Prior and by Ariosto.

In the same marginal comment, he declares, "now *Lust* is a *serious* passion, and <ye> cannot be excited by the *ludicrous*."<sup>146</sup> The facetiousness of the poem is both one of its devices and one of its defences. A part of the speaker's claim is that his jocularitas is a necessary self-defence in the face of the trials of life:

if I laugh at any mortal thing,  
'Tis that I may not weep; and if I weep,  
'Tis that our nature cannot always bring  
Itself to apathy, for we must steep

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<sup>146</sup> McGann 5.679: n st.172.

Our hearts first in the depths of Lethe's spring,  
Ere what we least wish to behold will sleep:  
Thetis baptized her mortal son in Styx;  
A mortal mother would on Lethe fix. (4.4.25-32).

This appeal to sympathy is derived from a worldview so pessimistic that true knowledge becomes an obstacle to happiness. The forgetfulness induced by Lethe, then, is one solution, and laughing is another. This last idea recurs through the poem, which proclaims its unlimited derision:

I hope it is no crime  
To laugh at *all* things – for I wish to know  
*What, after all, are all things – but a Show?* (7.2.14-6).

Of course, a fundamental element of the process of laughing at all things is the stage of *judging* all things, so as to find them ridiculous. This makes the facetiousness itself a genuinely critical enterprise, universal in its scope. As an exercise of judgement, it is also the exercise of a value system, the basis of a moral system. Thus, the speaker is able to remark that “Laughter now-a-days is deemed too serious; /A jest at Vice by Virtue’s called a crime” (13.1.2-3). Via the obvious analogy between this generalised comment and the specific example of the attacks on the facetiousness of *Don Juan*, the speaker claims the position of Virtue. This is somewhat facetious, but not entirely. To Bryan Waller Procter, Byron reiterates what he had written earlier to Murray, “They mistake the object of “Don Juan”, which is nothing but a satire on affectations of all kinds, mixed with some relief of serious feeling and description” (10.116, 5/3/23). Satire is meaningful, not meaningless, ridicule. He tells Kinnaird, “I mean it for a poetical T[ristran] Shandy – or Montaigne’s Essays with a story for a hinge” (10.150, 14/4/23); both of these literary models are light-hearted in tone, but nonetheless earnestly inquiring into numerous modes of human life.

Encouragement might well have been provided by the knowledge, acquired via a clerk of the Parisian publisher Galignani, that people were reading it: “of all *my* works Juan is by far the most popular and sells best – especially with the women – who send by

hundreds sily – for copies” (10.145, to Kinnaird 7/4/23). The clerk’s tale is consistent with the *Literary Chronicle*’s description of the poem as “universally read, much admired, often abused”,<sup>147</sup> and with Campbell’s assertion that “scarcely any poem of the present day has been more generally read”.<sup>148</sup> As with many of Byron’s other productions, the very popularity of the calumniated work demonstrated that the critics’ proclaimed repugnance was not representative of the wider readership’s feelings.

None of this suggests that he was unaware of its deviation from moral propriety: in a letter to Augusta Leigh, he comments,

I have also had a love letter from *Pimlico* from a lady whom I never saw in my life – but who hath fallen in love with me for having written *Don Juan!* – I suppose that she is either *mad* or *nau*[ghty]. (10.29, 7/11/22).

That she must be mad or naughty to fall in love over *Don Juan* says that the poem must diverge significantly from normal standards, but the poet did not consider normality to be equivalent with correctness, as is demonstrated by his frequent commentary upon the disjunction between the normal appearance of social propriety and the actual behaviours in which people engaged. The divergence of *Don Juan* from common social standards he did not consider to be dangerous, immoral, or unpopular, to judge by his comment to Kinnaird regarding *Don Juan*’s legal status, his declaration that Little and Rousseau are more corrupting, and his preference for a jury over the Lord Chancellor:

I am not at all clear that the poem is not a *Copyright* – at least all but the two first cantos – it is *not* sedition – it is *not* blasphemy – if Murray chooses to try the question before a jury with the former cantos – I will with the present ones. [...] it is useless to go to the Chancellor – better to a Jury at once. (10.98, to Kinnaird 12/2/23).

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<sup>147</sup> *Literary Chronicle*, August 11, 1821, 495-7; August 11, 1821, 514-6, RR, III, 1297-1302: p.495 (1297).

<sup>148</sup> *Monthly Magazine*, September 1823, p.112 (1705).

Since Kinnaird was not Murray, the vulnerable and often skittish publisher, there is no basis for claiming that Byron was misrepresenting the poem's virtues to him. After all, Kinnaird is frank enough to write to Byron, "But why Call thee Katharine a whore? [...] why blame her for liking fucking? [...] it is hard to blame her for following her natural inclinations".<sup>149</sup> The poet's insistence that the poem, at least excluding the first two cantos, is neither sedition nor blasphemy ought to be taken seriously: the moral improvement of the poem after the first two cantos, noted by the contemporary critics,<sup>150</sup> may have been quite deliberate on the part of the poet.

The poet was aware of the religious debate, and he draws a distinction between 'proper' religion and the behaviour of his opponents. Thus, in writing further to Moore about *The Loves of the Angels*, he says,

The bigots are not to be conciliated; and, if they were – are they worth it? I suspect that I am a more orthodox Christian than you are; and, whenever I see a real Christian, either in practice or in theory, (for I never yet found the man who could produce either, when put to the proof,) I am his disciple. But, till then, I cannot truckle to tithe-mongers[.] (10.137-8, to Moore 2/4/23).

It is worthwhile noting that, only four months earlier, he describes the poetry of 'Little' (Moore) as less moral and more likely to seduce than his own, and so the comments about his superior orthodoxy might be sincere. His description of the financially-motivated "bigots" is certainly consistent throughout his writings. As for Moore's orthodoxy, E H Coleridge, in a footnote to the reference to "Anacreon Moore" in 1.104, quotes the older poet:

Oh Susan! I've said, in the moments of mirth,

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<sup>149</sup> John Murray Archive, MS 43456, 15/10/22, p.13.

<sup>150</sup> The *Imperial Magazine*, which calls *Don Juan* "unprofitable, yea, iniquitous", nevertheless allows that "these three cantos [III-V] appear a little more free from the poisonous inuendoes which distinguished their predecessors" (*Imperial Magazine*, III (October 1821), columns 945-8, RR, III, 1155-6: p.946 (1155)), and *Blackwood's Magazine* finds that "There is some tendency to an improvement in manners" (*Blackwood's Magazine*, X (August 1821), 107-15, RR, I, 168-76: p.115 (176)).

What's devotion to thee or to me?  
I devoutly believe there's a heaven on earth,  
And I believe that *that* heaven's in *thee*.<sup>151</sup>

At the same time, Thomas Love Peacock's *Headlong Hall* (1816) depicts religion as a foreclosure of critical thought: Reverend Doctor Gaster defends the claim that all animals, even the tiger who devours a person, were created solely and exclusively for the use of humanity. He declares, "It requires no proof [...] it is a point of doctrine. It is written, therefore it is so."<sup>152</sup> Far more starkly, Shelley's *Queen Mab* (1813) declares of Jesus of Nazareth that

He lit within their souls  
The quenchless flames of zeal, and blessed the sword  
He brought on earth to satiate with the blood  
Of truth and freedom His malignant soul. (7.169-72).<sup>153</sup>

Shelley thus flatly contradicts the Gospels' and the Church's pacifistic representation of Jesus. Especially because it is declarative, this quatrain goes farther into unorthodoxy than *Don Juan*'s playful questioning, but Byron apparently did not have any strong expectation that his protestations would be accepted by all:

I have thought since – that your bigots would have “saddled me with a Judgment” as Thwackum did Square when he bit his tongue in talking Metaphysics – if anything had happened of consequence. – These fellows always forget Christ in their Christianity – and what he said when “the tower of Siloam fell”.<sup>154</sup> (10.52, to Murray 9/12/22).

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<sup>151</sup> “The Catalogue”, *Poetical Works of the Late Thomas Little*, 1803, p.128, in Coleridge 6.43n.

<sup>152</sup> Peacock, *Headlong Hall*, ch 2, in *Novels of Thomas Love Peacock*, ed. by Arthur Calder-Marshall (London: Pan, 1967), p.24.

<sup>153</sup> *The Complete Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, 4 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), I, 279.

<sup>154</sup> “There were present at that season some that told him of the Galilaeans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. And Jesus answering said unto them, “Suppose ye that these Galilaeans were sinners above all the Galilaeans, because they suffered such things? I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish. Or those eighteen, upon whom the tower in Siloam fell, and slew them, think ye that they were sinners above all men that dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.”” (Luke 13:1-4).

His reference to their Christianity having forgotten the Christ of the Gospels is a comment based in an appreciation of Christian values, and so it is a discrimination between standards of orthodoxy.

While Byron's defence varies in its devices, it is consistently maintained. He expresses surprise and disappointment at the reaction against his work; he suspects ulterior motives behind the criticisms; he claims comparable examples from history, to prove that the Don is not so scandalous; he admits the poem's naughtiness but points also to its popularity. The common tone of his claims is that of injured innocence. Throughout, he demonstrates that his conception of the poem's moral position diverges from the conservative critics' conception thereof, but claims that his standard is the higher. Finally, and most crucially, all of this defence is maintained as a defence: the poet does not simply ignore the criticism, dismissing religion or morality as irrelevant concerns by which to judge his work. That lack of dismissal in itself suggests that religion and morality did hold some value to him.

### **Teleology**

Byron consistently defends *Don Juan*, possibly because, as noted earlier, "it is intended a *satire on abuses* of the present *states* of Society – and not an eulogy of vice" (10.68, to Murray 25/12/22). The poem claims to be "a 'great moral lesson'" (12.55.436),<sup>155</sup> one which was necessary because "You are *not* a moral people, and you know it, /Without the aid of too sincere a poet" (11.87.695-6). In fact, a less sincere or at least less sombre poet could, via satire, achieve more than sententious moralising would, as both Campbell and the *Literary Examiner* note. This claim of a moral purpose is worth examining.

In the course of the poem's facetiousness, there is some apparent moralising which is but a parody thereof. Thus, as Don Juan slips from Donna Julia's bed, belying her earlier, aggrieved protestations of innocence, the speaker exclaims,

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155 This was a popular phrase, originally Wellington's (as noted in *Don Juan*, ed. by T G Steffan and Willis Pratt, 4 vols (Austin, University of Texas Press, 1957), IV, 142).

Oh shame!  
Oh sin! Oh sorrow! and Oh womankind!  
How can you do such things and keep your fame,  
Unless this world, and t'other too, be blind?  
Nothing so dear as an unfilch'd good name! (1.165.1313-7).

The exclaiming (ecphonesis) is 'pious', being focussed on appearance, on Julia's fame and name, rather than on actuality, her virtue. Bathos undercuts another pretence of moralism shortly afterwards:

I pity not, because  
He had no business to commit a sin,  
Forbid by heavenly, fined by human laws,  
At least 'twas rather early to begin[.] (1.167.1329-32).

These parodies of moralism are attacks upon the appearance of virtue, rather than upon its substance: upon cant, not upon morality.

Further, there is an ambiguous moral claim in the rejected stanzas to Canto I, in the explanation of the attacks on Southey via the assertion that "as Bard my duty to mankind /For warning to the rest, compels these raps" (McGann 5.87:6.46-7).<sup>156</sup> The alleged compulsion is an excuse for gratuitous vituperation, but the excuse is not necessarily wholly false as a reason: from a moral perspective which views Southey's ideas as pernicious, there is a duty to combat them. Byron has once more adopted the role of Moral Teacher, as in CHP. It is noteworthy in this regard that the poem does refer to "poets, or the moralists their betters" (3.64.512), directly asserting the primacy of the moralist's role. While this is a criticism on the self-perceived superiority of moralist critics of poetry, it is also sincere in regard to moralists with whom the speaker agrees: moral works are regarded as being superior to mere art for art's sake in that they present a socially-significant message, an activity to which *Don*

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<sup>156</sup> This is stanza 7 in Coleridge and in Steffan, since they have as 5 the stanza which McGann has as 7.

*Juan* lays claim. The claim of the speaker of the poem is echoed by the claim of the poet in the letters: “I maintain that it is the most moral of poems – but if people won’t discover that moral that is their fault not mine” (BLJ 6.99, to Murray 1/2/19). In the poem, the speaker declares, while ‘going aside’ to address the audience (parabasis), “my object is morality /(Whatever people say)” (12.86.683-4). Some contemporary critics, and some modern ones, such as Robert F Gleckner, have nonetheless denied this:

the poem is not moral, despite all of Byron’s protestations to the contrary. Fundamentally, it has to do not with morality or immorality but with nothingness, with a world devoid of value and humanity, a world in which even the “good” (in *any* sense) quickly destroys itself in its very effort to be what it is.<sup>157</sup>

Yet Byron’s contemporaries saw morality differently, and the *Edinburgh Monthly Review* declares that Byron’s poems, “be they good or bad, are prominently and conspicuously of a *moral* nature”.<sup>158</sup> There exists within *Don Juan* a considerable amount of genuine, unambiguous moralising. One such moral claim lies in the reference to “that charity we owe /But seldom pay the absent” (16.106.891-2). In discussing war, the speaker declares, “The drying up a single tear has more /Of honest fame, than shedding seas of gore” (8.3.23-4). This is an appeal to a distinct and different value (anthyphora) in order to oppose the stereotypical cultural valuation of military fame. A very similar comment, emphasized by a doubled instance of repetition with varied inflection (polyptoton), is directed to Wellington: “You *did* great things, but not being *great* in mind, /Have left *undone* the *greatest* – and mankind” (9.10.79-80 to Wellington). Throughout the poem, values are asserted.

Although often couched in the same jocular tone as everything else, *Don Juan*’s frequent claims to moral purpose should not be dismissed merely upon the basis of the style of discourse. Thus, when the narrator says, “I detest all fiction even in song, /And so must tell the truth, howe’er you blame it” (6.8.59-60), this activity of ‘telling

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<sup>157</sup> Gleckner, p.332.

<sup>158</sup> *Edinburgh Monthly Review* (October 1819), p.470, RR, II, 793.



the truth' is compatible both with the poem's scandalous frankness about sexual relations and with its exposing of hypocrisy. There is also another moral purpose described here, regarding

those

Whose headlong passions form their proper woes.

And that's the moral of this composition,

If people would but see its real drift[.] (6.87.695-88.698).

As with CHP, some contemporary readers did see this as a moral virtue of *Don Juan*,<sup>159</sup> as do some modern critics: E F Boyd notes, "To jest in earnest is the object of Don Juanism, it is impossible to separate the humorous tone from the moral sincerity."<sup>160</sup> She further notes R D Waller's introduction to his edition of Frere's *The Monks and the Giants*, with its commentary on Italian mock-heroic romance, describing the Italian medley poem and its digressions, wit, bathos, and vulgarity.<sup>161</sup> The significance of Waller's list lies not only its agreement with Byron's claims of historical precedent, but also its indication of the usage of bathos and "pointed wit".<sup>162</sup> These are not merely aesthetic accidents, but actual dialectical, rhetorical devices. The work, while being "a little quietly facetious upon everything", is also quite deliberately focussed upon certain things. As Joseph notes,

Byron's scepticism again comes into play, not as a form of evasion, but as a corrective and solvent. It attacks "cant", which is principle divorced from practice; it derides "entusymusy", which is emotion divorced from reality; and it opposes "system", which is abstraction divorced from fact. The common

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<sup>159</sup> Q.v. the view of Laurence Shadwell and of "some others at the Chancery Bar" in November of 1819, as expressed by Murray's correspondent Mr. Sharon Turner, in *A Publisher and His Friends: Memoir and Correspondence of the Late John Murray, with an Account of the Origin and Progress of the House, 1768-1843* [hereafter Smiles], ed. by Samuel Smiles, 2 vols (London: John Murray, 1891), I, 407, 408; see also *Literary Examiner*, July 5, 1823, p.8, RR, III, 1359.

<sup>160</sup> Elizabeth French Boyd, *Byron's Don Juan* (New York: The Humanities Press, 1958), p.46.

<sup>161</sup> John Hookham Frere, *The Monks and the Giants*, ed. by R D Waller (Manchester: University Press, 1926), p.22.

<sup>162</sup> Waller describes the English medley poem as having "reached perfection in *Don Juan*" (p.28).

factor in all of them is the unlimited human power of self-deception, and the whole complex method of *Don Juan* is designed as an attack on it.<sup>163</sup>

*Don Juan* has a purpose, and since, as a text, *Don Juan* is a discursive device, its means for fulfilling its purpose are likewise discursive, and particularly rhetorical. The contemporary association of morality with religion makes this rhetoric both a means of achieving a moral purpose and a means of addressing religious issues.

## Rhetoric

This poem is not a linear narrative, but a discourse within which a narrative is contained: the poem declares at the outset that “the following epic narrative is told by a Spanish Gentleman” (Preface, McGann 5.82:53-4), as an unidentified speaker speaks about a characterized speaker, who is to tell the tale of another character. Yet what is most significant here is not the identity of the teller of the tale, but the very process of the telling. As this process of telling involves many layers, so it involves many asides:

Most epic poets plunge ‘in medias res,’  
(Horace makes this the heroic turnpike road),  
And then your hero tells, whene’er you please,  
What went before – by way of episode[.] (1.6.41-3).

“Episode”, in classical literary terminology, is a digressive side narrative, and such digression is a basic form within *Don Juan*. It is a deliberate technique, not an aimless meandering. As Steffan says, “Byron excelled at two styles that might seem incompatible – the conversational and the oratorical”, and so *Don Juan*’s conversational style is studded with oratorical, rhetorical technique.<sup>164</sup> The digressiveness is not concealed, but openly announced by the poem:

If I have any fault, it is digression,

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<sup>163</sup> Joseph, p.286.

<sup>164</sup> As noted in Steffan’s *Don Juan* 1.165.

Leaving my people to proceed alone,  
While I soliloquize beyond expression[.] (3.96.858-60).

Commenting further upon the Epic trope of plunging ‘into the middle things’, the speaker of *Don Juan* disclaims, “That is the usual method, but not mine – /My way is to begin with the beginning” (1.7.49), but, much as in *Tristram Shandy*, his digressions begin also at the beginning, occupying the first seven stanzas of the poem. It is further worth noting that Friedrich Schlegel stated, “philosophy, like an epic poem, must start in the middle”, and that *Don Juan* frequently takes a deliberately anti-philosophical stance.<sup>165</sup> The poem sets out to deviate from high-culture forms.

This tendency towards digression can create an appearance of incoherence, and yet it serves multiple ends. The habit operates in one respect which is symbolic:

In *Don Juan*, the “open form” describes the formlessness of life itself, and at the same time reflects the controlling personality of the narrator and his continuous presence in the poem.<sup>166</sup>

As part of this, the digressions “permit the author to reveal the counter-aspects of events and characters”.<sup>167</sup> They also have a reflexive function regarding the speaking voice of the poem. The poem has, as Peter W Graham notes, “conversational, improvisational, and dramatic qualities” from the outset.<sup>168</sup> To a far greater extent than *The Giaour*, it replicates the process of a story being told. In T S Eliot’s words,

Digression, indeed, is one of the valuable arts of the story-teller. The effect of Byron’s digressions is to keep us interested in the story-teller himself, and through this interest to interest us more in the story.<sup>169</sup>

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<sup>165</sup> Schlegel, *Philosophical Fragments*, trans. by Peter Gasche (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), Athenaeum Fragment #84, p.28.

<sup>166</sup> Joseph, p.304.

<sup>167</sup> Leslie A Marchand, ‘Narrator and Narration in *Don Juan*’, *Keats-Shelley Journal* 25 (1976), 26-42 (p.31).

<sup>168</sup> Graham, *Don Juan in Regency England* (Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 1990), p.20.

<sup>169</sup> Eliot, *On Poetry and Poets* (London: Faber and Faber, 1957), p.196.

Further, in reasserting the role of speaker, or ‘rhetor’, the operation of the speech itself is emphasized, and hence the rhetorical nature of the work. The text is replete with identifiable techniques of formal rhetoric, from digression (ecbole) to a range of features such as compounding (auxesis) and preaching, especially by presenting and answering questions (sermocination). These techniques constitute a vital component of the text. This is where the scandalous tone of *Don Juan* plays its role. In the Bowles Controversy, Byron proclaims that

A man may be *coarse* and yet not *vulgar*, and the reverse. [...] *Vulgarity* is far worse than downright *blackguardism*; for the latter comprehends wit, humour, and strong sense at times; while the former is a sad abortive attempt at all things, ‘signifying nothing.’ (Coleridge 12.591, 2).

Vulgarity is both ‘impropriety’ and ‘commonness’, and it is the latter sense which is evidently in view here. In his letter to Murray, Byron accuses Hunt’s disciples of fashioning their work crudely rather than finely. The poet, he suggests, can employ coarseness if it is employed with artistic care, but should not lapse into vulgarity, the product of carelessness. A very similar point is made by William Hazlitt, in essay XXIV of *Table Talk* (1822), ‘On Familiar Style’: “Many people mistake a familiar for a vulgar style, and suppose that to write without affectation is to write at random.”<sup>170</sup> The same schema, applied to *Don Juan*, identifies it as coarse, rather than vulgar, familiar, but not random: occasionally obscene, but obscene in a deliberately-crafted, carefully rhetorical manner.

The sense in which *Don Juan* is rhetorical is not that of a false, pretending discourse, as rhetoric is often seen now, but rather the classical, fundamentally poetic sense of a carefully-fashioned discourse.<sup>171</sup> Nonetheless, this is not to say that it consists of the sophists’ stock phases of a speech, but rather that it follows the more free, more

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<sup>170</sup> Hazlitt, *Table Talk* (London: Dent, 1959), p.242.

<sup>171</sup> The term ‘poiēsis’ (ποίησις), from the same root whence ‘poiēma’ and thus ‘poem’ come, is ‘the act of fashioning’.

functional method of didactic texts, what McGann terms “the Horatian plain style”.<sup>172</sup> Ridenour covers this at some length:

The plain style is, to be sure, that of the so-called *musa pedestris* (Byron’s “pedestrian Muses”) of Horace (*Serm.* II.VI.17). The most important fact about it is that, as Pope observes (following Cicero and Quintilian), it “instructs” – it tells the truth.

[...]

In the Dedication Byron is speaking from behind the traditional satiric mask. He is a modest man (content with pedestrian muses) who writes “honest simple verse” – in other words, the plain blunt man we have been taught to recognize in Augustan satire.<sup>173</sup>

The plain style itself is a rhetorical manoeuvre, and the sincerity is a tool with a purpose, as is the obscenity which is an element of that plainness. Part of the purpose behind the obscenity is naturalism, plain speaking in the plain and even coarse language of real conversation. *Don Juan* places upon the page the language of the smoking-room and the bedroom, breaking through the hypocrisy of social discourse by laying everything bare.

The obscenity is not an end in itself, but merely a facet of the rhetor working to show life as it is, “To build up common things with common places” (14.7.56). In part, this phrase is reference back to the Horatian epigraph at the beginning of the poem, on the difficulty of speaking upon common things. Classicism is an underlying characteristic of Byron’s thought, as seen in the Preface’s reference to the poetics of “the best and wisest of our fathers” (McGann 5.82:36-7). In addition, the phrase in 14.7.56 is a pun on classical rhetorical technique, in which ‘common places’, or *τοπoι*, are the subjects (hence ‘topics’) of rhetorical discourses and especially subjects chosen for examples to prove arguments. The poem discusses common topics, although more precisely the common topics of everyday discourse than the common topics of literature. The value of this naturalism is that it radically transgresses the

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<sup>172</sup> McGann, *Don Juan in Context*, p.73.

<sup>173</sup> George Ridenour, *The Style of Don Juan* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1960), pp. 9, 16-17.

common view of the proper role of art. As Byron famously writes to Kinnaird, “it may be profligate – but is it not *life*, is it not *the thing*?” (BLJ 6.232, 26/10/18 [19]). This naturalism does not merely justify the obscenity, but actually necessitates it, since such topics and such modes of discourse were part of English life as it really was. Byron writes to Murray, “you have so many ‘*divine*’ poems – is it nothing to have written a *Human* one?” (BLJ 6.105, 6/4/19).

By presenting in *Don Juan* English life as it really was, Byron was able to shine a light on it, making it available for consumption but also available for criticism and even for modification. Discourses are, as Michel Foucault says, “practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak”,<sup>174</sup> and the process of encapsulating the object within the discourse enables the act of transforming that object via the modification of people’s perceptions of it. Thus,

words are things, and a small drop of ink,  
Falling like dew, upon a thought, produces  
That which makes thousands, perhaps millions, think (3.88.793-5).<sup>175</sup>

Because of this discursive-constructive activity, and particularly because of Byron’s *consciousness* of it, as demonstrated in that last quotation, the digressions and other aspects of rhetoric in *Don Juan* serve cultural-ideological, i.e. moral ends.

The rhetoric even plays with rhetoric, as in the encomium upon miserliness: “Oh Gold! Why call we misers miserable?/ Theirs is the pleasure that can never pall” (12.3.17-18). This claim is, of course, in direct contradiction to the biblical pronouncement that “the love of money is the root of all evil” (1 Timothy 6:10), and yet it is repeated in a questioning of the religious valorisation of asceticism:

Why call the miser miserable? as

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<sup>174</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge & the Discourse on Language*, trans. by A M Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972), p.49.

<sup>175</sup> The phrase “words are things”, which Byron mentions as a phrase from Mirabeau, in a letter to Samuel Rogers years earlier (BLJ 4.74, 27/2/14), also appears in *Marino Faliero* 5.289 (published 1821). It evidently held lasting significance for the poet.

I said before: the frugal life is his,  
Which in a saint or cynic ever was  
The theme of praise: a hermit would not miss  
Canonization for the self-same course,  
And wherefore blame gaunt Wealth's austerities? (12.7.49-54).

This questioning initially appears to be rhetorical questioning (erotesis), but the text itself works through to rather a different response: "Perhaps he fain would liberate mankind /Even with the very ore which makes them base" (12.10.77-8). By describing money as that "which makes them base", the rhetor not only undermines the value of the miser's schemes for liberation, but reiterates the corrupting influence of wealth. The apparent erotesis is actually sermocination. Nonetheless, the rhetor has not been muzzled by this moralism, and promises to be as revealing as ever:

But now I'm going to be immoral; now  
I mean to show things really as they are,  
Not as they ought to be: for I avow,  
That till we see what's what in fact, we're far  
From much improvement (12.40.313-17).

This is 'immorality' with a moral end, much like coarseness for an ethical purpose. Again, the expressed intention is, from a conservative moral standpoint, essentially unimpeachable, since it reiterates the values of honesty and social amelioration. The *Literary Examiner* validates such tactics as the "exposure of latent vice".<sup>176</sup>

The commentary on hypocrisy and cant also includes a commentary on tolerance, and the limits thereof, which reiterates the moral purpose of the poem via the balancing of one statement by a qualifying contrary (dirimens copulatio):

I was bred a moderate Presbyterian.

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<sup>176</sup> *Literary Examiner*, July 5, 1823, 6-12; July 12, 1823, 23-7, in RR, III, 1358-64: p.8 (1359).

But though I am a temperate theologian,  
 And also meek as a metaphysician,  
 Impartial between Tyrian and Trojan,  
 As Eldon on a lunatic commission, –  
 In politics my duty is to show John  
 Bull something of the lower world's condition.  
 It makes my blood boil like the springs of Hecla,  
 To see men let these scoundrel Sovereigns break law. (15.91.728-92.736).

As Thomas Ahnert notes, a moderate Presbyterian was a religious liberal:

Doubts about rational proofs for the immortality of the soul were to be found particularly among “Moderate” clergyman in the Presbyterian church [...]

They were not hostile to Christian revelation, let alone religion in general, but their arguments were directed against a particular form of natural religion, the attempts to demonstrate certain religious beliefs on the basis of natural reason. With the exception of Hume, they held that some form of natural religion was within the capacity of human rational powers. But they also believed that traditional, orthodox natural religion often overestimated the extent to which natural reason could be drawn on to support any truths of religion.<sup>177</sup>

This description of the moderate position and its epistemological doubts is entirely coherent with the views expressed in *Don Juan*, and, indeed, in much of Byron's work. One of the functions of the expression in stanza 92 of Canto XV is to present the impartiality of the rhetor, as reiterated by the *Aeneid* reference in line 731,<sup>178</sup> with its own appeal to authority, but this authority is literary rather than political, just as the last line's declaration of sovereigns being subject to law appeals to a moral and legal

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<sup>177</sup> Thomas Ahnert, 'The Soul, Natural Religion and Moral Philosophy in the Scottish Enlightenment', in *Eighteenth-Century Thought*, ed. by James G Buickerood (New York: AMS Press, 2004), II, 233-54: p.234. See also Christine Kenyon Jones, 'I was Bred a Moderate Presbyterian': Byron, Thomas Chalmers and the Scottish Religious Heritage', in *Romanticism and Religion from William Cowper to Wallace Stevens*, ed. by Gavin Hopps and Jane Stabler (Hampshire: Ashgate, 2006), pp.107-119.

<sup>178</sup> Tros Tyriusque mihi nullo discrimine agetur (*Aeneid* 1.574).



authority above the Crown. The same hierarchy of morality above politics occurs in the next stanza, which continues to discourse upon the moral purpose of the poem:

But politics, and policy, and piety,  
Are topics which I sometimes introduce,  
Not only for the sake of their variety,  
But as subservient to a moral use;  
Because my business is to *dress* society,  
And stuff with *sage* that very verdant goose. (15.93.736-42).

The double-entendre of ‘sage’, i.e. wisdom, is the moral purpose itself: far from being an aimless meandering, the rhetor explicitly and repeatedly declares the satire of *Don Juan* to be a moral activity, in the tradition of Juvenal.

In the course of the poem, the cantos become more digressive, which is to say that the role of rhetor takes a greater prominence and that of the narrator a lesser, and the rhetor’s digressions comment upon the alleged immorality of the work itself. Thus, the reader is advised that it is not the poet’s fault that Haidée and Juan were unmarried, and that anyone who will be upset by their situation ought to shut the book, as “’Tis dangerous to read of loves unlawful.” (3.12.96). The suggestion of shutting the book also appears in Rousseau’s *Julie, ou la nouvelle Héloïse*,<sup>179</sup> but there it is in the preface, whereas *Don Juan* leaves the comment until the twelfth stanza of the third canto, making the reader party to the joke directed against such prudishness. In a false denial (apophasis), the text insincerely urges its audience not to read it, playing off the very fact that they must be reading it to encounter the warning. The poem also explicitly discourses upon the critical response to the first two cantos:

Some have accused me of a strange design  
Against the creed and morals of the land,  
And trace it in this poem every line:

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<sup>179</sup> Rousseau, *Eloisa, or a series of original letters*, trans. by William Kenrick, 2 vols (Oxford: Woodstock Books, 1989), I, iii-iv.

I don't pretend that I quite understand  
My own meaning when I would be *very* fine,  
But the fact is that I have nothing plann'd,  
Unless it were to be a moment merry,  
A novel word in my vocabulary.

[...]

How I have treated it [the modern subject], I do not know;  
Perhaps no better than they have treated me  
Who have imputed such designs as show  
Not what they saw, but what they wish'd to see;  
But if it gives them pleasure, be it so,  
This is a liberal age, and thoughts are free[.] (4.5.33-40, 7.49-54).

The final sentence is not merely a statement of fact, but an assertion of a desired state of affairs, as much of a propagandistic move as the conservative reviews themselves. The poet is trying to generate a liberal age, and a culture in which thoughts are free.

It is in this propagandistic vein that the rhetor describes, within the poem itself, the critical response to the previous instalment, saying that he hears that “several people take exception /At the first two books having too much truth” (4.97.771-2). Serendipitously, this charge is proven by *Blackwood's* subsequently describing his failure as being too open about his knowledge of the world.<sup>180</sup> The liberal poet is competing with the conservative reviewers over the freedom of honesty and the safety of ignorance. This underlies the irony in which he promises a more moral way of writing:

I therefore do denounce all amorous writing,  
Except in such a way as not to attract;  
Plain – simple – short, and by no means inviting,

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<sup>180</sup> *Blackwood's*, August 1821, p.115 (176).

But with a moral to each error tack'd,  
Form'd rather for instructing than delighting,  
And with all passions in their turn attack'd (5.2.9-14).

Such 'uninviting' moralism would, of course, be inefficacious because very few would want to read it. The poet has taken up a view presented by his critics, the view that aesthetic appeal is the basis of moral and political influence and has shown that a moral but ugly work would be pointless: this is *reductio ad absurdum*. This passage is also ironic because it occurs not before but after the most 'amorous' passages, the descriptions of Haidée and Juan's love which Campbell valued so highly.<sup>181</sup> In the process of its demonstration of the absurdity of the claims that Byron ought to have written moral poetry, so common in contemporary criticism, a dichotomy is constructed between instructing and delighting. This dichotomy then necessarily harks back to the discrimination between coarseness and vulgarity: the delightful cannot be vulgar, but may be coarse, whereas the moralising, *Don Juan* claims, will be vulgar even when not coarse.

The efficacy of a moral corrective is a crucial moral issue, because the pursuit of the greatest good is a moral virtue in itself. In the first letter of the Bowles Controversy, Byron attacks cant not merely for its ideological narrowness, but also for its moral inefficacy:

I say *cant*, because it is a thing of words, without the smallest influence upon human actions; the English being no wiser, and no better, and much poorer, and more divided amongst themselves, as well as far less moral, than they were before the prevalence of this verbal decorum. (Coleridge 12.542).

Byron condemns cant as lacking the persuasive (protreptic) effect, and notably values morality alongside wisdom, goodness, wealth, and social unity. This is consistent with Lady Blessington's recording of the poet's views:

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<sup>181</sup> *Monthly Magazine*, September 1821, p.127 (1683).

It is such incongruities between the professions and conduct of those who affect to be religious that puts me out of patience,” continued Byron, “and makes me wage war with cant, and not, as many suppose, a disbelief or want of faith in religion. I want to see it *practised*, and to know, which is soon made known by the conduct, that it dwells in the heart, instead of being on the lips only of its votaries.<sup>182</sup>

The expressed hierarchy is of moral virtue over moralistic behaviour. Howsoever instructive it might claim to be, cant is useless because it cannot persuade, and thus has no ameliorative effect, which effect is evidently the poet’s concern. The satire of *Don Juan* can persuade, on the other hand, by undermining its target culture of cant. Thus, as Joseph notes,

“Cant” is opposed to the whole method of *Don Juan*, by which situations are simultaneously presented in the story and examined in the commentary; to the devices of mimicry and impersonation, in which various forms of cant are directly represented; and to the conversational style, which brings the words themselves to the test of an intelligent and varied verbal intercourse.<sup>183</sup>

The “intelligent and varied verbal discourse” is suasion, protreptic effort, to a moral end. Thus the Preface to Cantos VI to VIII deploys a further defence by association, in the commentary on his critics’ charges of blasphemy against his earlier cantos:

The hackneyed and lavished title of Blasphemer – which, with radical, liberal, jacobin, reformer, &c. are the changes which the hirelings are daily ringing in the ears of those who will listen – should be welcome to all who recollect on *whom* it was originally bestowed. Socrates and Jesus Christ were put to death publicly as *Blasphemers*, and so have been and may be many who dare to oppose the most notorious abuses of the name of God and the mind of man. (Preface 61-9).

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<sup>182</sup> Blessington, p.215.

<sup>183</sup> Joseph, p.285.

Byron redirects his opponents' argument (antagonogoe). Further, the connection with the philosopher and the religious figure is explicitly defined as "welcome" to the writer, directly indicating the honour in which he holds Jesus of Nazareth. While the nature of that honour is not so clearly defined as to demonstrate a specific religious position, it is clearly not anti-religious, and much the same can be said for the expressed concern for "the most notorious abuses of the name of God".

Even *Don Juan*'s besetting 'sin' is a rhetorical one. William Roberts expresses the perspective which seems to underlie much of the contemporary reprobation: the view that Byron was guilty of placing sacred subjects alongside frivolous or even obscene ones, a profaning tapinosis.<sup>184</sup> This conjunction of the sacred and the secular is, meanwhile, a part of the rhetorical plain style.

### **Satire**

Of course, the rhetorical mode most important to *Don Juan* is not formally dialectical, but satirical, and the poem carries on Byron's work in *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*, *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, *The Blues*, and *The Age of Bronze*. It satirizes society, including religion. At this point, it is useful to note that, as Joseph says, "Byron rejects "Cant about nature" because he hates cant, not because he hates Nature" and the same applies to religion.<sup>185</sup> Byron's rejection of cant about religion is indicative of his attitude towards cant, not of his attitude towards religion. The function of satire is protreptic, ameliorative, and moral. Because of the topical nature of the satire, the contemporary critical responses are especially salient here.

Byron's religious satire frequently targets hypocrisy, the conjunction of apparent orthodoxy with actual heteropraxy. Such behaviour particularly comes to the fore in reference to priests, and so, after the death of Don José, "A Jew took one of his two mistresses, /A priest the other – at least so they say" (1.34.268-9). Of course, in a Catholic context, priests are required to be celibate. In Donna Julia's letter to the departed Juan, "man may range /The court, camp, church, the vessel, and the mart"

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<sup>184</sup> William Roberts, *British Review*, December 1821, pp. 245-6 (484-5), 248 (486).

<sup>185</sup> Joseph, p.307.

(1.194.1546-7) for his interests, making the priesthood not a vocation, but merely another occupation. When the famished Juan is recovering under Haidée's care, and is offered food, "He fell upon whatever was offered, like /A priest, a shark, an alderman, or pike" (2.157.1255-6). The priest, like the stereotypical alderman, is here an image of unrestrained appetite.

The clergy are also taken as the appropriate synecdochic symbol for chanting the praises of hypocrisy, and, judging by Byron's other references to priests, not just because they were normally associated with singing: "Oh for a *forty-parson power* to chaunt /Thy praise, Hypocrisy!" (10.34.265-6). Commentary on such stereotypical hypocritical piety leads the narrator to an expression often quoted, and often taken as an example of the poet's nihilism:

Ecclesiastes said, that all is vanity –  
Most modern preachers say the same, or show it  
By their examples of true Christianity;  
In short, all know, or very soon may know it;  
And in this scene of all-confessed inanity,  
By saint, by sage, by preacher, and by poet,  
Must I restrain me, through the fear of strife,  
From holding up the Nothingness of life? (7.6.41-8).

The stanza's first line, the sentiment of which is echoed in the last, is a biblical quotation, one which similarly frames a book which discourses at length upon the apparent meaninglessness of life (Ecclesiastes 1:2, 12:18), without providing any definite answer to its own questions. The apparent nihilism is in the orthodox canon, and the criticism directed at the failures of "modern preachers" is one acknowledged as valid even by the reviewer for the *Edinburgh Magazine*, who comments that "the 'cant religious' is not religion".<sup>186</sup> Like Byron, the reviewer condemns not religion, but the misuse of religion.

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<sup>186</sup> *Edinburgh [Scots] Magazine*, 2nd Series, XIII (August 1823), 190-9, RR, V, 2212-17: p.192 (2213).

Another such example of ‘cant religious’ is the reference, among the guests at Norman Abbey, to “the Reverend Rodomont Precisian, /Who did not hate so much the sin as sinner” (13.87.693-4) and the rhetor’s statement that the clergy have thundered upon him “In pious libels by no means a few” (14.10.76). Since the clergy’s statements are “libels”, and thus false, “pious” is once more being used to refer to the appearance of virtue, not its reality. These clergy are entangled in secular affairs, and likewise one of Lord Henry Amundeville’s lawyers is very busy

on tithes, which sure are Discord’s torches,  
Kindling Religion till she throws down *her* gage,  
“Untying” squires “to fight against the churches” (16.60.524-6).

Tithes were a contentious social and political issue of the late Georgian period, especially in Ireland.<sup>187</sup> The theme of tithes reappears shortly afterwards in *Don Juan*, in regard to prosperous clergymen being “Takers of tithes” (16.80.687).

All of these clerics seem completely occupied by materialist concerns rather than spiritual ones. The poet was not simply anti-clerical, however, as is demonstrated by a comment on religious hypocrisy which segues into an encomium upon the Evangelical William Wilberforce:

And *à propos* of monks, their piety  
With sloth hath found it difficult to dwell;  
Those vegetables of the Catholic creed  
Are apt exceedingly to run to seed.

Oh, Wilberforce! Thou man of black renown,  
Whose merit none enough can sing or say,

[...]

set the other half of earth to rights:

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<sup>187</sup> Halévy, 1.400-1.

You have freed the *blacks* – now pray shut up the whites. (14.81.645-82.650, 55-56)

The final request does not undermine the praise, but the contrast between Wilberforce's philanthropic virtue and the tendency of monastics to "run to seed" underlines the concern for benevolent behaviour with or without a religious basis. This valuation of philanthropy is humanist and idealised, yet not antireligious. Once more, the target is not religion, but "the 'cant religious'", which is also in view in the reference to *Joseph Andrews*' Mrs Adams crying "That scriptures out of church are blasphemies" (13.96.761-8). Mrs Adams' riposte to her husband's quoting of passages on wifely obedience is that "it was Blasphemy to talk Scripture out of Church; that such things were very proper to be said in the Pulpit: but that it was prophane to talk them in common Discourse."<sup>188</sup> Profanity, of course, was a charge frequently levelled against *Don Juan* by contemporary critics, and the critics' complaint against discussing Scripture amidst bawdy jocularities was the same as Mrs Adams', and just as unjustified.

Another target of the satire is the widespread failure even among lay people to observe the forms of religion without pretence. Thus, as the Dedication says, "Apostasy's so fashionable too, /To keep *one* creed's a task grown quite Herculean" (17.134-5); this is directed especially to Robert Southey, the Poet Laureate, but the application is general, as the poem goes on to demonstrate. The censored 'God damn' (1.14.12) is described as a general English habit of religious misbehaviour; similarly, "What men call gallantry, and gods adultery, /Is much more common where the climate's sultry" (1.63.503-4). This arraigns humanity in general, making no distinction between gods, and further underlining the ubiquity of the prohibition, as does the later reference to the same "sin, /Forbid by heavenly, fined by human laws" (1.167.1330-31). As in CHP, the true object of criticism is heteropraxy.

The next stanza makes reference (1.168.1340-3) to Abishag, the virgin brought in to warm the bed of the aging King David (1 Kings 1:2-4). *Don Juan* is ambiguous about

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<sup>188</sup> Henry Fielding, *The History of the Adventures of Joseph Andrews and of his friend Mr Abraham Adams* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966), book 4, chapter 11, p.291.



the lack of sexual relations claimed by the Bible (v. 4), but then adultery is less straightforward for a king with eight wives. What *Don Juan*'s plain-style discourse presents is the humanity of the situation, including the humanity of violating heavenly and earthly laws. Similarly human is Donna Inez' vain attempt to protect Juan from corruption in his education:

That which Donna Inez most desired,  
[...]  
Was, that his breeding should be strictly moral  
[...]  
not a page of anything that's loose,  
Or hints continuation of the species,  
Was ever suffer'd, lest he should grow vicious. (1.39.305, 308, 318-20).

Such repression is utterly unsuccessful: as Lucifer says in *Cain*, "ignorance of evil doth not save /From evil" (C 2.2.235-6). This was also the point made by members of the Chancery Bar about *Don Juan*'s moral value in its demonstration of the dangers of poor education. Juan falls prey to something which he does not understand.

On the other hand, Haidée had a religious education which she "forgot /Just in the very crisis she should not" (2.193.1542-3). Likewise, Donna Julia's knowledge does not help her, but her wanting the Virgin not to answer her prayer suggests that she is complicit in her own downfall (1.75-6). For all that this is improper behaviour, it is entirely normal, as is her final, antithetical capitulation: "A little still she strove, and much repented, /And whispering "I will ne'er consent" – consented" (1.117.935-6). The Galignani editions list two useful contemporary comments upon this. Colton comments, "the poet displays a consummate knowledge of all the more subtle and refined self-delusions of the human heart. This is, perhaps, the least objectionable part of the poem". Hill goes farther towards Campbell and Lockhart, seeing something of a moral virtue as being approached in this work, which, but for its 'dangerous levity', could serve

as a moral warning to guard against the first approaches of irregular desires, and that sophistry of sentiment, by which our impurest wishes and designs are frequently veiled and disguised even from ourselves, till the moment when their gratification seems within our reach.<sup>189</sup>

The antithesis which forms the humour in Donna Julia's actions also presents the inherent contradictions of human behaviour, a dynamic once again evident in the shipwreck, where the rhetor says,

There's nought, no doubt, so much the spirit calms  
As rum and true religion; thus it was,  
Some plunder'd, some drank spirits, some sung psalms  
[...]  
Strange sounds of wailing, blasphemy, devotion,  
Clamour'd in chorus to the roaring ocean (2.34.265-7, 71-2).

Given that this is a Spanish ship, the "true religion" in question is most likely Catholicism, but the English critics appear not to have considered this. Still, "true", i.e. devout, religion does often have a calmative effect. The apparent paralleling of rum and religion in line 266 is then developed into the triads of 267 and 271, where plundering and spirits go with wailing and blasphemy, and only psalms with devotion: the relationship of rum to religion is not a positive parallel, a fact further underlined by the dangerous temptation of the rum serving as an opportunity to prove the heroism of the protagonist, as Juan, "with sense beyond his years" (2.35.274), bars Pedrillo and the rest from the alcohol. Unlike religion, rum is negatively valued.

Another famously-satirical passage begins with the affirmative position, "If I agree that what is, is; then this I call /Being quite perspicuous and extremely fair" (11.5.35-6), setting a basis at least of a non-relativistic ontology, an ordered world in which reality is stable. It moves thence into an extended commentary on religious psychology:

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<sup>189</sup> Galignani Edition, p.730nn3, 1.

The truth is, I've grown lately rather phthisical:  
I don't know what the reason is – the air  
Perhaps; but as I suffer from the shocks  
Of illness, I grow much more orthodox.

The first attack at once proved the Divinity;  
(But *that* I never doubted, nor the Devil);  
The next, the Virgin's mystical virginity;  
The third, the usual Origin of Evil;  
The fourth at once established the whole Trinity  
On so incontrovertible a level,  
That I devoutly wished the three were four,  
On purpose to believe so much the more. (11.5.33-6.48).

It is particularly the bathos of the final wish for another part to the Godhead which acts as the punch-line for the joke, making the canting belief appear excessive and unreasonable. This is at once the depiction of a human behavioural norm, in the common willingness to seek help (including metaphysical help) when suffering, and a commentary upon the development of religious belief in particular.

The jocularity of the passage can conceal some of its very orthodox comments, such as the assertion that the rhetor never doubted the existence of the Divinity or the Devil, an assertion consistent with Byron's own comments elsewhere. The subscription to the doctrine of the Trinity is one of the Thirty-Nine Articles, and a fundamental precept which differentiates orthodox Christianity from Deism. The devout wish for a fourth part to the Godhead is ridiculed, but is itself too unorthodox for the ridicule to then attach to orthodoxy and thus be sacrilegious. It operates as a criticism of excessive desire to believe, which is practice, not doctrine. Intriguingly, the passage then moves to "the Virgin's mystical virginity", perhaps referring to the Virgin Birth, but more likely, considering the source, referring to Mary's having remained a virgin after marriage, the Catholic and Orthodox dogma of Mary's

Perpetual Virginity. At this point, the poem is expressing some very orthodox views, and making jokes around them but not criticizing them.

In a more serious and more historically-conscious comment, the poem says that “Christians have burnt each other, quite persuaded /That all the Apostles would have done as they did” (1.83.663-4). This targets, as Fairchild notes, “The gap between Christian theory and Christian practice”,<sup>190</sup> between orthodoxy and heteropraxy. Further, the poet describes the burners as Christians, not exempting them from that appellation for their failure, nor discriminating between the different factions who killed one another. Catholics and Protestants alike are ‘Christians’.

The targets of *Don Juan*’s satire are cant and hypocrisy: the verbal representation of righteousness, especially when coupled with an active contravention of such standards. In the process of this satire, both clergy and laity are targeted for their sins, but Christianity as a belief system is not.

## Religion

The discrimination between heteropraxy and orthodoxy is a constant feature of Byron’s work. *Don Juan* repeatedly validates religious, and especially Christian, belief. Expressing a pluralistic valuation of religion, the rhetor of *Don Juan* says, “even the faintest relics of a shrine /Of any worship, wake some thoughts divine” (13.61.487-8). That any faith should have the same effect suggests an idealised or romanticised attachment to general ideas of the Divine, rather than strict adherence to a specific formulation, although one formulation might still be deemed more perfect than others.

At several points, an absence of criticism of religion is evident, such as in the reference to “The only truth that yet has been confessed /Within these latest thousand years or later” (13.7.49-42). Much like the stanzas on ruin and religion in *CHP* Canto II, this carefully avoids criticism of the metrically-possible ‘last two thousand years’ of Christianity. Notably, in the preface to Cantos VI to VIII, the poet deliberately

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<sup>190</sup> Fairchild, p.424.

distances himself from the views of the “wretched Infidel”, radical printer Richard Carlile, saying, “With his opinions I have nothing to do – they may be right or wrong” (McGann 5.297:72-3), a dissociation which has particular relevance to *Cain*. Another religious comment occurs in the description of Juan and Haidée’s love, “kindled from above” (2.186.1483). This is strikingly reminiscent of *The Giaour*’s “love indeed is light from heaven (G 1131), and “Heaven itself descends in love” (G 1136), and yet all of these are more emphatically spiritual and religious than is Moore’s “*that heaven’s in thee*”.

Christianity is commended for its social effects, also, and especially for its central ethic, the love of one’s neighbours. Haidée is described as being free, and not “kept in garrison” (2.175.1400), on account of her home being Christian rather than Muslim, a discrimination reminiscent of Byron’s *Eastern Tales*. She even meets Juan through a demonstration of Christian values: on finding the shipwrecked youth, she

deemed herself in common pity bound,  
As far as in her lay, ‘to take him in,  
A stranger’ (2.129.1030-2).

While this may be “common”, rather than especially ‘Christian’ pity, the quotation is from Matthew 25:31-46, the Parable of the Sheep and the Goats, a validation of orthopraxy rather than orthodoxy, in which salvation is granted upon the basis of charitable action and no mention whatsoever is made of belief. Similarly, in DJ 11.15, Juan’s desire to assist the robber whom he has shot is an inversion of the story of the Good Samaritan, who helps a man beaten by robbers. The Good Samaritan, of course, is given as the example of how to love one’s neighbour (Luke 10:30-37). Juan and Haidée act in an archetypally Christian manner.

Often, the characters’ words are noticed more readily than are their actions, and religious criticisms in the poem drew especially sharp contemporary complaints, such as with Donna Inez’ commentary on the affinity which she perceives between Hebrew and English:

this I heard her say, and can't be wrong,  
And all may think which way their judgments lean 'em,  
"Tis strange – the Hebrew noun which means "I am,"  
The English always use to govern d – n." (1.14.109-12).

The final closed couplet caused some offence, the *British Critic* describing it as a "little touch of blasphemy", and the *Investigator* agreeing,<sup>191</sup> and yet this is not the poem, or the poet, saying, "God damn", the expression to which they are objecting. Instead, a character (and thus the poem and the poet) is commenting upon the fact that this expression, complete with its bizarre conjunction of holiness and anathematization, is a frequent English habit; in 11.12.90, the uncensored expression is described as an English shibboleth. In Joseph's words, the poem is highlighting cant, the divorce of principle from practice, not celebrating the expression which Byron did originally blank out. The poem is being socially critical, not blasphemous, and is actually charging the English people with blasphemy.

A similar critical problem manifested in regard to the scene in which Pedrillo, having drawn the shortest straw, is killed and consumed by some of his shipmates, while Juan abstains. Various contemporary critics censured the mere appearance of this reference to cannibalism, but it is worth noting the result of the action:

                  The consequence was awful in the extreme;  
                  For they who were most ravenous in the act,  
                  Went raging mad – Lord! how they did blaspheme! (2.79.626-8).

The exclamation "Lord!", 'taking the Lord's name in vain', underlines the common nature of the offence, and recalls Donna Inez's thoughts on 'God damn', but this is no mere flippancy. Blasphemy is only one symptom of the cannibals' insanity: it is conjoined with foaming, rolling, convulsions, tearing, grinning, howling, screeching, swearing, and laughing like hyaenas (2.79.629-32). Blasphemy is damned by association, not praised or winked at, and is presented here in conjunction with one of

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<sup>191</sup> *British Critic*, August 1819, p.199 (298); *Investigator*, October 1821, p.358 (1169).

the most taboo of all acts, the consumption of another human. The source for the cannibalism is evidently *The Sufferings of the Crew of the Thomas*,<sup>192</sup> but, once again, the poet has added the religious element.

On another part of *Don Juan*, the *Edinburgh Monthly Review* thus also makes an error in reading when it claims “an apparently fixed disbelief of futurity” in the poem.<sup>193</sup> While many of the poet’s works do question the idea of post-mortem existence, this poem represents the idea as true. In the initial shipwreck, “near two hundred souls /Had left their bodies” (2.55.433-4), and the subsequent discussion of Purgatory implies that the souls did not cease to exist upon their exit. “Nine souls more went” in the swamping of the cutter (2.61.481): the souls are described as travelling, not perishing. Referring to Haidée and Juan, and their great love for one another, the rhetor says, “Their intense souls, into each other pour’d, /If souls could die, had perished in that passion” (2.191.1523-4). The usage of the past-form conditional states that souls cannot die, and thus do exist beyond the death of the body. *Don Juan* affirms the immortality of the soul, although it does go on to problematize that affirmation later, in its engagements with agnosis.

One single line which caused much contemporary comment was 8.9.70, with its condemnation of Wordsworth’s address to God which says, “Yea, Carnage is thy daughter!”<sup>194</sup> Whereas the liberal *Literary Examiner* validates Byron’s criticism of Wordsworth’s “blasphemy”,<sup>195</sup> others took exception to Byron’s reference to it.<sup>196</sup>

*Don Juan*, however, continues by saying, “If *he* speak truth, she is Christ’s sister, and /Just now behaved as in the Holy Land.” (8.9.71-2). The carnage in the Holy Land

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<sup>192</sup> Q.v. Galignani Edition, p.752b n3

<sup>193</sup> *Edinburgh Monthly Review*, October 1819, p.479 (797).

<sup>194</sup> Line 282 of the original version of “Ode, the morning of the day appointed for a general Thanksgiving, January 18, 1816”, later deleted by Wordsworth. Q.v. William Wordsworth, *Shorter Poems, 1807-1820*, ed. by Carl H. Ketcham (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989).

<sup>195</sup> *Literary Examiner*, July 5, 1823, 6-12; July 12, 1823, 23-7, RR, III, 1358-64: p.25 (1363).

<sup>196</sup> The *Literary Gazette* includes Byron’s passage amongst a series of quotations which are followed by the dismissal “what the fool only says in his heart, the worse than fool publishes openly”(July 19, 1823, 451-3, RR, IV, 1461-3: p.451 (1461), alluding to Psalm 14:1, “The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God”). The *British Critic* and *John Bull* exonerate Wordsworth’s “inadvertent nonsense” whilst arraigning Byron’s “shameless blasphemy” and “vice” (*British Critic*, 2nd Series, XX (August 1823), 178-88, RR, I, 331-336: p.184 (334); *John Bull*, July 20, 1823, 229, RR, III, 1220-1: p.229 (1221)).

could refer to Jesus' own bloody death on the cross, or to the bloody suppression of the Jewish rebellion against Roman occupation in 66-73 CE. Most significant in this passage is the idea of God having further offspring, an idea which is blasphemous in Christianity. This is the context into which the rhetor is placing Wordsworth's representation: orthodox Christianity is the frame within which *Don Juan*'s criticism of the other poet functions, whereas the critics evidently assumed that the poet's intent was heterodox. In fact, *Don Juan* is insistently orthodox in its thought in all of these examples.

Religion is occasionally employed in figures for other purposes. For example, the difficulty of completing a poem is expressed with reference to the devil, as a poet becomes

Like Lucifer when hurl'd from heaven for sinning;  
Our sin the same, and hard as his to mend,  
Being pride, which leads the mind to soar too far  
Till our own weakness shows us what we are. (4.1.5-8).

Icarus could have served as well as Lucifer, although the inherent, and orthodox, humility of the poet's acknowledgement of his own temptation towards pride re-appropriates the discourse of enemies who so frequently associated him with Lucifer.

References to religion as a human activity are also present, especially in regard to the human failings of believers. Thus, the poet comments that sailors threatened by storms "vow to amend their lives, and yet they don't; /Because if drown'd, they can't – if spared, they won't" (5.6.47-48). Much as with the rum and psalms, this is a very naturalistic portrayal of human weakness, or fallenness, and it gestures towards the same sort of ameliorative end by the same sort of satirical means.

One of the most direct critical comments on religion refers to a harsh example of Christian exclusivism, in the *Quicunque Vult*, the Athanasian Creed:

one feels at ease,



As after reading Athanasius' curse,  
Which doth your true believer so much please  
[...]  
And decorates the book of Common Prayer  
As doth a rainbow the just clearing air. (6.23.177-9, 183-4).

The Creed refers twice to the necessity of its prescribed faith, "Which Faith except every one do keep whole and undefiled: without doubt he shall perish everlastingly",<sup>197</sup> and the sarcasm in *Don Juan* highlights the incongruity between the practice of such dogmatic exclusivism and the belief in religion as a means to peace. This comment is thus not at odds with Byron's idealist view elsewhere of proper religion.

The poem does make a discrimination between positive and negative forms of religious devotion, as seen in the description of the shipwreck survivors in the lifeboat:

                  their swoln tongues were black,  
As the rich man's in Hell, who vainly scream'd  
To beg the beggar, who could not rain back  
A drop of dew, when every drop had seem'd  
To taste of Heaven — If this be true, indeed,  
Some Christians have a comfortable creed. (2.86.683-8).

Notably, this is not described as the creed of all Christians, but only of "Some", and positive religion can even be adopted by the rhetor as a value by which to persuade others. Thus, the Newgate reformer Elizabeth Fry is addressed with the claim "I thought you had more religion, Mrs. Fry" (10.85.680),<sup>198</sup> taking religious devotion as a value by which the rhetor can urge her to turn her preaching to the corrupt upper

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<sup>197</sup> *The Annotated Book of Common Prayer*, ed. by John Henry Blunt (London: Longman, Green and Co, 1893), p.182.

<sup>198</sup> McGann notes an earlier version in MS S as being 'more courage' (5.463: n680).

classes. The exhortation, while facetious in form, appears genuine in its motivating sentiment, the moral betterment of the rich.

Betterment is also what Juan and other Christians seek for Leila, in trying to convert her from Islam. Their attempts, however, prove fruitless:

one thing's odd, which here must be inserted,  
The little Turk refused to be converted.

It was strange enough she should retain the impression  
Thro' such a scene of change, and dread, and slaughter;  
But though three bishops told her the transgression,  
She showed a great dislike to holy water:  
She also had no passion for confession;  
Perhaps she had nothing to confess: – no matter;  
Whate'er the cause, the church made little of it –  
She still held out that Mahomet was a prophet.

In fact, the only Christian she could bear  
Was Juan[.] (10.55.439-57.450).

Neither Juan nor any of the bishops are presented as considering the view of Christianity naturally held by a person who has seen her entire community slaughtered by self-identifying Christians. This oversight quite possibly results from their own religious ideology, their 'cant' in Byron's terms, so insistently proclaiming the unquestionable superiority of its own position. The naturalistic response on Leila's part is evidenced in her view of Canterbury Cathedral:

being told it was "God's house," she said  
He was well lodged, but only wondered how  
He suffered Infidels in his homestead,  
The cruel Nazarenes, who had laid low  
His holy temples in the lands which bred

The True Believers; – and her infant brow  
Was bent with grief that Mahomet should resign  
A mosque so noble, flung like pearls to swine. (10.75.593-600).

The biblical reference in the final phrase (Matthew 7:6) reinforces the operation of this passage as the reverse of the usual English religious discourse: much as with the Eastern Tales' pairing of "Infidel" with "Christian", the poet could expect his audience to be surprised by the inversion of values here. The pathos of the poem is with Islam, underlining the existence of the multiple, mutually-contradictory religious perspectives, as Donna Inez' instruction to Juan in Russia does:

She also recommended him to God,  
And no less to God's Son, as well as Mother;  
Warned him against Greek-worship, which looks odd  
In Catholic eyes; but told him to smother  
*Outward* dislike, which don't look well abroad (10.32.249-53).

The irony, of course, lies in the reference to "God's [...] Mother", the Virgin. This is not merely a synecdochic symbol for Catholicism, which is explicitly labelled in line 252, but rather a reference to the *hyperdulia* (super-veneration) of the Virgin, one of the most contentious points of difference between Catholicism and England's dominant Protestantism.<sup>199</sup> As odd as Eastern Orthodoxy may appear to a Roman Catholic is just how odd Roman Catholicism may appear to a Protestant, which necessarily raises the question of whether any of them can be declared right or wrong if reasonable people believe in each.

In general, the religious commentary of *Don Juan* tends to adopt and affirm Christian values, including the sacredness of the name of God, the immortality of the soul, the benevolence of God, the vice of pride, and the social value of Christianity. However,

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<sup>199</sup> Serendipitously, the *Gentleman's Magazine's* article on cantos VI-XI begins on the same page as an article supporting a publication by the Bishop of St. David's against Catholic enfranchisement, which declares, "Protestantism is the greatest Providential blessing ever conferred upon this country" (*Gentleman's Magazine*, September 1823, p.215 (1142)).

it does not support Christian exclusivism, either among Christian denominations or between Christianity and other religions.

## War

Another major focus of religious imagery is in the powerful, negative descriptions of war, especially in Cantos VII to IX on the siege of Ismail, where the poem associates the church with the noises of combat: “sounds of horror chime /In like church bells, with sigh, howl, groan, yell, prayer” (8.58.462-3). This does not significantly associate the church with war, of course, as the central operation of the simile lies in the deafening volume of the two events, not in any inherent destructiveness. It is also worth considering Byron’s other sympathetic representations of the church as the victim of the siege of Corinth (SC 30-32) and the victim of the sacking of Rome (DT 2.3). War, not the church, is the enemy.

War and religion are frequently brought together throughout these three cantos of *Don Juan*, particularly in religious terms being used to criticize war, implicitly validating religious values in the process. Thus, shortly after the comparison of deafening war with deafening church bells, a reference is made to the “little minute” in which Ismail is taken:

In a little minute;  
But in the same small minute, every sin  
Contrived to get itself comprised within it. (8.59.466-8).

The enjambed line breathlessly rushes to an ending reinforced by the closely-spaced repetition (ploce) of “minute”, leaving the line-end emphasis with “sin”, and the religious judgement of the acts of warfare as crimes.

War is even contrasted with the creation of the universe by God: ““Let there be light! said God, and there was light!” /“Let there be blood!” says man, and there’s a sea!” (7.41.321-2). The creative activity of God is juxtaposed with the bloodthirstiness of humankind, and the self-evident truth of the latter lends credence to the former. Here,

as elsewhere, religion constitutes the positive value against which the evil of war is contrasted.

It is also in reference to religion that pathos is generated around the loss of Ismail to Leila, who was an inhabitant of the city. It is not merely her home environment which is described as destroyed, but particularly the religious aspects thereof: “there the Muezzin’s call /To prayer was heard no more! – And Juan wept” (8.141.1126-7). The tears of the protagonist reinforce the pathos of the child victim in her grief over the loss of the practice of her native faith, and give the audience personal cause to lament the results of war. This consistently-negative representation of war is entirely at odds with the reading of the *New European Magazine*, which somehow manages to imagine that

the noble poet appears to jest with calamity and slaughter, and to revel amidst scenes of death and misery, and destruction, with all the fiendish gloating of man’s eternal enemy over human wretchedness.<sup>200</sup>

This is much the same mistake in which the jocular comments around references to religion or the shipwreck are seen as the mocking of faith or of tragedy. The fiends are clearly on the side of war in these cantos, but the poem is not, and the most common figure used for conflict is that of Hell. This is most strikingly presented in Canto VIII, and especially in its final form there, in a pounding, anaphoric catalogue of totalities reminiscent of the reference to “every sin” (8.59.467), once more in regard to the taking of the city:

All that the mind would shrink from of excesses;  
All that the body perpetrates of bad;  
All that we read, hear, dream, of man’s distresses;  
All that the Devil would do if run stark mad;  
All that defies the worst which pen expresses;  
All by which Hell is peopled, or as sad

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<sup>200</sup> *New European Magazine*, III (August 1823), 126-8, RR, V, 1871-3: p.127 (1872).

As Hell – mere mortals who their power abuse, –  
Was here (as heretofore and since) let loose. (8.123.977-84).

In particular, the final line, with its pan-chronic scope, underlines the universality not of an innate wickedness of humanity, Calvin's Total Depravity, but of a persistent habit of evil behaviour. This is Byron's consistent representation of the operation of Original Sin, in a movement away from Calvinist-Protestant views, and towards Orthodox and Catholic ones.<sup>201</sup>

The habit of evil behaviour is underlined by the bathos with which Field-Marshal Suwarrow is represented as "the greatest Chief /That ever peopled hell with heroes slain" (7.68.538-9): as in CHP, war is depicted as wasteful, not glorious. The association between war and Hell continues from this point, recurring throughout Cantos VII and VIII: at the end of Canto VII, nature is polluted, the stars dimmed, by "the smoke /Of Hell" (7.86.687-8); a mere seven stanzas onward,

the artillery's flame,  
Which arched the horizon like a fiery cloud  
And in the Danube's waters shone the same –  
A mirrored Hell! [...]

for Heaven's flashes  
Spare, or smite rarely – Man's make millions ashes! (8.6.42-5, 47-8).

The direct contrast between Heaven's sparing and humanity's profligate destructiveness is further underlined by the alliteration and by the ditransitive usage of "make", which graphically presents the cost of war not only in numbers of dead, but in its explicit physicality and the carbonisation of human bodies. The pairing of Hell and war reappears yet again after ten stanzas, in a comparison between the heat of the defenders' fire and

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<sup>201</sup> In Calvin's fundamentally Augustinian concept of Original Sin (Q.v. Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ch.2; Augustine, *On Original Sin*), all of humanity are guilty because Adam sinned, whereas, in the Catholic and Orthodox concept of Original Sin view (Q.v. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Romans*, 10), humanity habitually become sinners just like Adam.

Vesuvius loaded,  
Besides its lava, with all sorts of shot  
And shells or hells (8.16.122-4).

This is reiterated four stanzas farther on, when Nature is again figuratively perverted as the close fire is said to have “really poured as if all Hell were raining, /Instead of Heaven” (8.20.158-9). Heaven is the positive value against which war and Hell are arranged together. The barrage which the attackers face is then once more figured as Hell-fire, when “They found on their return the self-same welcome, /Which made some *think*, and others *know*, a *Hell* come” (8.42.336). Here, the emphasis on the verbs sets up an antithesis between belief and knowledge, demonstrating that the genuine presence of Hell on earth is accurately perceived.

In a similar vein, a Russian is bitten by a fallen Turk (8.83.657-60), and the event is likened to the enmity between humanity and the serpent, configured in Christianity as the Devil, who tempts Eve in the Garden (Genesis 3:15). While this is not war as Hell, it is war as Fall, as a violation of the proper order of the world according to its original design. *Don Juan* borrows both biblical imagery and biblical values.

Another intersection of religion and warfare, however, is the connection established between war and religious dispute, especially in relation to the ethnic and political conflict being configured as a religious one:

A preacher had held forth (who nobly spurned  
All earthly goods save tithes) and bade them push on  
To slay the Pagans, who resisted battering  
The armies of the Christian Empress Katherine. (7.64.509-12).

The ascription of the term “Pagan” (‘believer in a false god’) to Muslims is of highly-debatable accuracy, but this mercenary preacher is not an image of virtue. The politicisation of religion is a frequent feature of Byron’s anti-clericalism, and the connection with war, already thoroughly damned here, makes the preacher’s action all the worse. Ethnicity is conflated with religion throughout the eighth canto in

particular, and so “Turk” is interchangeable with “Mussulman” (q.v. 8.77.609, 611), the Russian soldiers are frequently described simply as “Christian” (8.37.293, 8.107.851), and the two terms are directly opposed (7.87.693-4, 8.7.51-2, 8.75.598-600), as they often are in the Eastern Tales and especially in *The Siege of Corinth*.

It is in this vein that the Turkish chieftain’s eldest son is “As great a scorner of the Nazarene /As ever Mahomet picked out for a martyr” (8.111.882-3): the religious difference is presented as inherently antagonistic, such that being one means both being not the other and being the enemy of that other. No room is allowed for peaceful co-existence, and the result is Leila and Juan’s grief when, eventually,

the crescent’s silver bow  
Sunk, and the crimson cross glared over the field,  
But red with no *redeeming* gore (8.122.972-4).

This negative valuation of warfare is entirely in accordance with such Christian concepts as the claim that “all they that take the sword shall perish by the sword” (Matthew 26:52).

Sometimes, the discourse of British patriotism and belief is adopted for the purpose of subverting it, and this does occur with respect to Byron’s most-consistent criticism of Islam:

In short, howe’er *our* better faith derides,  
These black-eyed virgins make the Moslems fight,  
As though there were one Heaven and none besides –  
Whereas, if all be true we hear of Heaven  
And Hell, there must at least be six or seven. (8.114.908-12).

The reference to “*our* better faith” is evidently ironic, but this comment on parochialism is not a simply antireligious statement, not least because the last two lines present a condition which an orthodox perspective, as also most unorthodox ones, would declare invalid: not all claims about Heaven and Hell are true, and so



there need not be six or seven. In fact, much of orthodox religious discourse is built around declaring invalid any other group's claims. While this passage raises the issue of the multiple representations of the afterlife, it does not compare them with one another, or assert the relative reliability of any of them. The one feature which is clear in the context of these cantos is that war is wrong, which makes any incitement to war, including one framed within a religious discourse, also wrong. Misappropriation of such discourse is the sin highlighted in Suwarrow's brief message to Empress Catherine at the conclusion of the siege,

Glory to *God* and to the Empress!" (*Powers  
Eternal!! such names mingled!*) "Ismail's ours." (8.133.1063-4).

As the Galignani edition notes, this is based on the record of Suwarrow's message notifying his monarch of the capture of Tourtourkaya,<sup>202</sup> but the rhetor's italicised interjection, which is not in that record, serves to highlight the disjunction between the immortal and the mortal. As the irony points out, this is religion misused, the appearance of piety without its actuality, and thus it is cant.

However the concept of a just war is raised in the opening sally against the Duke of Wellington, which comments upon the gory nature of war, and upon its ideological validation:

War's a brain-spattering, windpipe-slitting art,  
Unless her cause by Right be sanctified. (9.4.27-8).

The necessary question is what "Right" can sanctify the spattering of brains and slitting of windpipes. As noted regarding CHP, Byron frequently validated one kind of war: defence of an invaded or even conquered nation. This habit would suggest that line 28 need not be ironic.

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<sup>202</sup> Galignani Edition, p.850nA1.

Consistently, war is damned by a contrast with biblical values, and especially by being associated with Hell. Religion forms the basis of the poem's value system for this condemnation, which makes the poem's commentary essentially a Christian critique of warfare, the activity which could be described as the ultimate failure to love one's neighbour, and hence the archetypal heteropraxy.

## The Bible

The foundation of Christian values is the sacred text, and the Bible is referenced constantly throughout Byron's work, often positively, which raises questions about the accuracy of claims that Byron reacted against it, such as Anne Barton's assertion that "The Bible, though it continued to haunt Byron's vestigially Calvinist conscience, tended now to activate his resistance to revealed religion."<sup>203</sup> Such claims move too quickly from Byron's criticisms of religious misbehaviour to an idea of disbelief which is constantly undermined in this text. For example, two of the early manuscript versions of 1.103.824, which came to refer to "the post-obits of theology", describe the "hopes" or "promises" of "true theology" (McGann 6.41:824), expressing the idea that theology, even if unprovable, can nonetheless be correct.

The Bible is adopted frequently as an intertextual source. The Dedication compares Milton with Samuel summoned from the grave (stanza 11, borrowing from 1 Samuel 28), the ship on which Juan is to leave Spain is likened to Noah's Ark (2.8.62-4), and another simile relates the men in the longboat to the rich man in Hell (2.86.683-6, borrowing from Luke 16:19-31). Such usage is appropriate to the plain, vernacular style of *Don Juan*: since real people really quoted the Bible in everyday circumstances, *Don Juan* should, too. Notably, it does not quote the Bible in order to criticize it, and frequently adopts not merely images but also values. Thus, when a bird flies around Juan's lifeboat, apparently looking for a place to land, another reference is made to the Flood:

And had it been the dove from Noah's Ark,  
Returning there from her successful search,

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<sup>203</sup> Anne Barton, *Byron: Don Juan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p.33.

Which in their way that moment chanced to fall,  
They would have eat her, olive-branch and all. (2.95.757-60).

This refers to the biblical story and assumes its values, in that the dove there is a sign of land and thence of hope, and so the idea of eating her is emblematic of their desperation. Notably, the poet added the biblical reference to the pre-existing story of the bird, which was drawn from *The Loss of the Lady Hobart Packet*.<sup>204</sup>

The simile which compares Juan with Joseph emphasizes the values of the biblical story, and thus Biblical ideology, yet more strongly. When trying to escape from Don Alfonso,

Juan contrived to give an awkward blow,  
And then his only garment quite gave way;  
He fled, like Joseph, leaving it; but there,  
I doubt, all likeness ends between the pair. (1.1.186.1485-8).

The scene is ridiculous, and the tone jocular, but the contrast between the two figures does make for a neatly-balanced allusion: in Genesis 39:7-20, Joseph is falsely accused of adultery, and imprisoned for that, whereas Juan is fairly accused of adultery, but escapes. In saying that “all likeness ends” at their loss of a garment, the rhetor directly implies that Joseph is as innocent as Juan is guilty, thus reinforcing the claimed truth, and hence the moral frame, of the Biblical narrative. The following reference to Isaiah 40:6-7,<sup>205</sup> ends with an imperative again valuing the sacred book:

I being fond of true philosophy,  
Say very often to myself, “Alas!  
All things that have been born were born to die,  
And flesh (which Death mows down to hay) is grass;  
[...]

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<sup>204</sup> Q.v. Galignani Edition, p.754n3.

<sup>205</sup> “All flesh *is* grass, and all the goodliness thereof *is* as the flower of the field: The grass withereth, the flower fadeth”.

read your Bible, sir, and mind your purse.” (1.220.1753-6, 60).

While this command certainly seems flippant in context, it is not contradicted elsewhere, and the instruction with which it is paired, to mind one’s purse, is far from foolish.

There is one place in which the Christian scriptures may appear to be less respectfully treated, when the rhetor draws a parallel between the Ark and the Argo (2.66.525-8). The comparison between a mythological story and a biblical tale might seem to imply that the Bible is likewise mythological, but the passage does use the indicative preterite to refer to the Ark, saying not that it “was said to go cruising”, but instead simply asserting that it “went cruising”. The biblical story is accepted as human history, much in the way that *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers* lists naval history “From Captain Noah down to Captain Cook” (EBSR 356), although Byron recognised that history was often a creative endeavour (q.v. L 1.11.190).<sup>206</sup>

Religious values are frequently adopted, as well as discussed, in these cantos. In a rare instance of an optimistic borrowing from Scripture, in regard to ‘fallen’ women, the rhetor notes that

Fame’s a Carthage not so soon rebuilt

Perhaps this is as it should be; – it is

A comment on the Gospel’s “sin no more,

And be thy sins forgiven:” – but upon this

I leave the saints to settle their own score.

Abroad, though doubtless they do much amiss,

An erring woman finds an opener door

For her return to Virtue (12.78.624-79.631).

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<sup>206</sup> *Don Juan* does not consistently connect Christian scripture with classical tales, instead generally presenting it on its own or in connection with historical accounts, as in the collocation of the reference to Daniel chapter 5, and the writing on the wall, with the corpses at banquets described in Herodotos’ *History* 2.78 (3.65.513-18), both of which were warnings of impending doom.

Given the context in *Don Juan*, the Gospel reference is evidently to the final verse of the story of the woman caught in adultery, John 8:1-11, wherein Jesus also famously declares, “He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her” (verse 7). The poem preaches the message of the Gospel in this stanza, taking Jesus as the model of Christian behaviour, whilst also presenting the practical social value of such a system (12.79.630-1). The poet is not merely pointing out that the English are failing, but is aligning himself with Jesus in the process. Notably, however, this biblical story has Jesus violating Mosaic Law by dispensing with the death penalty for adultery (Deuteronomy 22:22). It is an example of Jesus’ essentialising behaviour, taking mercy as an ideal and elevating it over justice, an ethic with which Byron appears to have sympathized.

*Don Juan* is replete with biblical references, and, while this was common for the period, that custom is not satirized by the poem, even though *Don Juan* deliberately opposes customs regarding the moral propriety of its subject matter and expressions. *Don Juan*’s frequently-positive use of the Bible, and the absence of any negative valuation of that text, makes contemporary and subsequent charges of blasphemy rather less secure, especially when the poem shades into an essentialising, idealising moral discourse.

### **The Decalogue**

There is a more complex borrowing from the Bible. At the time of its publication, one of the most heavily criticized passages in *Don Juan* was the set of poetical commandments, an imitation of the Ten Commandments, in stanzas 204-6 of Canto I. This is denounced by the *Literary Gazette* as “the most indefensible of these lapses [...] a profane parody, in which some of our modern bards are *roasted*”, and the *European Magazine* very similarly calls it an “unpardonable and profane parody”.<sup>207</sup> It is indeed profane, at least in the sense of putting the form of the sacred to a non-sacred use, but it is hardly unusual for the period, at least in private discourse. J C Hobhouse, writing to Byron, says that, in “the unjust steward in the Gospels”, where

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<sup>207</sup> *Literary Gazette*, July 17, 1819, 449-51; July 24, 1819, 470-3, RR, IV, 1406-12: p.450 (1407); *European Magazine*, LXXVI (July 1819) 53-56, RR, II, 965-8: p.54 (966).

the steward reduces someone's debt from fifty to twenty-five sacks of barley (conflating Luke 16:5-7), it should have been doubled instead. He disagrees with, and suggests rewriting, part of one of the Gospels, the most sacred section of the Christian sacred text.<sup>208</sup> In his memoirs, he records a similar situation:

Lord Lauderdale, talking of the late division against the Unitarian Marriage Bill, when the Chancellor beat Lord Liverpool by 39, said that he had asked the Lord Chancellor how he came off so victorious. "Why," said Eldon, "how could it be otherwise? I had the 39 articles for me!" Another proof how jocose these pious men can be in private on sacred subjects.<sup>209</sup>

J W Cowell does something less dramatic in writing,

I have often thought that if learning were like the Christian religion & of different sects & that mathematics were purgatory, I certainly would be a Roman Catholic as then I should be able to buy a licene and go to heaven with the poets.<sup>210</sup>

These examples demonstrate precisely what can be expected of a society in which religion was such a significant part of life: people would play with the ideas of religion, and would make jokes about them, thus 'profaning' them. *Don Juan* then opposes the 'verbal decorum', the cant, by transferring the genuinely familiar style of actual private discourse into a public sphere, as it does with the wish for a fourth person to the Godhead (11.6.47).

Meanwhile, the passage in *Don Juan*, while it does make use of the Decalogue as a template, does not make any commentary on the original text. It is not disparaging of its model. The whole forms a set of commandments on poetics, upon which both Aristotle and (pseudo)Longinus wrote treatises, and references to these two writers repeat through Byron's poem: *Don Juan* refers twice to Longinus and Aristotle

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<sup>208</sup> JMA, MS 43441, 31 July 1810, p.5.

<sup>209</sup> Lord Broughton (John Cam Hobhouse), *Recollections of a Long Life*, ed. by Lady Dorchester, 6 vols (London: John Murray, 1910), III, 32 (7/5/24).

<sup>210</sup> JMA, MS 43421, 13 September 1813, pp.1-2.

together (1.204.1630, 15.25.196) and also separately to Aristotle's "Ποιητικῆς"<sup>211</sup> (3.111.984), "Aristotle's rules" (1.201.1602 and 1.120.959), and his unities of drama (15.32.253-5). *Don Juan*'s poetic commandments are consistent with Byron's views, as expressed elsewhere, especially with regard to Milton, Pope, Wordsworth and Southey. The commandments may also have been influenced by contemporary treatises on poetics, such as the Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*, or S T Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria*. In this vein, Anne Barton describes Byron's first commandment of poetry as "literary [...] blasphemy", since, "Of the three names put forward, only Milton's was still venerated by the majority of Byron's literate contemporaries."<sup>212</sup> Byron's imperatives are serious edicts, jocular in their tone, but not in their message, and thus the pattern of sacred discourse is appropriate to the subject matter for someone who worships 'true' art.

Further, while these seven commandments can be connected with some of the commandments from Exodus 20, those on keeping the Sabbath, on honouring one's parents, and on not committing murder have been omitted, leaving the parallel incomplete, and the charge of parody yet more tenuous. This is a borrowing from the Decalogue, not a focused attack upon it. What has often been read only as a religious parody ought to be considered also as part of Byron's quite deliberate campaign to return to 'orthodoxy' the English poetics which he considered to have strayed into 'heresy'. This is not merely an attempt to overthrow the prevailing system, but to draw it back to a previous position.

## **Agnosticism**

The poem's desired position of poetics appears to be much more definite than its desired position of belief, which is obscured by a consistent agnosticism.

Agnosticism was not identified as a separate belief-position until T H Huxley did so around 1870, but it did nonetheless exist as the firmly non-affirmative alternative to any regular belief.

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<sup>211</sup> I.e. Περὶ Ποιητικῆς, 'About Poetics'.

<sup>212</sup> Barton, p.21; the others were Dryden and Pope.

*Don Juan* includes a questioning of knowledge of the afterlife, and, for Christianised early-nineteenth-century Europe, this automatically meant the Christian view of the afterlife. Thus, when the rhetor of *Don Juan* engages in aporia, the expression of doubt, and declares that “The goal is gain’d, we die, you know – and then – /What then? – I do not know, no more do you” (1.133.1064-134.1065), this is identified by the *Literary Gazette* as “a display of scepticism”.<sup>213</sup> It is scepticism, but in its original, etymological sense: questioning, not rejection. It is agnostic rather than atheistic, and does acknowledge the very definite limits of human understanding in this regard, much as Byron does elsewhere. Agnosticism, being epistemological rather than ontological, precludes only certainty, not theism, and there are specifically theistic expressions of agnosis here, such as when, in the Dedication, the rhetor refers to those seeking fame through art, and says, “The major part of such appellants go /To – God knows where – for no one else can know” (9.71-2). The common expression “God knows” still does weakly reiterate the deity’s knowledge, and therefore existence, and this appears also in more literal form, as in reference to Juan after the shipwreck:

Juan slept like a top, or like the dead,  
 Who sleep at last, perhaps, (only God knows)  
 Just for the present (2.134.1066-8).

The expression “God knows” occurs repeatedly throughout the poem (1.115.919, 2.65.514, 5.109.868, 5.134.1072, 6.2.10, 8.49.386, 15.63.498, 15.66.521), as does the trisyllabic euphemism “Heaven knows” (1.215.1720, 2.80.634, 2.127.1013, 2.170.1360, 2.187.1490, 4.76.606, 4.110.876, 5.65.515, 5.138.1103, 6.2.16, 8.44.348, 12.88.701, 14.25.194, 15.78.603). In each case, the poet is utilising a stock phrase of contemporary discourse, but the text is also reiterating a stock concept of contemporary discourse, that there is a God who does know, although there is one single instance of a pluralized variation, in “the Gods know” (8.31.243). As a theistic expression, the most affirmative usage is in reference to people’s post-mortem fates: “Where is Napoleon the Grand? God knows! /Where little Castlereagh? The devil can

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<sup>213</sup> *Literary Gazette*, 17 July 1819, p.450 (1407)



tell!” (11.77.609-10). The punchline which puts “Carotid-artery-cutting Castlereagh” (10.59.468) in Hell leaves open the inference by analogy that Napoleon is in Heaven and that there is a God to know this.

The text is reinforcing, not challenging, the stereotypical belief position in that particular regard, whilst challenging the certainty of mortal knowledge about these issues: non-specific theism is implicitly affirmed, and this is coherent with the poem’s previously-discussed representation of the post-mortem existence of the soul, but more specific formulations of belief are left undetermined by the criticism of their epistemology.

Another expression of agnosis is joined with an attack on cant. The first part is the playfully sceptical one, not attacking religion, but gently questioning it. This begins with the description of “this unriddled wonder, /The World, which at the worst’s a glorious blunder” (11.3.23-4), declaring the self-evident truth that the world is not understood by us, and moving on to a positive valuation which at the very least implies theism, since a blunder can only be made by an agent. This is further underlined by the beginning of the next stanza, which identifies the theistic position of the Bible as better than the vagaries of pure randomness, and then proceeds into a consideration of religious disputation:

If it be Chance; or if it be according  
To the Old Text, still better: – lest it should  
Turn out so, we’ll say nothing against the wording,  
As several people think such hazards rude:  
They’re right; our days are too brief for affording  
Space to dispute what *no one* ever could  
Decide, and *every body one day* will  
Know very clearly – or at least lie still. (11.4.25-4.32).

This is one of the passages which the *Literary Gazette* damns as “this wretched mixture of every thing that is wicked and silly”.<sup>214</sup> While the passage does end with the possibility of annihilation in death, something which Byron sometimes expressed as a positive value,<sup>215</sup> it is presented as merely one possibility, and the other, twice-acknowledged one is the possibility that the Bible’s account could be true.

Unknowing is not identical to disbelieving. Sometimes, the expression of agnosis includes implicit affirmation of belief, as in Canto IX, combined with a questioning of the practice of religion:

Without *me*, there are Demagogues enough,  
And Infidels, to pull down every steeple  
And set up in their stead some proper stuff.  
Whether they may sow Scepticism to reap Hell,  
As is the Christian dogma rather rough,  
I do not know; – I wish men to be free  
As much from mobs as kings – from you as me. (9.25.194-200).

The rhetor is discriminated from the Infidels, and is thus not one, which is consistent with the comment about never having doubted the existence of God (11.6.42) and with the rejection of Carlyle’s views (Preface to Cantos VI to VIII, 70-2), but the rhetor still denies knowledge of metaphysical ontology (9.25.199). The final disclaimer of partisanship acts in tandem with the reference to the Infidels’ desire to replace churches with something else, placing the rhetor outside of the conflict of belief systems. In the process, “the Christian dogma”, a rule taught to be believed and not questioned, is described as “rather rough”, which constitutes a reproof to the belief system, but a very gentle one: the value by which the system is judged is mercy, one

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<sup>214</sup> *Literary Gazette*, 6 September 1823, p.563 (1465); the others include 11.5-6, and the reference to God as a “Gentleman Farmer” (9.31.247-251).

<sup>215</sup> “I doubt that we have any right to pity the dead for their own sakes” (BLJ 5.256, to Murray 12/8/17, on hearing of the death of Mme de Staël); “the dead are at rest, and none but the dead can be so” (BLJ 2.77, to Hodgson 22/8/11); “I think of death often (continued Byron), as I believe do most people who are not happy, and view it as a refuge “where the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest.”” *Lady Blessington’s Conversations of Lord Byron*, ed. by Ernest J Lovell, Jr (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), pp.127-8, quoting Job 3:17.

of the system's own primary values. That same dogma did not have universal acceptance in Byron's own day.

Unknowing is a common feature of *Don Juan*, and much of the poem expresses epistemological doubt. At times, this is focussed upon metaphysical knowledge, but a few of the instances problematize knowledge in general: "Socrates said, our only knowledge was / "To know that nothing could be known"" (7.5.33-4, echoing CHP 2.7.56). *Don Juan* contains enough references to doubt as to constitute an aporetic discourse. At times, generalised epistemological doubt seems to be the central topic: "How little do we know that which we are! /How less what we may be!" (15.99.787-8). Ignorance and doubt are universalised, as the rhetor, in borrowing a moment from Byron's own life, says, "I've stood upon Achilles' tomb, /And heard Troy doubted; Time will doubt of Rome" (4.101.807-8). The assertion that Rome will be doubted is a clear demonstration that dubiousness is far from being evidence against facticity, and is instead a natural result of human nature and especially of human ignorance.

Part of the consideration of the limits of human knowledge is the devaluation of philosophy, from the poem's not launching *in medias res* to the commentary on Juan's youthful cogitations:

'Twas strange that one so young should thus concern  
His brain about the action of the sky;  
If *you* think 'twas philosophy that this did,  
I can't help thinking puberty assisted. (1.93.743-4).

Lambro is later described as being ignorant, just like a philosopher (3.26.204-8). As Charles R McCabe notes, Byron's rhetoric "probes satirically and ironically into several fundamental religious and philosophical presuppositions", destabilising them. Philosophy suffers more than religion, particularly through not being separated into idealised and fallen varieties. Frequently, philosophy is a heuristic exercise, and so it falls under the criticism of *Don Juan*'s vehement epistemological doubt. What McCabe goes on to say, following Hoagwood's viewpoint, is that this "prepares us to

accept more readily the inconclusiveness of skeptical thought”,<sup>216</sup> and yet the acceptance of inconclusiveness is no more present in *Don Juan* than is the acceptance of conclusiveness. Andrew M Cooper is closer in saying, “Byron’s scepticism is less a definite philosophic rationalism than a perpetual process of pragmatic adjustment”.<sup>217</sup> it is an atelic method, not a finished system. The activity of philosophizing thus remains a major component of the rhetor’s role in *Don Juan*:

I love Wisdom more than she loves me;  
My tendency is to philosophize  
On most things, from a tyrant to a tree;  
But still the spouseless Virgin *Knowledge* flies.  
What are we? and whence came we? what shall be  
Our *ultimate* existence? what’s our present?  
Are questions answerless, and yet incessant. (6.63.498-504).

These questions being “incessant” means that the issues are not simply abandoned, and the rhetor does not relax either into an assured materialism or into a complacent apathy regarding metaphysics.<sup>218</sup> Instead, there is a constant attempt to answer the unanswerable, regardless of the prediction of complete absence of lasting success:

I would solicit free discussion  
Upon all points no matter what, or whose –  
Because as Ages upon Ages push on,  
[...]  
What was a paradox becomes a truth or  
A something like it – as bear witness Luther! (17.6.41-3, 7-8).

The ideological stability of lasting philosophical success, however, is not necessary for a thinker who is capable of holding contradictory propositions in tension: “I leave

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<sup>216</sup> McCabe, ‘A Secret Prepossession: Skepticism in Byron’s *Don Juan*’, *Renascence*, 28 (1975), pp3-14: 7.

<sup>217</sup> Cooper, ‘Shipwreck and Skepticism in *Don Juan*’, *Keats-Shelley Journal*, 32 (1983), 83-80 (p.75).

<sup>218</sup> This is wherein any such system as Pyrrhonism does not apply, because the traditional stoic calmness is not attained by the rhetor of *Don Juan*.

the thing a problem, like all things” (17.13.97). This approaches the Greek Sceptics’ *εποχη*, but it is not formalised as a system.<sup>219</sup> The doubt appears to depend more upon a pragmatic recognition of the limits of human knowledge than upon any philosophical self-justification. Nonetheless, the rhetor, and perhaps the poet, can take pride in being in elite company, since “‘Que sçais-je’ was the motto of Montaigne, /As also of the first Academicians” (9.17.129-30).

The strongest articulations of scepticism present agnosis elevated to radical, reflexive doubt:

There’s no such thing as certainty, that’s plain  
As any of Mortality’s Conditions:  
So little do we know what we are about in  
This world, I doubt if doubt itself be doubting. (9.17.133-6).

Such reflexive doubt undermines unbelief as well as belief, and thus the rhetor’s claim with respect to the belief in ghosts, that “you must be in my condition, /Before you learn to call this superstition” (15.98.783-4) is equally applicable to any form of belief about metaphysics. This doubt is universal. The apparent Pyrrhonism continues through much of the poem, predicated upon radical epistemological doubt, the sheer difficulty of establishing and thus knowing anything at all for certain. Thus,

If from great Nature’s or our own abyss  
Of thought, we could but snatch a certainty,  
Perhaps mankind might find the path they miss –  
But then ’twould spoil much good philosophy.  
[...]

Pray tell me, can you make fast,  
After due search, your faith to any question?  
Look back o’er ages, ere unto the stake fast

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<sup>219</sup> Q.v. Hoagwood, and also Anne K Mellor’s *English Romantic Irony*.

You bind yourself, and call some mode the best one.  
Nothing more true than *not* to trust your senses;  
And yet what are your other evidences?

For me, I know nought; nothing I deny,  
Admit, reject, contemn; and what know you,  
Except perhaps that you were born to die?  
And both may after all turn out untrue. (14.1.1-4, 2.11-3.20).

While humanity misses the path, the rhetor does not represent this as a loss, the loss instead being what philosophy should suffer were the demonstrably-true path ever found. Philosophy is identified as a noumenological exercise, belonging to the realm of thought rather than of being. However, it is not represented as an Ideal. *Don Juan* indulges in the plentiful possibilities of doubt, and in a freedom from the narrow confines of certitude. In contrast, being bound to a stake suggests not merely a lack of freedom, but also, in the context of religion, necessarily raises the spectre of sectarian violence and the burning of heretics. Looking back over the ages also serves to emphasize just how many different religious movements have appeared, anathematized their opponents, and been quashed in their turn. The sheer number of contradictory viewpoints problematizes the assumption of any one of them. Further, the rejection of the reliability of the senses excludes empirical positivism as firmly as it excludes the various religious foundationalisms, thus leaving no room for any firm belief anywhere, even in materialism. Uncertainty remains.

The repeated assertion of this metaphysical doubt upset some of Byron's contemporaries as much as it pleased others. For the rhetor, and possibly for the poet, this doubt appears to be less an answer than a reason to question further, recalling the unceasing questions of 6.63.504. Thus, the reaction to the assassination of the military commandant in Ravenna turns towards this same speculation:

I gazed (as oft I have gazed the same)  
To try if I could wrench aught of death  
Which should confirm, or shake, or make a faith;

But it was all a mystery. Here we are,

And there we go: – but *where*?

[...]

and we dead?

We, whose minds comprehend all things? (5.38.302-39.306, 310-11).

This questioning, because it seeks to “confirm, or shake, or make a faith”, is exploring belief positions, and it is significant that it occurs in reference not just to an event which the poet created on paper, but one which he experienced in real life. This passage appears to be genuine interrogation, not ironic criticism, of the basis for belief.

Returning to the expression which commences Canto XIV, “For me, I know nought; nothing I deny”, the rhetor universalises this idea as an apophthegm, before proceeding into aetiology:

He who doubts all things nothing can deny:

Truth’s fountains may be clear – her streams are muddy,

And cut through such canals of contradiction,

That she must often navigate o’er fiction. (15.88.701-4).

The cause of doubt is located in the obscurity of truth in its manifested form rather than in its essence. Truth is thus idealised as a pure archetype, corrupted by the imperfections of the world, leaving the truth indeterminable and agnosticism the only reasonable position. This is as much a denial of atheism as it is of theism.<sup>220</sup> The next stanza continues this strain, turning towards discursive formulations of truth claims:

Apologue, Fable, Poesy, and Parable,

Are false, but may be rendered also true,

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<sup>220</sup> Agnosticism, not being ontological, can be theistic or atheistic in its leanings.

By those who sow them in a land that's arable:  
'Tis wonderful what Fable will not do!  
'Tis said it makes Reality more bearable:  
But what's Reality? Who has its clue?  
Philosophy? No; she too much rejects.  
Religion? Yes; but which of all her sects? (15.89.705-12).

This is *Don Juan's* anti-philosophical stance at its most explicit. Via the allusion to the Parable of the Sower in line 707,<sup>221</sup> the first half of the stanza identifies truth not with ontological accuracy, but with belief: what is false can become true by being believed, since it can become true to the internal world of the believer. This makes truth a noumenal value alone, an aspect of thought rather than of being. Line 709 then turns to the idea of the psychological value of belief, and finally elevates religion over philosophy as a means to approach reality. The *Literary Gazette* objected to this passage and described it as being among "the poor man's best flings at Christianity",<sup>222</sup> presumably because of its failure to choose the correct one from the multiplicity of competing religious claims. Despite the problematization via the consideration of that range of views, it is religion which is coherent with the role of belief as the basis of truth in line 706, whereas philosophy is, for a rhetor who asserts "nothing I deny" (14.3.17), guilty of foreclosure of possibilities: if truth is the product of belief and affirmation, then negation and demands for proof are obstacles. Obviously, this applies equally well to dogmatic religious belief. Like the poet of *CHP*, the rhetor is apparently seeking a truth in which to believe, even if that belief includes some uncertainty.

Another passage which disturbed the *Literary Gazette* is one which moves from the belief in ghosts to the basis of such belief, and particularly the argument from authority:

'Tis time to strike such puny doubters dumb as

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<sup>221</sup> Matthew 13:3-23, Luke 8:4-15.

<sup>222</sup> *Literary Gazette*, April 3, 1824, 212-3, RR, IV, 1472-3: pp.212-3 (1473), the reference including 15.13, on Socrates and Jesus, and 16.4, on 'Augustine', i.e. Tertullian.



The sceptics who would not believe Columbus.

Some people would impose now with authority,  
Turpin's or Monmouth Geoffry's Chronicle;  
Men whose historical superiority  
Is always greatest at a miracle.  
But Saint Augustine has the great priority,  
Who bids all men believe the impossible,  
*Because 'tis so.* Who nibble, scribble, quibble, he  
Quiets at once with "*quia impossibile.*"

And therefore, mortals, cavil not at all;  
Believe: – if 'tis improbable, you *must*,  
And if it is impossible, you *shall*:  
'Tis always best to take things upon trust.  
I do not speak profanely to recall  
Those holier mysteries which the wise and just  
Receive as gospel, and which grow more rooted,  
As all truths must, the more they are disputed (16.4.31-6.48)

Byron misremembered Augustine in place of Tertullian,<sup>223</sup> but the whole passage is nonetheless a consideration of bases of belief, and particularly of dogmatism, which is at odds with Idealism and with the poet's views of religion and religious belief as expressed throughout his work. The irony in the sixth stanza in particular is directed at this form of belief which has no basis beyond what is taught. Interestingly, the modal "shall" in line 43 could be predictive rather than jussive, declaring that people have a consistent habit of believing the impossible, just as they have a habit of promising repentance which they will never effect (5.6.47-8). The poem's commentary would then focus on general human psychology, one of Byron's favourite topics.

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<sup>223</sup> *De Carne Christi* 5.4, "Certum est, *quia impossibile* est": 'it is certain, because it is impossible [and so no one would have just made it up]'.

The agnosticism of *Don Juan* is unsystematic, and perhaps quite deliberately so. It is more a pragmatic response to the perceived condition that knowing is impossible than it is a celebration of its own validity. The presentation of answers, or at least of a system for finding them, would be appropriate to a didactic text, but radical epistemological doubt makes answers impossible, which makes a discussion of heuristic methods pointless. However, this does not make belief pointless, because belief can exist “for comfort”, without necessarily requiring ontological accuracy: rather than taking epistemic religion, a metaphysical basis of understanding and explanation, it moves rather more towards anagogical religion, a mysticized inspiration. Joseph’s general comment is pertinent here:

both predestination and a stoic *ataraxia* [calmness] are rejected; something like the idea of a stoic divinity evident to reason and of a periodic *ekpyrosis* [conflagration] blends in with Cuvier’s catastrophism, and shades over into a pyrrhonic *epoché* or denial of final certainty and an assent to *to eulogon*, the rational; the moral order and the soul of man keep their place by a kind of Pascalian wager.<sup>224</sup>

The representation of belief in *Don Juan* reaches no simple and stable position, and such comprehensive solutions as predestination or calm acceptance are not adopted. The one problem with Joseph’s description lies in the mention of *to eulogon*, which implies that rationality is given a greater place than it is in a poem which constantly reiterates the limitations of human reason. Not even rationality is beyond *Don Juan*’s doubt, although certain religious elements are never subjected to it.

## **Fall**

One factor of which the rhetor is sure is the ubiquity of fallenness, another common discursive trope within the contemporary culture, but one which was particularly

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<sup>224</sup> Joseph, p.307.

directed towards the scandalous poet,<sup>225</sup> and thus one which he had quite personal cause to employ. Yet more significantly, as Robert F Gleckner has pointed out,

It is a poem of endless cycles or, as Ridenour has put it, endless repetitions of the Fall, which form the skeletal framework for the myriad variations Byron plays upon the nature of the fallen. Furthermore, it is a poem written (or narrated) from the point of view of the fallen, and this central fact determines both form and style of the entire work. It is not written from above, or chanted mysteriously from within the temple of prophecy, or thundered divinely from the mount; the gaze of the poet is level with life, the accents of his voice the very accents of all men.<sup>226</sup>

Gleckner thus connects fallenness with the idea of the rhetorical plain style, as opposed to the ‘high’ or ‘grand’. This is very much a part of *Don Juan*, in the consistent effort to discourse upon the topics of real conversation, to circumvent the ‘verbal decorum’ of cant via a witty frankness and even coarseness.

The theme of fallenness thus appears throughout this poem, and the most scandalous occasion ought to have been the passage addressed to Love, which mixes sexual intercourse with the Fall, although that may be the very reason why the contemporary critics passed over it in silence:

well I  
May pause in wondering how all Souls are dipt  
In thy perennial fountain: – how man *fell*, I  
Know not, since Knowledge saw her branches stript  
Of her first fruit, but how he falls and rises  
*Since, thou* hast settled beyond all surmises. (9.55.435-40).

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<sup>225</sup> E.g. the *Literary Gazette*'s claim that the poet himself was “fallen” and insensate (September 16, 1823, 562-3, RR, IV, 1464-5: p.562 (1464)).

<sup>226</sup> Gleckner, p.330.

Notably, the poet does not repeat the common misreading that the Fall itself has anything to do with sex.<sup>227</sup> This passage shares a common theme with much of the rest of the poem: agnosis, the lack of knowledge. However, it also shows a possible link with Platonism, particularly in the reference to the dipping of souls in the fountain, which could be from the sixth-century Platonist Damascius. This is interesting because Platonism is necessarily interconnected with Idealism.

The Fall also makes its appearance in an intertextual reference which, returning once more to agnosis, mixes biblical and Shakespearian allusions on a common theme of the unknown future:

“But Heaven,” as Cassio says, “is above all, –  
No more of this then, – let us pray!” We have  
Souls to save, since Eve’s slip and Adam’s fall,  
Which tumbled all mankind into the grave,  
Besides fish, beasts, and birds. “The Sparrow’s fall  
Is special providence,” though how *it* gave  
Offence, we know not; probably it perched  
Upon the tree which Eve so fondly searched. (9.19.145-52).

The rough quotation from *Othello* 2.3.97, 106-7 is part of Cassio’s drunken speech on salvation and predestination: “there be souls must be saved, and there be souls must not be saved” (O 2.3.98-9). The sparrow quotation appears in Hamlet’s discussion on death with Horatio shortly before fighting Laertes, and also immediately prior to the comment on predestined, inevitable fate:

If it be now,  
'tis not to come; if it be not to come, it will be  
now; if it be not now, yet it will come (H 5.2.214-6).<sup>228</sup>

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<sup>227</sup> Sexual intercourse first appears in the Genesis account in 4:1, after Adam and Eve have been exiled.

<sup>228</sup> William Shakespeare, *Four Tragedies* (London: Penguin, 1994).

In *Don Juan*, these quotations are combined with the reference to the Fall (9.19.147), to Original Sin (9.19.148), and to the idea of the sin-corrupted world (9.19.149), the one question directed at them all being the offence which causes the sparrow's death. Since a personal sin is demanded to justify the punishment of death, this is again not the Calvinistic-Augustinian view of Original Sin.

The passage's implications include the Problem of Pain, the question of the existence of suffering in a world ruled by an omnipotent, benevolent god, asking why some souls must not be saved, why death must come, why the rest of humanity should suffer for Adam and Eve's Fall, and why the rest of creation should suffer for humanity's fall. This problem is intrinsically bound up with the idea of predestination, as a controlling God is necessarily more culpable than a permissive one. Intriguingly, however, the *Don Juan* passage takes the sparrow from *Hamlet* as the direct subject of its central question, when the sparrow is indeed granted special providence in the Gospels: "not one of them is forgotten before God".<sup>229</sup> Far from being a concerted attack, this allusion returns to the orthodox pronouncement that God is conscious of the world and has it all under control. The corruption brought on by Original Sin, or by a Fall analogous to it, is a fundamental principle of the world of *Don Juan*. As Ridenour notes,

Man, who in his paradisaal state had ruled all things, now becomes subject to the vicissitudes of a fallen natural order. Byron sees a symbol of this state of subjection in natural man's helplessness before the law of gravity. [...] As Byron sees it, since the Fall men naturally fall (morally and physically).<sup>230</sup>

Corruption debases the perfect to the imperfect, which then begets further imperfection in an endless pattern.<sup>231</sup> As Joseph notes, there is also the reference to Cuvier, presenting the cyclical model of successive creation and destruction, and the consequent loss of knowledge:

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<sup>229</sup> Luke 12:6, and also Matthew 10:29.

<sup>230</sup> George Ridenour, *The Style of Don Juan* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1960), p.30.

<sup>231</sup> This is entirely orthodox, and is actually Thomas Aquinas' answer to the Problem of Pain (*Summa Theologica*, 2.1.85).

So Cuvier says; – and then shall come again  
Unto the new Creation, rising out  
From our old crash, some mystic, ancient strain  
Of things destroyed and left in airy doubt (9.38.297-300).

This is largely a comment on the obscurity of history, although it does serve to raise the existence of Cuvier's cyclical model as a competitor to a linear reading of the "sacred history" of the Genesis account.<sup>232</sup> Such jocular references to religious belief and particularly to sacred narratives rarely make any particularly definite claims about religion in themselves, but their very frequency demonstrates the significance of religion as a topic of common discourse. Throughout *Don Juan*, references to orthodox religious ideas and to the value of religious belief construct a positive representation of faith, provided that it avoids hypocritical behaviour. Within this discourse, as presented by the poem, the Fall is repeatedly represented as "true" (14.23.179), and thus provides a historical analogue for a description of Gulbayez:

Her form had all the softness of her sex,  
Her features all the sweetness of the devil,  
When he put on the cherub to perplex  
Eve, and paved (God knows how) the road to evil (5.109.865-8).

Once again, "God knows", and the text is describing here as incomprehensible precisely what occurred in the Fall, an event which the Bible represents as the worst choice of history, a decision incomprehensibly wrong. In another biblical reference Johnson tells the hero, who is now dressed as a woman, "Keep your good name; though Eve herself once fell" (5.84.670): there is a serious edge to advising vigilance to a pretty young man, enslaved and dressed as a woman, in Ottoman Turkey. This is the general pattern of the references to the Fall, cloaking seriousness in jocularly so well that it can never be clear which is more significant to the poet.

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<sup>232</sup> The linear reading is actually a non-literalist one, since the sequences of Genesis 1 and Genesis 2 contradict one another, which makes the idea of an "orthodox" reading quite problematic.

The idea of a fallen world is, of course, not exclusively biblical or Christian. Hesiod's progressive cycles of degeneration in *Works and Days* operate upon much the same basis (and *Don Juan* does allude to Hesiod's scheme in the reference to "A day of gold from out an age of iron", 3.36.283), as does the cosmology of Idealism, which subordinates the manifest imperfection of the 'real' to transcendent perfection of the Ideal.

## **Idealism**

Idealism is essentially the belief in a world of ideas. Particularly in Platonic Idealism, this tends to revolve around archetypal ideas being the 'real' version of their imperfect manifestations in the sensible world. This can connect with Christian lapsarian concepts: in Christianity, the world after the Fall is the flawed version of an originally-perfect Creation; in Idealism, the world around us is composed of the flawed versions of perfect archetypes. As Frederick Copleston notes of Friedrich Schelling's views,

The Fall consists in the emergence of a dim image of an image, resembling the shadow which accompanies the body. All things have their eternal ideal essence in the Idea or divine ideas. Hence the centre and true reality of any finite thing is in the divine Idea, and the essence of the finite thing may thus be said to be infinite rather than finite. Considered, however, precisely as a finite thing, it is the image of an image (that is, an image of the ideal essence which is itself a reflection of the absolute). And its true existence as a distinct finite thing is an alienation from its true centre, a negation of infinity.

[...]

Creation is thus a Fall in the sense that it is a centrifugal movement. The absolute identity becomes differentiated or splintered from the normal level, though not in itself.<sup>233</sup>

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<sup>233</sup> Frederick Copleston, SJ, *A History of Philosophy*, 8 vols (London: Search Press, 1963), VII, 127, 129, on Schelling's *Philosophy and Religion* (1804), the ideas being very similar to Plato's Cave Allegory.

This view of Creation as diminution, and thus as Fall, is also quite evident in the passages on art in CHP Canto IV. The Idealist and Christian concepts of the Fall are highly compatible, and much Western thought developed through the interrelation of Christian and Platonic ideas. This Idealism also allows for a sharp discrimination between spiritual and physical, to such an extent that the body can be, as it is in *Manfred* and *Cain* and *Don Juan*, described as improper to the spirit:

With the substantial company engrossed  
By matter, and so much materialised,  
That one scarce knew at what to marvel most  
Of two things – *how* (the question rather odd is)  
Such bodies could have souls, or souls such bodies! (DJ 16.90.766-8).

In Christianity, this discrimination descended from Manicheanism, and most famously became the Albigensian Catharist heresy, condemned in twelfth-century France. The disjunction between such ‘gross’ bodies and souls necessarily calls into question the very idea of the soul, and might have been behind Byron’s various comments on the loathsomeness of physical bodies, e.g., his dislike of seeing women eat (BLJ 2.208, to Lady Melbourne 25/9/12). As noted earlier, however, *Don Juan* does assert the existence of the soul in 2.191.1523-4, et al, allowing for the existence of an idealised soul trapped by base matter, one of the themes of *Manfred*. However, Jerome McGann, working from *Beppo* to *Don Juan*, dismisses the proper place of Idealism in either poem:

Again at first glance we seem to be looking at a verbal definition of the conventional *beau idéal*, i.e., at a Platonic concept or “idea.” It is not so, however, for [...] Byron is deliberately summarizing the specific accumulation of mortal beauties and delights

[...]

This, Byron’s curious reinterpretation of an originally Platonic aesthetic, is made the basis of *Beppo* and *Don Juan*. According to Byron, art imitates an



original ideal image. The original is not, however, a super mundane reality but something “real,” something from the natural or human world.<sup>234</sup>

As reasonable as this argument may be for *Beppo*, *Don Juan* is not the same poem, and does not express the same ideas, not least because it was written over a much longer period of the poet’s life.

Idealism in its traditional form is referred to in *Don Juan* in the commentary on love: “some heathenish philosophers /Make Love the Main Spring of the Universe” (9.73.583-4). The commentary seems to adopt these philosophers’ view at least in part, and so continues for eight stanzas, with love acting as a Platonic Ideal, a value which dominates the operation of the physical world. The particular appeal of this position might be the noumenalist aspect in which Ideals can exist even without achieving perfect manifestation in the material world, remaining simply ideas. As such, they neither invalidate nor are invalidated by agnosis: they only need to be conceivable, not observable, in order to exist. Idealism and agnosis happily co-exist, so long as the Idealism is not too rigidly affirmed, and this is especially true for as unsystematic an agnosticism as *Don Juan*’s. This Idealist position even encompasses the protagonist, as Juan himself is

real or ideal, –

For both are much the same, since what men think

Exists when the once thinkers are less real

Than what they thought, for mind can never sink (10.20.153-6).

The idea that the mind can never sink, an idea which recurs throughout Byron’s poetry, is linked to the Idealist concept of the Ideals existing above and beyond the material realm, being the original Platonic *metaphysics*. This is highlighted in the poem’s reference to Bishop Berkeley:

What a sublime discovery ’twas to make the

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<sup>234</sup> McGann, *Fiery Dust*, p.290.

Universe universal Egotism!

That all is ideal – *all ourselves*: I'll stake the

World (be it what you will) that *that's* no Schism. (11.2.9-12).

The wager in the final line most likely refers to the lack of division of opinion on this topic, since humans so consistently tend towards egotism. It therefore constitutes a critique of human thought about thought. The sarcasm directed at the egocentric nature of the central idea, and particularly at Berkeley's claim that "all the choir of heaven, and furniture of earth, – in a word, all those bodies which compose the mighty frame of this world, – have not any subsistence without a mind",<sup>235</sup> is directed at the noumenalist aspect of Idealism, in which the importance, and sometimes the very existence, of matter is dependent upon human consciousness. McGann claims that "Byron here presents a materialist's objection to a basic idealist position as set forth by Bishop Berkeley", and further suggests, "For a concise exposition of Byron's (guarded and sceptical) materialism see his "Detached Thoughts", nos. 96-8 (*BLJ* IX.45-6)."<sup>236</sup> However, Detached Thought 96 states, "Of the Immortality of the Soul – it appears to me that there can be little doubt" (*BLJ* 9.45-6), and 97 declares,

Matter is eternal – always changing – but reproduced and as far as we can comprehend Eternity – Eternal – and why not Mind? – Why should not the Mind act within and upon the Universe? (*BLJ* 9.46).

The comment is only 'materialist' in so far as it acknowledges the independent existence of matter. Nonetheless, its focus is upon noumenalism, the operation of the mind and the processes of pure thought, not materialism, and the conception of matter as constantly changing is a basic element of Idealism: the manifestation is in flux, while the Ideal remains constant. Further, as E H Coleridge explains, "Berkeley did not deny the reality of existence, but the reality of matter as an abstract conception",

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<sup>235</sup> Berkeley, *Principles of Human Knowledge and Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous* (London: Penguin, 1988), p.55.

<sup>236</sup> McGann 5.746-7:1ff.

and placed ‘reality’ within the phenomenal realm, in minds’ perceptions of their environments.<sup>237</sup>

The rhetor of *Don Juan* was apparently reacting against what he perceived to be the excessive subjectivism and anthropocentrism of Berkeley’s Idealism, in which the perceiving beings, by experiencing the universe, make the universe real, the “esse est percipi” of *Three Dialogues Between Hylas and Philonous*. The rhetor is not commenting on, let alone criticizing, the existence of Ideals, which exist in the noumenal realm rather than the phenomenal. Idealism is so recurrent a motif of *Don Juan* as to be reflected even in Juan’s dancing:

The “*tout ensemble*” of his movements wore a  
Grace of the soft Ideal, seldom shown,  
And ne’er to be described (14.40.317-19).

Juan’s movements do not display the Ideal qua the Ideal, but merely a Grace, a gift bestowed by it. In Platonic Idealism, the Ideal is seldom shown because the imperfect world is rarely capable of manifesting the perfect idea, and it is ineffable because it is too far beyond the experience of humanity to have been encapsulated by human vocabulary. A similar aspect is evident in a reflexive comment on the rhetor’s own discourse:

And therefore what I throw off is ideal –  
Lower’d, leaven’d, like a history of Freemasons;  
Which bears the same relation to the real,  
As Captain Parry’s voyage may do to Jason’s.  
The grand Arcanum’s not for men to see all;  
My music has some mystic diapasons;  
And there is much which could not be appreciated  
In any manner by the uninitiated. (14.22.169-76).

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<sup>237</sup> Coleridge, 6.427n.

Notably, it is the ‘ideal’ which is paralleled with Parry’s historical quest for a northwestern passage, and the ‘real’ with Jason’s mythical quest for the golden fleece: in a proper Idealist manner, the ephemeral ‘real’ is less true than is the eternal Ideal. The paradoxical claim to esotericism is a contradiction of the plain style, but its incomprehensibility is at once both a reflexive joke about the tendency of the poem itself to fall into confused or confusing arrangement (synchysis) and a commonplace of mysticism, which tends not to make sense to anyone who is not familiar with the entire system. Given Byron’s own personal encounters with dissenting Protestants, Armenian Mekhitarist monks, and Bektashi Sufis, he would have been well familiar not only with the peculiarity of others’ systems, but also of the existence of the fields of discourse within each which are not normally made plain to outsiders.

Another idealist strain appears in the rather benevolent, and not at all stereotypically Byronic, declaration that

The world upon the whole is worth the assertion  
(If but for comfort) that all things are kind:  
And that same devilish doctrine of the Persian,  
Of the two Principles, but leaves behind  
As many doubts as any other doctrine  
Has either puzzled Faith withal, or yoked her in. (13.41.323-8).

This positive view of life, in which “all things are kind”, is one which has appeared previously in *Don Juan* in regard to “The World, which at the worst’s a glorious blunder” (11.3.24). Such a view may be indicative of a mellowing of the often-despairing poet, or simply of the poet’s ever-present *mobilité*. In either case, it is optimistic, and shows a world tending towards the ideal. The dismissal of Zoroastrianism, the “doctrine of the Persian”, is in part a defence against the charge of Manicheanism, a belief system which was descended from Zoroastrianism, and with which Byron was charged, particularly over *Cain*.<sup>238</sup> It is also a comment on the

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<sup>238</sup> *Eclectic Review*, 2nd series, XVII (May 1822), 418-427, RR, II, 769-774: pp.525-6 (773); *Evangelical Magazine*, XXX (May 1822), 192-193, RR, II, 998-1000: p.193 (1000); Reginald Heber, *The Quarterly Review*, XXVII (July 1822), 476-524, RR, V, 2057-81: p.514 (2076).

Problem of Pain, in as much as Zoroastrianism's concept of the universe as a conflict between the Good God, Ahura Mazda, and the Evil God, Ahrimanes, is an entirely-consistent resolution of that problem: evil is caused by the intervention of the Evil God, whom the Good God cannot completely defeat until the ending of the world. The rhetor opines that, despite being able to resolve this one issue, Zoroastrianism presents no clearer a route to truth, which is to say that even resolving the Problem of Pain does not constitute proving the validity of a particular religious position.

The poem's scepticism and agnosis reasserts the epistemological gap, and the result that no metaphysical system can be known to be ontologically correct. This is why the belief in the ideal world is worthwhile "for comfort": in the absence of knowledge, the psychological value of faith becomes a very significant consideration, and a belief which makes the believer happy is more valuable than one which does not. As a result, Idealism is a means of believing despite the knowledge that one cannot know the truth.

Idealism also segues easily into mysticism, and thus Canto XV starts with the image with which the pilgrimage of Childe Harold ends:

the ocean,  
That Watery Outline of Eternity,  
Or miniature at least, as is my notion,  
Which ministers unto the soul's delight,  
In seeing matters which are out of sight. (15.2.12-16).

The existence of Eternity is asserted by the metonymy, which uses the ocean as the vehicle. Further, the soul is described as delighting in seeing the invisible, the metaphysical. This is a declaration at least of positive religious feeling, if not of positive religious identification.

One of the virtues of Idealism in a religious context is that it is capable of placing the object of veneration beyond criticism or corruption. As a transcendent Ideal, God can be identified with Absolute Good, and thus known to be always correct, whatsoever

might occur here below. Much the same can apply to the figure of a saint. In an idealised form of religion, dogmatic idiosyncrasies and clerical or ecclesiastical failures can be displaced from significance as being the natural imperfections of the incorrupt Ideal's entelechy in the corrupt and corrupting world.

## **Marian Devotion**

As already mentioned at a number of points, *Don Juan* refers frequently to Catholicism, and notably treats Catholicism as Christianity, prompting objections from sectarian contemporary critics. Byron expressed considerable enthusiasm for what he described, to RB Hoppner, as "the best religion as it is assuredly the eldest of the various branches of Christianity" (BLJ 8.98, 03/04/21), in stating his wish that his natural daughter, Allegra, should be raised Catholic.<sup>239</sup> The usage of the superlative rather than the comparative indicates that the poet was including Orthodoxy in the consideration of age, making this a considered, if still partisan opinion.

In some respects, Catholicism is a stick for beating English Protestantism. As Graham comments on *Don Juan* I, "The canto's two betrayed spouses, Inez and Alfonso, do not react as Spanish Catholics would."<sup>240</sup> He rightly points out, for example, that, even if they did seek the dissolution of a marriage, it would not be from Doctor's Commons. Since much of *Don Juan* is a satire on English culture and society, Catholicism has a role to play in this satire: "Byron makes use of the contrast between Catholic orthodoxy and English values as one of several ways of presenting the cultural insularity summed up in the nation's capital."<sup>241</sup>

Being a foil to Protestantism is not Catholicism's only role, however, and the older faith can be a target of satire, as in the shipwreck:

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<sup>239</sup> Byron's love for theatre-going might have played a part in this enthusiasm: as Halévy notes, "the two celebrated actors, Kemble and his sister Mrs. Siddons, no doubt did more to make their Church popular than all these intellectuals together." (Halévy I, 474n3). See also David Goldweber, 'Byron, Catholicism, and *Don Juan* XVII', in *Renascence* Spring 1997 (49:3), 175-89, for a quite adept, if not unbiased, treatment of Byron's interest in Catholicism.

<sup>240</sup> Graham, p.26.

<sup>241</sup> Graham, p.173.

near two hundred souls  
 Had left their bodies; and what's worse, alas!  
 When over Catholics the ocean rolls,  
 They must wait several weeks before a mass  
 Takes off one peck of purgatorial coals,  
 Because, till people know what's come to pass,  
 They won't lay out their money on the dead –  
 It costs three francs for every mass that's said. (2.55.433-40).

Andrew Rutherford reads here a “flippant derisive tone [...] which constitutes a blemish”,<sup>242</sup> but the flippancy is misleading, for this is serious satire. As is common among Byron's criticisms of religion, the target here is not devotion, but corruption, and particularly the financial and materialist concerns held both by the believers who will not waste money on masses for the living and by the clergy who demand payment for the care of others' souls. The commodification of mercy is an abuse which *Don Juan* attacks.

However, a very intriguing facet of *Don Juan*'s representation of this denomination is the appearance of a Marian devotion, which becomes a motif of the poem. As Stephen Cooper says, “*Don Juan*, for all its relentless secular energy, is not unresponsive to religious impulses, in particular when these are Catholic, and most especially when they are Marian”.<sup>243</sup> The rhetor declares, “I have a passion for the name of ‘Mary,’” (5.4.25), and E H Coleridge notes Byron's interests in Mary Duff, Mary Robertson, Mary Anne Chaworth, and another, obscure Mary.<sup>244</sup> In addition, the Gospels include the Virgin Mary, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joses, Mary the wife of Klopas, Mary the sister of Martha and Lazarus, and also ‘the other Mary’ (Matthew 27:61), who may or may not be one of the former. The poet's personal, romantic interest in the name may have been combined with a religious, literary one. The appearance of Mary in this poem is not simply romantic,

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<sup>242</sup> Rutherford, *Byron: A Critical Study* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1961), p.172n12. On p.171, Rutherford does note that Byron “was trying to show – now seriously, now sardonically, but not flippantly – how men really think, feel, and behave in crises and sufferings”. He views 2.55 as an aberration from that.

<sup>243</sup> Cooper, ‘Aurora Raby and the Stone Virgin’, in *English Language Notes* 26:2 (1988), 44-7 (p.45).

<sup>244</sup> Coleridge 1.192n2, 32n1.

nor wholly mortal, and the Virgin Mary plays a significant part in *Don Juan*. The Marian focus is linked particularly with the character of Aurora Raby, and Bernard Beatty draws a parallel between the poem's depiction of Aurora and its representation of the Virgin, via Norman Abbey:

There can be no doubt that Aurora represents, in a precise and pondered way, that holiness, a specific feminine wholeness, which the original building (dedicated to the Blessed Virgin) was designed to celebrate and, oddly, still does.<sup>245</sup>

Cooper concurs, noting also the “fairy” associations of ‘Mary’ (5.4.27) and of Aurora (15.43.339).<sup>246</sup> In the process of this association of figures, both the character and the faith are somewhat romanticised. Joseph agrees with Beatty to some extent:

In spite of his awareness of corruptions of Italian society, his residence in Italy caused him to modify his earlier stock-response and gave him a considerable regard for the older religion, which is reflected in the splendid idealisation of Aurora Raby[.]<sup>247</sup>

Further, Aurora is “left an only /Child to the care of guardians good and kind” (15.44.345-6), in much the same way as the young Mary is left to the care of the Temple by her parents.<sup>248</sup> Juan's religious identification is declared by the poem, and is one of the aspects which particularly connects him with Aurora Raby: when Lady Adeline is indulging in her match-making schemes and cannot comprehend why Juan should have a preference for Aurora, “Juan rejoined – “She was a Catholic, /And therefore fittest, as of his persuasion”” (15.50.393-4). The text contrasts the two women in religious terms: Aurora is only named for a pagan goddess, whereas Adeline is explicitly associated with pagan deities, “Venus” (14.55.436) and even “Dian of the Ephesians” (14.46.363), the goddess whose worship leads to Paul and Barnabas being chased from Ephesus in Acts 19:24-41, and who is, therefore, an

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<sup>245</sup> Beatty, p.152.

<sup>246</sup> Cooper, p.46.

<sup>247</sup> Joseph, p.308.

<sup>248</sup> The narrative of Mary's childhood is in the second-century *Protoevangelium of James*.



enemy to Christianity. It is further Adeline, not Aurora, who has “malicious eyes” (15.78.623). The implication of all of these associations, and particularly of Juan’s comment on Aurora’s fitness is that, if Juan is to be faithful to his Catholic creed, he should venerate Aurora, not Adeline.

To a considerable extent, Aurora is an image, not a person. She is nearly silent, and, when she does speak, the words are reported rather than directly quoted. She is almost an icon of the saint, rather than a human. This makes her more Ideal, and hence more properly desirable, but simultaneously less achievable for the mortal Juan. Aurora’s religious identification is also emphasized in an extended passage on her positive traits, associating her faith with her virtues:

She look’d as if she sat by Eden’s door,  
And grieved for those who could return no more.

She was a Catholic, too, sincere, austere,  
As far as her own gentle heart allowed,  
And deem’d that fallen worship far more dear  
Perhaps because ’twas fallen: her sires were proud  
Of deeds and days when they had filled the ear  
Of nations, and had never bent or bow’d  
To novel power; and as she was the last,  
She held their old faith and old feelings fast. (15.45.359-46.368).

She is compassionate, sincere, and romantic about her belief system and about history, particularly the history of her family. Such a devotee of history as Byron himself could quite possibly share at least some of this feeling, which might go some way towards explaining his fascination with Catholicism, a much older variety of Christianity than the Protestantism which separated from it. That Catholicism was politically “fallen” (line 363) in Georgian Britain may have been one of its attractions to a poet who wrote so much about fallen figures, especially considering the subaltern status which that conferred upon the British Catholics whose cause he had

championed in the House of Lords. A similar fascination with faith is expressed in regard to Aurora's effect on Juan:

certainly, Aurora had renewed  
In him some feelings he had lately lost,  
Or hardened; feelings which, perhaps ideal,  
Are so divine, that I must deem them real: –

The love of higher things and better days;  
The unbounded hope, and heavenly ignorance  
Of what is called the world, and the world's ways (16.107.901-108.907).

She is inspiration towards belief. Once more, the ideal is real, because it is divine, or sublime, and is about "higher things" rather than the mere matters of the imperfect world. *Don Juan* is not about the achievement of such perfections, though, and so Donna Julia's attempt to resist the temptation of Juan is doomed, despite her making

The noblest efforts for herself and mate,  
For honour's, pride's, religion's, virtue's sake;  
[...]  
She prayed the Virgin Mary for her grace,  
As being the best judge of a lady's case. (1.75.595-6, 599-600).

The *European Magazine* says, "The allusion in the concluding line is but one instance of a secret blow at religion", and the *Literary Gazette* similarly describes it as a "fling at religion".<sup>249</sup> Both comments seem strange in light of the context of Donna Julia's prayer:

She vow'd she never would see Juan more,  
And next day paid a visit to his mother,  
And look'd extremely at the opening door,

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<sup>249</sup> *European Magazine*, July 1819, p.54 (966); *Literary Gazette*, July 17, 1819, p.450 (1407).

Which, by the Virgin's grace, let in another;  
Grateful she was, and yet a little sore –  
Again it opens, it can be no other,  
'Tis surely Juan now – No! I'm afraid  
That night the Virgin was no further pray'd. (1.76.601-8).

The antithesis between the vow and the visit, the revisiting (epanalepsis) of the grace of the Virgin from line 599, the anaphora of “And .../And” in lines 602-3, which underlines that seeing Juan was her true purpose, and the comment that Donna Julia was “yet a little sore” all declare the character's own feeling, as does the rhetor's prosopopeia on her behalf in lines 606-7. However, the Virgin is given credit for the fact that someone else came through the door to which Donna Julia so eagerly looked, and so the saint, at least, is blameless, as further emphasized by Donna Julia's cessation of petition. This is human failure, not saintly failure, and so there is nothing irreligious in this passage, the fault clearly being left with Donna Julia, not with the Virgin or the faith.

The basis upon which the *European Magazine* and the *Literary Gazette* view this as antireligious is most likely a specifically Protestant one: they dislike the Virgin, rather than God, being referred to as “the best judge of a lady's case”, when that sort of personal, sympathetic connection is precisely the purpose of saints in Catholic and Orthodox belief, and the Blessed Virgin is, after all, a patron saint of virginity. God would still be the most perfect judge, but the saint would be a valid advocate. As McGann notes, earlier versions of line 600 differed slightly, in that they had Donna Julia “Thinking Christ [‘God’ in another manuscript] might not be the best judge of a lady's case” (McGann 5.32:600). That the poet used “Christ” and “God” interchangeably is as orthodox as can be, but the character's preference for a female ear to her petition is entirely naturalistic, if unProtestant. Universalising Protestantism as True Religion, the critics could describe anything which was not Protestant as being irreligious.

Just as Mary is the addressee of Donna Julia's requests for assistance, she is also Juan's favourite saint:

so that even when he pray'd  
He turn'd from grisly saints, and martyrs hairy,  
To the sweet portraits of the Virgin Mary. (2.149.1190-3).

This preference is part of his gynophile nature, of course, and the connection between Aurora and the Virgin is further underlined by their both being objects of the hero's attention and (potential) devotion, but the hero's devotion is echoed by the rhetor's. Perhaps the poem's most important commentary upon religion, and its longest, appears in regard to Haidée and Juan, leading into a written prayer by the rhetor:

The Lady and her lover, left alone,  
The rosy flood of twilight's sky admired; –  
Ave Maria! o'er the earth and sea,  
That heavenliest hour of Heaven is worthiest thee!

Ave Maria! blessed be the hour!  
The time, the clime, the spot, where I so oft  
Have felt that moment in its fullest power  
Sink o'er the earth so beautiful and soft,  
While swung the deep bell in the distant tower,  
Or the faint dying day-hymn stole aloft,  
And not a breath crept through the rosy air,  
And yet the forest leaves seem'd stirr'd with prayer.

Ave Maria! 'tis the hour of prayer!  
Ave Maria! 'tis the hour of love!  
Ave Maria! may our spirits dare  
To look up to thine and thy Son's above!  
Ave Maria! oh that face so fair!  
Those downcast eyes beneath the Almighty dove –  
What though 'tis but a pictured image strike –  
That painting is no idol, 'tis too like.

Some kinder casuists are pleased to say,  
In nameless print – that I have no devotion;  
But set those persons down with me to pray,  
And you shall see who has the properest notion  
Of getting into heaven the shortest way;  
My altars are the mountains and the ocean,  
Earth, air, stars, – all that springs from the great Whole,  
Who hath produced, and will receive the soul. (3.101.901-104.928).

If, as Beatty says, “Byron often pretends to be narrator and the narrator often claims to be Byron”,<sup>250</sup> the speaker here could well be the poet who complained against those self-described Christians who forgot the Christ of the Gospels. Joseph appears to be falling into a rare lapse when he says, “But this is not Byron uttering a credo; it is the narrator adjusting himself to the context of Haidée, “Nature’s bride”, and the transitory Paradise of her island.”<sup>251</sup> The rhetor is indeed speaking from the context of Haidée’s isle, but the Marian devotion is too consistent throughout this poem to be dismissed as merely a momentary manoeuvre.

The contemporary critics appear to have been uncertain how to respond to this passage, perhaps unwilling to condemn its strength of religious feeling but also unwilling to praise its apparently Catholic bent.<sup>252</sup> More recently, McGann’s comment on it is very interesting:

To see the wit of this we must understand that Byron’s devotion is directed toward a picture of the Immaculate Conception (not of the Annunciation or the Assumption). What picture, specifically, he has in mind is difficult to say; the subject was a favourite with Spanish artists, but was uncommon in Italy.  
(McGann 5.702-3:3.917-20.)

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<sup>250</sup> Beatty, p.38.

<sup>251</sup> Joseph, p.305.

<sup>252</sup> *Blackwood’s Magazine* makes a lame joke about its pathos (August 1821, p.111 (172)), while the *British Review* praises stanzas 105-8, and avoids any reference to the Ave Maria (December 1821, pp.251-2 (487-8), 261-2 (492-3)).

To claim that it is wit based on devotion directed to a particular, but contextually uncommon image which cannot be specified is quite peculiar. In these stanzas, there is no juxtaposition with anything base, no undermining of the sentiments expressed here. David E Goldweber agrees that it is most likely an image of the Immaculate Conception, since “the absence of Gabriel seems to rule out the Annunciation and the downcast eyes make the Assumption unlikely”, but does not regard it as jocular.<sup>253</sup> There is no reason within the text to read this as ‘wit’, or as anything other than a devotional digression, and the poet’s habitual spiritualisation of love, and his comments upon the Virgin elsewhere (e.g., *The Siege of Corinth* 30:949-59), make this a reasonable possibility. The irony is in line 921, with the “kinder casuists”; the devotional stanzas are the demonstration of the validity of the poet’s claims in stanza 104.

The focus of belief is similarly strong in the description of the statue of the Virgin within Norman Abbey, a description reminiscent of similar ones elsewhere in Byron’s work, once more including the smiling Madonna in *The Siege of Corinth* 30.904-8:

in a higher niche, alone, but crown’d,  
The Virgin Mother of the God-born child,  
With her son in her blessed arms, look’d round,  
Spared by some chance when all beside was spoil’d;  
She made the earth below seem holy ground.  
This may be superstition, weak or wild,  
But even the faintest relics of a shrine  
Of any worship, wake some thoughts divine. (13.61.481-8).

Perhaps inspired at least in part by Byron’s Italian life, the poet seems to have had a certain affection for the Virgin, and it is particularly with her that his tendency towards religious enthusiasm, being inspired to “thoughts divine” is evident. This description of the statue is, like the other references to the Virgin, unmitigated by any

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<sup>253</sup> Goldweber, p.178.

irony, and thus, to all appearances, quite devout. The occurrence of this devotion in the rhetor might be linked to the Idealist image of religion, a focus upon the most sublime object of faith.

As Byron is recorded as having said to Lady Blessington,

Love, who is painted blind (an allegory that proves the uselessness of beauty), can supply all deficiencies with his aid; we can invest her whom we admire with all the attributes of loveliness, and though time may steal the roses from her cheek, and the lustre from her eye, still the original beau idéal remains, filling the mind and intoxicating the soul with the overpowering presence of loveliness.<sup>254</sup>

Aurora and Mary both act as foci for the spiritualisation of love, and the love of the spiritual, drawing two of Byron's favourite themes together. In regard to these two, religion is presented as being entirely good and right. Still, there remained certain complications in the contemporary reception of Catholic sympathy. As Boyd notes, Byron wrote to Murray that his translation of Pulci's *Morgante Maggiore* would bring his audience to understand what was permissible within the faith:

you will see what was permitted in a Catholic country and a bigoted age to a churchman, on the score of religion; – and so tell those buffoons who accuse me of attacking the liturgy. (BLJ 7.35, 7/2/20).<sup>255</sup>

Here, Byron takes the practice of Catholic belief as an example of Christian belief, something which a considerable proportion of his English audience would not do. What Catholics did with their liturgy was irrelevant to ardent Protestants, and English critics constantly attacked pro-Catholic parts of the poem as anti-Christian. This did not deter Byron, who appears to have been quite blind, perhaps deliberately so, to this sectarianism. As Beatty aptly expresses it,

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<sup>254</sup> Blessington, p.96.

<sup>255</sup> Boyd, p.17.

If we were told suddenly that Cantos XIII to XVIII were in fact a cunning later interpolation by Cardinal Newman disguised as Byron's own work – and in other contexts we are often asked to take such things in our stride – then received opinion would undoubtedly condemn the blatant, Catholic propaganda of the fable.<sup>256</sup>

The strength of the pro-Catholic sentiment in *Don Juan* might be a result of the freedom, especially in lay Catholicism, from the nervous rationalism which formed such a part of contemporary English Protestantism. The quest for a natural theology and a scientific religion was a threat to the creative exercise of faith which apparently appealed to Byron: the romanticised idealist religion could always be more virtuous and hence more admirable than the imperfect version practised in the world.

## Conclusion

*Don Juan* was condemned by contemporary conservative critics for its 'immorality', but they were reading obscenity as irreligion, when the poet was employing coarseness as wit. More-liberal critics saw the poem quite differently, leaving later readers no cause to assume that the conservatives alone were representative of the mores of the time.

*Don Juan* is not a blasphemous poem, and instead it adopts, adheres to, and even validates a Christian perspective. This perspective is not profaned and undermined by the jocularity of the poem, which allows the rhetor to address topics in a familiar and comfortable fashion, as is underlined by the poet's own consistent claims, in the poem and outside of it, in defence of *Don Juan*'s moral virtues.

A crucial part of the construction of those virtues in the poem is the rhetorical nature of the work, its character as almost a written speech, and very definitely as a crafted discourse. That discourse does satirise hypocrisy, and particularly betrayal of claimed piety, but it frequently adopts both the images and the values of orthodox Christian

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<sup>256</sup> Beatty, p.154.



belief. This is vivid in its continuation of CHP's condemnation of war, and particularly in its own association of war with Hell.

Orthodoxy is generally given a positive representation, as is the Bible, but the selection of Christian values individually rather than as a set is nonetheless unorthodox, and the guiding principle of *Don Juan's* religious position is essentially an acknowledgement of agnosis, joined with an elective Idealism which takes Christianity as a vehicle. This allows for an idealised, romantic version of faith to transcend fallen practice. In the process, a particular devotion to the Virgin Mary is expressed, possibly indicating a feeling held by the poet himself for a figure who is romanticised beyond fallibility or criticism.

Notably, the romanticisation of religious feeling is coupled with a rejection of philosophical rationalism. This has a necessary consequence in regard to religion, in that theology is religious philosophy. By validating religious feeling whilst denigrating at least the accuracy of metaphysical thought, the poem turns away from religion as an epistemic exercise and an explanation of what is, towards religion as an analogical exercise and a conception of what could be.

## The Eastern Tales: Islam versus Christianity

The Eastern Tales discussed here are *The Giaour*, *The Bride of Abydos*, *The Corsair*, *Lara*, and *The Siege of Corinth*. The first two were published in 1813, the second two in 1814, and the last in 1816. As such, all fall within the period of composition of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, and so it is unsurprising that they do share some themes with that poem. However, there are also very significant differences, not the least of which is the much more prominent role which Islam plays in the Eastern Tales.

The sources for Byron's commentary upon Islam are multiple. First and foremost appear to be Samuel Henley's notes to William Beckford's *Vathek*: a great proportion of Byron's notes on Islam borrow not only information but even phrasing from Henley. Second, Byron lived among Muslims in Rumelia, the Balkan dominions of the Ottoman Empire, from 1809 until 1811. Third, he appears to have read George Sale's 'Preliminary Discourse' to his translation of the *Qu'ran*, and possibly the translation itself, although that is uncertain. Beyond that, he read and makes reference to a number of other writers who also wrote about the East.

The representation of Islam is, like the representation of religion in general and Christianity in particular in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, rather equivocal, but it often shades farther into the negative side. This is particularly relevant to the characterization of the Byronic Heroes. While the first of these, Childe Harold, and the last, Manfred, have no significant interactions with Islam, the majority do. The contrasting representations of Islam and Christianity help to construct this hero, as they also further characterize the two faiths themselves.

### Eurocentrism

The mere fact of the Tales representing Islam served to disrupt the monologic of English Christianity, at least slightly, by presenting a religious alternative,<sup>257</sup> as did

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<sup>257</sup> See Albert Hourani, *Islam in European Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p.12ff.

his later Venetian tales with respect to English Protestantism, merely by presenting Catholicism. Byron was certainly not the only one to do this at this time: Thomas Moore, Robert Southey, Walter Scott, and others were all writing about Moors and Turks. Byron's representations stand out from among them for the depth of the detail, which makes the nature of his representations of Islam all the more crucial, because they were believed to be all the more authentic.

Nineteenth-century Western views of the East vary, but often demonstrate a considerable degree of condescension, criticism, and antipathy. In addition, where they were not starkly negative, they would often romanticise the East. Nonetheless, exceptions do exist. Thus, for example, James Boswell records Samuel Johnson as saying, "There are two objects of curiosity – the Christian world, and the Mahometan world. All the rest may be considered as barbarous."<sup>258</sup> Byron occupies an interesting position within this array of representations of the oriental Other.

The presumed accuracy of Western accounts of the East allowed for their use as premises for certain ethnic assumptions, and so the *Monthly Museum's* review of *The Bride of Abydos* describes the excitability of "the inhabitants of the warm climates to the most atrocious crimes", along with the occasional "sudden fit of humanity, equally unaccountable and equally common among semi-barbarous natives". Turkish behaviour is, apparently, not the product of reasoned thought. In the *Critical Review*, the readiness to mutiny of Seyd's soldiers is "a misfortune very common to Mussulmen", as if mutiny were never an English problem.<sup>259</sup> Francis Jeffrey comments upon the "heroic bigotry", and George Ellis on the "religious prejudices" of the Turk.<sup>260</sup> Meanwhile, the religious prejudices, and perhaps the heroic bigotry, of the monks in the *Giaour*, for example, pass without mention, being less starkly obvious to the Western commentator.

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<sup>258</sup> Boswell, *Life of Johnson*, revised, ed. by L F Powell, 6 vols (Oxford, 1934), IV, 199. Journal entry 10/4/1783.

<sup>259</sup> *Monthly Museum*, I (February 1814), 287-290, RR, IV, 1715-1717: p.287 (1715); *Critical Review*, 4th Series, V (February 1814), 144-155, RR, II, 630-636: p.152 (634).

<sup>260</sup> George Ellis, *Quarterly Review*, X (January 1814) 331-354, RR, V, 2001-2012: p.334 (2002); *Edinburgh Review*, Francis Jeffrey, XXIII (April 1814), 198-229, RR, II, 848-863: p.205 (851).

Byron's use of Turkish and Arabic terms and figures has convinced many contemporary and modern critics alike that, rather than merely being a Westerner's imaginative representations of an exotic Orient, these poems are 'genuine' representations of that Orient, even "realistic orientalism".<sup>261</sup> Indeed, this reputation for authenticity was such that it evidently contributed to the *Monthly Museum's* erroneous assumption that *Lara* could not be the production of Lord Byron, because that poem failed to demonstrate his accustomed bent for cultural specificity.<sup>262</sup>

This alleged authenticity has not always been accepted, however. Some of Byron's contemporaries were displeased with the poet's "local colouring", the objection lying in the potential contamination of the English language, and possibly the English culture, by these foreign terms and ideas.<sup>263</sup> More recently, the accuracy of Byron's representations of Ottoman culture has been contested, Seyed Mohammad Marandi declaring that "Many scholars take it for granted that reality is being presented [in these Tales] and it is of little significance that the poet's claims are often self-contradictory."<sup>264</sup>

Certainly, Byron was not incapable of being eurocentric. An aspect of Byron's terminology which caused some comment was the appearance of Classical Greco-Roman figures in *The Bride of Abydos: A Turkish Tale*.<sup>265</sup> The tale refers to "dreams Elysian" (BA 1.6.164), to "Helle's stream" (BA 2.4.39), to "him who felt the Dardan's arrow" (BA 2.4.45), and to "Dian" (BA 2.5.55). There is no appearance of any narrator as a separate voice in the text, which makes these references all the more unusual in a tale which self-identifies as "Turkish". In reference to a line in *The Giaour*, "Then curl'd his very beard with ire" (G 593), Byron's note describes as

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<sup>261</sup> Mohammed Sharafuddin, *Islam and Romantic Orientalism: Literary Encounters with the Orient* (London, New York: I.B. Tauris, 1994), p.229. See also McGann 3.435; *Literary Panorama*, XV (April 1814), 370-378, RR, IV, 1527-1531: p.371 (1528); Francis Jeffrey, *Edinburgh Review*, XXI (July 1813), 299-309, RR, II, 842-847: p.308 (847);

<sup>262</sup> *Monthly Museum*, II (September 1814), 220-224, RR, IV, 1720-1726: p.220 (1721); p.223 (1724), on "his strict adherence to local customs".

<sup>263</sup> William Roberts, *British Review*, V (October 1813), 132-145, RR, I, 409-415: p.141 (413); *Eclectic Review*, 2nd Series, I (February 1814), 187-193, RR, II, 715-718: p.188 (716).

<sup>264</sup> Marandi, 'The Concubine of Abydos', in *The Byron Journal*, 33:2 (2005), 97-108 (p.98). Marandi's references to some modern critics' overeager acceptance of Byron's representations of Islam and Turkish culture are quite just, but Marandi occasionally stumbles into comparing Byron's views too closely with orthodox Sunni Islam, and not taking sufficient account of Bektashi heterodoxy.

<sup>265</sup> *Literary Panorama*, XV (April 1814) 370-378, RR, IV, 1527-1531: p.374 (1529).

typical the humorous anecdote of “the Capitan Pacha’s whiskers” becoming “no less lively with indignation than a tiger cat’s” (McGann 3.419:593). The Other is exoticised and even animalised. Another alienating view in Byron’s work is the description of the Muslim as inscrutable in *The Bride of Abydos*:

the face of Mussulman  
Not oft betrays to standers by  
The mind within[.] (BA 1.2.25-7).

This inability to determine emotion from the culturally-specific cues of body language does suggest a lack of familiarity with the culture. Therefore, at the very least, Byron’s work tends to be complicit in the eurocentric representation of the non-European, in that his representation of the Orient derives from and operates within an intrinsically Western perspective.

However, Nigel Leask goes rather too far, in attempting to support his claim that Byron was afraid of “Asiatic values swamping the west”, when he describes the murder of Ezzelin in *Lara* as “‘oriental’ both in its scope and execution”.<sup>266</sup> The assumed connection here, between ‘oriental’ and ‘brutal’, is one not made by Byron, and it is also worth noting that none of the contemporary reviews describes the crime as ‘oriental’, perhaps because of the poet’s note referencing the assassination and nocturnal river-dumping of the Duke of Gandia, one of the sons of Pope Leo X, in Rome in 1498 (McGann 3.454-455:550). This is hardly an oriental setting or situation, and the event in *Lara* functions more as a device for characterization, a graphic illustration of the criminal side of that pseudo-villain, the Byronic Hero.

Regency views of Turks and Muslims frequently contained essentialised notions of the Other, including charges of a lack of sensibility, a tendency towards violence, a lack of reason, unreliability, a lack of sense, and outright barbarity. Not all Westerners agreed with these prejudices, but Byron occasionally did.

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<sup>266</sup> Nigel Leask, *British Romantic Writers and the East: Anxieties of Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 61, 62.

## Religious and Ethnic Tension

Eurocentrism, of course, is merely the European's preference of the Self's own group against the Other's group. Any group which might be identified as including the Self might be contrasted with any group identified as excluding the Self, and the common result is a simple dichotomous dyad: in this case, Christian versus Muslim. In Byron's *Eastern Tales*, this operates often in place of ethnicity, such that "Muslim" and "Turk" become interchangeable,<sup>267</sup> and are opposed to the likewise-interchangeable "Christian" and "European".

This dichotomy comes most obviously to the fore in the first of Byron's *Eastern Tales*, in its very title. Addressing the foreigner, the Muslim fisherman says, "young Giaour! /I know thee not, I loathe thy race" (G 190), making a zeugma of race and religion; the poet glosses the Arabic term, in a footnote, as "Infidel" (McGann 3.417:190). The usage of the term caused some comment: the *New Review*, for example, complains about Muslims referring to Christians as 'Giaours', but validates Christians referring to Muslims as 'infidels'.<sup>268</sup> This is strikingly reminiscent of the complaints by contemporary reviewers regarding the usage of non-English terminology in this same poem. The objection, then, is not to the idea of people calling one another "faithless", but rather to the idea of Christians being called so, and to the usage of non-English terms. Byron's *Tales*, however, use the term for Christians and for Muslims.

While having a Muslim character describe the foreigner as an "infidel" may be realistic, it was not something calculated to engender a positive reaction from a Western audience, for whom this charge constituted an unjust attack. Ethnic and nationalist partisanship naturally come into play in the reading of these texts. For instance, when Selim, in *The Bride of Abydos*, is speaking with his cousin Zuleika about the army under the Vizier fighting "the Giaour" (BA 1.14.459), the English audience have no reason to sympathize with Selim and Zuleika, especially

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<sup>267</sup> Bernard Lewis notes that 'Turk' became a pejorative in Turkey under Ottoman rule, and was largely replaced in self-identification with 'Muslim'. This might explain such odd phrases as "Of Tartar and of Mussulman" (SC 10.190). See Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp.1, 2, 13.

<sup>268</sup> *New Review*, II (December 1813), 674-675, RR, V, 1933-1934: p.674 (1933).

considering that England had only been at peace with the Ottoman Empire since January of 1809, and so they themselves had recently been the “Giaour” enemy.<sup>269</sup>

In *The Siege of Corinth*, which is presented in the words of an avowedly Christian narrator (SC 25.748), the term “infidel” is not applied to Christians by Muslims, but there is still some commentary upon Muslim hostility to Christians. This occurs in reference to the convert Alp, and particularly in his men’s reaction to him: they follow him because he is a valiant leader,

But still his Christian origin  
With them was little less than sin.  
[...]  
he, their mightiest chief, had been  
In youth a bitter Nazarene. (SC 12.269-70, 73-4).

The bitterness of the ethno-religious feud is such that it makes it difficult for them to accept the convert as genuine. In this instance, the sympathy is clearly with the attacked Christian side, rather than the attacking Muslim one, and so the Turkish and Muslim hostility remains in a decidedly negative light. Like the reference to “the usurping Moslem” in CHP 4.153.1377, with no consideration of Christian usurpations, this elides the fact that the Venetians were, themselves, foreign occupiers of Corinth. The audience of the Tales are, by default, opposed to Islam, and the Tales do little to subvert this.

The Muslim fisherman narrator of *The Giaour* does make a bid for sympathy, particularly with regard to the killing of Hassan. The slaying brings destruction not only upon the pacha, but upon his soldiers who die with him on the road, and then upon the whole society, as Hassan’s hall is left empty and his role as provider with it:

The curse for Hassan’s sin was sent  
To turn a palace to a tomb;

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<sup>269</sup> M. E. Yapp, *The Making of the Modern Near East* (London and New York: Longman, 1987), p.55.

[...]

Gloom is gathered o'er the gate  
Nor there the Fakir's self will wait;  
Nor there will wandering Dervise stay,  
For Bounty cheers not his delay;  
Nor there will weary stranger halt  
To bless the sacred 'bread and salt'.

[...]

For Courtesy and Pity died  
With Hassan on the mountainside. –  
His roof – that refuge unto men –  
Is Desolation's hungry den. –

[...]

Since his turban was cleft by the infidel's sabre! (G 280-1, 338-43, 46-9, 51).

The Fakir and Dervise beggars (McGann 3.417:339) have lost a sanctuary, and the virtues of charity, hospitality, courtesy and pity are no longer able to be practised because of Hassan's death. Within an Islamic values-system, this is a particularly great loss because, as Byron notes,

Charity and Hospitality are the first duties enjoined by Mahomet; and to say truth, very generally practised by his disciples. The first praise that can be bestowed upon a chief, is a panegyric on his bounty; the next, on his valour. (McGann 3.417-8:351).

In this case, for the beggars, who are themselves innocent of any of the crimes in the tale, the pathos within the fisherman's narrative coincides with Western values, and so a Western reader can empathize with the Eastern narrator over the damage suffered.

When the injured are not as innocent, the situation operates differently, as is most clearly exemplified in what ought to be the pathos-generating reference to Hassan as a boy:



And oft had Hassan's Childhood played  
Around the verge of that cascade; [the now-dead fountain]  
And oft upon his mother's breast  
That sound had harmonized his rest[.] (G 308-11).

The rest of the poem, however, gives Hassan no positive Western virtues, and shows him instead in acts of extreme violence: the reader encounters too little of him for the image of the boy playing around the fountain to eclipse that of Leila's murderer. This latter clashes with Western values, and the sympathy is inhibited, denying that passage any functional role in allaying Western prejudices. Worse, sympathy for the murderer makes the Muslim narrator appear immoral by association.

Nevertheless, *The Giaour* and the other Eastern Tales show both Eastern and Western victims and oppressors, depicting discrimination also among Muslims, as in the note on the emir's identifying green garb, which says,

Green is the privileged colour of the prophet's numerous pretended  
descendants; with them, as here, faith (the family inheritance) is supposed to  
supersede the necessity of good works; they are the worst of a very indifferent  
brood. (McGann 3.418:357).

The connection between Islam and Christianity ("as here"), and the implicit valuation of works over faith highlight hypocrisy on both sides of the religious divide. Nonetheless, it is only the Muslims who are declared "a very indifferent brood."

Muslims are then described as discriminating against Christians in everything from their greetings (G 358-9 and McGann 3.418:358)<sup>270</sup> to their views of the afterlife. According to a note to *The Giaour*, the way into the Muslim paradise is difficult, and the way to hell is easy, but "There is a shorter cut downwards for the Jews and Christians" (McGann 3.418-9:483). Interestingly, Byron's version presents a

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<sup>270</sup> Thomas Thornton corroborates this discrimination of greetings, in his *The Present State of Turkey: or a description of the political, civil, and religious constitution, government, and laws of the Ottoman Empire*, 2 vols (London: Joseph Mawman, 1809), 2.7.180.

discrimination absent from his sources: George Sale's comment on this refers not to Jews and Christians, but to "the wicked", as does another of Byron's sources on Islam, Samuel Henley.<sup>271</sup> Byron is not representing Muslims as being tolerant, and no balancing comment on Christian intolerance is provided.

The *Bride of Abydos* continues this pattern of depicting the perspective of the Other. Giaffir, for example, describes Selim as "From unbelieving mother bred" (BA 1.4.82), and the variant from MS A, "<Son by a Christian> mother bred" (McGann 3.110), clarifies that this 'unbelieving' means 'not of *our* belief' rather than 'not of any'. Continuing, Giaffir makes a partial discrimination between ethnicity and religion in calling Selim "Greek in soul, if not in creed" (BA 1.4.87). Of course, this does make Selim a much more acceptable hero to a Western audience, being admirably Greek in soul even while being Muslim, and therefore inherently suspect, in belief.<sup>272</sup> For Giaffir himself, it is not a concession, but a condemnation, and so he says, "Go – let thy less than woman's hand /Assume the distaff – not the brand" (BA 1.4.99-100); being 'Greek in soul' means being insufficiently fierce, and unwilling to "strike one stroke for life and death /Against the curs of Nazareth!" (BA 1.4.97-8).

As part of the characterizing contrast between Selim and Giaffir, the younger man describes to Zuleika the pirates with whom he has been consorting, saying, "every creed, and every race, /With them hath found – may find a place"<sup>273</sup> (BA 2.20.365-6). Selim considers the information about religious plurality worth communicating, which demonstrates that it is unusual in their society. It is particularly noteworthy that, among these, Selim should "chiefly to [his] council call /The wisdom of the cautious Frank" (BA 2.20.378-9). The superior Westerner is the 'best' adviser to the half-Western hero. Notably, Selim's namesake, the reforming sultan Selim III, had

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<sup>271</sup> *The Koran*, trans. by George Sale (London: Frederick Warne and Co. Ltd, ND), 'Preliminary Discourse', p.98. References to pages in Sale are to this discourse; references to the Qu'ran will include the sura number. William Beckford, *Vathek* [1786], trans. by Samuel Henley (New York: Scholars' Facsimiles & Reprints, 1972), 313:141.

<sup>272</sup> Similarly, Thornton notes that intermarriage between Moorish men and Christian women was claimed by Westerners as the basis of "that taste for literature which distinguished the Arabs of the eighth century" (1.1.7).

<sup>273</sup> This is despite the fact that friendship with Christians is forbidden in the Qu'ran, 5.51, Sale p.106.

employed French military aides to assist in the repulse of the English in 1807, for which collusion with foreigners he lost his throne, and eventually his life.<sup>274</sup>

The religious beliefs of the pirates in *The Corsair* are never specified, although their opponents' are: when they sail to their pre-emptive strike upon the Pasha's forces, "The lights in vain o'er heedless Moslem shine" (C 1.17.598). Given previous examples of piratical religious plurality, and of equation between ethnicity and religion, it seems imprudent to suggest that this implies that none of the pirates themselves are Muslims. Still, the ethno-religious conflict does exist in so far as the positive feelings, and thus the pathos, of the poem lie with the pirates, not with the "Moslems". Early in the poem, the narrative focus is upon the pirates' domestic situation:

The hum of voices, and the laughter loud,  
And woman's gentler anxious tone is heard –  
Friends' – husbands' – lovers' names in each dear word[.] (C 1.5.108-10).

The personal attachments, the very stuff of human social interaction and sympathy, are found among the pirates, not the "Moslems", lending the Western reader further reason to support their side against the Other. The generation of sympathy for the side who are fighting against the Muslims is a step towards direct condemnation of the Muslims.

This pattern of non-Muslim tolerance is quite consistent in the Tales, and so, the 'Lines Associated With *The Siege of Corinth*', a poem which was not actually printed with *The Siege* in Byron's lifetime, presents a similar religious plurality:

We were of all tongues and creeds; –  
Some were those who counted beads,  
Some of mosque, some of church[.] (McGann 3.356:18-20).

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<sup>274</sup> Q.v. Lewis, pp.70-1.

Muslims may be included amongst the tolerant side, but the Muslim side is never represented as being the tolerant one. The West is depicted as being open to the East, but not vice versa.

All of this, of course, is starkly at odds with Byron's representation of the Turkish state in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, particularly in the 'Additional Note, on the Turks' at the end of Canto II, wherein the Turkish toleration of the Christian Greeks is contrasted with the English intolerance of the Catholic Irish. There is, nonetheless, a common pattern in these different representations. In both *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* and *The Bride of Abydos*, the tolerant society exists beyond the boundaries of the state in which the speaker is situated, whether that be the United Kingdom or the Ottoman Empire: tolerance is a quality of the more-diverse, polylogical Other. It is thus more ideal than real.

Byron does not fail to explicitly represent the other, anti-Muslim, side of the ethno-religious tension. On announcing the murder of Hassan to his confessor, and seeing the apparently-horrified response, the Giaour interjects,

Nay, start not – no – nor bend thy knee,  
Nor midst my sins such act record,  
Thou wilt absolve me from the deed,  
For he was hostile to thy creed!  
The very name of Nazarene  
Was wormwood to his Paynim spleen[.] (G 1036-41).

He imagines that it is not a sin to kill someone who was hostile to Christianity; in so doing, he demonstrates the belief of the Crusaders better than that of their Messiah. The abbot's horrified reaction demonstrates that the Giaour's view is not representative of all Christians, but the Giaour only goes on to justify it further, calling Hassan "Ungrateful fool!" (G 1042) for not wanting to be killed by him, and for not considering "wounds by Galileans given /The surest pass to Turkish heav'n" (G 1044-5). Significantly, he identifies himself here amongst the "Galileans", or Christians, despite the abbot's disagreement with him, and describes such wounds as

the means of entry to “Turkish”, not to ‘Muslim’, Heaven: ethnicity stands for religion as religion does for ethnicity. However, the Christian side is more diverse than the Other.

The pro-Western, anti-Eastern attitude is strongest in *The Siege of Corinth*. Indeed, it might have gratified the *New Review* article’s writer, who complained about the use of the term “infidel” against Christians in *The Giaour*, to read *The Siege of Corinth*, which begins with an Advertisement taken from David Jones’ *A Compleat History of the Turks* (1718-9), using the term “infidels” for the Ottoman Muslims (McGann 3.322: Advertisement, 11). The term is then applied consistently to Muslims throughout *The Siege* (SC 21.527, 24.705, 27.832), but not used in the poem for the Christians, even when Muslims are speaking together. This consistently-discriminatory usage was followed by at least one reader: the *Dublin Examiner* uses the term “infidels” for the Turks in its review of the poem.<sup>275</sup> Thus, also, the poem refers to Ottoman control of Greece as “the unchristian yoke” (SC 9.178). The negated term automatically defines the root, ‘Christian’, as the norm, from which this instance is an aberration.

Moreover, in *The Siege*, Byron seems to move towards the all-too-common position of using religion to justify war. That might seem peculiar for a text which focuses upon the death and destruction resulting from warfare, but it is noteworthy that the Muslims are attacking the Christians, and so the Corinthian casualties are a cause for the English audience’s sympathy. The Turks are represented as the enemies of all Christians: introducing the Grand Vizier Ali Coumourgi, Byron’s note says,

His last order was the decapitation of General Breuner, and some other German prisoners; and his last words, ‘Oh that I could thus serve all the Christian dogs!’ a speech and act not unlike one of Caligula. (McGann 3.485).

The note is an explanation of Giaffir’s expression “the curs of Nazareth” (BA 1.4.98). The poet having thus used the description of the Grand Vizier’s words and actions,

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<sup>275</sup> *Dublin Examiner*, I (May 1816), 9-20, RR, II, 682-688: pp.16, 17 (686, 687).

and the association with such a figure as Caligula, to condemn him, the narrator goes on to say,

Coumorgi – can his glory cease,  
That latest conqueror of Greece,  
Till Christian hands to Greece restore  
The freedom Venice gave of yore? (SC 5.102-5).

This verges upon an invitation to a Crusade, which would contradict the poet's general attitude to war, and to the involvement of religion in war. However, it does coincide with the poet's general attitude to Greece, and to what he believed was the foundation of Greek independence: Greek rebellion. This is not a call to other nations to free Greece, because that would merely cause more problems; as the poet states in the 'Additional Note, on the Turks' for *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, "Were they driven from St. Sophia to-morrow, and the French or Russians enthroned in their stead, it would become a question, whether Europe would gain by the exchange" (McGann 2.210). This is a call for Greece to free Greece, and particularly for Christian Greece to free itself from "the unchristian yoke". This makes it no less an ethno-religious conflict, of course, just a narrower one.

The critique of the Other can serve as a critique of the familiar. As David Pailin notes, other religions were commonly employed "as part of debates about Christianity and as attempts to justify positions and answer questions raised in those debates."<sup>276</sup> Albert Hourani concurs, saying that "in refuting Islam, writers might be using it as a symbol of enemies nearer home – Protestants arguing against Catholics, Anglicans against Deists, freethinkers against theological tyranny and prejudice."<sup>277</sup> In general, the Tales' position is closest to the last of Hourani's types, in that they oppose religious dogmatism. Byron was evidently opposed to religious tyranny, and especially exclusivism. However, were Byron's position one of absolute

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<sup>276</sup> Pailin, *Attitudes to Other Religions: Comparative Religion in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Britain* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), p.5.

<sup>277</sup> Hourani, p.136.

‘freethinking’, total religious neutrality, there would be no differentiation between his treatment of Islam and his treatment of Christianity.

As previously noted, the anti-Muslim position was the Western norm. Sale, the eighteenth-century scholar whose interest in Islam led him to translate the Qu’ran with copious, comparatively-sympathetic notes, comments upon Christian writers depicting Islam as the product of Muhammad’s “sensuality”.<sup>278</sup> He not only identifies this antipathy in other Christian writers, but also demonstrates it himself, describing Christianity as free of “those puerile imaginations which reign throughout that of Mohammed, much less any of the most distant intimation of sensual delights”.<sup>279</sup> Similarly, Byron, writing to Annabella Milbanke, includes Turkey with Spain and Greece as “the most bigotted & credulous of countries” (BLJ 3.119, 26/9/13). That condemnation, nevertheless, is not aimed at Islam alone, and includes two separate branches of Christianity.

In his letters, Byron sometimes shows sympathy to Islam, and sometimes antipathy, much as he does with Christianity. In a letter to Hodgson (BLJ 2.97, 13/9/11), Byron says, “You degrade the Creator, in the first place, by making Him a begetter of children”. This is a paraphrase of the idea in sura 2.116 of the Qu’ran, which says, in Sale’s translation, “They say, God hath begotten children: God forbid!”<sup>280</sup> While it may have been for the purpose of the argument, the poet adopted the idea from the sacred text of Islam. In a somewhat similar vein, the poet describes the style of *The Bride* to Lord Holland: “thoroughly Eastern – & partly from the Koran” (BLJ 3.168-9, 17/11/13). While it is not at all clear what part of *The Bride* is stylistically derivative of the Qu’ran, the reference to having borrowed from it indicates Byron’s approval of its artistic merits.

Approval does not equal expertise. A letter to his publisher, John Murray, includes the question of whether Medina or Mecca contains “the *holy* sepulchre” of Islam, and expresses the poet’s embarrassment for the uncertainty (BLJ 3.191, 3-4/12/13).

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<sup>278</sup> Sale, p.41.

<sup>279</sup> Sale, p.109.

<sup>280</sup> Sale, p.18; the passage is repeated verbatim at Sale p.205, sura 10.68, and the idea is repeated throughout in various ways.

Marandi says, “Byron’s question is one that anyone with even a minimal amount of knowledge of Islam ought to be able to answer.”<sup>281</sup> However, Byron Porter Smith notes that it “is almost invariably given as Mecca” by Westerners,<sup>282</sup> and anyone with a minimal amount of knowledge of anything is quite capable of confusing himself or herself on the topic and thus requiring verification; what matters here is that the poet cared enough to check. In part, this is his customary need for authenticity, but it also shows at least a sufficient interest in Islam on his part to feel that he *ought* not to need to ask. Byron did care about Islam, at least as an object of knowledge.

The general trends in Regency views of Islam include, first, the hostility itself: the zero-sum competition between exclusivist faith positions, in which the Other is necessarily an “infidel”. Within this, acknowledgments of Eastern hostility to the West are authentic, but reflect badly upon the East nonetheless, the hostility appearing to a Western audience to be without justification. In a few cases, these Eastern complaints do coincide with Western values, and this can make them seem more reasonable; nevertheless, the very operation of this process prevents such complaints from ever being able to critique the Western values which form the basis of such judgements. There are certainly traces of these Western values in Byron’s work, rendering his representation of Eastern issues subordinate to Western ideas, but he nevertheless pursues the attempt to depict the East in detail. In part, this serves to increase the realism of the Tales, in part, to highlight Western issues, and, in part, to balance the monologic of English cultural self-representation. This shows Byron, while not completely transcending his own cultural and ideological origins, appearing nonetheless more open to foreign ideas and perspectives than many of his contemporaries were.

## **Islam**

Byron’s representations of Islam vary. Massimiliano Demata oversimplifies in claiming that Byron “was full of reverence for Islam, had the habit of seeking precision and accuracy in his references to the Qu’ran, and was attracted to Turkish

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<sup>281</sup> Marandi, p.99.

<sup>282</sup> Byron Porter Smith, *Islam in English literature* (Delmar, New York: Caravan Books, 1977), p.9.



culture.”<sup>283</sup> It is worth noting, however, that there is a significant difference between valuations of the different facets of a religion: the practice of a religion, its social manifestation, as opposed to the philosophy of a religion, its ideological core. Criticism of heterodoxy, as seen in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* and *Don Juan*, can be a manifestation of orthodoxy. In contrast, the criticism of orthodoxy constitutes a direct attack upon the validity of the religious system itself, and yet it often is the result of an Idealist attempt to purify the system by altering it.

For example, Thomas Thornton, a contemporary of Byron, also differentiates between religious theory and religious practice in his description of the situation in Turkey:

The doctrines of Islamism, founded as they are on the religion of nature and the revelations of both our scriptures, must necessarily possess a considerable portion of intrinsic worth; but this acknowledgement by no means implies respect for the heterogeneous superstructure which peculiarly constitutes Mahometanism.<sup>284</sup>

Writing more recently, M E Yapp notes that, in the Ottoman Empire in the nineteenth century, “Popular Islam was especially the Islam of the Şūfī orders which formed a major element in the social fabric of the Near East”, and also that

The claim of the Janissaries to be the guardians of Muslim orthodoxy was suspect as many of them were members of the heterodox Bektāshī dervish order, which was anathema to the orthodox ulema, as well as to members of rival brotherhoods.<sup>285</sup>

When the unorthodox are the guardians of orthodoxy, the resulting religion is likely to be somewhat aberrant. For Byron to criticize such aberration is one thing; for him to

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<sup>283</sup> Demata, ‘Byron, Turkey, and the Orient’, in *The Reception of Byron in Europe*, ed. by Richard Cardwell, 2 vols (London: Thoemmes Continuum, 2004), II, 439-52 (p.447).

<sup>284</sup> Thornton, Preface, 1.xiii. Byron refers to Thornton repeatedly in the ‘Papers Referred to by Note’ appended to CHP II.

<sup>285</sup> Yapp, pp.7, 105.

criticize the very philosophy of Islam, and particularly the very ideas of the Qu'ran, is another entirely.

Quite possibly because he was writing for an English audience, Byron's *Eastern Tales* contain an abundance of information about Islamic belief, and the practices of Muslims. To name but a few examples, the reader is told that Muslims are forbidden to drink wine (G 547-8), that Bismallah means "In the name of God" and commences all but one of the chapters in the Qu'ran (McGann 3.419:568), that amulets carrying Qu'ranic verses are commonly worn (McGann 3.439:69), and that Muslims have prayer beads (McGann 3.439:72). All of this is about practice, and is neither simply positive nor simply negative in its deployment here: it functions both as education of the Western audience and as commodification of the Eastern subject, helping to sell the poems, by the provision of exotic, and therefore valuable, knowledge.

The reader is also informed about Muslim beliefs and 'superstitions'. For example, a note on the Muslim soldiers who each have "a single long tuft of hair" (SC 424) says, "This tuft, or long lock, is left from a superstition that Mahomet will draw them into Paradise by it" (McGann 3.485:424).<sup>286</sup> Describing it as a 'superstition' rather than simply as a 'belief' casts it immediately as doubtful; this is a negative representation of the *local version* of the religion, however, this idea not being one from the Qu'ran itself. A Muslim too could thus describe it as a superstition.

Ideas which are unacceptable within Christianity but are represented as acceptable within Islam emphasize the divide between the faiths. The note in *The Giaour* on the beauty of the Muezzin's call is attached to the fisherman's eulogy for Hassan, who is cast in a very positive light by the narrator:

There sleeps as true an Osmanlie  
As e'er at Mecca bent the knee;

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<sup>286</sup> Aaron Hill rejects this claim, saying, "They rather wear it as a *voluntary Mark* of their Profession of his [the Prophet's] Faith" (*A Full and Just Account of the Present State of the Ottoman Empire* (London: J Mayo, 1710), p.93).

As ever scorn'd forbidden wine,  
Or prayed with face towards the shrine,  
In orisons resumed anew  
At solemn sound of 'Alla Hu!' (G 729-34).

However, describing the man who had his wife tied into a sack and thrown into the sea as a "true [...] Osmanlie" highlights a stark cultural difference. As previously noted, the murder too thoroughly violates Western values to gain acceptance, nullifying the attribution of righteousness merely on the basis that he always responds to the Muezzin's call. Thus, Hassan's own call to Alla is contrasted with this by the Giaour: "One cry to Mahomet for aid, /One prayer to Alla all he made" (G 1082-3). Although the fisherman says that Hassan always responded to the Muezzin's call to prayer, the Giaour says that Allah failed to respond to Hassan's call, as to Leila's:

He call'd the Prophet, but his power  
Was vain against the vengeful Giaour:  
He call'd on Alla – but the word  
Arose unheeded or unheard.  
Thou Paynim fool! – could Leila's prayer  
Be pass'd, and thine accorded there? (G 679-84).

The final question raises an issue which will be considered in more detail later: comparative gender roles in Islam, as represented by Byron. With its changes between narrators of different religious viewpoints, *The Giaour* is the poem in which there should be the greatest competition between the two ethnicities for the presentation of the correctness of each perspective. The Turkish and Islamic one, however, is severely handicapped by being associated with Hassan and his uxoricide.

One of Byron's more interesting notes on Muslims is his comment on the role of Old Testament images in *The Bride*. Murray had queried their appropriateness to an Islamic setting, and Byron wrote back describing such a view as the province of "the ignorant" (BLJ 3.165, to John Murray (a), 14/11/13). The note to the poem clarifies the situation:

It is to be observed, that every allusion to any thing or personage in the Old Testament, such as the Ark, or Cain, is equally the privilege of Mussulman and Jew: indeed the former profess to be much better acquainted with the lives, true and fabulous, of the patriarchs, than is warranted by our own Sacred writ, and not content with Adam, they have a biography of Pre-Adamites. (McGann 3.440:204).

The *Anti-Jacobin Review* objected nonetheless, and rejected the poet's explanatory note as a "lame excuse".<sup>287</sup> Nevertheless, the irony-laden note undercuts its own initial proclamation of shared ownership with the statement that Muslims "profess" a better understanding than "is warranted by" the Bible, with no mention of what might be warranted by the Qu'ran. This directly implies that the Bible is the guarantor of accuracy, and refers to the fact that Qu'ran and the Hadith, the traditions of the sayings of the Prophet, not only contradict some details of the Bible's accounts, such as the actual crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth, but describe the Jews and Christians as having distorted or misinterpreted God's words.<sup>288</sup>

Having appeared so much later than the Bible, the Qu'ran depends upon its recognition as divine revelation for validation of these contradicting claims, and revelation was something which Byron distrusted: "I do not believe in any revealed religion, because no religion is revealed" (BLJ 2.97, to Hodgson 13/9/11). For the orthodox Christians in the poem's audience, the very existence of pre-Adamites is contradicted by Genesis, that being the epistemic hierarchy: the canon scripture must be right, and so the differing account cannot be. This would prejudice readers against the Muslim understanding of the early world. Further, the note on *The Bride* does say that the Islamic claims challenge what appears in "our own Sacred writ"; this use of the personal pronoun does raise the issue of the different versions reflecting different ideas of the sacred, but the poet is including himself with the first person plural. Here, Byron is being orthodox about Scripture by presenting the hierarchy which his

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<sup>287</sup> *Anti-Jacobin Review*, XLVI (March 1814), 209-257, RR, I, 36-50: p.224 (43).

<sup>288</sup> For the denial of the crucifixion, see sura 3.54 (Sale p.50) and Sale's note on it, pp.50-1, and also 4.157 (p.94); for the claims of distortion, see suras 2:75 (p.12), 4:46 (p.79), 5:13 (p.100).

audience would accept, thus taking biblical orthodoxy as the standard by which to critique qu'ranic orthodoxy.

In regard to theory versus practice, then, Byron's representations of Islam include criticisms of local variations of practice, but also validations of some instances, especially when they can serve as examples for the English. He further sometimes criticizes the actual philosophy itself, the very ideas of the Qu'ran, comparing it unfavourably with the Bible. This stands in stark contrast to his treatment of Christianity.

### **Islam and Violence**

The strongest personal representative of Islam in Byron's work is not in the Eastern Tales at all. In *Don Juan*, Leila is a victim of European imperialism, and thus a figure of pathos. Nevertheless, she represents Islam less than she represents believers in Islam, especially because she never articulates her faith as a philosophical system, or argues for its worth. Her pathos is thus only the pathos of the innocent victim of war, irrespective of religious position, and *Don Juan* only goes as far as to acknowledge her understandable lack of enthusiasm about the religion of the conqueror (DJ 10.55.459-57.450).

In the Tales, there is no figure of such pathos who is associated with Islam, and the religion is most often on the side of the perpetrators rather than the victims. This is not particularly surprising given the contemporary Western view of Islam, which was such that even Sale's comparatively sympathetic treatment of the faith in his extensive 'Preliminary Discourse' to his translation of the Qu'ran includes a comment to the effect that "It is certainly one of the most convincing proofs that Mohammedism was no other than a human invention, that it owed its progress and establishment almost entirely to the sword."<sup>289</sup> In part, such an assertion might well have been driven by the exclusivist version of Christianity, which claims that all other religions must be false because it is true. This ascription of violence was certainly not an unusual perspective: Pailin goes so far as to say that "This charge seems to be repeated by

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<sup>289</sup> Sale, p.53; Thornton concurs, 2.7.152.

Christian apologists nearly every time that Islam is discussed.”<sup>290</sup> Sale later adds that “the Mohammedan divines [...] call the sword the key of heaven and hell”. However, having done so, Sale then demonstrates balance by proceeding to censure Christianity for its failure to match its own practice to its pacifistic philosophy, describing Christians as having “shown a more violent spirit of intolerance than either” Jews or Muslims, both of whom Sale describes as having divine commissions for warring.<sup>291</sup>

Byron, then, is following the common trend in connecting Islam with violence. In the Tales, the association with violence is, on one level, simply the connection between Islamic cultural activities and militant behaviour. Thus, *The Giaour* describes the Feast of Bairam (Eid al Fitr), as being announced with gunfire:

The flashes of each joyous peal  
Are seen to prove the Moslem’s zeal.  
To-night – set Ramazani’s sun –  
To-night – the Bairam feast’s begun[.] (G 226-9).

Byron’s note reads, “‘Tophaike’, musket. – The Bairam is announced by the cannon at sunset; the illumination of the Mosques, and the firing of all kinds of small arms, loaded with *ball*, proclaim it during the night” (McGann 3.417:225). The initial image of serenity of the Mosque on the hill (G 222-4) is rather undercut by the use of the musket and cannon, which “prove the Moslem’s zeal”, not least because the weapons are indeed loaded with shot, instead of powder alone for the noise. This representation would not be terribly significant but for the multiplicity of others, not least of which is that of the Muslim convert Alp in *The Siege of Corinth*, and how he “proved, by many a deed of death, /How firm his heart in novel faith” (SC 5.112-3). The association with warfare is also an association with the tools of warfare, and thus Muslim characters in these Tales connect their religion with their own personal swords. Selim, for example, promises Zuleika,

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<sup>290</sup> Pailin, p.103. See also Paul Rycout, *The Present State of the Ottoman Empire* (London: John Starkey and Henry Brome, 1670), p.104, and Richard Knolles, *Turkish History* (London: Isaac Cleave, 1701), 1.455, for more examples of this. Rycout and Knolles are listed in Byron’s 1807 catalogue of reading in Moore’s *The Life, Letters and Journals of Lord Byron*, 5.46-7.

<sup>291</sup> Sale, pp.152, 153.

Thy lot shall yet be linked with mine;  
I swear it by our Prophet's shrine,  
And be that thought thy sorrow's balm.  
So may the Koran verse displayed  
Upon its steel direct my blade[.] (BA 2.12.186-90).

Byron notes that the practice of etching passages from the Koran into blades is a common one:

The characters on all Turkish scimitars contain sometimes the name of the place of their manufacture, but more generally a text from the Koran, in letters of gold. (McGann 3.440:189).

What is most significant is not merely that Selim has a sword with a passage from the Koran etched into it, but his belief that doing so can 'direct his blade': the belief in the supportive power of the religious text in battle, a belief in religious validation of warfare. Selim is not the only one to form such an association. Seyd has determined to capture the corsairs: "This he hath sworn by Alla and his sword" (C 2.1.6). In an Islamic context, this is *shirk*, the sin of 'association': Allah is generally understood to be so supremely transcendent as to be above all comparison and association. This makes Seyd's action not terribly orthodox, but the poem does not acknowledge that, and so Muslim zeal is associated with the use, including the lethal use, of weapons.

Warfare is carried out in the name of Islam, with Allah specifically invoked: "Alla il Alla! Vengeance swells the cry" (C 2.6.235); "God and the prophet – Alla Hu! (SC 22.668); "Hark to the Allah shout!" (SC 26.774). Although it might be argued that these descriptions simply depict the normal cultural practice, the fact remains that the practices are thus represented in these Tales, and also that no answering cry is ascribed to the other side: the poems do not present a matching connection between Christianity and violence, the connection which George Sale made, and which Byron did make in other texts, e.g., CHP 2.77. This violence is also present in the description of the Muslim army at Corinth as "the leaguring infidel" (SC 21.527), and

the description of the scene surrounding the city: “the Moslem’s leaguering lines” (SC 2.31). The attacking army are particularly identified with their religion rather than their nationality, again as part of the equation of religion with ethnicity, but here specifically in the context of war.

This warfare is also described in explicitly religious terms within the discourse of the Muslim side. Much in the vein of Coumorgi’s comment on “Christian dogs”, Alp’s army are exhorted to let

none escape  
Aged or young, in Christian shape;  
[...]  
Leave not in Corinth a living one –  
A priest at her altars, a chief in her halls[.] (SC 22.649-50, 65-6).

When Alp is urging his men on to this genocide, he promises, “He who first downs the red cross may crave /His heart’s dearest wish; let him ask it, and have!” (SC 22.672-3). This war is represented as being, for the Muslims, a war against Christianity. Even the slaughter of warfare, which leaves both sides mangled alike, is represented as having been the result of Muslim aggression: the Muslims are attacking Corinth. As a result, the landscape is covered by bodies of the slain, spread in indistinguishable masses of human wreckage:

Some fell on the shore, but, far away,  
Scatter’d o’er the isthmus lay;  
Christian or Moslem, which be they?  
[...]  
Not the matrons that them bore  
Could discern their offspring more[.] (SC 33.994-6, 1003-4).

A further effect of the war is the devastation of nature by war, marked by the long list of animals disturbed by the explosion which destroys the church (SC 33.1012-33). Byron shows not just one victim of the ethnic conflict, but all: the Western, the



Eastern, the collectively human, and the environmental. The responsibility for all of this is left with the Muslim attackers.

The practices of the Turkish soldiers in war are also condemned. This plays a major part in the plot of *The Corsair*, in that the pirates are the ones who rescue the Turkish women from the burning Haram because the Turkish soldiers do not. The Turkish troops are represented as failing in the soldiers' basic duty of protecting their own civilians. This is a moral failing, which necessarily reflects upon the religion since the Turks are identified as "the Moslems": the Muslims fail to save their own women.

The condemnation of Turkish soldiers appears also in the sack of Corinth. First, the church is presented as a place of love, an island of peaceful contemplation in the midst of the battle:

Minotti stood o'er the altar-stone:  
Madonna's face upon him shone,  
Painted in heavenly hues above,  
With eyes of light and looks of love;  
And placed upon that holy shrine  
To fix our thoughts on things divine[.] (SC 30.903-8).

Then, this sanctuary is violated by the invasion of soldiers so violent that their destruction extends not only to enemy combatants, but also to the fallen, and to the sacred items within the church:

With barbarous blows they gash the dead,  
And lop the already lifeless head,  
And fell the statues from their niche,  
And spoil the shrines of offerings rich,  
And from each other's rude hands wrest  
The silver vessels saints had bless'd.  
To the high altar on they go;  
Oh, but it made a glorious show!

On its table still behold

The cup of consecrated gold[.] (SC 32.945-54).

Once more, the “barbarous” mutilating and vandalising is reported with no balancing account of any misdeeds on the part of the opposing, Christian side. In describing this passage, the reviewer for the *Dublin Examiner* writes, “The foe comes on, marking his way with slaughter and sacrilege”.<sup>292</sup> Perhaps a periodical in a predominantly Catholic location might be more sensitive to the violence against a non-Protestant church, but the zeugma of “slaughter and sacrilege” indicates the interconnection of the two crimes in the mind of the reviewer, and thus the wickedness of “the foe”. The “slaughter” mentioned there is killing of the Venetian soldiers within the church: “slaughter streamed along her aisles” (SC 30.914), the engraved names of the honoured dead buried beneath the floor are “now illegible with gore” (SC 31.923), and the statuary is “smeared, and slippery – stained” (SC 31.926).

This passage has received some interesting modern commentary. Although Caroline Franklin’s work on characterization is superb, her discussion of religion in these Tales contains some peculiar conclusions. This is evident, for example, in her reading of this passage of *The Siege*:

Daniel Watkins has commented on the sledgehammer irony here, in that the Christian church is resting upon foundations stored with the weapons of destruction. The father of Francesca is here plainly associated with the vengeful God of the Old Testament who, if threatened, will punish his in Hell. As the icon of the Madonna smiles on, Minotti is prepared to exterminate real mothers and babies in its name: ‘Still she smiled; even now she smiles, /Though slaughter streams along her aisles’ (913-14).<sup>293</sup>

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<sup>292</sup> *Dublin Examiner*, I (May 1816), 9-20, RR, II, 682-688: p.18 (687).

<sup>293</sup> Caroline Franklin, *Byron’s Heroines* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), pp.70, 71.

Watkins' comment refers to "the venerable church resting comfortably upon weapons meant for human destruction".<sup>294</sup> The adverb "comfortably" is absent from Byron's poem: Watkins and Franklin both ought to have considered that the church is the first *victim* of the explosion, and not its perpetrator. Furthermore, since the mutilation of the church was already happening at the hands of the Turkish soldiers, Minotti's destruction of it all could be considered giving it a clean death. As for the association of Minotti with "the vengeful God of the Old Testament" who threatens Alp with punishment in Hell and "is prepared to exterminate real mothers and babies", this is at odds with the text of the poem. It is actually Christ, "him thou didst forsake" (SC 21.595), who is announced as the future punisher of Alp, and punishment in Hell is, in fact, a New Testament idea, the Old Testament only ever referring to Sheol, the Grave, which is a place of emptiness. Moreover, Minotti is fighting to *defend* "the real mothers and babies" of Corinth from the invading Ottoman army, whereas the only slaughter which appears in the text is that of the Venetian soldiers being massacred in the church. As for the smiling of the Madonna, it makes more sense to connect this with the similar image in the third canto of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, published in the same year, regarding Heaven smiling beneficently upon even such radical unbelievers as Rousseau and Gibbon (CHP 3.105.981-5). The smiling saint, like the deity, is not punishing anyone. Christianity is not associated with violence here.

The violence perpetrated by Christians in *The Siege* is the desperate defence against Alp's promised genocide. It is also worth noting that the description of the Turkish "slaughter" of the Venetian soldiers in the church is far more bloody than the description of the Turkish soldiers being killed in the assault, when

the first were backward bent  
 Many a bosom, sheathed in brass,  
 Strewed the earth like broken glass,  
 Shivered by the shot, that tore  
 The ground whereon they moved no more[.] (SC 23.685-9).

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<sup>294</sup> Daniel P Watkins, *Social Relations in Byron's Eastern Tales* (London and Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1987), p.15.

Whereas the Turkish troops are bloodless “broken glass”, and it is the ground, not the flesh, which is torn, the Venetian ones are bloodily ‘slaughtered’. It is difficult to see the condemnation of the Muslim soldiers as “barbarous” being purely a rhetorical pose, merely the perspective of the definitely Christian narrator of *The Siege of Corinth*, when the following occurs in an editorial comment by the poet on Turkish-Greek relations in *The Corsair*:

Mean time the watch may slumber, if they will,  
Nor only wake to war, but dreaming kill.  
Though all, who can, disperse on shore and seek  
To flesh their glowing valour on the Greek;  
How well such deed becomes the turbaned brave –  
To bare the sabre’s edge before a slave!  
Infest his dwelling – but forbear to slay,  
Their arms are strong, yet merciful to-day,  
And do not deign to smite because they may!  
Unless some gay caprice suggests the blow,  
To keep in practice for the coming foe. (C 2.1.14-24).

The vacillating statement, the volte-face followed by the volte-face, emphasizes the utter senselessness of the violence being perpetrated against the weak, and so emphasizes the violent nature of the perpetrators.

Not only the practices of Muslims, but also teachings of the faith are represented in specifically violent terms, in, for example, the fisherman’s graphic account of the fate awaiting the Giaour:

But thou, false Infidel! shalt writhe  
Beneath avenging Monkir’s scythe;  
And from its torment ‘scape alone  
To wander round lost Eblis’ throne;  
And fire unquench’d, unquenchable –

Around – within – thy heart shall dwell  
Nor ear can hear, nor tongue can tell  
The tortures of that inward hell! (G 747-54).

Byron's note on the passage clarifies, but does nothing to alleviate, the violence of the idea, the dark humour of the poet's note actually making it all the more bleak:

Monkir and Nekir are the inquisitors of the dead, before whom the corpse undergoes a slight noviciate and preparatory training for damnation. If the answers are none of the clearest, he is hauled up with the scythe and thumped down with a red hot mace till properly seasoned, with a variety of subsidiary probations. The office of these angels is no sinecure; there are but two; and the number of orthodox deceased being in a small proportion to the remainder, their hands are always full. (McGann 3.420:748).

The final sentence is the Idealist's prod at the exclusivist monologic of orthodoxy, one which could be applied equally well to orthodox Christianity, but it is not here, while the note as a whole contributes to the grim depiction of the Muslim afterlife. Marilyn Butler, who determinedly sees an anti-Christian bent to the work, opines that "this [passage] is at least colourful, and thus, like the other Muslim superstitions Byron treats, relatively attractive."<sup>295</sup> It is not positively coloured, however, and that is the crucial point.

The idea of the route to Hell, and particularly the "shorter cut downwards for the Jews and Christians", in *The Giaour* (McGann 3.418: 483), was one respect in which Byron was predisposed to disagree with Islam, because he rejected the idea of Hell altogether: "nor on the other hand can such a Scene as a Seat of eternal punishment exist, it is incompatible with the benign attributes of a Deity to suppose so" (BLJ 1.114, to Edward Noel Long 16/4/7).<sup>296</sup> This rejection is not anti-Christian, and is the assertion of a minority Christian position termed either "annihilationism" or

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<sup>295</sup> Butler, 'The Orientalism of Byron's *Giaour*', in *Byron and the Limits of Fiction*, ed. by Bernard Beatty and Vincent Newey (New Jersey: Barnes & Noble Books, 1988), 78-96 (p.88).

<sup>296</sup> A sentiment repeated fourteen years later, in BLJ 9.45, Detached Thought #96.

“conditional immortality”, in which only the righteous continue to exist after death. The debate between conditional and universal immortality dates from the earliest days of Christianity, and continued in Byron’s own time. As another contemporary example, Mary Wollstonecraft, whose religious views in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* are not dogmatically orthodox but are nonetheless assertively Christian, writes, “I shall pass over her [Madame Genlis’] vehement argument in favour of the eternity of future punishments, because I blush to think that a human being should ever argue vehemently in such a cause”.<sup>297</sup> However, while such competing versions already existed within English cultural discourse, no such plurality is presented for Islam, which is left to appear monologically harsh.

Further, the represented violence in Islam is given a motivation, in the form of the Houris. This connection only makes the ideas, and thus the religion, seem worse by Western values. The Houris appear, among other places, in the fisherman’s eulogy on Hassan:

But him the maids of Paradise  
Impatient to their halls invite,  
[...]  
Who falls in battle ‘gainst a Giaour,  
Is worthiest an immortal bower. (G 739-40, 5-6).

This is religious incitement to violence, much like the later “These black-eyed virgins make the Moslems fight” of *Don Juan* 8.114.909. A comment by the narrator in *Lara*, sounding very much like the voice of the poet, says, “Religion – freedom – vengeance – what you will, /A word’s enough to raise mankind to kill” (L 2.8.222-3, 225); the same can, and does, happen with Christianity, as with the Reconquista, in CHP 1.35. The Giaour’s comments to the abbot, noted earlier, that the abbot ought to be pleased by the death of his enemy Hassan, are another example of this. However, there the cleric is shocked, and moved to prayer (G 1036): the belief of the layman is

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<sup>297</sup> Wollstonecraft, Mary, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (London et al.: Penguin, 1992), p.205.

clearly contrasted with that of the orthodox clergyman. The fisherman's belief is given no contrast. Further, Byron adds a note on this passage:

The following is part of a battle song of the Turks: – 'I see – I see a dark-eyed girl of Paradise, and she waves a handkerchief, a kerchief of green; and cries aloud, Come, kiss me, for I love thee', &c. (McGann 3.420:743).

The man being invited into Paradise by the Houris, being praised as "worthiest an immortal bower", is Leila's murderer, and he is being invited in not because he has been forgiven for her murder, but rather because he has never been charged with it. Commenting upon contemporary Ottoman practice, Thornton says,

The husband who inflicts the punishment of instant death on his inconstant wife, is not only held innocent by the law, but may even found his claim to the inheritance of her property on the murder which he himself has committed.<sup>298</sup>

For Hassan, the Houris are replacing Leila, who is apparently written out of the Islamic scheme of Heaven, while Hassan is welcomed in. The positive value in Islam of martyrdom is contrasted with the negative value in Christianity of murder. Further, the idea of this *being* murder is never raised by the Muslim narrator of *The Giaour*, perhaps for the very reason which Thornton records. The *Monthly Review's* questioning of the narrator's calmness in relating the event<sup>299</sup> is an example of the incomprehensibility to a Western reader of this Muslim character's response to Leila's plight.<sup>300</sup> *The Giaour* is being delivered to a Christian society, and the conflict of values there can only have one result: the murderer should not go to Paradise. This necessarily makes Islam appear to be validating violence against women.

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<sup>298</sup> Thornton, 2.8.236-7.

<sup>299</sup> *Monthly Review*, 2nd Series, LXXI (June 1813), 202-207, RR, IV, 1740-1743: p.207 (1743); *Drakard's Paper*, June 27, 1813, 199-200, RR, II, 520-521: p.200 (521).

<sup>300</sup> It should be noted that the Bible also includes the death penalty for adultery (Leviticus 20:10), but that Jesus of Nazareth's instruction to "Let the sinless one among you cast the first stone" (John 8:7) effectively defeated any practical enforcement of this, making it not a 'reasonable' response in Christendom. Alternatives such as ostracism were sought to replace it, nonetheless.

The immortal virgins appear again in regard to Alp, who is contrasted with his Turkish men in that he is apparently not attracted by the promise of them:

Not his the loud fanatic boast  
To plant the crescent o'er the cross,  
Or risk a life with little loss,  
Secure in paradise to be  
By Houris loved immortally[.] (SC 12.252-6).

Once more, the religion is being used to inspire warfare. This time, the word 'raising mankind to kill' is 'love'. This is a shrewd comment on the functioning of such offers of paradise; like the Norse idea of Valhalla, or the blessings given to the Christian Crusaders, they make death in battle a positive idea instead of a negative one, and thus encourage fearlessness. However, neither of these, nor any other culture's version, is presented, leaving Islam alone in this respect.

Much of this representation of Islam may have been influenced by Byron's encounters with Bektashi believers.<sup>301</sup> Yaşar Nuri Öztürk, writing about the founder of the "heterodox Bektāshī dervish order" which Yapp identifies as predominant in the Ottoman Empire and particularly amongst the Janissaries,<sup>302</sup> notes of the founder of the school that

In the *Maqalat* [Sayings], Haji Bektash has this to say about *ghaza* (holy war):

*If you kill the unbeliever you are a ghazi [one engaged in holy war], and if he kills you, you will be a shahid [martyr for Islam]...and the rank of martyr is superior in five respects to that of the prophets.*<sup>303</sup>

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<sup>301</sup> Q.v. Beatty, 'Byron and Islam: the Triple Eros', *Journal of European Studies*, 4 (1974), 325-63.

<sup>302</sup> See also J L Lee, *Bektashiyya Sufism of Turkey and the Balkans* (Birmingham: Centre for the Study of Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations, 1994), p.26, especially on the rejection of the world as an illusion, an idea quite compatible with Idealism.

<sup>303</sup> Öztürk, p.63. Thornton mentions Haji Bektash's "high repute" in contemporary Ottoman Turkey, particularly amongst the Janissaries (2.7.124-5).



As noted previously, Bektashism is not strictly orthodox, and this last comment contradicts the accepted ranking of martyrs and prophets:

It is, however, the constant doctrine of the Korân, that the felicity of each person will be proportioned to his deserts, and that there will be abodes of different degrees of happiness; the most eminent degree being reserved for the prophets, the second for the doctors and teachers of God's worship, the next for the martyrs, and the lower for the rest of the righteous, according to their several merits.<sup>304</sup>

It is questionable whether Byron would have known that this validation of martyrs was not truly representative of Muslim belief, however. The Muslims with whom Byron spent the most time were the family of the warlord Ali Pasha. In a letter to Lady Melbourne (BLJ 3.111, 7/9/13), Byron passes on a story in a letter from the pasha, about him recently having avenged the rape, forty-two years previous, of his mother and two sisters. Those killed were “all the persons living in the remotest degree akin to this outrage (in *Turkey* these are affronts) their children grand children – cousins &c. to the amount of 600”.<sup>305</sup> The sheer difference between the degree of violence thus practised in the Ottoman Empire and that practised in Byron's own society might well have led him to judge the other more brutal. However, as Franklin points out, “Byron's stress on [the Ottoman Empire's] brutality” was also part of his philhellenic campaign, the justification for the liberation of Greece, and featured in his speech to the House of Lords on the 27<sup>th</sup> of February in 1812 in regard to “the most despotic of infidel governments”.<sup>306</sup>

In these Tales, Islam is a faith connected with weapons, warfare, and brutality. Its hell is presented as a place of violence, and its paradise as an incitement to violence. This association of violence with Islam was a common idea in Byron's time, and his

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<sup>304</sup> Sale, p.105; see also *Koran* sura 4.69, p.82.

<sup>305</sup> Marandi claims that Ali Pasha was not “a practicing Muslim” (in ‘The Bride of the East’, his revised version of ‘The Concubine of Abydos’, in *Byron and Orientalism*, 215-31 (p.221)). Marandi cites no basis for this claim, which is always a difficult one to make, and is contradicted by Ali Pasha's self-identification in story of Adjutant-General Rose, quoted from Ibrahim-Manzur-Effendi, *Mémoires sur la Grèce et l'Albanie, pendant le gouvernement d'Ali-Pacha* (Paris, 1827), pp.32-3, in *Byron and Orientalism*, pp.42-3.

<sup>306</sup> Franklin, p.34; Coleridge 9.429.

expression of it is, in part, merely his retransmission of this accepted view. Clearly he was not so enlightened as to be above the adoption of his own culture's view of the Other. Given the earlier condemnation of war as idolatry in *CHP Cantos I and II*, and the later association of war with Hell in *Don Juan*, both criticisms from within a Christian value system, the association of Islam with war does reflect very strongly and very negatively upon that faith, as does the association with violence against women.

### **Islam and Women**

One of the most salient aspects of religion in the Eastern Tales is the treatment of women under Islam, whether according to the letter and philosophy of the Qu'ran or as a cultural practice within Islamic nations.

Susan Oliver sees Byron's representation of the oppression of women under Islam as political, and largely ironic, echoing Hourani in saying that it is "as much aimed at British and other Western European perceptions of Islam as at actual Qur'anic belief and its interpretations by Muslims."<sup>307</sup> Such a reading risks obscuring the manifold functions of the representation, and not least the fact that, in these Tales, the treatment of women under Islam is presented in a manner almost universally negative. Byron is reiterating the standard position, not deconstructing it.

A possible cause for the harsh treatment of women in the Islamic cultures of the Tales is given in the belief that they had no souls. This is introduced in an oblique fashion when the fisherman-narrator of *The Giaour* says of Leila that

Soul beam'd forth in every spark  
That darted from beneath the lid,  
Bright as the jewel of Giamschid.  
Yea, *Soul*, and should our prophet say  
That form was nought but breathing clay,

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<sup>307</sup> Susan Oliver, *Scott, Byron and the Poetics of Cultural Encounter* (Hampshire and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p.170.

By Alla! I would answer nay;  
Though on Al-Sirat's arch I stood,  
Which totters o'er the fiery flood,  
With Paradise within my view,  
And all his Houris beckoning through.  
Oh! Who young Leila's glance could read  
And keep that portion of his creed  
Which saith, that woman is but dust,  
A soulless toy for tyrant's lust?  
On her might Muftis gaze, and own  
That through her eye the Immortal shone[,] (G 477-92).

The narrator thus asserts that Leila has a soul, but the fact that he feels it necessary to assert this at all, let alone defend it so vigorously, is a testimony to the perception of the idea as open to challenge. Byron's note is similarly ambivalent in its affirmation:

A vulgar error; the Koran allots at least a third of Paradise to well-behaved women; but by far the greater number of Mussulmans interpret the text their own way, and exclude their moieties from heaven. Being enemies to Platonics, they cannot discern 'any fitness of things' in the souls of the other sex, conceiving them to be superseded by the Houris. (McGann 3.419:488).<sup>308</sup>

While Byron thus states that the Muslims' sacred text asserts that women do have souls, the mathematics is interesting: "at least a third of Paradise" is allotted to the sex who constitute *more than half* of the population.<sup>309</sup> Sale's note on the belief says,

whatever may be the opinion of some ignorant people among them [...] in this case God will make no distinction of sexes.<sup>310</sup>

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<sup>308</sup> Byron was most likely referring to the Platonic concept of the twin halves of the soul (Plato, *Symposium*, 190-3). Gibbon refers to the same "vulgar prejudice" (*The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, 7 vols (London: Henry Frowde, 1904-6), 5.50.414), contrasting it with the orthodox view on p.412 n88.

<sup>309</sup> Demetra Vaka Brown, an Ottoman émigré, reports the existence of this idea of soulless women in Turkey at the end of the nineteenth century (*Haremlik: Some Pages from the Life of Turkish Women* (New Jersey: Gorgias Press, 2004), pp.60, 83).

This is a far more politic representation than most contemporary Western ones. However, Sale further notes that “the same prophet has also declared, that when he took a view of paradise, he saw the majority of its inhabitants to be the poor, and when he looked down into hell, he saw the greater part of the wretches confined there to be women.”<sup>311</sup> This idea is not from the Qu’ran itself, but rather from a hadith, a tradition regarding a comment by the prophet. These vary in the degree of acceptance which they achieve, but this one was collected by Sahih Bukhari, one of the most trusted sources in Sunni Islam.<sup>312</sup>

If the majority of those who enter Hell are women, then it is not so surprising that the majority in Heaven would be men. This idea is contextualised and delimited by subsequent Islamic commentaries on the hadith, but neither Byron nor Sale demonstrates any cognisance of that.

However, Byron’s note states this is a “vulgar” error, a ‘common’ error, which means both ‘a lower-class’ and ‘a widely-held’ one, impugning the bulk of the Muslim population. In a similar vein, Thornton says, “Where women are degraded from their rank in [Western] society, the European sinks into the Turk.”<sup>313</sup> If, as Byron claims, “by far the greater number” of Muslim men did not believe that women had souls, then a Muslim woman ran a grave risk of being treated as “but dust, /A soulless toy for tyrant’s lust”, to which Gulnare attests in *The Corsair* (C 3.8.342-3). This idea, that Muslims believed that women were soulless, had some degree of acceptance in the West at the time, having been propagated, as Sale noted, “by several writers”.<sup>314</sup> Thus, for example, the review of *The Giaour* in *The Satirist* refers to the narrator’s “impiety” in that “he would give his prophet the lie, should the latter persevere, after

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<sup>310</sup> Sale, p.110. The expression and phrasing of the passage mimics that in a letter by Mary Wortley Montagu (*Complete Letters of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*, ed. by Robert Halsband, 3 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965): I, 455, to the Abbé Conti, February 1728). See also Sale, *Koran* p.90, sura 4.124.

<sup>311</sup> Sale, p.105.

<sup>312</sup> *Translation of the Meanings of Sahih Al-Bukhari*, trans. Muhammad Muhsin Khan, (Beirut: Dar al Arabia, 1971-2) vol.VII, book LXII, chapter 88, number 124, p.94.

<sup>313</sup> Thornton, 2.7.195.

<sup>314</sup> Sale, p.110.

seeing Leila, in declaring that women had no souls.”<sup>315</sup> That Muhammad could be said to “persevere” in this indicates that he is already understood to be doing it. Mary Wollstonecraft demonstrates the same conception when she describes Milton’s description of Eve as possibly showing that “in the true Mahometan strain, he meant to deprive us of souls” because women existed only “to gratify the senses of man.”<sup>316</sup> Despite Sale’s protestation for the doctrine of the Qu’ran, Byron, Wollstonecraft, and *The Satirist* demonstrate a Western belief in Muslim unbelief in women’s souls. It is also noteworthy that Byron (McGann 3.442:618), Thornton (2.7.224), and Wortley Montagu (1.362, to the Abbé Conti, 29/5/17) all independently comment upon the fact that only Muslim men’s gravestones feature turbans: the discrimination was significant to the Westerners.

Byron is directly criticizing Islam as it is practised, critiquing what is understood to be the commonly-held belief that women are soulless, not challenging the common Western view. At the same time, he is also criticizing the pure theory, the hadith, by pointing out that, although it does allow women into Paradise, the proportion so allowed is less than the proportion within the general population. All of this is consistent with the treatment of Muslim women by Muslim men in the Tales.

The “black-eyed maids of Heaven” (CHP 1.59.609.11) are also a significant factor in Byron’s representation of Islam, as they implicitly compete with mortal women for the attentions of the male Muslim characters. This is most evident in the case of Hassan, who dies fighting a Giaour and so is to be welcomed into Paradise by these immortal virgins. It is apparently an immortal who will eventually fulfil the role of being for Hassan “a bride /More true than her who left his side” (G 533-4). The idea that the Houris might be purely metaphorical is discussed by Sale,<sup>317</sup> but not by Byron, in whose work they appear most often merely as inducements to fearlessness in battle. That they can function as inducements, and particularly as ones so valuable that their promise can outweigh the fear of the pain of mortal injury, is testament to their great desirability. In contrast, for mortal women to be mistreated is testament to

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<sup>315</sup> *Satirist*, XIII (July 1813), 70-88, RR, V, 2124-2134: p.76 (2128).

<sup>316</sup> Wollstonecraft, pp.100-1.

<sup>317</sup> Sale, pp.109-10.

their much more limited value: toys are not honoured. The mortal women in these Tales are placed in a competition against the immortals, a competition which they cannot win. There is one instance of the acknowledgement of this competition, in which Zuleika asks herself, regarding Selim, “Oh! Who so dear with him could dwell? /What Houri soothe him half so well?” (BA 2.7.112-3). The rhetorical question suggests that her opinion, at least, is sure, but that of the fisherman-narrator in *The Giaour* is less so.

Eternal destiny has yet further implications. Sale also notes the ambiguity of the precise future for those women who are admitted to Paradise. Speaking particularly of the Houris to greet the men but not to greet the women, Sale writes that he has not found the precise situation of good women in Paradise.<sup>318</sup> This ambiguity is noted in *The Bride of Abydos* when it describes how Zuleika

oft her Koran conned apart;  
And oft in youthful reverie  
She dream'd what Paradise might be:  
Where woman's parted soul shall go  
Her Prophet had disdain'd to show;  
But Selim's mansion was secure[.] (BA 2.7.103-8).

The question is not simply whether she is going to Paradise, but to exactly what kind of Paradise she shall be admitted. As a contrast to this, consider Thomas Thornton's representation of the Qu'ran's word on the very same issue, reminiscent of Sale: “God will make no distinction of the sexes; but the prophet does not insult the modesty of women by unveiling to their imagination a paradise of sensual bliss.”<sup>319</sup> This is far more politic and positive than the representations in Byron's poem: the lack of distinction, noted by Thornton, *ought* to answer Zuleika's question, but the poet is not following the historian's representation. Again, the poet is critiquing the religion

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<sup>318</sup> Sale, p.110.

<sup>319</sup> Thornton, 2.8.239. See also Hill, p.42, on women being segregated into “Places far less Bright” than men's in the afterlife.

itself, in its sacred text, not merely the cultural practice of it, and his representation is not the most positive of those produced by Westerners.

Nonetheless, Zuleika submits to this situation, accepting what she has been taught.<sup>320</sup>

Likewise, she accepts her seclusion as a Muslim woman:

To meet the gaze of strangers' eyes  
Our law, our creed, our God denies;  
Nor shall one wandering thought of mine  
At such, our Prophet's will, repine[.] (BA 1.13.429-32).

She says that she will not contradict the dogmata of her religion, but the poet is rendering these elements visible, and questionable, by expressing them. This is even more apparent when Zuleika describes the Kaaba shrine at Mecca:

I swear by Mecca's shrine, –  
If shrines that never approach allow  
To woman's step admit her vow[.] (BA 1.11.312-4).

While women are allowed near the Kaaba, they are not permitted direct access to it for prayer, on the basis that this would involve mixing with the crowds of men who are present. However, in none of these cases in which the Islamic separation of men and women is marked in the poems is the Western reader called upon to accept such a discrimination. Segregation in this life, and quite possibly in the next, is simply presented as a feature of Islam, a feature which contradicts Western cultural precepts and the Christian view of the afterlife, and which is not defended by the poem. This leaves Islam appearing inherently discriminatory.

Forced marriages have long been an object, and a device, of horror in Western literature. Therefore, when, in *The Bride of Abydos*, Giaffir announces very abruptly to his daughter Zuleika that he has found a husband for her, this is not particularly

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<sup>320</sup> 'Islam' is a derivative of an Arabic term for 'submission'.

unusual, or at all specific to his being a Muslim. However, he goes on to extol the man's virtues as a warrior, which accords with the already-noted association in these Tales between Islam and violence. He then does say what would be unusual for a Western father-character: "And now thou know'st thy father's will – /All that thy sex hath need to know" (BA 1.7.215-6). She is deprived of any right of reply, let alone argument. Further, she is to obey unquestioningly not because of her age, but because of her sex. This expectation is made even more stark by the earlier response of one of Giaffir's retainers, and the narrator's subsequent comment: " 'Pacha! to hear is to obey. –' /No more must slave to despot say" (BA 1.3.44-5). This equation of daughter with slave in *The Bride* matches the equation of wife with slave in *The Giaour*, where the Muslim narrator says that Hassan

trusted to the slave [Leila]  
 Whose treachery deserv'd a grave:  
 And on that eve had gone to mosque[.] (G 461-3).

That Leila flees into the arms of her non-Muslim lover as Hassan goes to the mosque emphasizes her choice as a rejection of both Hassan and his religion. Likewise, Hassan considers her dispensable and replaceable: nothing in the poem indicates any intrinsic value imputed to Leila by him. Instead, she is "The faithless slave that broke her bower; /And, worse than faithless, for a Giaour!" (G 535-6). She is only notable for her failure, not for any personal worth.

Likewise, in *The Corsair*, Gulnare is "the slave of Seyd" (C 2.5.224).<sup>321</sup> Thus, Seyd feels free to say to her, "Accursed was the moment when he bore /Thee from the flames, which better far –" (C 3.5.187-8). The aposiopesis leaves the implication clear. There is also a reference in *The Siege of Corinth* to Francesca's death having saved her from slavery to "Mahomet and thee [Alp]" (SC 27.819), and thus what is likewise clear is the correlation throughout these Tales between such misogyny and Muslim characters, to whom it exclusively belongs. While Mary Wollstonecraft does use the same term, in denouncing James Fordyce's description of the ideal English

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<sup>321</sup> Nowhere in the text is she described, as Nigel Leask idiosyncratically chooses to describe her, as "a harlot" or "a prostitute": see Leask, pp.49, 50.



wife as “the portrait of a house slave,”<sup>322</sup> even he has not gone so far as to suggest that she ought to be burnt alive rather than be unfaithful. When she does talk about the general treatment of women in English society, it is noteworthy how she describes it: “in the true style of Mahometanism, they are treated as a kind of subordinate beings”.<sup>323</sup> The enslavement of women is something which she connects, and which she expects her readers to connect, with Islam. Thornton agrees, describing women “throughout the Turkish empire, and almost the whole continent of Asia” as being “converted into the merest instruments of [man’s] will or his appetites.”<sup>324</sup> In his review of the *The Giaour* and *The Bride of Abydos*, George Ellis writes,

in a country where every man is, or may become possessor of a haram, the reciter and hearer of a story will generally be disposed to acquiesce in the necessity of maintaining a severe domestic police, and in the moral fitness of strangling or drowning every female convicted of infidelity.<sup>325</sup>

Byron’s poems follow his culture’s representations of Islam, although some of the same ideas do show up in the Byronic Heroes. The *Giaour* comes closest to Hassan’s reaction to infidelity, in saying that he would have followed Hassan’s own course of action in murdering Leila, “did he but what I had done /Had she been false to more than one” (G 1062-3). This comment is often quoted as proof of a parallel between the *Giaour* and Hassan, but where Hassan proves the words with deeds, the *Giaour* does not, and instead expresses a devotion to Leila which is not heard from Hassan. The Byronic Hero does not discriminate against the love interest on the basis of her sex; if anything, he discriminates *for* her. The starkest contrast in such valuations is that between Seyd and Conrad in *The Corsair*. Where Seyd thinks it better for

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<sup>322</sup> Wollstonecraft, p.195.

<sup>323</sup> Wollstonecraft, p.80.

<sup>324</sup> Thornton 2.8.227-8.

<sup>325</sup> *Quarterly Review*, George Ellis, X (January 1814) 331-354, RR, V, 2001-2012: p.333 (2002). This is the attitude against which the Byronic Hero’s love for the woman is contrasted. However, there is a note in Byron’s own journal which sounds very similar:

There is a fine engraving in Lavater, from a picture by Fuseli, of *that* Ezzelin, over the body of Meduna, punished by him for a *hitch* in her constancy during his absence in the Crusades. He was right – but I want to know the story. (*BLJ* III.253-4, 20/3/14).

The comment “He was right” appears to be a validation of the Ezzelin’s punishment of Meduna. It is nonetheless a unique comment, which cannot, therefore, be claimed as truly representative, and the behaviour of the Byronic Hero is of a much more chivalrous nature.

Gulnare to die painfully than to be unfaithful, Conrad risks pain and death to rescue women who owe him no faith, the women who were not being rescued by their own men:

Oh! burst the Haram – wrong not on your lives  
One female form – remember – *we* have wives.  
On them such outrage Vengeance will repay[.] (C 2.5.202-4).

In so doing, he allows the momentum of his attack to dissipate, permitting his enemy crucial time to regroup (C 2.6.227-30), and so losing the battle. Meanwhile, Gulnare notes, “*that* robber thus with gore bedew’d /Seem’d gentler than Seyd in fondest mood” (C 2.7.263-4). While it may be true that Seyd is not a strict Muslim, but one who employs dancing girls (C 2.2.36)<sup>326</sup> and is suspected of drinking (C 2.2.32), he does promise “by Alla” (C 2.1.6), which indicates at least some enculturation to Islam, as does his description of Conrad as “this Giaour” (C 3.5.173). The contrast is again between the lover of women and the Muslim.

The most general description of the fate of women appears during the one of the fisherman’s monologues in *The Giaour*, in which he says,

Woe waits the insect and maid,  
A life of pain, the loss of peace,  
From infant’s play, or man’s caprice:  
The lovely toy so fiercely sought  
Has lost its charm by being caught  
[...]  
With wounded wing, or bleeding breast  
Ah! where shall either victim rest? (G 401-5, 10-1).

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<sup>326</sup> Edward Daniel Clarke, an associate of Byron, records in his *Travels in various countries of Europe, Asia, and Africa* (London: T Cadell & W Davies, 1812), that the “Almahs” were prostitutes (2.2.32) and that all dancing except by dervishes was forbidden by Ottoman law (2.1.40). See also Henley’s notes to *Vathek*, p282:99.

While this is being spoken by a Muslim character, the comments made were equally applicable to ‘polite’ English society in Byron’s time, a society in which, especially in the middle classes, a woman who failed to keep herself virginal could struggle to find a husband able to provide for her. The shortly-following comment that “every woe a tear can claim /Except an erring sister’s shame” (G 420-1), is also applicable to both cultures. This is most clearly illustrated in the *British Critic*’s objection to the passage, not on the grounds that it is inaccurate, but on the grounds that “the sternness of female virtue towards the fallen fair” is self-evidently necessary.<sup>327</sup> This particular critique of Islam functions as a critique of Western culture also, but this in no way mitigates its function as a critique of Islamic cultures, and the poems do not explicitly connect it with Christianity.

The woe of women is ascribed in *The Giaour* to “man’s caprice”, and the description of Count Lara’s past suggests that he was guilty of this:

Woman, the field, the ocean, all that gave  
Promise of gladness, peril of a grave,  
In turn he tried – he ransack’d all below[.] (L 1.8.117-9).

For this Byronic hero, women were objects, toys for play. This starts to sound like the Muslim attitude in the Tales, but, again, it fails to ever reach that level in the text. The Byronic Hero is *described* as being bad far more frequently than he is actually shown being bad. Still, being a perfect gentleman is not always the best choice, and one comment in *The Corsair* seems to agree with the *British Critic*:

By this [woman’s tear] – how many lose not earth – but heaven!  
Consign their souls to man’s eternal foe,  
And seal their own to spare some wanton’s woe! (C 2.15.552-4).

The suggestion that a man could lose his soul to the Devil for helping a woman is not explained any further, but the idea calls to mind the Fall, in which Adam joins Eve in

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<sup>327</sup> *British Critic*, XLII (December 1813), 611-613, RR, I, 238-239; p.613 (239).

eating the fruit. Genesis describes this as the origin of male supremacy, with Eve being punished for eating the fruit by being required to obey him ever after, and Adam being punished for listening to his wife by having to toil to survive.<sup>328</sup> Thus, the poet is questioning the Western patriarchy as well, but not with nearly the same vigour or directness which he displays against the Islamic one. The passage in *The Corsair* might appear to be a typically misogynistic throwaway comment, but for the irony in which the idea comes back later, reversed. Conrad eventually acknowledges that Gulnare “for him had given /Her all on earth, and more than all in heaven!” (C 3.17.529-30) to spare *him* woe. The misogyny is deconstructed in the inversion of the gender roles, which leaves *The Corsair* innocent of such prejudice, and questions its presence elsewhere.

In contrast, Muslims are accused of sexual discrimination even by the Advertisement for *The Giaour*, which describes the poem as referring in part to the story of “a female slave, who was thrown, in the Mussulman manner, into the sea for infidelity” (*Giaour*, Advertisement, 5-7). In the Qu’ran itself, the penalty for adultery is specified as eighty lashes, which, harsh as it is, is not meant to be fatal, and is not differentiated by gender.<sup>329</sup> However, Islamic law is composed of the Qu’ran, the Hadith, and jurisprudence (*fiqh*), which makes the application somewhat more complex.<sup>330</sup> It is further notable that, as Abdur Raheem Kidwai says, stoning of adulterers is practised in accordance with certain Hadith, but “The Turks had altered the mode of execution”.<sup>331</sup> In describing this particular practice as the “Mussulman”, rather than the “Ottoman”, way of acting, Byron connects Muslims, from the very beginning of the text, with violence towards women in particular.

Throughout these Tales, Byron’s representation of Islam in regard to women is quite negative, and his certainly is not the most positive of contemporary Western views. In this respect, his sympathy for the other faith appears to be limited. Mortal women are unfairly contrasted with immortal Houris, and even considered soulless. They are

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<sup>328</sup> Genesis 3:16-7.

<sup>329</sup> Sura 24:3, Sale p.343. Thornton describes the same act of drowning as Byron does, as punishment for prostitution, in 2.8.292.

<sup>330</sup> Q.v. Thornton 1.2.192.

<sup>331</sup> Kidwai, *Orientalism in Lord Byron’s “Turkish Tales”*, p.160. The practice is not universal in Islam, and the validity of the relevant haditha is disputed.

treated under Islam as toys and as slaves. Worst of all, they are rendered vulnerable to violence, an idea which his Western audience was bound to find objectionable. As Peter Thorslev notes, “According to the sentiments of the age, of course, any act of cruelty or even of unkindness and disrespect for women was unforgivable”.<sup>332</sup>

This representation may have had a religious inspiration. As mentioned previously, Bektashism was common particularly amongst the Janissaries, who had a very visible presence in the Ottoman-occupied Balkans where Byron himself lived, and it treated women rather differently. George C Arnakis comments upon its effectiveness in conversion, owing to “its broad scope, based on the mystical concept of the unity of existence and the denial of barriers of race, religion, status, or creed”, all of which would appeal to the idealist in Byron.<sup>333</sup> Interestingly, Yaşar Nuri Öztürk comments that “the Bektashis, unlike most *tariqats* [schools or denominations], allow women to join their ranks. Women are not, however, permitted to advance to positions of leadership”. He later refers to “the social reforms which the Bektashis had always hoped to achieve: abolition of the caliphate, the liberation of women, and the suppression of religious fanaticism.” He adds,

No discussion of the Bektashis should omit to mention that among the *tariqats* they are distinguished by the fact that they accord women a relative measure of equality. This is exemplified by their allowing women to become members of the *tariqat*, as well as by the disapproval of divorce on virtually any grounds apart from infidelity.<sup>334</sup>

The significance of all of this is the possibility that Byron’s view of Islam may have been inflected by a *tariqat* which so valued women, and his representations of the treatment of women under Islam could, conceivably, be not entirely a condemnation of Islam, but rather of the ‘wrong’, non-Bektashi, Islamic way. This is not to suggest that he approached conversion: the Bektashi validation of violence is condemned, as it

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<sup>332</sup> Thorslev, Peter L., Jr., *The Byronic Hero*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1961), p.55.

<sup>333</sup> Arnakis, George C., ‘The Role of Religion in the Development of Balkan Nationalism’, in *The Balkans in Transition*, ed. by Charles and Barbara Jelavich (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963), 115-44 (p.124).

<sup>334</sup> Öztürk, pp.79, 83.

fails to fit in with his ideals, and Byron's representation of Islam is less positive than those of Sale and Thornton. Since the ideals have been constructed within a Christian ideological framework, Islam suffers, and it also suffers from being presented as a foil to the Byronic Hero in particular.

### **Love and Religion**

In direct comparisons between Christianity and Islam, the Christian (or Western) way is consistently represented as the better. This is particularly clear in the choices of the female characters: Leila chooses the Giaour over Hassan; Zuleika chooses liberal, half-Greek Selim over the orders of her more-traditionalist father, Giaffir, and his chosen groom, Osman Bey; Gulnare chooses Conrad over Seyd; Kaled chooses to emigrate to the Christian West with Lara. All of these Muslim women cross cultural boundaries to be with Western or Westernised men.

The one difference is in *The Siege of Corinth*, where the pair are a Christian woman and a Muslim man, and the pattern is exactly the reverse of the others: the woman does not cross the boundary westwards, towards him, but the man does, eastwards, away from her, and for revenge rather than for love. The woman, on the other hand, instead moves deeper towards the centre of her own cultural group by becoming more actively involved in Christianity:

when the Adriatic bore  
Lanciotto to the Paynim shore,  
Her wonted smiles were seen to fail,  
And pensive wax'd the maid and pale;  
More constant at the confessional,  
More rare at masque and festival[.] (SC 4.153-8).

Francesca's last interaction with Alp is her apparition's plea to him to convert back to Christianity, and her assurance that he will never be with her unless he does so: her choice is made. The consistent discourse in these Tales is of women choosing Christianity and the West over Islam and the East. Whether or not Christianity is

simply better, it is certainly represented here as being more attractive to women. This is significant because, outside of just these texts, women are more heavily involved in religious activities than men are.<sup>335</sup> Byron was playing to the majority of his audience.

Franklin takes a strange turn with Francesca in saying that “the shade [of Francesca] articulates the constricting ideology of Christianity which has killed her *doppelgänger* – the live girl.”<sup>336</sup> Nothing in the text suggests that Francesca suffers any ‘constriction’. Nowhere in the poem is the nature, let alone the cause, of Francesca’s death explained, and the allegedly “constricting ideology” is the one to which, as previously noted, Francesca enthusiastically devotes herself when Lanciotto, later to become Alp, leaves Venice for the East. Franklin justifies her assessment by Minotti’s opposition to the love match, despite the fact that, in the text of the poem, Minotti only ever expresses that in terms of his opposition to Francesca being enslaved to Islam: his earlier reasons for denying Lanciotto’s suit are never revealed. Considering that Lanciotto subsequently betrays his country and becomes a devotee of bloody massacre, it is difficult to claim that Minotti is wrong in keeping his daughter away.

It is further worth noticing how male-female love relations are described. Interestingly, Hassan identifies the leader of the ambush as “Lost Leila’s love – accursed Giaour!” (G 619). For a man to admit that his wife loves another is usually a great blow to his pride, unless he does not care for her feelings at all, a suggestion which coincides with her evident replaceability, and thus apparent redundancy. The closest to an Islamic valuation of romantic love is the story of Selim and Zuleika’s romance, the story of *The Bride of Abydos*. Selim is a Muslim, but is rather liberal, and half Greek; when Zuleika expresses her love for him, she is moving towards the Other. One of Byron’s notes connects them with Romeo and Juliet (McGann 3.436:72). There is also Gulnare’s forceful declaration to Conrad, including her claim that her love is greater than Medora’s because she is more passionate and more daring

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<sup>335</sup> This is general human norm. See, e.g., Justin L. Barrett, *Why Would Anyone Believe in God?* (California: Altamira Press, 2004), pp.42-3.

<sup>336</sup> Franklin, p.70.

(C 3.8.301), but this, too, is mitigated by the fact that it is being spoken by the woman who plans to murder her husband and escape with her lover, and so is hardly to be taken as an orthodox Muslim view. There is no simply orthodox Muslim love in these Tales.

The most vivid and passionate declarations of love, in fact, are placed in the mouth of the Giaour, in a passage which firmly conjoins love and theistic belief:

Yes, love indeed is light from heaven;  
A spark of that immortal fire  
With angels shar'd, by Alla given,  
To lift from earth our low desire.  
Devotion wafts the mind above,  
But Heaven itself descends in love –  
A feeling from the Godhead caught,  
To wean from self each sordid thought –  
A Ray of him who form'd the whole[.] (G 1131-39).

This is Love as Ideal. Interestingly, the fire is given by “Alla”, not “God”, which suggests an identification with Islam rather than Christianity, but the Giaour’s religious identification is quite complex.

One of the features of the obsessive, unrestrained love of the Byronic Hero is that it is focused very firmly upon one individual. The Giaour discourses upon this at some length, beginning “this was taught me by the dove – /To die – and know no second love”, and ending “For worlds I dare not view the dame /Resembling thee, yet not the same” (G 1165-87); Selim tells Zuleika that they will share “Unnumber’d perils – but one only love!” (BA 2.20.417); Conrad tells the gorgeous Gulnare “there is one – to whom my memory clings” (C 2.14.474), and stays true to Medora despite Gulnare’s rescue of and sacrifices for him. In all three, the hero is strictly monogamous. While monogamy is, as Marandi notes, not exclusively “a Western concept and non-existent



in the East”,<sup>337</sup> Westerners did automatically associate Islam and the East with polygyny, and Mary Wollstonecraft’s description of polygyny is “physical degradation”, which would mean that “woman must be inferior to man, and made for him”.<sup>338</sup> According to Thornton, this is something of a misconception, as polygamy was rare in Turkey, and was, in fact, “frequently guarded against in the marriage contract”,<sup>339</sup> despite being explicitly permitted in the Qu’ran.<sup>340</sup> The actual rarity might be why polygyny never appears explicitly in any of these Tales.<sup>341</sup> Still, the perception remained, as was evident in George Ellis’ previously-noted reference to “a country where every man is, or may become possessor of a haram”.

Franklin comments upon the romance in the Tales as being “overtly politicized” by the setting.<sup>342</sup> This is most certainly the case, as Leila, for example, is both the butterfly-woman (G 388-415), who is the victim of man, and the bloom of Greece (G 46-67), which is the victim of man; nonetheless, the political aspect is far from the only one. To a considerable extent, the romance is in these Tales as romance, taking an affective role. However, there are also the facts that the consistent movement of the women is away from Islam, and towards Christianity, and that none of these romances involves an orthodox Muslim couple. In addition, the romance serves as characterization and often as religious differentiation, forming the contrast between the loving Byronic Hero and the oppressive Muslim husband or father. Even in the case of Selim, the Muslim hero, the contrast is made between liberal Selim and more-traditionalist Giaffir.

## **The Byronic Hero and Religion**

Islam is not the only religious aspect to these poems. Byron’s signature characters, the protagonists of these Tales, are involved with religion in a variety of ways. They are generally not very devout, and their despair, in particular, was enough to see some

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<sup>337</sup> Marandi, p.103.

<sup>338</sup> Wollstonecraft, pp.163-4.

<sup>339</sup> Thornton, 2.8.236.

<sup>340</sup> Sura 4:3, Sale p.71.

<sup>341</sup> The closest occurrence is the existence of Seyd’s harem in *The Corsair*, but it is unclear whether even Gulnare holds the legal status of wifhood.

<sup>342</sup> Franklin, pp.53, 75.

brand them as devils. Nonetheless, they usually show some signs of faith and of religious self-identification.

Thorslev has commented upon Byron and Scott's Noble Outlaws and their difference from the Gothic Villain, which lay in the fact that a *loving* Noble Outlaw was not utterly, irredeemably wicked.<sup>343</sup> As William Roberts, in his review of *The Siege of Corinth*, says,

They [Byron's heroes] are a very narrow-minded gentry, without any sentiments that carry them out of a selfish circle of animal pleasure, but covering all their brutal habits with the expiatory quality of desperate devotion to some pretty woman.<sup>344</sup>

This unique redeeming feature which Roberts sees in Byron's poems is highlighted by a consistent pattern in which the Byronic Hero's "desperate devotion" is juxtaposed with the Muslim lord's oppression of and violence towards women. While this makes the oppression of women under Islam at least partially an artistic device, that does not detract from its function as a representation of Islam.

The tormented, brooding Byronic Hero rapidly became a stock figure, leading contemporary critics to complain that Byron's characters were all the same. The *Augustan Review*'s comment upon *The Siege* was that "The scenery is as usual Grecian, and the hero as usual a villain."<sup>345</sup> To an extent, this is true, but the repetition is only of the general template, with variations between the individual instances, which suggests that the poet may have been looking for a particular, perfect version of this type. A number of those variations involve interactions with religious concepts.

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<sup>343</sup> Thorslev, p.55, partially quoted above.

<sup>344</sup> William Roberts, *British Review*, VII (May 1816), 452-469, RR, I, pp.428-437: p.455 (430).

<sup>345</sup> *Augustan Review*, II (April 1816), 380-388, RR, I, 60-65: p.382 (62). See also the *British Critic*, 2nd Series, II (October 1840), 401-413, RR, I, 250-256: p.408 (254), and the *Theatrical Inquisitor*, VIII (April 1816), 276-283, RR, V, 2257-2261: p.281 (2260).

At the most basic level, the Giaour is apparently an ‘unbeliever’ to all faiths, and yet demonstrates complex religious connections; Selim lives within a Muslim family, but comes from a non-Muslim mother, and spends his time with non-Muslims; Conrad says that he has left his God, but he still believes in God’s existence, and also adheres to certain Muslim ways; Lara may be a Muslim convert; Alp is a definitely Muslim convert. While they are similar in personality, no two are quite alike in religion, although there is a distinct progression towards Islam.

Returning to the first of those, the Giaour describes love as “by Alla given” (G 1131). However, this is a ‘*giaour*’, an ‘unbeliever’, not a Muslim. To complicate matters yet further, he is identified by the fisherman as an “Apostate from his own vile faith” (G 616), and so he is not a Christian either. The basis of this claim is never revealed, but it is at least partially corroborated by the ethno-religious conflation in which the monk-narrator describes him as “only Christian in his face” (G 810). This charge appears to result from the Giaour eschewing involvement with any of the rites of the monastery: he avoids vespers, confession, and hymns (802-4 and 887-8), the shrine and the Eucharist (814-5), the prayers (891-2), and also the oath of obedience (899), and the tonsure (899-900). Nonetheless, he does choose to reside in a Christian monastery, and he does align with Christianity at least as an ethnicity: he identifies himself among the deliverers of “wounds by Galileans given” (G 1044), and he directs the abbot that, when he is buried, “save the cross above my head, /be neither name nor emblem spread” (G 1325-6). The presence of the symbol makes the anonymity strikingly incomplete, although the identification of his grave may be more political than strictly religious. The Giaour, then, is the exemplar of religion as ethnicity: he has no faith in Christianity, but still chooses it as an identity, if only in opposition to that of his enemy, Hassan. Alp does much the same, in the opposite direction.

One of the features which caused contemporaries to doubt the Christianity of the Byronic Hero, and even of the poet, was the characters’ persistent despair, which was seen as a rejection of the validity of the hope of Christianity. That perception might have been more justified had the despair been proclaimed as a universal truth, rather than a personal position, and had the Hero’s determination not been a countervailing

factor. The struggle between determination and despair is the basic state of the Byronic Hero.

The despair is announced from the very beginning of *The Giaour*, with the quotation from Moore's 'As a beam o'er the face', from his *Irish Melodies*, which includes the reference to a disaster so complete that "Life nothing darker nor brighter can bring" (McGann 3.39). The struggle, impelled by determination, is the very reason for the continued existence of the Giaour after the loss of Leila. Thus he is "Unfit for earth, undoom'd for heaven" (G 436). In typical Byronic style, the double negative is non-affirmative, and not Calvinistic Double Predestination which dooms him to Hell. The central issue here is that there is no appearance of supervening grace to rescue the Byronic hero and carry him into heaven despite himself. He remains, instead, locked in conflict.

Passion rules the Byronic Hero, and it drives him far more than does faith. Generally, the passion is romantic. The exceptions to this are Lara and, as noted by William Roberts, Alp. Notably, Alp is a Muslim, and Lara, the other non-romantic Hero in this group, may also be, which again underlines the general disjunction between Islam and romance in the Tales. Lara never shows any passion for Kaled, although he also never sends her away. Alp does show a passion for Francesca, but one surpassed by his lust for vengeance. Following the comment about the Byronic Hero's "expiatory quality", Roberts says of Alp that "he remained true to his turban and his Turkish creed, thus giving an oblique preference to the paradise of Mahomet and the celestial hours."<sup>346</sup> While the comment about the Houris is directly contradicted in the text (SC 12.252-5), the comment on his being the exception to the Byronic Hero mould is entirely fair. This is where Alp fails Thorslev's rule for the Noble Outlaw, and is quite possibly why Alp and *The Siege* failed to attract the praise which did fall to *The Giaour*, *The Bride of Abydos*, and *The Corsair*. However, Alp is not faithful to Islam so much as he is determinedly opposed to Christianity. In place of a passion for Francesca, or for religion, his passion is revenge:

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<sup>346</sup> William Roberts, *British Review*, VII (May 1816), 452-469, RR, I, 428-437: p.455 (430).

He stood a foe, with all the zeal  
Which young and fiery converts feel  
[...]

all the false and fatal zeal

The convert of revenge can feel. (SC 4.80-1, 12.279-80).

This zeal is misunderstood by his own men, who do not comprehend the true nature of his feelings: he is a convert to Islam simply because it is not Christianity. While this makes him zealous, he is not truly ‘surrendering to God’, and so his Muslim faith is incomplete, hence his almost signing the cross on seeing Francesca’s ghost (S20.495-6). The warped passion is nevertheless enough to drive him, and so, when Francesca’s ghost implores him to recant and return to Christianity, he refuses despite her assurance of his resulting destruction and alienation from him: “his heart was swollen, and turn’d aside” (SC 21.608). While the destruction might not be sufficient cause, the alienation would if she mattered more than his vendetta. The basis of his rejection is personal and political, not religious: “*He* sue for mercy! [...] *He*, wronged by Venice” (SC 21.612, 614). Alp lacks the redeeming feature, and thus remains a villain.

Of course, the Byronic Hero is generally part villain: he is fallen, and recognises this. The monk in *The Giaour*, like many of Byron’s contemporaries, is upset by the Byronic Hero’s acknowledgement of his own wickedness but failure to repent. While this is often attributed to pride, it also depends a great deal upon despair, and so, believing that he is “undoom’d for heaven”, he does not consider salvation to be a goal:

Despair is stronger than my will.  
Waste not thy orison, despair  
Is mightier than thy pious prayer:  
I would not, if I might, be blest;  
I want no paradise, but rest. (G 1266-70).

Notably, for his despair to be stronger than the abbot's prayer, his own will must be a greater determinant than God's. Byron is not preaching predestination. A similar wish is expressed by Conrad, when losing the battle against Seyd's regrouped forces: "Oh were there none, of all the many given, /To send his soul – he scarcely ask'd to heaven?" (C 2.8.290-1). He does not bother with the apparently-vain attempt to reach heaven, but he does not deny heaven's existence, which he likewise affirms when exhorting his men to join him in rescuing the harem women, making the orthodox declaration that Heaven will not be merciful to the merciless (C 2.5.207). In all of this, the point of view seems rather annihilationist, expecting cessation of consciousness, but it nonetheless assumes a Christian universe.

Much the same hope for surcease is expressed by the Giaour, who says that there "lurks a wish within my breast /For rest – but not to feel 'tis rest" (G 994-5). Alp walks within shot of the Christian fortifications, and wonders why no one tries to kill him (SC 16.395-9). As he hoped for death in battle, Conrad prays for the storm to strike him down, but Heaven disdains the "impious prayer" (C 3.7.264-8). However, this desire for peace, this death-wish, is firmly opposed to any notion of actual, self-initiated suicide:

My spirit shrunk not to sustain  
The searching throes of ceaseless pain;  
Nor sought the self-accorded grave  
Of ancient fool and modern knave:  
Yet death I have not fear'd to meet[.] (G 1004-8).

Conrad makes no direct attempt on his own life, or any suggestion of such to Gulnare, despite his impending torture. While Christianity has long condemned suicide, and so this may be a factor in Byron's oft-stated abhorrence for it, ancient Greek culture did likewise, and so his feelings are likely to have been inflected by both.<sup>347</sup>

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<sup>347</sup> The Romans believed in honourable suicide, whereas Greek texts frequently represent it as a failure: q.v. Plato, *Laws*, 873c, and also the fate of Aias, son of Telamon, in the Troy cycle.

Part of the Byronic Hero's assurance of guilt is his certainty that he would perform the same action again, which means that he cannot pretend repentance, as seen in the Giaour's killing of Hassan (G 1036-41). Nonetheless, in not pretending repentance, he is being honest about his guilt. Thorslev notes of the Gothic Villain, one of the precursors to the Byronic Hero, that

He fits into the morality of the age: unlike the Romantic hero, he acknowledges the moral codes of society and his own wickedness in violating those codes, and he therefore never engages our sympathies with his rebellion.<sup>348</sup>

The Byronic Hero does much the same: he acknowledges his wickedness in violating the moral codes, and makes no attempt to improve his ways. This violation of the moral code forestalled the sympathies of many contemporary critics, but his faithful, expiatory love made him the darling of the public. More interestingly, his self-awareness and honesty before God could actually be reasonable, honourable, and thus admirable. This is particularly true for Conrad, who refuses to turn to God out of mere desperation:

My sole resources in the path I trod  
Were these – my bark, my sword, my love, my God!  
The last I left in youth! – he leaves me now –  
And Man but works his will to lay me low.  
I have no thought to mock his throne with prayer  
Wrung from the coward crouching of despair[.] (C 2.14.476-81).

This refusal to petition God *insincerely* is not a refusal to acknowledge God. Conrad is simply being honourable, which he is to a fault, as in his refusal to murder Seyd in his sleep. The Giaour and Conrad both acknowledge God, and recognise their guilt before God, but are sure that they cannot be forgiven:

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<sup>348</sup> Thorslev, p.53.

In pain, my faltering tongue had tried  
To bless his memory ere I died;  
But Heaven in wrath would turn away  
If guilt should for the guiltless pray. (G 1240-3).

He knew himself a villain – but he deem'd  
The rest no better than the thing he seem'd;  
And scorn'd the best as hypocrites who hid  
Those deeds the bolder spirit plainly did. (C 1.11.265-8).

This honest self-appraisal is consistent with the poet's attacks upon hypocrisy in *Don Juan* and *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*. Interestingly, no reason is ever given for Conrad to be called a villain. Considering the area in which he is operating, he might as well be called 'privateer' as 'pirate'.<sup>349</sup> In fact, the two heroes' clear recognition of their faults makes them very *moral* rather than the opposite, and their religious inhibitions are not absolute, as is clear when both say that they would turn religious for love:

When thou canst bid my Leila live,  
Then will I sue thee to forgive;  
Then plead my cause in that high place  
Where purchased masses proffer grace. (G 1210-3).

but my love –

For her in sooth my voice would mount above[.] (C 2.14.485-6).

Although the Giaour may be being sarcastic in talking about securing grace by purchased masses, he did buy his way into the monastery, presumably in an attempt to acquire some measure of peace. Considering his passionate love for Leila, there is no reason to assume that his statement is not entirely genuine, and the same applies to

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<sup>349</sup> For more detail on this, see Oliver, pp.165-6. John Cam Hobhouse reports having gone on a privateering jaunt: *Recollections of a Long Life*, I, 14-15.



Conrad's devotion to Medora. While love is the highest value for each, they do describe it as being able to motivate them to faith.

To return to Thorslev's comment upon the difference between the Gothic Villain and the Romantic hero, the implication is that the Romantic hero "engages our sympathies" by resisting "the moral codes of society". However, our sympathies, our shared feelings, depend upon emotional connection, and the Byronic Hero is also provided with other ways of connecting with the audience.

Love is not the Byronic Hero's only redeeming feature. The Giaour has not merely love, but *passion*: he burns for Leila with a blazing passion which shines from line 1099 to line 1140 in a declaration rarely matched for the ferocity of its attachment. In this, he is a symbol of freedom from those constraints of social behaviour which make civilisation possible. Selim needs no redemption, as he lacks vice. Conrad, however, is honourable and dutiful to a fault: pre-empting Seyd's attack, to protect his own followers, at the expense of parting from Medora (C 1.14); saving the women in the haram, at the expense of his own attack (C 2.5); honouring the deaths of his compatriots by refusing to flee, at his own expense (C 2.14.472-3). Lara provides for the poor and the oppressed (L 2.8.168-219), demonstrating the general love known as philanthropy.<sup>350</sup> Alp is the exception, being consumed so utterly by vengeance that he even chooses that over Francesca. For all of the others, the sympathies of the reader are engaged by the character's demonstration of values which the reader shares. For the Giaour and Conrad, this also includes their honesty and their sympathy with their enemies: the Giaour says that he would have acted as Hassan did (G 1062-3); Conrad says that he would have acted as Seyd did (C 2.11.371).

However, the Byronic Hero is doomed, and, to a great extent, he is doomed by his clinging to the past. He owns his guilt as depending upon the deeds which he has done, but he will not repent of them, and will not surrender himself so utterly to religion as to allow it to change him. Thus,

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<sup>350</sup> The instruction to do this is, incidentally, one of the most-repeated in the Bible as well as being one of the Pillars of Islam, which makes Lara's adoption of it very orthodox indeed.

Ere his very thought could pray,  
Unanel'd he pass'd away,  
Without a hope from mercy's aid, –  
To the last a Renegade. (SC 27.848-51).

His one redeeming virtue is, as noted, love, and Franklin goes so far as to say that “Love of woman becomes a secular form of Grace and a means of restoring the lost paradise on earth”.<sup>351</sup> Certainly, the love of woman is a spiritual event in these poems. The Giaour says, “Heaven itself descends in love” (G 1135); Conrad says to Gulnare, “I thank their [his gaolers'] courtesy or thine, /That would confess me at so fair a shrine!” (C 2.13.444-5); apparitions of Leila and Francesca appear to their respective loves. While Gulnare says to Conrad, “Thou may'st forgive, though Alla's self detest” (C 3.14.469), she is not suggesting that his doing so would absolve her guilt; her concern is simply for his approval (C 3.14.470-5). Love is not separated from but is, instead, intimately intertwined with religion in these Tales.

However, there is no paradise on earth for the Byronic Hero: Leila is murdered, Selim is killed in battle, Zuleika dies of shock, and Medora dies of fear for Conrad, who is left with Gulnare, the woman whom he cannot love. If Lara loves Kaled, no sign of it is visible to anyone else. As Franklin says, “Byron used the concept of romantic love to stress sexual autonomy as the primordial freedom of the individual and the source (not result) of political freedom.”<sup>352</sup> Rather than the “defiance and contempt” which Thorslev describes the Byronic Hero as holding towards religion and morality,<sup>353</sup> the attitude is more one of unconcern: these systems do not rank sufficiently highly among his values as to engender any strong reaction, unless they become a route to love.

This is not always comprehended by those around the hero. Thus, the monk-narrator is shocked by the Giaour's failure to adhere to the Rule of the monastery, and this apparently causes the monk to doubt whether the other has any right to be in the

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<sup>351</sup> Franklin, p.44.

<sup>352</sup> Franklin, p.75.

<sup>353</sup> Thorslev, p.152.

monastery at all, despite his substantial donations (818-9). However, what causes the greatest disturbance to the monk is the Giaour's general attitude:

that stoney air  
Of mixed defiance and despair!  
[...]  
If ever evil angel bore  
The form of mortal, such he wore –  
By all my hope of sins forgiven  
Such looks are not of earth nor heaven! (G 907-8, 912-15).

This gross overreaction says more about the monk than it does about the Giaour, of course. A similar representation of the Byronic hero as some sort of fiend appears also with respect to Lara:

There was in him a vital scorn of all:  
As if the worst had fall'n which could befall,  
He stood a stranger in this breathing world,  
An erring spirit from another hurl'd[.] (L 1.18.313-6).

This motif returns when the hero is duelling Otho and is momentarily overcome by rage: "Lara's brow upon the moment grew /Almost to blackness in its demon hue" (L 2.4.73-4). Similar comments are made about Conrad, when he throws off his dervish disguise, and engages the whole of Seyd's court: he is "Zatanai" (C 2.4.160), Satan, the enemy "Whose demon death-blow left no hope for fight" (C 2.4.151). However, this is at least partly because the fighting had "Flung o'er that spot of earth the air of hell!" (C 2.4.156), in much the same way that it had in Greece in *The Giaour* (G 62-5), and later did at Ismail in *Don Juan*. It is violence, not the Byronic Hero, which is inherently satanic in these works. Never is the Byronic Hero entirely wicked; indeed, as *The Corsair* observes, "None are all evil" (C 1.12.281), and even Alp is offered redemption by Francesca's ghost (SC 21.532-5). Nevertheless, the perception that the Byronic Hero was a creature of Hell, and the comparison of him with the Miltonic

Satan, appears in the work of a few contemporary critics, and is worthy of consideration.

### **The Satanic Hero**

The characterization of the Byronic Hero as satanic began with Childe Harold. Francis Jeffrey says of that character, “Like Milton’s fiend, however, he ‘sees undelighted all delight,’ and passes on through the great wilderness of this world with a heart shut to all human sympathy.” This association of Harold with the Devil also involves the poet:

the mind of the noble author has been so far tinged by his strong conception of this Satanic personage, that the sentiments and reflections which he delivers in his own name, have all received a shade of the same gloomy and misanthropic colouring[.]<sup>354</sup>

Jeffrey repeats this same idea four years later, after the *Eastern Tales*, in his review of the third Canto for the *Edinburgh Review*: “He delights too exclusively in the delineation of a certain morbid exaltation of character and of feeling, – a sort of demoniacal sublimity, not without some traits of the ruined Archangel.”<sup>355</sup> In the review, he describes all of the Byronic heroes as following that same trend, and thus depicts the poet as unhealthily obsessed with unhealthy attitudes, recalling Crabb Robinson’s comments about the poet of *CHP*.

Jeffrey was certainly not the only one to make this connection between Harold, or the Byronic hero in general, and Satan. On Canto III of *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage*, the *Independent* notes that self-command in adversity “throws a dignity around Milton’s Satan”, whom “Byron, from the whole train of his thinking, is well adapted for drawing”.<sup>356</sup> The *Edinburgh Magazine*, in its review of Canto IV, warns its readers of “that bitter scorn of the whole human race, which has yet given a kind of Satanic

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<sup>354</sup> Jeffrey, *Edinburgh Review*, February 1812, RR, II, p.836 (466), p.837 (467).

<sup>355</sup> Jeffrey, *Edinburgh Review*, XXVII (December 1816), 277-310, RR, II, pp.864-881: p.865 (279).

<sup>356</sup> *Independent*, I (September 1816), 310-318, RR, III, pp.1160-1164: p.1163 (315).

grandeur to the author's courage".<sup>357</sup> The contemporary consciousness of discursive effect, upon both reader and writer, is a fundamental element of the criticism, implicitly making the poet a pawn of the devil.<sup>358</sup> The same consciousness also reinforces the fact that this association of the poet with the forces of spiritual evil is not simply an innocent expression of belief on the critics' part, but actually a rhetorical manoeuvre, discourse created for effect. Many of these critics made explicit their desire to conform Byron to their own ideological position.

In the Eastern Tales in particular, the Byronic Hero's unconcern regarding morality is one of the reasons why his characterization as "Satanic" is inaccurate, as it was in the contemporary descriptions of Harold, the Pilgrim. The *Critical Review's* comment on *The Corsair* was that "The Hero, is that almost universal favourite of its [the liberal school's] disciples, a satanic union of unconquerable mind and inordinate wickedness." However, perhaps the most striking is the comment on *The Siege* and *Parisina* by the *Gentleman's Magazine*:

There needed not the bookseller's Advertisement, to designate the Author of these Poems:

*Aut* Byron, *aut* Diabolus.

"None but himself can be his parallel."<sup>359</sup>

This connection, made in the nineteenth century, was picked up again in the twentieth. Thus, Thorslev goes into great detail to match the Byronic Hero with the character of Satan-Prometheus, when Prometheus alone might have been a better choice. As Thorslev notes of Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound*,

in the Preface he is comparing Satan and Prometheus, to the latter's advantage,  
[...]

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<sup>357</sup> *Edinburgh [Scots] Magazine*, 2nd Series, II (May 1818), 449-453, RR, V, 2179-2183: p.2183 (453).

<sup>358</sup> An argument made explicit in reference to *Cain*: see *London Christian Instructor*, April 1822, p.204.

<sup>359</sup> *Critical Review*, 4th Series, V (February 1814), 144-155, RR, II, 630-636: p.144 (630); *Gentleman's Magazine*, LXXXVI-I, (March 1816), 241-243, RR, III, 1097-1099: p.241 (1097); see also *New Monthly Magazine*, V (March 1860), 148-149, RR, V, 1891-1892: p.148 (1891).

It is worth noticing, too, that although Prometheus lends “Promethean” characteristics to all the rest of these [Romantic] heroes, he borrows nothing from them.

[...]

Shelley adds in addition the Christ-like attribute of mercy, that capacity to forgive one’s enemies which the poet says in the Preface makes Prometheus superior to Milton’s Satan, and the capacity which makes Prometheus repent of his curse against Jove, saying, “I wish no living thing to suffer pain” (I, i, 305).<sup>360</sup>

What is very clear through all of this is the fact that Prometheus is not only a *better* figure than Satan, but also that he is the archetype of the Romantic hero, because he is the one who lends characteristics to all of the others, the Romantic Satan included, who is but one of the heirs to this tradition. Further, the connection between Prometheus and Satan is never strong: Prometheus is a hero because his motivation, in stealing fire to benefit humanity, is philanthropic; Satan is a villain, even in Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, precisely because he lacks this. The Byronic Hero falls between the two. The *Universal Magazine*’s comment upon *The Corsair* explains it best, in saying, “Conrad, the hero of the piece, is drawn with a powerful and skilful hand; stern, ferocious, misanthropic, irreligious, abjuring all human feelings, save one, and the foe of all mankind, save one.”<sup>361</sup> The love which the romantic Byronic Hero bears for the love interest is his redeeming virtue because it is a very focussed form of philanthropy. While he might love that one person to the exclusion of all others, he pours into that one relationship all the affection which another, like Prometheus, might have for the whole species, or for part of it, as does Lara, who lacks a love-object. The Byronic Hero is not satanic, and was only cast as such by the overzealous reaction of the orthodox in his own time.

This trend even continued with *Don Juan*, by which stage contemporary critics were commenting not on that poem alone, but upon other works by the poet, and even upon

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<sup>360</sup> Thorslev, pp.111, 112-3, 116-7.

<sup>361</sup> *Universal Magazine*, 2nd Series, XXI (February 1814), 129-136, RR, V, 2312-2319: p.130 (2313).

the poet himself, describing him as “devoid of religion”,<sup>362</sup> and associating him with Satan.<sup>363</sup> This trend most likely contributed to the presumption of the writer’s guilt in the later works, distorting the reading of *Don Juan*, *Cain*, and *Heaven and Earth*.

### **The (para-)Muslim hero**

Far from being evil, or only antireligious, the Byronic Hero does adopt some religious practices, and a few of the practices of Islam are sufficiently attractive for Byron’s Western heroes to want to follow them. For example, Conrad eschews wine (C 1.2.67), apparently to his benefit: “But while he shuns the grosser joys of sense, /His mind seems nourish’d by that abstinence.” (C 1.2.75-6). When disguised as a Dervish in Seyd’s court, he refuses all of the food set before him. Seyd questions this unusual and potentially offensive reaction, asking,

What ails thee, Dervise? eat – dost thou suppose  
This feast a Christian’s? or my friends thy foes?  
Why dost thou shun the salt? that sacred pledge,  
Which, once partaken, blunts the sabre’s edge[.] (C 2.4.117-20).

Interestingly, rather than a Muslim taking it for a Christian feast, and therefore not halal, not permitted, the actual situation is that of a Westerner taking it for a Muslim feast, and refusing to betray a Muslim convention. Byron notes,

To partake of food – to break bread and salt with your host – insures the safety  
of the guest, even though an enemy; his person from that moment is sacred.  
[4th to 6th editions:] The pledge of hospitality with all Mussulmans,  
particularly the Arabs. (McGann 3.417:343).<sup>364</sup>

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<sup>362</sup> *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine*, August 1819, p.513 (144); *Miniature Magazine*, October 1819, p.236 (1643).

<sup>363</sup> *Miniature Magazine*, October 1819, p.237 (1643), referring to James 2:19, “the devils also believe, and tremble”; see also *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine*, August 1819, p.513 (144), and *Investigator*, October 1821, p.353 (1166). Only the last actually states that Byron is not a devil.

<sup>364</sup> See Henley’s notes to *Vathek*, p.311:131.

Conrad is about to attack Seyd, and doing so after having eaten his food would be a violation of this convention: Conrad has adopted this Muslim practice. With this character, at least, the adoptions are part of establishing his radical difference from the norm, and thus maintaining the special position of the rebel-hero. However, all of the heroes up to Conrad face villainous Muslim rulers; after Conrad, the roles change.

The Giaour is apparently a Christian apostate. Selim is a Muslim, having been born into the faith, but was “half Greek”. In Conrad, Byron created a Western hero who was starting to ‘go native’, and adopt local, Islamic ways. After Lara, the poet created in Alp a Western hero who had made the transition completely, and converted with violent zeal. Lara, as a less outspoken convert, would mark the missing stage in this progression, a Westerner who had converted but kept that private.

Lara’s servants comment among themselves upon the strange language which they hear from his apartments: “They heard, but whisper’d – *that* must not be known – /The sound of words less earthly than his own” (L 1.9.139-40). What sounded to them like unearthly speech could simply have been foreign speech, and most particularly the Arabic chanting of Qu’ran verses which is part of Muslim prayer. When Lara later has a fit, he does not speak the local language when he revives; instead,

his words are strung  
In terms that seem not of his native tongue;  
Distinct but strange, enough they understand  
To deem them accents of another land[.] (L 1.13.229-32)

Kaled calms him by speaking to him “in that tongue which seem’d his own” (L 1.14.242).<sup>365</sup> Further, when dying, Lara speaks again with Kaled in that language (L 2.18.443-4), demonstrating an identification with her rather than with the Europeans. While this indicates only that Kaled and Lara spoke a foreign language, it is worth

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<sup>365</sup> I will not be treating Gulnare and Kaled as the same person, any more than I will be treating Conrad and Lara as the same person. As noted by E H Coleridge (3.321), Gulnare and Kaled have different hair colours: Gulnare’s hair is auburn (C 2.12.402), Kaled’s is raven (L 2.21.509). They are also very different in activity; Gulnare is independent and vocal where Kaled is dependent and voiceless.



considering that ‘Kaled’ is an Arabic (male) name, and that every Muslim ought to learn Arabic because that is the language of the Qu’ran, which is deemed to be no longer truly the Revelation of God once it has been translated out of its original form. This suggests the strong possibility that the foreign language was Arabic.

Another puzzle for his servants is “Why [he] heard no music” (L 1.9.148). Music has long been an issue of contention in Islam: many Islamic scholars have decided that it is forbidden by the Qu’ran’s injunction against idle pursuits.<sup>366</sup> Lara is not idle, but spends much of his time reading, as does Kaled, whose “sport [is] some foreign book” (L 1.26.548); it is particularly the singularity of the text which makes it most likely to be a religious one, and so a very likely candidate for that book is, indeed, the Qu’ran.

In his governance of his lands, when “That soil full many a wringing despot saw” (L 2.8.159), Lara is marked by his philanthropy:

For thence the wretched never unsoothed withdrew,  
For them, at least, his soul compassion knew.  
[...]  
                  beneath his roof  
They found asylum oft, and ne’er reproof.  
[....]  
They but required a shelter, and ‘twas given.  
[...]  
With him old avarice found its hoard secure,  
With him contempt forbore to mock the poor[.] (L 2.8.182-3, 86-7, 199, 202-3).

As is noted by Thornton, the Islamic requirement of *zakat*, charity, extended to the obligation of lords to commoners.<sup>367</sup> In *The Giaour*, this obligation is highlighted with respect to Hassan’s death, in the loss to the poor of his provision for them. The narrator claims of Lara that “He raised the humble but to bend the proud” (L 2.9.253),

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<sup>366</sup> Q.v. Sura 31:6, Sale p.400. See also Henley’s notes to *Vathek*, p.214:3.

<sup>367</sup> Thornton, 2.7.155-9.

but the Christian narrator is in no hurry to praise him, and one wonders how usefully the poor and weak would be supposed to serve in the army of peasants which he gathers, were that the only purpose of his action.

When Lara dies, there are a number of suggestions that he may have converted. First, Kaled, who has assiduously cared for Lara's needs, rejects the offer of Christian ritual:

For when one near display'd the absolving cross,  
And proffer'd to his touch the holy bead,  
Of which his parting soul might own the need,  
He look'd upon it with an eye profane,  
And smiled – Heaven pardon! if 'twere with disdain:  
And Kaled, though he spoke not, nor withdrew  
From Lara's face his fix'd despairing view,  
With brow repulsive, and with gesture swift,  
Flung back the hand which held the sacred gift,  
As if such but disturb'd the expiring man,  
Nor seem'd to know his life but *then* began,  
That life of Immortality, secure  
To none, save them whose faith in Christ is sure. (L 2.19.477-89).

While this has been taken as Kaled acting on her own accord, rejecting the rites of a religion to which she did not adhere, Lara is not yet dead, and his is the apparently-disdainful glance (L 2.19.481).<sup>368</sup> It is very common for anyone to respect the last wishes of the dying, and so it is unlikely that the devoted Kaled is imposing her wishes upon him. This is also just after Kaled and Lara have been conversing in the tongue which no one else comprehends, relating in intimate privacy and separating themselves from the Europeans. All of this simply makes more sense if he is a Muslim convert. Further, when Lara dies, "Rose Lara's hand, and pointed to the East"

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<sup>368</sup> Watkins, on the other hand, chooses to read as proof that "religion is emptied of whatever value it might otherwise have" (p.104), assuming that Christianity stands for all religion, despite the cultural difference highlighted by the text.

(L 2.19.467); most likely, this indicated some sort of dying wish regarding burial. Since he is buried where he fell (L 2.22.520-1), unless his dying wish were ignored, it would seem that he was buried facing east, as a Muslim would be, towards Mecca.

As a final note to this point, Leask peculiarly says, “*Lara* ends [...] with female madness expressed as language disorder. Kaled/Gulnare obsessively traces “strange characters along the sand” before she dies (CPW, p.256, II line 625).”<sup>369</sup> That the characters which she writes are “strange” to the Western narrator is unsurprising if she is simply writing in her native language, with its non-Roman alphabet. Significantly, however, what she is writing are most likely passages from the Qu’ran as prayers for Lara himself. As Thornton comments,

[The Muslims] assert, that the sinful soul is greatly benefited by the prayers of the living, and still more by the reading of the *Koran*, whereby the angel Gabriel is assisted in guarding the soul from the devils, during its forty days of hovering about the grave wherein the body is laid.<sup>370</sup>

Byron’s presentation of Muslim behaviour is sufficiently detailed as to have taken this custom into account. Thus, Kaled remains beside his grave because she believes that he is still there, and when she is speaking apparently to herself (L 2.25.620), she is speaking to him.<sup>371</sup> While her writing scriptures as prayers for the dead might be merely her assumption of the validity of her own Islamic beliefs about the afterlife, it could well be another point, along with the progression of the Byronic Heroes, the language, the avoidance of wine and music, the presence of the foreign book, and the charity, all suggesting that Lara has converted.

The progression of the Byronic Heroes into Islam might well have been a deliberate artistic manoeuvre in making them more radical. The original rebel-hero so quickly became the darling of the public that outlaw status alone would no longer provide the necessary frisson of danger. Islam, especially when represented negatively, could add

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<sup>369</sup> Leask, p.62.

<sup>370</sup> Thornton, 2.7.119-20.

<sup>371</sup> Watkins’ belief that the rejection of the last rites is a rejection of all religion seems rather peculiar in light of this: see Watkins, p.104.

another spice of wickedness. Further, the movement away from rebellion against the despotic Eastern overlord, and into rebellion against 'legitimate' Western authority, would add yet another degree. Unfortunately, the hero loses his love in the process, and thus his expiatory quality. Yet again, Islam is associated with negative characteristics.

## **Conclusion**

It is abundantly clear that Byron's representation of Islam tends towards the negative. This includes eurocentric biases regarding the nature of Islam, eurocentric employment of Islam as a device in discussion about Western issues, but, most importantly, the judgement of Islam under Western standards. These Tales consistently value Christianity over Islam in terms of romance and of the treatment of women, and never value Islam over Christianity in anything. This is what makes the greatest difference between Byron's representation of Islam and his representation of Christianity.

Crucially, Christianity faces less criticism in these Tales than does Islam, despite the fact that, within a Western society, the former was far more able to weather such attacks. With the validation of Christianity being constantly reiterated by the mainstream cultural discourse, Christianity could not truly be defamed: the religion was publicly accepted as truth, making it necessarily innocent of all failings. Any strong, justifiable criticism had to be deflected onto aberrations from the 'true' faith, explained as a failure to behave as instructed. Any strong criticism which was not accepted would be reflected back onto the 'dissident' speaker, as did often happen with Byron. With Islam, this was far from the case, because the mainstream cultural discourse in English presented it negatively. Far from working against this trend, Byron follows it, casting Islam as dangerous, especially to women.

This representation does not appear to have been the result of any particularly anti-Islamic bent, and certainly not of the dichotomous religious hostility of which he writes. In *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* Canto II, the 'Additional Note, on the Turks', written before the Eastern Tales, is sympathetic to Muslims. In Canto III, written

after the Eastern Tales, their devotion is described as “most sincere” (note to 3.91.853, McGann 2.311).<sup>372</sup> Byron did value aspects of Muslim behaviour, and so his complaints are more evidently against Islamic belief. The very basis of Byron’s ideology appears to have been Idealism, the belief that values existed in perfect instances *in potential*, and that these values should be aspired to *in practice*. For Byron, the important values included such things as Freedom, Tranquillity, and also Passion. Crucially, Byron’s values were inflected by Western ones, and thus by certain Christian ones. When he judges Christianity to be flawed, he does so with respect to an Ideal version of Christianity which is largely orthodox, and so he is most truly judging the faith by its own standards. When he judges Islam, he does so from the very same perspective, and Islam cannot match up to an ideological concept which exists completely outside of itself. Byron’s ideological mobility was evidently limited, and this affects his image of Islam.

This is not to say that he is judging Islam, as other writers did, for the purpose of improving Christianity. Byron apparently did not adhere strongly enough to any ideological position to become its partisan, saving national self-determination, whence came his support for the Italian and Greek independence movements. However, it is worth noting that the presentation of another belief system tends to simplify internal variations: Protestants and Catholics are Christians together when fighting Muslims. To this end, abhorrence of Islam might serve to create acknowledgement of different denominations as being at least Christian, much along the lines of his attempt, in the ‘Additional Note’ to *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage*, to persuade an English audience to treat Catholics better than the Turks treated the Greeks. Sometimes, the Other is a symbol which stands not for itself, for any reality, but for its function within the discourse.

To a considerable extent, then, the condemnation appears to have been a product of his work, but not a goal. Islam as a metaphysical philosophical system does not seem to be an object which was very much considered by Byron. Note, for example, the fact that no mention is made, nor awareness shown, of the different schools of Islam,

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<sup>372</sup> See also Clarke, “the *Mahometans* are, of all people, the most sincere in their worship”, p.464, and the following pages on the Turks’ various virtues.

despite the many pages which Sale devoted to enumerating them.<sup>373</sup> Note also the absence of even a single quotation from the Qu'ran, despite all of the Islamic characters and settings. On the other hand, the descriptions of Muslim practice are quite detailed. The major purpose of Islam seems to have been as an artistic device: an exotic setting for adventures, and a setting which would, in Western eyes, justify the misogyny of the villain which serves to highlight the Byronic Hero's one virtue. To a considerable extent, it is the villain who makes the Byronic Hero a hero, and it is the Muslim villain's misogyny which makes the Byronic Hero so clearly romantic.

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<sup>373</sup> Sale, section VIII. See also Henley's notes to *Vathek*, 216:6.

## Manfred: Transcending the Real

*Manfred* is less a poem about religion than it is a poem about magic, but those two activities bear a close relationship to one another. Ceremonial magic is a typically-unlicensed derivative of religious practice, and has been condemned by religious orthodoxy since at least classical times.<sup>374</sup>

While magic appears briefly in the curse stanzas of CHP IV (130-8), and in the transformations in *The Deformed Transformed* (1.1.153ff), *Manfred* is Byron's most thorough exposition of the other side of religion. Like Faustus, or Kehama in Southey's *Curse of Kehama*, Manfred is immediately known to be wicked merely by being a magician. The poem presents the characters' relations with God through faith, Manfred's relations with others through his unique power and knowledge but also through their common mortality, and, further, the hero's own situation, in his despair and his sense of self. In the process, it takes into view his interactions with the mysterious figure of Astarte. Religion operates as a significant background to all of this. What is particularly important here is the nature of the alternative cosmology and its inhabitants, since such a fantastic setting frees the writer to recreate the very universe, making the choices of reinvention significant. It is especially worth considering how heterodox *Manfred* is not, given this freedom.

When published in 1817, *Manfred* was sufficiently unusual as to be called "wild and original",<sup>375</sup> and also "unintelligible".<sup>376</sup> Claims of plagiarism from Goethe's *Faust*, Marlowe's *Faustus*, and Maturin's *Bertram* were issued, and contested.<sup>377</sup> What was not contested, and what was most roundly condemned, was the incestuous relationship

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<sup>374</sup> Q.v. Matthew W. Dickie, *Magic and Magicians in the Greco-Roman world* (London; New York: Routledge, 2001), passim.

<sup>375</sup> *Champion*, June 22, 1817, p.197, RR, II, 532; see also Francis Jeffrey, *Edinburgh Review*, XXVIII (August 1817), 418-31, RR, II, 881-8: p.429 (887), "a work of genius and originality"; *Gentleman's Magazine*, LXXXVII-ii (July 1817), 45-47, RR, III, 1106-1108: p.46 (1107), "the wildest and the worst" of Byron's works.

<sup>376</sup> William Roberts, *British Review*, X (August 1817), 82-90, in RR, I, 451-5: p.84 (452); see also John Wilson, in the Galignani edition, p.338n, on the poet being overwhelmed by "the strength and novelty" of the work".

<sup>377</sup> Q.v. Francis Jeffrey, *Edinburgh Review*, August 1817, p.431 (888).

between Manfred and Astarte.<sup>378</sup> As with many of Byron's other works, the poem's artistry was praised while its morality was censured.

More recent critics have been less interested in the moral side of the work, but their views of its art have still been divided. Andrew Rutherford, for example, describes the protagonist as having "an emotional and intellectual immaturity of the kind usually associated with adolescence," which "is fatally disabling in a moral-metaphysical play like *Manfred*." He thus pronounces that

The failure of *Manfred*, then, is largely due to the deficiencies of the hero, and to Byron's inability to "place" these, or alternatively to convince us that they are virtues, but it is also due in part to the hopeless confusion of the supernatural machinery.<sup>379</sup>

Leslie Marchand, on the other hand, describes *Manfred* as "the most clear-cut and the most successful [of Byron's "speculative dramas"] in giving poetic realization" to the themes of "the spirit's inevitable slavery to the limited human condition, and the defiant Promethean invincibility of the mind and will."<sup>380</sup> Samuel Chew praises both the hero and the work, saying,

Manfred is thus the consummation of the Byronic hero-type. A philosophical meaning, a depth of thought, is given to the melancholy which in the poems of his youth had been merely fashionable.<sup>381</sup>

Manfred possesses Faustus' magic, Prometheus' courageous defiance of divine tyranny, and, at least temporarily, Ahasuerus' invulnerability, but he himself is not simply any one of those. It is the complexity of *Manfred* which gives rise to these varied positions, and its representation of religion is similarly varied.

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<sup>378</sup> *Theatrical Inquisitor*, XI (August 1817), 120-27, RR, V, 2266-69: p.121 (2267).

<sup>379</sup> Andrew Rutherford, *Byron: A Critical Study* (Edinburgh and London: Oliver and Boyd, 1961), p.90.

<sup>380</sup> Leslie A. Marchand, *Byron's Poetry: A Critical Introduction* (London: Murray, 1965), p.75.

<sup>381</sup> Samuel C. Chew, *The Dramas of Lord Byron*, (Gottingen: Dandenhoed & Ruprecht; Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1915), p.67.



## Faith

Religious faith receives quite a positive response in the poem. As Chew mentions, the roasting of hypocritical clergy, “though Byronic, hardly enters into *Manfred*.”<sup>382</sup>

Joseph broadens this argument into describing a wider tolerance of religion in the poem:

its basic positions are consistent with those of his maturity: belief in a Creator, a doubtful assent to immortality, an increasingly respectful rejection of established religion, and a strong sense of recurrent violence in the universe. Manfred’s defiance, however confused its origins, is in the end rational, and his death achieves a stoic pride.<sup>383</sup>

It is important to note that the “rejection of established religion” is more Manfred’s than it is *Manfred*’s. For this reason, there is a danger in saying, as Chew does, “Opposed to him are two figures which represent the *doctrinaire* attitude, the acceptance of truth as revealed by authority”, and in further describing the Chamois Hunter as “the devotee of a *doctrinaire* religion”, who “urges Manfred to seek comfort in the aid of holy men (II, I, 34), and prays that penitence may restore him to himself (II, I, 88).”<sup>384</sup> While the Chamois Hunter does represent a more orthodox religious position than Manfred’s, the pejorative, anti-rationalistic connotations of the repeated, italicised “*doctrinaire*” risk dismissing the character as merely a shallow portrayal of submissiveness,<sup>385</sup> failing to account for his free-spirited, hardly-deferential attitude to the great magician. While the Chamois Hunter acknowledges Manfred as a lord (2.1.6-7), and thus his social superior, and also as a climber of some skill (1.2.60-2), he never acknowledges Manfred to be his superior as a person. Interestingly, when initially perceiving the magician, the Chamois Hunter notes that “his air [is] /Proud as a free-born peasant’s” (1.2.63-4): for the mountaineer, nobility is an aspect of mind, not of birth, and authority lies not automatically in socially-appointed hands. This attitude allows the Chamois Hunter to consider himself to be

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<sup>382</sup> Chew, p.65.

<sup>383</sup> Joseph, p.107

<sup>384</sup> Chew, pp.80, 81.

<sup>385</sup> Chew later discusses “that *doctrinaire* stultification of the intellect against which Byron ceaselessly inveighs”, p.141.

on the same level as Manfred, and so, when the latter boldly asserts, “I am not of thine order” (2.1.38), the Chamois Hunter frankly retorts,

Thanks to Heaven!

I would not be of thine for the free fame  
Of William Tell; but whatsoe'er thine ill,  
It must be borne, and these wild starts are useless (2.1.38-41).

The attitude of the admirer of the rebel hero is pragmatic and sensible, in stark contrast to Manfred's apparent madness (2.1.59) and dramatic claims of greatness (e.g., 2.1.44-8, 76-8). This is visible even in the punctuation: eleven exclamation marks are used for Manfred's words in this scene, and only two for the Chamois Hunter's. The religious advice, then, is delivered from the position of greater apparent reasonableness, by a character constantly identified with anti-authoritarian positions.

The other “doctrinaire” character, the Abbot, does have a doctrinaire moment, in referring to “the true church” (3.1.51) as the only means to Manfred's salvation. Since the Abbot is certainly Catholic,<sup>386</sup> this statement would most likely strike Byron's audience, who were living in a society which still denied Catholics the right to vote or to have their own churches, as a sign of involvement with the ‘wrong’ religion. The Abbot, however, is helpful and kind, and not judgemental:

ABBOT. Thy life's in peril.

MAN. Take it.

ABBOT. I come to save, and not destroy –

I would not pry into thy secret soul (3.1.46-8).

Despite this conciliatory approach, Manfred responds aggressively, demanding proof that he has sinned (3.1.55-6), in a challenge reminiscent of one made by Jesus in John

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<sup>386</sup> Protestant monasticism effectively disappeared between the time of Luther and its reinvention under the Oxford Movement in the 1840s. Further, the Abbot's emphasis upon the church's role in sanctification (3.1.60-1) and salvation (3.1.51) are in line with Catholic, and not Protestant, ecclesiology.

8:46, “Which of you convinceth me of sin?”<sup>387</sup> The “half dust, half deity” (1.2.40) of Manfred is paralleled with the double nature of the man-god of orthodox Christianity.<sup>388</sup> This is the point at which the revised ending of *Manfred* replaces the original, and so it will be useful to consider them separately.

In the original ending, the unhelpful Abbot takes the part of Jesus’ accusers, the contemporary religious establishment, threatening Manfred with “the stake on earth – and beyond earth /Eternal –”. In a neat *correctio*, Manfred interrupts with “Charity – most reverend Father! /Becomes thy lips so much more than this menace” (McGann 4.467.4-5), rewriting the discourse of religious judgement with the discourse of religious love. Manfred and the Abbot have exchanged positions and attitudes, with the magician becoming reasonable and the priest unreasonable, and with the former advising the latter on moral behaviour. Manfred then asks, “What wouldst thou with me?” (McGann 4.467.8), the same question issued to Manfred himself by the Seventh Spirit (1.1.131) and the Witch of the Alps (2.2.37): as those beings are spiritually superior to Manfred, so Manfred is to this Abbot.

To further underline this difference, the Abbot then demands not merely penance, but ransom: “with gift of all thy lands /To the Monastery” or Manfred should “Expect no mercy” (McGann 4.468.12-3, 14). Manfred’s response to this materialistic avarice is to call forth the spirit Ashtaroth, and order it to

Convey this man to the Shreckhorn, to its peak –  
[...]  
But harm him not – and when the morrow breaks  
Set him down safe in his cell. (3.1.35, 39-40).

While Chew compares this “grotesque punishment” with the ending of Lewis’ *The Monk*, the relationship is not strong when one considers that Manfred’s orders to Ashtaroth are but to scare the Abbot, and not to harm him, whereas Ambrosio is

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<sup>387</sup> The word *ελεγγει*, rendered in the KJV as “convinceth”, refers to ‘putting to shame’, or ‘proving’.

<sup>388</sup> Q.v. the Chalcedonian definition of the natures of Christ, from the Fourth Ecumenical Council, in 451.

dropped from “a dreadful height”, and then left to die in agony over six days.<sup>389</sup> Manfred treats the Abbot better than the Abbot treats him, and the Abbot becomes little more than a caricature of religious hypocrisy who earns a deserved chastising. Of this version, Byron wrote to Murray, “The third act [of *Manfred*] is d–d bad [...] It must on *no account* be published in its present state; – I will try & reform it – or re-write it altogether” (BLJ 5.211, 14/4/17).

The second version of the ending of this scene is rather different, and the characters very much changed with it. Writing again to Murray, Byron says that he is sending “the new third act of ‘Manfred.’” – I have rewritten the greater part – & returned what is not altered in the *proof* you sent me. – The Abbot is become a good man – & the Spirits are brought in at the death” (BLJ 5.219, 5/5/17). In this version, the Abbot responds to Manfred’s overreacting “prove and punish!” (3.1.56) with further conciliation and explanation of concern, not judgement:

My son! I did not speak of punishment,  
But penitence and pardon; – with thyself  
The choice of such remains – and for the last,  
Our institutions and our strong belief  
Have given me power to smooth the path from sin  
To higher hope and better thoughts; the first  
I leave to heaven – ‘Vengeance is mine alone!’  
So saith the Lord, and with all humbleness  
His servant echoes back the awful word (3.1.57-65).

It is the Abbot who first identifies Manfred as the agent of his own troubles, and thus the necessary agent of his own relief. Despite the respectful tone of the advice and the offer, Manfred, hardly mollified, proceeds to tell the priest that he and his intervention are useless:

MAN. Old man! There is no power in holy men,

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<sup>389</sup> Chew, p.66; Matthew Lewis, *The Monk* (Oxford University Press: Oxford and New York, 1995), pp.441-2.

Nor charm in prayer – nor purifying form  
Of penitence – nor outward look – nor fast –  
Nor agony – nor, greater than all these,  
The innate tortures of that deep despair,  
Which is remorse without the fear of hell,  
But all in all sufficient to itself  
Would make a hell of heaven – can exorcise  
From out the unbounded spirit, the quick sense  
Of its own sins, wrongs, sufferance, and revenge  
Upon itself; there is no future pang  
Can deal that justice on the self-condemn'd  
He deals on his own soul.

ABBOT.                                      All this is well;  
For this will pass away, and be succeeded  
By an auspicious hope  
[...]

Say on –

And all our church can teach thee shall be taught;  
And all we can absolve thee, shall be pardon'd (3.1.66-80, 85-7).

Notably, Manfred locates the source of the problem within himself, as the Abbot did earlier. He then denies the power of religion to help him, much as the Giaour (G 1240-3) and Conrad (C 1.11.265-8) do: he is doomed by his clinging to the past. Even when so rejected, this version of the Abbot remains humble and hopeful. He treats Manfred better than Manfred treats him.

This Abbot is also courageous. He is persistent in his attempts to convert Manfred because, he says, “my duty /Is to dare all things for a righteous end” (3.1.169-70). This is a bold claim, but his desire does prove great enough to lead him into peril for the other’s benefit: in returning to Manfred, he says,

All it hath of ill  
Recoils on me; its good in the effect

May light upon your head (3.4.48-50).

He then honours his word even when confronted by a netherworldly spirit who, Manfred warns, “may shock thine old limbs into palsy” by his appearance alone (3.4.68). Earlier, Manfred says to himself, “I can act even what I most abhor, /And champion human fears” (2.2.204-5); similarly, the Abbot here describes the spirit as “That which should shake me, – but I fear it not”, and, again, “I do fear him not” (3.4.61, 66). While Manfred claims that the Abbot has no reason to fear a spirit who has not come for him (3.4.67), the mere appearance of such a being is sufficient cause for any normal mortal to be afraid. The Abbot is displaying a Manfred-like transcendence of his mortal frailty.

Another interesting aspect of the Abbot’s self-sacrificial desire to help another person is that, whereas the Abbot speaks of working for another’s good, Manfred speaks of himself having worked to another’s ill, in his interactions with Astarte: “Her faults were mine – her virtues were her own – / I loved her, and destroyed her!” (2.2.116-17). Where Manfred (apparently) engendered Astarte’s destruction, the Abbot attempts to engender Manfred’s salvation. Once again, it is the Abbot who is morally superior.

Given this fact, it is worth paying some attention to the attitude taken to Manfred’s moral status by both the Chamois Hunter and the Abbot. When asked, Manfred says that he would not exchange places with any other, as doing so would be harmful to the other. The Chamois Hunter responds,

And with this –  
This cautious feeling for another’s pain,  
Canst thou be black with evil? – say not so (2.1.79-81).

Likewise, the Abbot persistently tries to persuade Manfred that he is not beyond forgiveness (3.1.81-3, 98-100; 3.4.53). Also, it is the Abbot who identifies the magician’s sanctification through “penitence and pardon” as lying with Manfred

himself (3.1.58-9). The “doctrinaire” characters are the non-judgemental ones, the ones trying to find ways to prove or to make Manfred good.

In contrast, the Witch of the Alps is quicker to judge him, stating, “I know thee for a man of many thoughts, /And deeds of good and ill, extreme in both” (2.2.34-5).

While this does indicate vices, it likewise indicates virtues, as does Manfred’s self-introduction: “I have done men good” (1.1.17). If he has committed crimes (3.4.121), nevertheless, as *The Corsair* declares, “None are all evil” (C 1.12.281). Manfred, like the other Byronic heroes, is described as being a greater villain than he is ever shown to be. Rutherford, who appears to quite dislike the poem, takes exception to this, saying,

the hero’s sinful past is emphasised to make him seem more interesting and awe-inspiring, but the more objectionable qualities (like hypocrisy or delight in others’ pain) are excluded from the actual portrayal of his character, by an artistic sleight of hand amounting to dishonesty.<sup>390</sup>

Rather than dishonesty, one has to wonder about the very Byronic habit of irony, especially considering the autobiographical connection with an author who was himself frequently held to be Childe Harold, the Giaour, or Conrad: there is not nearly enough evidence to convict Manfred of villainy. Byron’s letters at this time show no tolerance for the English fascination with the “mad, bad Lord Byron”.<sup>391</sup> To some extent, Byron may be “humming” his audience about the Byronic Hero’s wickedness, and simultaneously using that trait as exotic colouring.

Manfred shows some of the same faith as the others. When he is planning to commit suicide by leaping from the top of a cliff on the Jungfrau, the Chamois Hunter sees him and exclaims, “for the love /Of him who made you, stand not on that brink!” (1.2.101-2). Manfred himself later expresses a belief in the same Maker, when refusing to bow to Arimanes (2.4.26-9). The magician further evinces a belief in Heaven, when, in speaking to the absent Astarte, he refers to “the clouds, that shut me

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<sup>390</sup> Rutherford, p.82.

<sup>391</sup> Q.v. BLJ 5.191, to Murray 25/3/17, and Blessington, p.190.

out of heaven, /Where thou art not – and I shall never be.” (2.1.29-30). While Manfred is certainly not an orthodox Christian, some of his views do overlap with Christian ones. Even his aggressive response, which so angers the Abbot in the original ending, is essentially a declaration of the ultra-Protestant anti-clerical position:

whate'er

I may have been, or am, doth rest between  
Heaven and myself. – I shall not choose a mortal  
To be my mediator (3.1.52-5).

This further reaffirms the idea, consistent throughout much of Byron's work (e.g., CHP 3.108.1006), of religion being a personal issue, of one's own conscience and not of any wider social concern. Nonetheless, the rejection of the need for a mediator should not be misunderstood as a rejection of the value of religion as a whole: Manfred asserts the existence of a Heaven and its metonymic role in this very statement. He also later refers to “the Almighty” (3.2.11), and cites the story of the raising of Samuel by the Witch of Endor (1 Samuel 28:7-19, in 2.2.182-3) and the story of the giant offspring of angels and mortal women (Genesis 6:2, 4, in 3.2.4-8), stories from the Bible, as historical events. Manfred apparently believes that at least some part of the Bible is true.<sup>392</sup> Further, in Arimanes' court, Manfred says that the Maker “made [Arimanes] not for worship” (2.4.48), demonstrating the thoroughly orthodox rejection of idolatry enshrined in the second of the Ten Commandments.<sup>393</sup> It is thus unsurprising that Manfred later declares his approbation for the Abbot and his brotherhood:

Old man! I do respect

Thine order, and revere thine years; I deem  
Thy purpose pious, but it is in vain;  
Think me not churlish (3.1.154-6).

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<sup>392</sup> However, he probably does not think highly of Exodus 22:18, “Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live.”

<sup>393</sup> Exodus 20:4-5.



That he respects the Abbot's order, his whole religious fraternity, bespeaks a validation of a collective, ecclesiastical practice of religion, not just a personal faith. Note also the contrasting of "pious" with "vain": in Manfred's representation, piety is not a vice. The usage is quite different from the later usage in *Don Juan*. Manfred's rejection of religion in this play is never on grounds of metaphysical ontology: he never suggests that the religion's beliefs are incorrect, which is interesting in the light of his supernatural education. Instead, he describes the religion as unable to help him, and, thus, currently unprofitable.

In a similar vein to his respect for the Abbot and his order, Manfred expresses admiration for the other "doctrinaire" figure, the Chamois Hunter, whom he describes as "patient, proud, pious and free" (2.1.65). This echoes the Chamois Hunter's own validation of pride in his perception of Manfred (1.2.62-3), and again represents piety as a positive value.

These two very orthodox characters, the Chamois Hunter and the Abbot, represent orthodox religion in very good light in *Manfred*, and this representation is not contradicted, especially because the protagonist demonstrates respect for both of them and for their viewpoint. His own views are evidently theistic, which is not surprising when one considers that he keeps company with gods and demons; further, they are quite compatible with orthodox Christianity. Manfred's "rejection of established religion", noted by Joseph, is a rejection of the efficacy of that religion in solving his self-perpetuated dilemma, not a rejection of its metaphysical ontology or intrinsic value. At that point, it is worth considering that his own prodigious powers prove likewise incapable of ending his troubles.

The one truly critical comment upon religion in *Manfred* is amidst Nemesis' description of her activities, the 'political' speech in which she refers to utilising "the dull" as the source for her "Shaping out oracles to rule the world / Afresh, for they were waxing out of date" (2.3.66-8). The idea of the old oracles, the old divine revelations, being 'out of date' is a common claim of groups which splinter off from larger religions. That such groups should be guided by the words of "the dull" is quite

possibly a reference to someone like “Brothers the prophet”, whom Byron gave as an example of the ease of creating a cult and who, Marchand notes, believed that he was the true ruler of the world (BLJ 2.97, to Hodgson 13/9/11).

The mere appearance of powers like Nemesis herself, the Destinies, and Arimanes ought not to be read as anti-Christian.<sup>394</sup> The poem presents an unorthodox worldview, and yet one which is closely analogous to the orthodox version, with Arimanes in Satan’s role. Magic, it should be remembered, also appears repeatedly in the Bible (e.g., the Egyptian magicians in Exodus 7, and Simon Magus in Acts 8). There, as in *Manfred*, the Almighty remains superior to such powers. The poem pushes the boundaries of orthodoxy, without simply violating them.

## Power

In *Manfred*, power is generally less an issue of economics or societal structures, and more the personal power of magic. The relationship between religion and magic is a complex one itself, there being a very thin line between the two, a line which is perhaps best defined by the consideration of religious prayer as the act of *asking* the god(s) to do something, and of magical invocation as the act of *forcing* the god(s) to do something.<sup>395</sup>

The tradition of magic deriving from demonic powers followed on from this,<sup>396</sup> and led to the idea of the exchange of the magician’s soul for power, as in the story of Faustus, a text most often cited as an influence upon *Manfred*. Indeed, the concept of magical power being supplied by an external agency is suggested early in the drama, when the Seventh Spirit says to Manfred,

Thou worm! whom I obey and scorn –  
Forced by a power (which is not thine,  
And lent thee but to make thee mine) (1.1.125-7).

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<sup>394</sup> Q.v. Alan Richardson, ‘Byron and the Theatre’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Byron*, ed. by Drummond Bone (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 133-50 (p.145).

<sup>395</sup> Q.v. Dickie, p.26.

<sup>396</sup> This occurs at least as early as Irenaeus of Lyons’ *Adversus Haereses*, 1.13.3 (c.180 CE).

No specific source is given for Manfred's power, although the spirit represents the aims of that source as aligned with its own. This appears thoroughly Faustian, an appearance aided by the fact that Manfred, to whom the spirit is speaking, does not contradict this statement at this time.

Later in the play, however, the contradiction does appear. First, the Witch of the Alps, whom Manfred summons, says that she might be able to help him "if thou /Wilt swear obedience to my will" (2.2.155-6). Like Cain's later response, Manfred's is immediate, definite, and negative:

Obey! and whom? the spirits  
Whose presence I command, and be the slave  
Of those who served me – Never! (2.2.158-60).

That she asks for the power suggests that she lacks the ability to take it, which would be peculiar if she were supplying it. Later, when Manfred enters the court of Arimanes, the greatest of these spirits, a similar dialogue ensues:

ALL THE SPIRITS. Prostrate thyself, and thy condemned clay,  
Child of the Earth! or dread the worst.  
MAN. I know it;  
And yet ye see I kneel not.  
FOURTH SPIRIT. 'Twill be taught thee.  
MAN. 'Tis taught already; – many a night on the earth,  
On the bare ground, have I bow'd down my face,  
And strew'd my head with ashes; I have known  
The fulness of humiliation, for  
I sunk before my vain despair, and knelt  
To my own desolation (2.4.34-42).

Manfred refuses their demand to make obeisance to their leader, and they are unable to force him to comply, even when reducing the demand from prostration to

genuflection. In part, this may be because his despair over his sufferings is enough to make him immune to any threat of bodily harm, depriving them of psychological force against him, but it also indicates that they lack the physical force to make him kneel. The demand is repeated, and Manfred retorts,

Bid *him* bow down to that which is above him,  
The overruling Infinite – the Maker  
Who made him not for worship – let him kneel,  
And we will kneel together (2.4.46-9).

This reply further angers the spirits, but their rage remains impotent: they have no power over him. In making this reference to a higher God, Manfred not only denies absolute sovereignty to Arimanes, but also makes himself equal with Arimanes as a fellow creation of “the Maker”. Despite this double challenge, Arimanes does not attempt to force Manfred to obey, further suggesting that Manfred and his power are not at all under demonic control. In the *Quarterly Review*, Robert Southey commented that Manfred “Met the devil on the Jungfrau – and bullied him”, to which Byron replied, “in this Manfred exactly followed the sacred precept – “Resist the Devil and he will flee from you.””<sup>397</sup> Byron represents Manfred’s act as being in accordance with Scripture (James 4:7), and, thus, entirely orthodox.

In the process of Manfred’s resistance, the poet has raised a question about the nature of obedience, asking whether it is necessitated by power. If force alone does not effect obedience, and thus grant rulership, then rulership may only be granted by the will of the subjects. This implies some sort of responsibility of the ruler to the ruled: Manfred’s act is the denial of the ability to tyrannize, and a statement about ethical governance. He demonstrates this conception of power being bestowed by the subject once more at the end of the drama, when a spirit comes to take him away: “I am prepared for all things, but deny /The power which summons me. Who sent thee here?” he says (3.4.82-3). His denial is not based in his relationship to the other, but in his assertion of his own total independence.

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<sup>397</sup> ‘Some Observations Upon An Article in *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine*’, in *Lord Byron: the Complete Miscellaneous Prose*, p.90.

The spirit does not accept his refusal, and so he must refuse three more times (3.4.88-90, 112-19, 123-4). Significantly, in the second of these, he states that his power “Was purchased by no compact” with the spirits (3.4.114). As Chew notes, “The rejection of the pact with the spirits of evil is Byron’s great alteration of the *Faust*-idea. Manfred retains his independence.”<sup>398</sup> If Fate, Providence, or any similarly inscrutable power had granted him his magic, then his having acquired the skill might be both a result of a gift and his own work, giving him no reason to contradict the Seventh Spirit’s assertion that it was bestowed upon him.

Unable to hold him to any contract, the spirit attempts to claim that Manfred’s crimes leave him liable to its power, but the mortal retorts, “Must crimes be punished but by other crimes, /And greater criminals? – Back to thy hell!” (3.4.123-4). His question turns the focus upon justice, both within and without the action of the drama: if the right of the just to punish the wicked is questionable, the right of the unjust is only more so. Again, the only reasonable solution is a moral leadership, not the tyranny which is constantly attempted against Manfred. The political values of the drama implicitly judge the governments of the non-fictional world. This political subtext also appears in Nemesis’ description of her evil activities:

I was detain’d repairing shattered thrones,  
Marrying fools, restoring dynasties,  
Avenging men upon their enemies,  
And making them repent their own revenge (2.3.62-5).<sup>399</sup>

In a religious discussion, of course, one must ask how high the desire to tyrannize runs, and particularly whether “the Maker” acts in the same way that the spirits do. This, of course, is effectively impossible to answer when the Maker remains absent not only from this play, but from all of Byron’s work. Nonetheless, critics do make

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<sup>398</sup> Chew, p.80.

<sup>399</sup> Byron’s political commentary was not overlooked by his contemporaries: see Francis Jeffrey, *Edinburgh Review*, August 1817, p.431 (888).

comments about the nature of this unseen Deity, as Marchand says, of Manfred's challenge to Arimanes, that

This seems to indicate that Byron – like Shelley in *Prometheus Unbound*, who conceived a power above Jupiter, the man-made God who enslaved mankind – recognized a force in the universe more powerful than and independent of the spirits created by man's mind. But that is no solution for Manfred's problem, for such a force is inaccessible to him and deaf to his pleas. If Manfred had hoped to find spirits above him, he was disappointed. His magic science had succeeded in conjuring only spirits like his own.<sup>400</sup>

Within the play, the only support for the Deity being “deaf to his pleas” is Manfred's statement to the Abbot that there is no “charm in prayer” (3.1.67). However, a charm is a magic device, and the acknowledgement that prayer does not automatically accomplish its own ends is entirely orthodox. Moreover, the statement is delivered in the wake of both the Abbot's and then Manfred's acknowledgements of the magician's own crucial role in forgiving and healing himself. Manfred denies prayer the ability to cure without effort, not the ability to have effect at all. Further, it is difficult to see how one can claim the Deity to be deaf to pleas that are never made: in this text, Manfred neither prays nor refers to having done so, despite the Abbot's advice at the end (3.4.144-5, 150). Finally, why should he be able to conjure a spirit more powerful than himself when his conjuring is based, as he has said (2.2.158-60), in dominance?

Further regarding this Maker, Martyn Corbett suggests,

this being might be identified with Zurvan or boundless Time, who in that cosmology dwelt beyond the clash of light and darkness and would, in the end, and have been only to adjudicate between Orzmud and Ahriman. But, whilst there is an Ahriman (Arimanes is simply his name Hellenised) in *Manfred*, there is no Orzmud.<sup>401</sup>

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<sup>400</sup> Marchand, p.81.

<sup>401</sup> Corbett, p.37.

There is also no Zurvan in *Manfred*, at least not explicitly. That the Maker is the Zoroastrian Zurvan is a possibility,<sup>402</sup> but Byron's cosmology here is not simply Zoroastrian. As the *Literary Gazette*, among others of the time, noted, the drama includes "truly rather a heterogeneous assemblage of mythology",<sup>403</sup> placing the Greek agent of divine justice and avenger of impious acts, Nemesis, as a subordinate of the Persian evil principal, Arimanes.

Eventually, Manfred's dominance lapses. When he is dying and the spirit comes to carry him off, he commands it to leave, but he must do this thrice before it complies (3.4.90, 124, 140). It is quite plausible that it departs on the third occasion not because it must obey him, but rather because it cannot control him, and so has reached an impasse. It is also worth noting this failure as a parallel to the Abbot's similar inability to expel the spirit (3.4.79, 92, and also in the original ending of the drama, q.v. McGann 4.468.34): Rutherford's presentation of the event as a simple dichotomy between the Abbot's impotence and Manfred's potency is misleading.<sup>404</sup>

Manfred himself can be dominated, however. Just before meeting the Chamois Hunter, he remarks, on his inability to commit suicide, that "There is a power upon me which withholds /And makes it my fatality to live" (1.2.23-4). This is part of the curse following his interview with the first seven spirits: "Nor to slumber, nor to die, /Shall be in thy destiny" (1.1.254-5). It may be that the Seventh Spirit, the spirit of Manfred's star (1.1.110-1), is pronouncing this curse, but the stage directions say only "a voice". M. K. Joseph suggests that "the star-spirit takes a form – Astarte, or some other – which is sinister to Manfred, and calls down on him the curse of selfhood, "Thyself to be thy proper Hell"."<sup>405</sup> It seems rather out of character for Astarte to be

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<sup>402</sup> Byron composed *Manfred* at least partly at the Armenian Mekhitarist convent at San Lazzaro, Venice: q.v. Coleridge 9.9n. As noted in *A Brief Account of the Mechitaristic Society Founded on the Island of St. Lazaro*, by Paschal Aucher, trans. by Alexander Goode (Venice: Armenian Academy, 1835), p.61, the monks translated the *Discourses of Eznik against the Manicheism*, a polemic by the fifth-century Armenian Christian Eznik of Kolb, who railed against Zoroastrianism, for publication in 1826. Byron might have learnt about Zurvan through this connection.

<sup>403</sup> *Literary Gazette*, June 21, 1817, pp.337-8, RR, IV, 1391-3: p.337 (1392). See also Byron writing to Douglas Kinnaird that *Manfred* contained "a mixed mythology of my own" (BLJ 5.194, 25/3/17).

<sup>404</sup> Rutherford, p.87.

<sup>405</sup> Joseph, *Byron the Poet*, p.105.

the one who delivers this curse, especially when it is issued “by thy delight in others’ pain /And by thy brotherhood of Cain” (1.1.248-9). Sadism is something not seen in Manfred’s character in the drama, and he denies being physically responsible for Astarte’s death, which calls into question the accusation of murder in the reference to the “brotherhood of Cain”. Furthermore, McGann notes that this ‘Incantation’, published originally among *The Prisoner of Chillon and other Poems*, may have been written from as early as 1813 or 1814 (McGann 4.463-4), and so these comments might not be at all related to Manfred’s character, although he is later accused of extremely ill deeds by the Witch of the Alps (2.2.35) and of crimes by the spirit who comes at his death (3.4.121).

There are two significant aspects to power in this drama. One is that Manfred’s comes from himself, from his own studies rather than from any external source. This is what allows him to have power over the spirits without them having power over him. The other is that even his great power cannot directly solve his problem, and thus he remains, as other mortals, in conflict with the troubles of his life. This is entirely orthodox, and harks back to Ecclesiastes 9:11, the battle not being to the strong, the concept so central to CHP.

## **Knowledge**

In the traditional dichotomy, religious faith is opposed to scientific knowledge. Manfred’s magical power, on the other hand, derives from an esoteric form of such knowledge:

by superior science – penance – daring –  
And length of watching – strength of mind – and skill  
In knowledge of our fathers – when the earth  
Saw men and spirits walking side by side,  
And gave ye no supremacy (3.4.115-19).

The fundamental difference between Faust and Manfred is that Manfred holds power over the spirits by knowledge, whereas Faust’s knowledge allows him to contact the



spirits and strike a bargain which leaves him in their power.<sup>406</sup> In both cases, however, the knowledge is acquired through careful study, as Manfred again details:

I dived,  
In my lone wanderings, to the caves of death,  
Searching its cause in its effect; and drew  
From wither'd bones, and skulls, and heap'd up dust,  
Conclusions most forbidden. Then I pass'd  
The nights of years in sciences untaught,  
Save in the old-time; and with time and toil,  
And terrible ordeal, and such penance  
As in itself hath power upon the air,  
And spirits that do compass air and earth,  
Space, and the peopled infinite, I made  
Mine eyes familiar with Eternity,  
Such as, before me, did the Magi (2.2.79-91).<sup>407</sup>

In a nineteenth-century representation of powerful knowledge gained through rigorous human endeavour, one might expect to see a secular humanist allegory of the Enlightenment, of the 'liberation' of knowledge from the inherently ecclesiastical structures of the universities. Instead, *Manfred* presents 'old science', presumably occult natural philosophy, which brings power but is of questionable value.

This connection between knowledge and peril is demonstrated from the beginning of the drama, when Manfred says, in his opening soliloquy, that

grief should be the instructor of the wise;  
Sorrow is knowledge: they who know the most  
Must mourn the deepest o'er the fatal truth,  
The Tree of Knowledge is not that of Life. (1.1.9-12).

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<sup>406</sup> Q.v. Goethe's *Faust (Part One)*, 1.

<sup>407</sup> As noted by Chew, p.70, this is an echo of a passage in 'The Dream' (8.191-201), written in the year before *Manfred*.

In Genesis, in the middle of the garden are the Tree of Life and the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil (q.v. Genesis 2:9). The latter refers only to one very specific form of knowledge. *Manfred* widens the scope of the Biblical idea, from one particular type of knowledge to all kinds, a point further emphasised by the fact that the MS ML variant for this line had “Tree of science” for “Tree of Knowledge” (McGann 4.53n).<sup>408</sup> Manfred’s sorrow is knowledge, and his wide knowledge is sorrow to him. Thus, he goes on to discuss what he has studied, and how he has performed good deeds, and how he has vanquished all of his foes, but each of these three achievements “avail’d not” (1.1.17, 19, 21). Far from being humanist, this is strictly orthodox in Christian terms, human effort being insufficient for success in a divinely-controlled world.<sup>409</sup>

This sorrow is not unique to Manfred. When he reaches the hall of Arimanes, the spirits there discuss him, including his similarity to themselves. In one such reference, the First Destiny says,

his aspirations

Have been beyond the dwellers of the earth,  
And they have only taught him what we know –  
That knowledge is not happiness, and science  
But an exchange of ignorance for that  
Which is another kind of ignorance. (2.4.58-63).

This contradicts the traditional representation of the superhuman and thus immensely enviable knowledge possessed by spirits. It also contradicts the Enlightenment valuation of knowledge and enquiry, making knowledge a curse rather than a worthy goal.

The resultant sorrow may not apply to all forms of knowledge, since the Abbot says to Manfred that “all our church can teach thee shall be taught” (3.1.86). Perhaps,

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<sup>408</sup> The earlier variant reappears in *Cain*, with “the tree of science /And sin” (1.1.440-1).

<sup>409</sup> E.g., “A man’s heart deviseth his way: but the LORD directeth his steps” (Proverbs 16:9).

because of his awareness of Manfred's bent for study, the Abbot might imagine that the church's knowledge would be inherently valuable to the scholar, and draw him towards the conversion for which the Abbot hopes. In the process, the church's esoteric knowledge is neatly paralleled to the knowledge gained by Manfred's occult studies, his "sciences untaught" (2.2.84). Significantly, the church's knowledge appears to be an exception to that rule that it is "they who know the most" (1.1.10) who mourn,<sup>410</sup> since the Abbot is clearly happy in his own knowledge and willing to share it for Manfred's benefit. Unfortunately, the offer meets with Manfred's quoted refusal "'It is too late!'" (3.1.98).

Manfred does not desire this further knowledge. By this stage, he appears to have attained whatever value he might from knowledge, having said just a little earlier,

If I did not know philosophy  
To be of all our vanities the motliest,  
The merest word that ever fool'd the ear  
From out the schoolman's jargon, I should deem  
The golden secret, the sought 'Kalon', found,  
And seated in my soul. (3.1.9-14).

The representation of philosophy foreshadows *Don Juan*'s. However, Manfred claims to have attained the ultimate good, το Καλον. This demonstrates that there was a significant usefulness to his knowledge, and it is indeed his knowledge which ultimately allows him to conclude his quest:

WITCH.	It may be
That I can aid thee.	
MAN.	To do this thy power
Must wake the dead, or lay me low with them.	
[...]	
	I can call the dead,

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<sup>410</sup> A similar claim is made by Lucifer in *Cain* 1.1.425-6: that those angels who know most love least.

And ask them what it is we dread to be (2.2.150-2, 178-79).

Manfred tells the witch that his quest depends upon communing with the dead, and he then acknowledges that he can do such a thing himself, and so does it. Making use of Arimanes and Nemesis, he arranges his interview with Astarte. After returning from that conversation, he describes himself as having found the Kalon, and changed his state:

There is a calm upon me –  
Inexplicable stillness! which till now  
Did not belong to what I knew of life (3.1.6-8).

His power is insufficient to solve his problems, and yet his knowledge brings him to Astarte, and bringing him to Astarte leads to his problem being solved. The knowledge, then, while not being in itself the solution to his problems, is instrumental in allowing him to reach that solution, while at the same time generally leading to sorrow. While the representation of knowledge in this drama tends towards the negative, it is not unrelentingly so: knowledge is useful, but flawed.

## **Mortality**

Mortality in *Manfred* comprises not just the finitude of a human life, but the entire imperfection of existence: not merely being doomed to die, but being doomed to fail. The manifestation is never as pure as the ideal. Thus, for example, Manfred initially complains to the Witch of the Alps that his great magical powers are unable to solve the problem which he faces,

my sciences,  
My long pursued and super-human art,  
Is mortal here – I dwell in my despair (2.2.147-9).

It is mortal because it is not godlike: it is incapable of solving the problem. This actual weakness of apparent strength is a significant theme in the drama. Manfred recalls having visited the place

where the Caesars dwelt,  
And dwell the tuneless birds of night; amidst  
A grove which springs through levell'd battlements,  
And twines its roots with the Imperial hearths (3.4.22-25).

The apparently world-conquering power of the Caesars could not preserve their own hearths against time or even against their own human enemies. The battle is not to the strong. Even the power of the spirits who have dominion over the world is sometimes unavailing: they cannot bring peace to one mortal (1.1.147), nor force him to kneel (2.4.35-6), and the greatest of them cannot make Astarte utter a word (2.4.114). It is, of course, the tension caused by unachieved desire which drives most narrative, and that is the case even here, in a drama of magic and supernatural beings: it is the weakness, the mortality, which creates the interest.

Nonetheless, those who are apparently godlike, the various spirits, emphasize their difference from humanity by questioning Manfred's claim that he is like them (1.1.161-1), and by calling him "Child of Clay" (1.1.131,133), "son of mortals" (1.1.135), "Child of Earth" (2.4.35), and "Son of Earth" (2.2.32). Manfred uses this last title for himself, when talking to the Witch of the Alps (2.2.28-9). These titles are reminiscent of two Biblical references: the first is the creation of Adam from the soil (or "the dust of the ground" in the KJV) in Genesis 2:7; the second, and perhaps more important, is the repeated usage in the Bible of 'son of man' as an identifier of a mortal, a descendant of Adam and Eve, as it is used for Jesus of Nazareth. This reiteration reinforces the humanity of the hero.

Often, however, Manfred attempts to deny that humanity. In his conversation with the Witch of the Alps, Manfred refers to other mortals as "creatures of clay" (2.2.58), and says that, when he met them, "I felt myself degraded back to them, /And was all

clay again” (2.2.78-9). The Witch rebukes him for then caring about Astarte more than for the supernatural world:

And for this –  
A being of the race thou dost despise,  
The order which thine own would rise above,  
Mingling with us and ours, thou dost forego  
The gifts of our great knowledge, and shrink’st back  
To recreate mortality – Away! (2.2.121-6).

The hierarchy of spirit over clay is clearest here, having appeared as early as Manfred’s initial proclamation that his “Promethean spark” (1.1.154) will resist the spirits “though coop’d in clay” (1.1.157). This claim is supported by the First Destiny, who similarly describes Manfred as being like the spirits “As far as is compatible with clay” (2.4.56), and represents his attributes as being such “As clay hath seldom borne” (2.4.58).

Nonetheless, rather than accepting the valuation of spirit above clay unquestioningly, as Marchand does,<sup>411</sup> it might be useful to recall the parallels made between Manfred and the Chamois Hunter, and between Manfred and the Abbot. Both the Chamois Hunter and the Abbot are bold as Manfred is bold. As Manfred challenges Arimanes to show proper respect to his Maker, so the Chamois Hunter enjoins Manfred to show proper respect to his Maker, and each validates the other’s pride. As Manfred has occult knowledge, so the Abbot and his church have spiritual knowledge, and both repeatedly fail to exorcise the spirit which comes for Manfred’s soul. As Manfred mistakes the Abbot’s warning as a threat, the Abbot mistakes Manfred’s warning as a threat:

MAN. Retire, or ‘twill be dangerous – Away!  
ABBOT. Thou dost not mean to menace me?  
MAN. Not I;

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<sup>411</sup> Marchand, pp.75-79.

I simply tell thee peril is at hand,  
And would preserve thee (3.4.55-8).

It is also worth noting that Manfred, like the minor characters Manuel and Herman, is still a man, a 'Child of Clay'. All of these connections humanise the superhero, as does his very struggle: Manfred's battle with grief is a very human one, and it goes on despite his magic, which is the most obvious difference between Manfred and most of his fellow mortals. Even in that regard, it should be noted that, since his magical powers have been learnt from 'old science', someone else, such as Iamblichus of Colchis (q.v. 2.2.92) or the Arcadian Evocators whom Pausanias sought (2.2.189), must have previously known such abilities. Even his powers are human powers.

Thus, in describing the human condition, Manfred repeatedly uses the first person plural:

we, who name ourselves its [the world's] sovereigns, we  
Half dust, half deity, alike unfit  
To sink or soar, with our mix'd essence make  
A conflict of its elements  
[...]  
Till our mortality predominates[.] (1.2.39-42, 45).

This description, 'half dust, half deity', applies just as well to the Chamois Hunter, the Abbot, and certainly Astarte, as it does to Manfred. Manfred's struggle to transcend his humanity is the wrong quest, because it is a vain pursuit of power and a denial of the truth of half his self, and thus leads him into unhappiness.

## Despair

One of the contemporary objections to the Byronic Hero was his predilection for despair, an attitude which could be seen as a rejection of the hope of Christianity,<sup>412</sup> and, thence, as a rejection of the established social order, a slide towards the cataclysmic radicalism of the French Revolution. The *Critical Review*, in its article on *Manfred*, charged Byron with ‘monotonously’ delighting in murder, incest, and characters

in which all the ordinary passions are wrought to the intensity of a convulsion, and sublimated by the operations of a fierce pride which triumphs in its own despair.<sup>413</sup>

Byron’s fascination with despair, however, seems to have been more artistic than political, less about the despairing hero’s rejection of the normal emotional palliatives such as religion, nation, and family, which would present implied slight against their value, and more about the nature of the hero’s suffering when those palliatives are found unavailing in the face of terrible trials. As Chew notes, Byron’s plays “are concerned with the effect of situation on character rather than with the course of external incident”.<sup>414</sup> The issue of significance in this play is the psychology of the victim of despair, which is precisely why no *deus ex machina* is allowed to interrupt the progress of the character’s interaction with the feeling.

Instead, the problem and its resolution are both placed within the individual. As Joseph explains, this is why much of *Manfred*’s questing amongst the spirits is a failure:

What *Manfred* demands of the spirits is self-forgetfulness; and this is Byron’s own problem of losing himself in nature, “to withdraw *myself* from *myself*”.

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<sup>412</sup> A good example of a hostile religious attitude to such despair is found in the depiction of ‘accidie’ in ‘The Parson’s Tale’ (Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales*, X.678ff, in *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. by Larry D. Benson, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), p.310 ff).

<sup>413</sup> *Critical Review*, 5th series, V (June 1817), 622-29, RR, II, 666-70: p.623 (667).

<sup>414</sup> Chew, p.30; see also McGann, *Fiery Dust*.



This is precisely what the spirits cannot give; they have no power over the internal self, and all they can offer is power over the external world.<sup>415</sup>

It initially appears that a powerful magician such as Manfred ought merely to be able to “magic away” his problems, but his knowledge and the powers of his servants are vain when the problem exists within his own mind. Such a representation of the vanity of magic is coherent with the orthodox condemnation thereof.

While the external cause of these feelings is the death of his beloved Astarte, it is the feelings themselves which constitute the problem of the play: he is not seeking to resurrect Astarte, but rather to lay himself to rest. His feelings appear to constitute “survivor’s guilt”, the self-recriminating tendency of those who do not die when their loved ones do:

If I had never lived, that which I love  
Had still been living; had I never loved,  
That which I love would still be beautiful –  
Happy and giving happiness (2.2.193-6).

There is, of course, absolutely no way that Manfred could possibly know that any of this would be the case, but what matters is what he feels, not what he knows. His feeling, his belief, is that he is responsible for Astarte’s destruction, even though he was not directly involved in her death:

MAN. I loved her, and destroy’d her!  
WITCH. With thy hand?  
MAN. Not with my hand, but heart – which broke her heart (2.2.117-8).

This is the feeling which precipitates him into the downward spiral of depression. As noted earlier, it is the Abbot who first identifies Manfred’s condemnation as self-inflicted, his problem as depression, rather than evil (3.1.98-100). Manfred does not

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<sup>415</sup> Joseph, p.105.

need punishment, as he himself comes to realise, and thus finally proclaims that the sinful spirits have no right to punish sinful mortals (3.4.123-4).

One aspect of this despair, and part of the theme of vulnerability to time and change, has particular resonance with the much later *Cain*: soliloquising on the Jungfrau before his suicidal leap, Manfred considers his current state of depression and expresses his disgust “to be thus, eternally but thus, /Having been otherwise!” (1.2.70-1). This grief is a close parallel to Cain’s disillusionment over “the inadequacy of his state to his Conceptions” (BLJ 9.54, to Murray 3/11/21). Manfred, of course, is distressed by having caused the death of someone close to him, whereas Cain causes the death of someone close to him as a result of being distressed. Cain is tempted and apparently led astray by the spirit who comes to him, whereas Manfred goes to the spirits and apparently remains uninfluenced by them. To a certain extent, *Cain* is an anti-*Manfred*.

Manfred repeats this same idea of perpetual despondency later, saying, “I dwell in my despair – /And live – and live for ever” (2.2.147-50). This idea of being “eternally but thus”, of the problem being seemingly endless, is one of the hallmarks, indeed one of the diagnostic indicators, of clinical depression, as is sleeplessness (1.1.3-4); another is his lack of love or hope or fear (1.1.21-7). The Abbot remarks that his despair is unusual, in that

even those who do despair above,  
Yet shape themselves some phantasy on earth,  
To which frail twig they cling, like drowning men (3.1.101-3).

Manfred replies that he had earthly hopes, but that they failed him (3.1.104ff). Nothing has helped.

Manfred expresses the depressive’s loss of enjoyment of what was previously pleasurable, in regard to his love of nature. Speaking to the Witch of the Alps, Manfred says that he used to love nature and solitude: “My joy was in the Wilderness” (2.2.62, and ff.), but that, following the death of his beloved, “My

solitude is solitude no more, /But peopled with the Furies” (2.2.130-1).<sup>416</sup> Thus, at the beginning of the drama, he says,

My mother Earth!

And thou fresh breaking Day, and you, ye Mountains,  
Why are ye beautiful? I cannot love ye.  
And thou, the bright eye of the universe,  
That openest over all, and unto all  
Art a delight – thou shin’st not on my heart. (1.2.7-12).

This is, as Rutherford notes, a rejection of the nature-worship of Canto III of CHP: nature cannot help Manfred any more than religion or his own powers could.<sup>417</sup> After his interview with Astarte, however, Manfred’s view of nature is changed, and, thus, he delivers an encomium upon the sun at what he expects to be his last sunset:

Glorious Orb! the idol

Of early nature,  
[...]  
Most glorious orb! that wert a worship, ere  
The mystery of thy making was reveal’d!  
Thou earliest minister of the Almighty  
[...]  
Sire of the seasons! Monarch of the climes  
And those who dwell in them (3.2.3-4, 9-11, 20-1).

The *British Critic* quite reasonably connects this speech with Adam and Eve’s praise of the created world in Milton’s *Paradise Lost*:<sup>418</sup> “Thou sun, of this great world both eye and soul” (PL 5.171). The couple repeatedly refer to God as “Maker”, just as

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<sup>416</sup> The task of the Ερινυες, the Furies, was to punish the perpetrators of great, and especially *impious*, crimes, including kinslaying, which makes them quite appropriate to Manfred’s situation if he is guilty of Astarte’s death, as he believes.

<sup>417</sup> Rutherford, p.81.

<sup>418</sup> *British Critic*, 2nd Series, VIII (July 1817), 38-47, RR, I, 270-5: p.46 (275).

Manfred refers to “the Maker” and “the Almighty”. Manfred praises also the virtues of the moon, recalling its light upon the ruins of Rome,

Leaving that beautiful which still was so,  
And making that which was not, till the place  
Became religion, and the heart ran o’er  
With silent worship of the great of old! (3.4.36-39).

Religion is formed in the appreciation of beauty. That Manfred is, at the end of the play, able to appreciate nature and solitude once more, such that place can become religion, indicates that he has already achieved within himself some measure of the very peace which the Abbot offers. As Chew notes,

To understand and appreciate *Manfred* one must see that its chief message is one of encouragement and hope. [...] In *Manfred*, despite the sense of the clod of clay which clogs the soul, the final victory is felt to remain with the forces of good.<sup>419</sup>

The despair which plagues Manfred in the first two acts is largely gone at the beginning of the third. In contradiction to the *Critical Review*’s claim, Manfred does differ from the other Byronic heroes, achieving a resolution denied to the Giaour, Conrad, Lara, or Alp. Manfred’s sense of that victory, the end of his despair, evidently occurs in the immediate wake of his interview with Astarte.

## **Astarte**

In the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures, “the goddess of the Sidonians”<sup>420</sup> is Astarte (Αστάρτη); in English Bibles, her name is commonly rendered as ‘Ashtoreth’ or ‘Ashtaroth’.<sup>421</sup> Considering that this last is the name of the demon whom Manfred summons to terrify the Abbot in the original ending of the play

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<sup>419</sup> Chew, p.84.

<sup>420</sup> 1 Kings 11:5, 33. She is also described as “the abomination of the Sidonians”, in 2 Kings 23:13.

<sup>421</sup> The latter appears in Judges 2:13. E D Clarke, whose book Byron had read, lists variants of the name, including ‘Astarte’ and ‘Ashtaroth’, in 2.2.806.

(McGann 4.468), it seems unlikely that any association with an ancient West Asian deity was intended by the naming of Manfred's love, Martyn Corbett's suggestion that Astarte is a tool of Arimanes notwithstanding.<sup>422</sup>

Astarte's first appearance in the play may be in 1.1.188, when Manfred has asked the most powerful of the spirits to "take such aspect /As unto him may seem most fitting" (1.1.186-7). Manfred responds with passion:

Oh God! if it be thus, and *thou*  
Art not a madness and a mockery,  
I yet might be most happy. – I will clasp thee,  
And we again will be –        [*The figure vanishes*  
My heart is crush'd!  
[MANFRED *falls senseless* (1.1.188-91)

Astarte remains tantalisingly just out of sight for the duration of the drama: in the first scene, she is apparently present, but unnamed; in Manfred's conversation with the Witch of the Alps, she forms a major part of the subject-matter (2.2.104ff.), but remains unnamed; in Arimanes' hall, she is both named and summoned, but speaks only eleven words, five being "To-morrow ends thine earthly ills", the others being "Manfred!" thrice and "Farewell!" thrice (2.4.150-6), and so she remains largely unknown; finally, Manuel's story to Herman and the other servants about Manfred and Astarte is interrupted just when he is about to identify the precise nature of their relationship (3.3.47).<sup>423</sup> Astarte's mysterious identity is a key element of the construction of tension within the drama.

There are other mysteries with Astarte. One is the possible autobiographical reference;<sup>424</sup> another is her precise fate. In this regard, Chew asks, "But is Astarte

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<sup>422</sup> Corbett, p.39.

<sup>423</sup> This interruption occurs, tellingly, in *both* versions of the ending of the play: in the original version, it is interrupted by the mystical fire which devastates the tower and mortally wounds Manfred; in the published version, it is interrupted by the arrival of the Abbot. The story was meant to go untold.

<sup>424</sup> Chew, pp.72-3, especially in the footnotes there, presents a very plausible theory that any autobiographical reference might well be to Mary Chaworth, rather than to Augusta Leigh, as is most commonly assumed. If she can plausibly be both, then she can plausibly not be either.

dead?”, presenting support for the possibility that “actual physical death was not meant to be conveyed.” His support includes the apparent contradiction between Manfred’s assertion that Astarte is not in heaven (2.1.30) and Nemesis’ statement that “She is not of our order, but belongs /To the other powers” (2.4.115-6). There is also Manfred’s statement that Astarte is “One without a tomb” (2.4.81), which Chew connects with the idea, expressed in some other parts of Byron’s work, that absence is equivalent to death.<sup>425</sup>

However, Manfred need not have gone to such great *magical* lengths were Astarte only absent: he could have travelled to her physically, rather than ascending to the court of Arimanes. He tells the Witch of the Alps, whilst discussing his loss of Astarte, that “her blood was shed” (2.2.120), a comment of little relevance if she is only geographically distant, but a comment of great relevance if she has been killed somehow. He further tells the Witch that the only means of aiding him involves waking the dead or killing him (2.2.152).

To turn to the statements which Chew considers, even assuming that the information in them is correct, that Manfred does know that Astarte is not in Heaven and that Nemesis is telling the truth in saying that Astarte belongs to the other powers, there is a possibility which Chew apparently overlooks. Not being in Heaven and not being with the forces of evil might leave only one option, life, in a Protestant context, but, as evidenced by the Abbot, *Manfred* is not set in a Protestant context. A third option in a Catholic context is Purgatory. This would place her at once outside of heaven but within the care of “the other powers”, and would be her destination if she were not guilty of a mortal sin but were also not properly sanctified. Lastly, the description of Astarte as being “without a tomb” only indicates that her body has not been commodiously housed, not that it has not been interred at all. Referring to common eighteenth-century practice, Michael MacDonald and Terence R Murphy note,

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<sup>425</sup> Chew, p.70.

Suicides who were not judged *felo de se* were interred in the north side of the churchyards, along with executed felons, excommunicates, and unbaptized infants.<sup>426</sup>

Although it is unlikely that Manfred would willingly have allowed such a burial for his beloved Astarte, he would not have been a willing participant in her suicide, nor would he likely have been able to secure a tomb for her in a churchyard when it was known how she died: all of this would have been outside of his control.

The idea of suicide is introduced in the second scene, with Manfred's attempt and the Chamois Hunter's intervention, calling upon the magician to "Stain not our pure vales with thy guilty blood" (2.1.111). Astarte's death is then referred to in a comment by the Witch of the Alps, deleted in the original manuscript, as "Her noble sacrifice" (McGann 4.74 n.121), indicating self-willed death.

Astarte having committed suicide makes sense of all of the indications in the text.<sup>427</sup> In Catholicism, a mortal sin, a sin which leads the soul towards Hell, depends upon full knowledge of the consequences.<sup>428</sup> If the person were overcome by grief or mental illness, the act would not be *felo de se*, and would not constitute mortal sin, which would thus leave the soul in Purgatory, not Hell. Manfred could then consider himself to have

destroy'd her

[...]

Not with my hand, but heart – which broke her heart –

It gazed on mine, and withered. (2.2.117, 118-9).

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<sup>426</sup> Michael MacDonald and Terence R. Murphy, *Sleepless Souls: Suicide in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), p.213. See also pp.205-6 on clerical disagreements over the burial rites due in cases ruled 'non compos mentis' suicide. Byron, after all, had much the same problem in 1820 for his natural daughter Allegra, on account of her birth. After much argument, she was buried in an *unlabelled* site within Harrow church (McCarthy, p.420).

<sup>427</sup> The reviewer for the *European Magazine* raised the same conjecture, that Astarte "became her own executioner", disclaiming the idea as anything more than a "guess", owing to "the fogs and mists" which obscure the facts of the story (issue LXXII (August 1817), 150-2, RR, II, 962-4: p.151 (963)).

<sup>428</sup> Augustine, *Reply to Faustus*, 22.28, and thence the Catechisms.

Viewing himself as the cause of her suicide, he would have every reason to loathe his own existence and to long for her forgiveness even though he had not personally shed her blood. This would also give him reason to so aggressively demand that the Abbot should prove his transgressions (3.1.56), as he would not be guilty of any specific sin for an action which was willingly committed by someone else, but might well want to be proven guilty of it. Manfred appears, in part, to be a study of the psychology of someone bereft by suicide.

The precise event of Astarte's death is possibly hinted in Herman and Manuel's conversation. Herman says, "I've heard thee darkly speak of an event /Which happened hereabouts, by this same tower" (3.3.32-3), and Manuel begins to talk about something involving Astarte and Manfred. That it is a singular event of which one would speak "darkly", involving these two, is all well suited to the narrative of her suicide.

The final aspect of Astarte to be considered is her one definite appearance in the play, the event which apparently allows Manfred to escape his despair. Although she is summoned by Nemesis, neither that goddess nor Arimanes is able to command her to speak (2.4.106-9, 114). This appears to be what prompts Nemesis to announce that Astarte "belongs /To the other powers", which might indicate that those other powers hold her beyond Nemesis and Arimanes' command, but Nemesis was at least able to cause her to appear, which quite possibly indicates another factor also at work.

As noted by Garber,<sup>429</sup> Astarte was very similar to Manfred both in form and in mind:

She had the same lone thoughts and wanderings,  
The quest of hidden knowledge, and a mind  
To comprehend the universe (2.2.109-11).

This could have been a catalyst for her suicide. As Manfred (1.1.10-1) and the spirits (2.4.61) have said, knowledge brings sorrow: with her "gentler powers [...] /Pity, and

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<sup>429</sup> Frederick Garber, 'Continuing Manfred', in *Critical Essays on Lord Byron*, ed. by Robert F. Gleckner (New York: G.K. Hall & Co., 1991), 228-48 (p.243).



smiles, and tears” (2.2.112-3), she may well have been unable to withstand the sorrow of the knowledge which he shared with her. Thus, he would then have cause, if not quite reason, to feel responsible for her suicide.

Her Manfred-like character is also a plausible cause for her silence in the court scene. As he does not obey the spirits’ commands to do obeisance to Arimanes (2.4.30, 33, 34, 45), she does not obey their commands to speak. In fact, she only speaks after being repeatedly begged by him to do so (2.4.118, 25, 35, 44, 45, 48). Her will, like his, does not bend merely because others command it. The petition to which she finally responds is threefold, and demonstrates his concern for her over himself:

Say that thou loath’st me not – that I do bear  
This punishment for both – that thou wilt be  
One of the blessed – and that I shall die (2.4.125-7).

The middle part of this, that Manfred should bear the punishment and so Astarte should *become* one of the blessed, rather than being one already, lends further support to the proposition that Manfred considers her to be in Purgatory, and thus not *yet* in Heaven. Interestingly, Astarte only gives a direct answer to one part of this threefold petition: “To-morrow ends thine earthly ills” (2.4.152). In an early letter describing the play to Murray, Byron calls this “an ambiguous & disagreeable answer” (BLJ 5.169, 15/02/17), and it does refer only to the end of *earthly* ills, leaving other sufferings in doubt. Manfred’s further question “am I forgiven?” is met only with a “Farewell!”, as is his “shall we meet again?” (2.4.153, 4). Thus far, Manfred, who has gone to the greatest of lengths for this interview, has received little in the way of reward for his efforts. However, when he finally begs her, “One word for mercy! Say, thou lovest me”, she replies, “Manfred!” Thus, the contemporary reviewer for the *Monitor* wrote,

Every reader will be struck with the beautiful and tender iteration [by Astarte] of the word “*Manfred*,” in reply to his question of affection; and indeed the whole scene displays most masterly management.<sup>430</sup>

She thrice wishes him “Farewell” and thrice calls his name, including making his name her very last word (2.4.156). This indicates that a strong personal connection still exists, and it is more likely to be love than hatred.

This indication is, apparently, what allows Manfred to reach his resolution and the peace which he identifies in act III: he is assured by his interview with her that Astarte still cares for him, that he will die, and that she belongs not to the forces of darkness, and is, therefore, likely in Purgatory, whence she will eventually progress to being one of the blessed. The whole of his threefold query is answered, and fits neatly within an orthodox, *Catholic* worldview, showing a hint of the turn towards Catholicism which becomes so evident in *Don Juan*.

## **Self**

As Manfred differentiates himself from other humans (e.g., 2.2.78-9), he presents himself as an isolated individual. The focus on the self is significant in the relation to the group in many ways, as, for example, in the culturally marginalised, and thus more individuated, art of magic, versus the culturally centralised, and thus more regulated, practice of religion. It is likewise a medium for the presentation of the Promethean image. Manfred describes himself as possessing “the Promethean spark” (1.1.154) in as great a measure as the spirits whom he summons. Particularly with respect to Thorslev’s intermingling of Prometheus and Satan in *The Byronic Hero*, it is worth noting that this image is strictly one of Prometheus, the valiant opponent of tyranny, not of Satan, the rebel against authority. Chew notes, in connection with Shelley’s *Prometheus Unbound*,

For just as Prometheus is not in revolt against Demogorgon, but rather in harmony with him, so Manfred breathes no defiance against “the overruling

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<sup>430</sup> *Monitor*, I (1817), 170-6, 177-82, RR, IV, 1645-52: p.118 (1651).

Infinite”, and the “other powers”, who guard and govern the blessed and to whom he bids even Arimanes bow. This is apparent in every interview with the spirits.<sup>431</sup>

Manfred rejects domination by the spirits, and eschews the advice of the Chamois Hunter and the Abbot to seek clerical help, but he also respects the men’s piety (2.1.65, 3.1.154-6). He relies upon his own powers, but does not begrudge others their supports or their happier lives.

His character and powers are, indeed, recognised by others as being great. The First Destiny proclaims that “No other Spirit in this region hath /A soul like his – or power upon his soul” (2.4.71-2). Considering that they are in the court of Arimanes, this is a remarkably bold assertion to make. On seeing his mastering of his grief over Astarte, one of the spirits comments, “Had he been one of us, he would have made /An awful spirit” (2.4.161-2). In a parallel comment, the Abbot remarks,

This should have been a noble creature: he  
Hath all the energy which would have made  
A goodly frame of glorious elements  
Had they been wisely mingled (3.1.160-3).

The Chamois Hunter recognises both Manfred’s mountaineering ability and his noble mien. The hero is special both in clay and in spirit, and all agree that Manfred is unusually focussed and powerful. This is demonstrated in the very first scene, when Manfred tries, initially without success, to summon the spirits to do his bidding:

I call upon ye by the written charm  
Which gives me power upon you – Rise! appear!

[...]

Now by the voice of him  
Who is first among you – by this sign,

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<sup>431</sup> Chew, p.76.

Which makes you tremble – by the claims of him  
Who is undying, – Rise! appear! – Appear!  
[...]  
By the strong curse which is upon my soul,  
The thought which is within me and around me,  
I do compel ye to my will. – Appear! (1.1.35-6, 37-40, 47-9)

The first invocation is “by the written charm”: this is in the logocentric tradition of Western magic, in which having the right words, spoken or written, causes the magical effect to occur. The second invocation is by the voice, the sign, and the claims of ‘the first of the spirits’. While this last designation is generally congruent with the spirits’ description of Arimanes (2.4.1-16), they never actually describe him as “first”, and Manfred does refer to “that which is above him” (2.4.45). The phrase “him /Who is undying” includes a defining adjective clause, a reference to a singular person, and, as Byron would no doubt have read, “God is Spirit”.<sup>432</sup> Further, the reference to the “sign, /Which makes you tremble” is most likely a reference to the Name of God, as is inscribed upon a ring in the *Testament of Solomon* in order to terrify demons into compliance.<sup>433</sup> This is magic predicated upon a religious ontology and hierarchy of spirits. The third invocation is the unusual one, in that it is an invocation by the inherent power of the self rather than by any external agency: “I do compel ye”. In the end, Manfred is his own source of power, which is, as he says to the spirits, why they have no claim over him (2.4.114).

As Manfred is the source of his own power, he is consequently the cause both of his own suffering and of his release from that suffering. The ‘Incantation’ curse demands that he must be the source of his own torment: “I call upon thee! and compel /Thyself to be thy proper Hell!” (1.1.250-1). This imprecation evidently has the desired effect, as Manfred later describes:

The innate tortures of that deep despair,

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<sup>432</sup> John 4:24.

<sup>433</sup> This first to third-century CE text is seminal in the Western magical tradition of spirit-summoning, and many subsequent texts follow it, especially in using various names of God in magic circles or invocations for the same purpose: to command compliance.

Which is remorse without the fear of hell,  
But all in all sufficient to itself  
Would make a hell of heaven (3.1.69-73).

The mind which is immortal makes itself  
Requital for its good or evil thoughts –  
Is its own origin of ill and end –  
And its own place and time – its innate sense,  
When stripp'd of this mortality, derives  
No colour from the fleeting things without,  
But is absorb'd in sufferance or in joy,  
Born from the knowledge of its own desert (3.4.129-36).

This is, of course, a borrowing from *Paradise Lost*, where Satan says, “The mind is its own place, and in itself /Can make a Heav'n of Hell, a Hell of Heav'n” (PL 1.254-5), but it is also an idea which apparently fascinated Byron, appearing repeatedly in his work.<sup>434</sup> Rather than being a celebration of Romantic individualism, this passage operates in context as a lament.

Any mind enclosed within itself will create its own environment, causing its own bliss or doom with its own thoughts, and this is precisely Manfred's problem: no power outside of his mind can deliver it, because deliverance is only achieved when the mind itself releases those torments. Then only can religion operate “for comfort” (DJ 13.41.324). What eventually frees Manfred is his acceptance of Astarte's situation and of his own. He accepts Astarte's situation between the interview at the end of act two and the previously-unknown peace at the beginning of act three. Possibly through her message of his imminent death, he then comes to accept his own mortality, meaning not just his death, but also the nature which he shares with the rest of humanity. This is why Rutherford is incorrect in saying,

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<sup>434</sup> Q.v. Martyn Corbett, *Byron and Tragedy* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1988), pp.42-3.

he is no Prometheus but a Prometheus *manqué*, and [...] although he defies supernatural powers this does not affect the material or spiritual condition of mankind. His is an entirely private martyrdom, and he cannot be said to represent humanity or the mind of man – he is an exceptional, unique phenomenon, his problems are peculiar to himself, and their solution (if there is one) has no bearing on the situation of *nous autres*.<sup>435</sup>

As already noted, he is not as exceptional as he claims, and his central problem, grief over the death of a loved one, is very human and very relevant to the rest of us. The other major issue, his contest with his own mortality, is likewise very human and very generally relevant. This is particularly obvious when he assures the Abbot that death is not as daunting as it might appear. This comment might best be seen in the context of the original ending of the drama. There, Manfred is slain by the fire which strikes his tower, a fate which Manuel laments:

MANUEL.    And such a death!  
 Alone – we know not how – unshrived – untended –  
 With strange accompaniments and fearful signs  
 I shudder at the sight – but must not leave him.  
 MAN. [*speaking faintly and slowly*]. Old man! 'Tis not so difficult to die  
 (McGann 4.471.38-42).

“Alone” and “untended” are synonyms, and enclose the religious propriety of “unshrived”; this personal concern about dying alone results in Manuel’s perception of the importance of not leaving his master. Manfred assures him that it is not so difficult. In the altered version of the final scene, the last line is retained, and Byron was incensed when it was deleted from the first edition, writing to Murray, “You have destroyed the whole effect & moral of the poem by omitting the last line of Manfred’s speaking” (BLJ 5.257, 12/8/17): Byron clearly saw great importance in that line. In the ‘reformed’ version, it is the Abbot who laments:

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<sup>435</sup> Rutherford, p.89.

ABBOT. Cold – cold – even to the heart –  
But yet one prayer – alas! how fares it with thee? –  
MAN. Old man! 'tis not so difficult to die (3.4.149-51).

In both cases, Manfred does act to improve the spiritual condition of mankind, with reassurance of the acceptability of death, becoming the philanthropic “enlightener of nations” which he earlier tells the Abbot of having hoped to be in his youth (3.1.107). This line is the necessary proof of Manfred’s achievement of personal peace, but also of his humanity, his reconciliation of the deity and the dust, the “final victory” described by Chew, in which the practitioner of proscribed arts demonstrates himself a hero rather than a villain.

## Conclusion

*Manfred* is a fantasy, but not a rejection of orthodoxy, and the drama operates within a fantastic world derived from an orthodox one. There is one god over all, magical powers are not efficacious in solving human dilemmas, and there is both a Heaven and quite possibly a Purgatory for which to hope.

However, the poem rejects the traditional, orthodox demonizing of magic. Manfred’s powers are not demonic in origin, and, although the spirits do come for him in the end, they cannot take him. Neither does he commit suicide: his death appears to be entirely natural. Manfred is a sympathetic character, not at all a villain, and is an admirer of those who are orthodox.

The poem thus constitutes a rejection only of legalistic religiosity’s condemnation of unorthodox practice. Once again, the redeeming virtue is not obedience, but moral and ideal behaviour: *Manfred*’s worldview is Idealist. At the same time, the maintenance of an orthodox hierarchy of being provides, for the last of the Byronic Heroes,<sup>436</sup> an opportunity to express faith in a Higher Power whilst still having a

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<sup>436</sup> After *Manfred*, M G Lewis asked Byron to stop writing all of those “Characters of gloom and mysterious feelings of guilt”, and Byron did (November 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1817, in the John Murray Archive, MS 43484).

Devil to resist. This displaces the poem out of the simple dichotomy of orthodoxy and heterodoxy, and into the murky space of unorthodoxy.



## **Cain, Heaven and Earth, and Piety**

In 1821, Byron wrote two ‘biblical dramas’, one about Cain’s murder of Abel, and the other about the Deluge. On its surface, *Cain* appears to be deeply impious, filled as it is with arguments about the wickedness of God and the injured innocence of Lucifer. *Heaven and Earth*, in contrast, frequently preaches the orthodox message of the unquestionable righteousness of God. This is how these two texts appear to an epiphenomenal reading, a reading which takes the surface discourse as the ‘message’ of the work. Although the epiphenomenal reading considers explicit expressions of hostility towards God, it may obscure factors which problematize such hostility.

A deeper reading of these dramas reveals rather a different image. Byron wrote into them a considerable array of parallels: positive parallels which reinforce aspects of the themes, characters, and ideas of the dramas; contrastive inverse parallels, wherein one character’s words or actions reflect upon another’s; contradictory inverse parallels, wherein one character’s words or actions belie at one point what they assert at another. When considered together, these parallels reveal aspects of these dramas which have frequently been overlooked.

### ***Cain***

Since impiety is disrespect towards a deity, the piety of *Cain* depends most heavily upon the representation of God. Since Lucifer is the most vocal commentator upon God, his character becomes a significant part of that study, as does the character of God as demonstrated in the drama.

The reception of *Cain* has tended towards the monological. Modern voices have frequently asserted that the drama is impious. In so doing, they have identified very effectively the unorthodox elements, but have often overlooked the drama’s problematization of the very unorthodoxy which its characters express: the critics’ comments tend to focus upon the unorthodox elements alone. Thus, for example, Marjarum labels *Cain* “an indictment of orthodox religious tradition”, Gleckner

describes it as “Byron’s complete rejection of God in a almost full-blown nihilism”, and Bostetter calls the drama “Byron’s most deliberate and violent attack on the shibboleths of Christian society”, part of a campaign to ‘convert as many Cains as possible to revolt’.<sup>437</sup> For McGann, it is “radically sceptical.”<sup>438</sup> Rutherford describes *Cain* as one of Byron’s “blundering frontal assaults” on Christianity, along with *Manfred*.<sup>439</sup> In a similar vein to the other critics, Bernard Blackstone asserts that

*Cain* is a refutation of that “first lesson of Monosyllables – “God made man, let us love him”” which Byron learned by rote at Bodsy Bowers’s school at the age of five. Its theme is equally monosyllabic: “God made man, let us hate him.” God made man, but to live under a tyranny, and then to die.<sup>440</sup>

Leslie Marchand writes,

*Cain* was an outpouring, not wholly coherent or consistent, of Byron’s revolt against conventional religious orthodoxy coupled with speculations on free will and man’s destiny, and a questioning of “the politics of Paradise.”<sup>441</sup>

The quotation at the end refers to Byron’s rather ambiguous expression, in which he writes that Cain “kills Abel in a fit of dissatisfaction, partly with the politics of Paradise, which had driven them all out of it,” and partly with the Deity’s preference for Abel’s sacrifice, as in Genesis 4:4-5 (BLJ 8.216, to Moore, 19/9/21).<sup>442</sup> The expression is ambiguous because politics is not government, and, in Genesis, it is the will of God which drives them out, not politics in any sense of partisan

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<sup>437</sup> Marjarum, p.33; Gleckner, p.324; Bostetter, p.282.

<sup>438</sup> McGann, *Don Juan in Context* (London: John Murray, 1976), p.24.

<sup>439</sup> Rutherford, p.92.

<sup>440</sup> Blackstone, p.244. See also Martin Priestman, *Romantic Atheism: Poetry and Freethought, 1780-1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p.241, for a similar view. There is also John W. Ehrstine’s gross, Freudian oversimplification, in a four-word sentence: “Cain is about death” (*The Metaphysics of Byron: A Reading of the Plays* (The Hague: Mouton, 1976), p.89); the same critic claims that “Heaven and Earth simply makes no Byronic sense” on p.111.

<sup>441</sup> Marchand, *Byron’s Poetry: A Critical Introduction*, p.84.

<sup>442</sup> It is not, as Dimitri Karkoulis remarks, “because the play can neither contain nor incorporate the apocalyptic potential of the second act” (‘“They pluck’d the tree of Science /And sin”: Byron’s *Cain* and the Science of Sacrilege’, in *European Romantic Review*, 18:2 (April 2007), 273-81 (p.277)).

interrelationship. Byron's target might be the *ideology* of Paradise, but that is far from clear.

These modern voices are echoing ones contemporary with Byron, and it appears, *prima facie*, to be entirely reasonable to follow the author's contemporaries in judging the work impious since such judgement was based upon the poem's (apparent) deviation from their standards of piety. Those contemporary judgements were frequently emphatic, as, for example, one says,

Among the bold attempts of Infidelity to "turn the Truth of God into a lie," no one that we can call to mind, of ancient or modern date, contains so much impiety as this poem[.]<sup>443</sup>

Another contemporary review introduces the work with a quotation from Milton, giving Abdiel's denunciation of Lucifer's attempt to engender a revolt amongst the angels: "Oh! argument, blasphemous, false, and proud!"<sup>444</sup>

Within the contemporary objections to *Cain*'s perceived infidelity are three significant themes. The first is that the impiety of the work was unnecessarily dangerous, because "There is nothing easier than to shock modest and pious delicacy; but there is nothing more vulgar, or more cruel",<sup>445</sup> and such a shocking work might even result in "a shipwreck of the faith of thousands."<sup>446</sup> The second is that the impiety of the work was the worse because it was effectively uncontradicted, since

In *Cain*, nought is opposed to the horrid blasphemies and daring impieties of Lucifer and the willing disciple of his infernal misanthropy and infidelity, but

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<sup>443</sup> *Evangelical Magazine*, XXX (May 1822), 192-193, RR, II, 998-1000: p.192 (999).

<sup>444</sup> *Literary Speculum*, I (February 1822), 257-260, RR, IV, 1574-5: p.257 (1574), quoting *Paradise Lost* 5.806.

<sup>445</sup> *Edinburgh [Scots] Magazine*, 2nd series, X (January 1822), 102-14, RR, V, 2191-7: p.113 (2197).

<sup>446</sup> *European Magazine*, LXXXI (January 1822), 58-70, RR, II, 981-993: p.69 (992).

a few feeble declarations of the women, that the Deity must be right in all he does, though why and wherefore there is no attempt to prove.<sup>447</sup>

The third is a repeated objection to *Cain*'s failure to adhere to a particular variant of biblical literalism. One aspect of this appears in regard to Lucifer's claims in *Cain* that he was not the Serpent in the Garden of Eden. This was taken as evidence of thorough infidelity on the poet's part:

Lord Byron disbelieves the whole Scripture narrative: otherwise, he would not for a moment have adopted a supposition which renders the import of the prediction, Gen. iii. 15, almost unmeaning, and contradicts the plainest declarations of Scripture relative to the agency of the Tempter.<sup>448</sup>

Contemporary critics likewise objected to the statement, in the Preface to *Cain*, citing Bishop Warburton on there being "no allusion to a future state in any of the books of Moses, nor indeed in the Old Testament" (Preface 40-1). The *British Critic*, the *British Review*, and the *Investigator* devote considerable space to refuting this statement, which appears to have been drawn directly from Warburton's claim of "the omission of the doctrine of a future state of rewards and punishments, in the laws and religion he [Moses] delivered to the *jewish* people".<sup>449</sup> Byron was evidently guilty of believing the bishop.<sup>450</sup>

As usual, the claims of impiety failed to convince some readers at all: while the reception has *tended towards* the monological, a vocal minority have defended the work from the beginning. The standards of piety, and thus of impiety, varied. Hence, for example, one contemporary reviewer directly contradicts the 'faith shipwrecking' claim in referring to

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<sup>447</sup> *Investigator*, V (October 1822), 315-371, RR, III, 1170-99: p.352-3 (1190).

<sup>448</sup> *Eclectic Review*, 2nd series, XVII (May 1822), 418-427, RR, II.769-774, pp.525-6 (773): p.424 (772).

<sup>449</sup> Warburton, *The Divine Legation of Moses*, 2 vols (London: J & P Knapton, 1744), 1.1.5.

<sup>450</sup> Warburton was certainly not the only proponent of this position: Hugh Blair and Lord Kames were also "unwilling to assume any knowledge of the immortality of the soul" (Thomas Ahnert, 'The Soul, Natural Religion and Moral Philosophy in the Scottish Enlightenment', in *Eighteenth-Century Thought*, ed. by James G. Buickerood, 3 vols (New York: AMS Press, 2004), II, 233-53 (246)).

the dangerous sophistry and impious acclamations of Satan, the effects of which, however fatal they proved to Cain, we do not much apprehend on the mind of a sober reader. The church is in no danger from these.

This same review denounced not *Cain* but the outcry against it as “sheer nonsense.”<sup>451</sup> Frederick Denison Maurice, writing for the *Athenaeum*, makes essentially the same moral value argument for *Cain* as Lockhart makes for *Don Juan*.<sup>452</sup>

The positive reviews raise a significant methodological question: how can modern critics use contemporary responses as indicators of the drama’s contextual unorthodoxy when contemporary responses contradict one another? One solution might be to use the majority of responses as an indicator of a majority consensus, but this solution falls afoul of two related aspects of the critical trade of the day: the first is that a number of periodicals simply borrowed opinions or even material from others to fill their own columns, a habit which inflates the apparent consensus beyond the actual one; the second is that the operations of politics within culture can similarly skew results, especially when the monarch was rumoured to be upset.<sup>453</sup> Further, the Byronic Hero had made Byron’s works a soft target for conservative critics, who might well have expected to find impiety in the work simply because Byron had written it. All of these factors contribute to creating a false appearance of concerted disapprobation: not only did several very able contemporary critics and literary figures fail to find the drama impious at all,<sup>454</sup> those who did claim to find it impious failed to agree upon how it was impious, which suggests that their orthodoxies, the bases against which they measured the drama’s perceived deviations, are not identical

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<sup>451</sup> *Monthly Magazine* (February 1822), 10-15, RR, IV.1686-91): p.13 (1689), p.10 (1686). For other wholly positive reviews, vide *Examiner*, December 23, 808-10, and December 30, 827-8, 1821, RR, III, 1010-1016: p.809 (1013).

<sup>452</sup> ‘Lord Byron’s Monument’, in *Athenaeum and Literary Chronicle*, *Athenaeum and Literary Chronicle*, 48 (24 September, 1828), 751-2 (p.751).

<sup>453</sup> Vide *Gentleman’s Magazine*, XCI-ii (December 1821), 537-41; supplement for XCI-ii (January 1822), 613-5, RR, III, 1120-7: p.613 (1125), and also Coleridge V.204.

<sup>454</sup> Q.v. Walter Scott’s acceptance of the dedication of the work (Coleridge V.206), and the excerpt in the Galignani Edition, p.624, from “Mr. Campbell’s Magazine” (*New Monthly Magazine and Literary Journal*).

to one another.<sup>455</sup> Contemporary critical responses can demonstrate the existence of a perception of unorthodoxy in the drama, but they do not effectively demonstrate its distribution across the society.

Some modern critics have also seen that the impiety is far from being the entirety of the drama's message. Thorslev writes that the drama "has been vastly misunderstood" as being iconoclastic,<sup>456</sup> and M. K. Joseph says,

the play is far more than the naïve exercise in Satanism that it was sometimes taken to be; at its centre is the temptation of Cain by Lucifer which is a Goethean and metaphysical dialogue, the encounter of good and evil, a second Temptation and Fall in which the mysterious implications of the first are further explored.<sup>457</sup>

Far from its being an exercise in Satanism, the drama was evidently written for purposes other than an anti-Christian evangelism, as demonstrated by the poet's own comments. In particular, the author appears to have been greatly surprised by the perception of an impiety so extreme as to prompt the *Investigator's* call for prosecution of his publisher.<sup>458</sup> Writing to Douglas Kinnaird about John Murray, Byron comments,

He says – he is to be prosecuted about "Cain" – in that Case – let his lawyer merely quote the daring passages from *Milton*. – "Evil be thou my Good" – and "better to reign in Hell than serve in Heaven" (BLJ 9.89, 18/1/22).

Kinnaird's own response to the drama, like Moore's, Matthews', and Gifford's, was positive (q.v. BLJ 9.61, to Kinnaird, 16/11/21). The self-assurance of Byron's comment above, and particularly the idea that Murray could "merely quote" a few

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<sup>455</sup> Q.v. the contradiction between the *Investigator*, pp.351-2 (1189-90), and Reginald Heber (in *The Quarterly Review*, XXVII (July 1822), 476-524, RR, V, 2057-81: p.513 (2076)), over whether or not the biblical Cain redeems himself.

<sup>456</sup> Thorslev, 'Byron and Bayle: Biblical Skepticism and Romantic Irony', in *Byron, the Bible, and Religion: Essays from the Twelfth International Byron Seminar* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1991), 58-76 (p.66).

<sup>457</sup> Joseph, p.117.

<sup>458</sup> *Investigator*, V (October 1822), 315-371, RR, III, 1170-99: p359 (1193).

passages from Milton, bespeaks a lack of concern for the affair. Considering Byron's generally-friendly relationship with his publisher, it is unlikely that he is being inconsiderate, in which case it seems that the poet simply failed to anticipate the strength of the hostility to the work. Thus, he goes on to write a defence of the drama to Murray seven weeks after its publication, utilising the argument from precedent employed for *Don Juan*, stating that *Cain* was no more blasphemous than *Paradise Lost*:

If "Cain" be "blasphemous" – Paradise lost is blasphemous – and the very words of the Oxford Gentleman – "Evil be thou my Good" are from that very poem – from the mouth of Satan, – and is there anything more in that of Lucifer in the Mystery? – – Cain is nothing more than a drama – not a piece of argument – if Lucifer and Cain speak as the first Murderer and first Rebel may be supposed to speak – surely all the rest of the personages talk also according to their characters – and the stronger passions have ever been permitted to the drama. – I have even avoided introducing the Deity – as in the Scriptures – (though Milton does and not very wisely either) but have adopted his Angel as sent to Cain instead – on purpose to avoid shocking any feelings on the subject by falling short – of what all uninspired men must fall short in – viz – giving an adequate notion of the effect of the presence of Jehovah. [...] any odium or persecution – ought to fall upon me only. I had been laughing with some of my correspondents at the rumours &c. till I saw this assault upon you (BLJ 9.103-4, to Murray, 8/2/22).<sup>459</sup>

The defence of *Cain* even appears in *Don Juan*. The firm disclaimer of association with Richard Carlile or his views, in the Preface to Cantos VI-VIII, takes on an extra dimension when one considers that Carlile's pirate publication of *Cain* had caused their names to be associated.<sup>460</sup> Thus, when the poet avers, "With his opinions I have

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<sup>459</sup> Essentially the same case from precedent is made in 9.100, to Kinnaird, 6/2/22.

<sup>460</sup> Leslie Tannenbaum has listed the contemporary reviewers associating Byron with Carlile, and with Hone, in 'Lord Byron in the Wilderness: Biblical Tradition in Byron's "Cain" and Blake's "The Ghost of Abel' (*Modern Philology*, vol 72, 4 (May 1975), 350-64 (p.352n9)). In particular, the *Leeds Correspondent* for April 1822 notes that "The deluded followers of Paine, Carlile, and Cobbett have claimed it [*Cain*] for their own, and the justice of their claim has been admitted" (p.115 (1267)). As

nothing to do” (McGann 5.297:72-3), he is distancing himself from an atheist radical who took up his *Cain* as a political tract.

Byron’s comments are all justification, not persuasion: no attempt is made to argue, merely to assert. This argument from precedent was apparently deemed effective, considering that it was adopted by the lawyer Lancelot Shadwell for the defence of the copyright of *Cain*.<sup>461</sup> Further, the poet is here expressing his wish to take all of the blame upon himself: he advised Murray to make use of the letter, and Byron’s justification of *Cain* was indeed published in various periodicals in March of 1822.<sup>462</sup>

There are also two significant points of comparison for this passage. The first is another passage from later in the very same letter, wherein Byron writes to Murray, “As for what the Clergyman says of “Don Juan” you have brought it upon yourself by your absurd half and half prudery” (BLJ 9.104), referring to Murray having published *Don Juan* but having withheld his own name from it. The religion of *Cain* is defended where that of *Don Juan* is not: the drama appears to have been meant to be more pious than the travelogue-meditation. The second point for comparison is Byron’s response, three months earlier, to Murray’s very first letter about the content of *Cain*:

The two passages<sup>463</sup> cannot be altered without making Lucifer talk like the Bishop of Lincoln – which would not be in the character of the former. – – The notion is from Cuvier (that of the *old Worlds*) as I have explained in an additional note to the preface. – The other passage is also in Character – if *nonsense* – so much the better – because then it can do no harm – & the sillier

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McGann notes, the second Preface to *Cain* “could not have been written before late August” of 1822 (5.715), after most of the reviews which Tannenbaum lists.

<sup>461</sup> Q.v. Galignani Edition., p.597, for an excerpt of Shadwell’s argument and Lord Chancellor Eldon’s prevaricating reply. It should be noted that, contrary to some accounts (q.v. McGann 6.648-9), Eldon did not simply withhold protection from the work, but instead deferred the decision to a jury, who granted the request for legal protection, albeit ineffectually. Q.v. Smiles 1.428, Coleridge 5.203-4.

<sup>462</sup> Q.v. *The Letters of John Murray to Lord Byron*, ed. by Andrew Nicholson (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2007), p.433; Truman Guy Steffan, in *Lord Byron’s Cain: Twelve Essays and a Text with Variants and Annotations* (Austin & London: University of Texas Press, 1968) notes that several periodicals published the letter, beginning with *The Examiner* on the 10<sup>th</sup> of March, and *The Literary Gazette* on the 16<sup>th</sup> of March, 1822 (p.12n24).

<sup>463</sup> Murray’s letter has been lost, and so it is not known *which* two passages are meant here (Nicholson, p.431), but the Galignani edition identifies them as occurring in 2.2 (p.612n1).



Satan is made the safer for every body. -- As to "alarms" &c. do you really think such things ever led anybody astray? are these people more impious than Milton's Satan? -- or the Prometheus of Æschylus? [...] Are not Adam -- Eve -- Adah -- and Abel as pious as the Catechism? -- Gifford is too wise a man to think that such things can have any *serious* effect -- *who* was ever altered by a poem? I beg leave to observe that there is no creed nor personal hypothesis in all this -- but I was obliged to make Cain and Lucifer talk consistently -- and surely this has always been permitted to poesy. -- Cain is a proud man -- if Lucifer promised him kingdoms &c. -- it would *elate* him -- the object of the demon is to *depress* him still further in his own estimation than he was before -- by showing him infinite things -- & his own abasement -- till he falls into the frame of mind -- that leads to the Catastrophe -- from mere *internal* irritation -- *not* premeditation or envy -- of *Abel* -- (which would have made him contemptible) but from rage and fury against the inadequacy of his state to his Conceptions -- & which discharges itself rather against Life -- and the author of Life -- than the mere living. His subsequent remorse is the natural effect of looking on his sudden deed -- had the *deed* been premeditated -- his repentance would have been tardier (BLJ 9.53, to Murray, 3/11/21).

This passage contains the arguments which Byron was to repeat: that the characters speak only in character, and that the work is not comparatively impious. The absolute consistency of these claims leaves no justification for claiming that the poet was merely attempting to slip an assault upon piety past his conservative publisher,<sup>464</sup> particularly when he could, as he soon did, have works published by others: Byron engaged in negotiations with Galignani, in Paris, over the publication of *Heaven and Earth* in March of 1822 (McGann 6.680), and John Hunt began publishing *Don Juan* the following year. Murray himself even refers to the "humbug Row about Cain" in a letter to Byron on the 16<sup>th</sup> of April, 1822,<sup>465</sup> and John Galt says that the *Edinburgh Review* "exhibited a little twaddle about Cain", and, even more tellingly, that "The Edinburgh Reviewers make a noise about religion and morality, but do they care

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<sup>464</sup> Q.v. Bostetter, 'Byron and the Politics of Paradise', in *PMLA*, 75:5 (December, 1960), 571-76 (p.575n10); Schock, p.189.

<sup>465</sup> *The Letters of John Murray to Lord Byron*, p.435.

much about one or the other? They care nothing about church establishments or religion.” He goes on to assert that their only true interest in matters religious is the maintenance of an appearance of propriety.<sup>466</sup>

It is also worth mentioning that Byron wrote, in a private, subsequent letter to Thomas Moore, someone whom he had no need to impress with any appearance of his own piety, a similar defence of the drama:

There is nothing against the immortality of the soul in “Cain” that I recollect. I hold no such opinions; – but, in a drama, the first rebel and the first murderer must be made to talk according to their characters. However, the parsons are all preaching at it, from Kentish Town and Oxford to Pisa, – the scoundrels of priests, who do more harm to religion than all the infidels that ever forgot their catechisms! (BLJ 9.111, to Moore, 20/2/22).

The valuation of religion such that priests can be criticized for ‘doing it harm’ is significant. Similarly, he writes to Kinnaird, “for my part – I maintain that it [*Cain*] is as orthodox as the thirty nine articles” (BLJ 9.56, 4/11/21).<sup>467</sup>

Thus, Byron consistently represents *Cain*, in all of his letters to his friends, as not being unorthodox or impious, and he consistently represents his characters as merely speaking *in propria persona*. The consistency of his arguments problematizes Bostetter’s claim that Byron, “awed by his own audacity [...] automatically adopted” the language of orthodox views, to which he then “paid lip service”:<sup>468</sup> his letters repeat the same sentiments over a period of four months to his publisher, his banker, and his personal friend, never wavering at all, showing a steadfastness of opinion more likely to be the result of genuine conviction than of momentary defensiveness. The very length of time is more than enough for the frequently self-deprecating poet

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<sup>466</sup> Galt, ‘Life of Byron’, in Galignani Edition, p.cxvii.

<sup>467</sup> He does devalue those articles in a much earlier journal note, but from a religious perspective: “I abhor books of religion, though I reverence and love my God, without the blasphemous notions of sectaries, or belief in their absurd and damnable heresies, mysteries, and Thirty-nine articles” (‘Memoranda of Readings’, 30/11/7, in *The Life, Letters and Journals of Lord Byron*, ed. by Thomas Moore (London: John Murray, 1901), 5.47).

<sup>468</sup> Bostetter, p.283.

to have overcome any 'awe at his own audacity'. Robert M. Ryan comments reasonably that Byron

seems honestly to have assumed that most readers would understand [...] that, despite his experiments in humanistic rhetoric, Lucifer's position in the play, morally, is that of an accessory to murder; and that Cain, ill-natured from the start, continually demonstrates the inherited corruption he continually denies until finally it drives him to commit the worst sin of which he is capable.<sup>469</sup>

Byron's apparent assumption of critical reading of the Devil's words was largely mistaken. As Walter Scott notes, regarding the controversy, in a letter to William Stewart Rose, "it is scarce possible to make the Devil speak as the Devil without giving offence."<sup>470</sup> A considerable number of critics, in Byron's time and since, have been peculiarly willing to trust Lucifer, despite the fact that the Preface to the drama states that at least some of his words are untrue:

The assertion of Lucifer, that the pre-Adamite world was also peopled by rational beings much more intelligent than man, and proportionably powerful to the mammoth, etc., etc., is, of course, a poetical fiction to help him to make out his case. (Preface, 61-5).

Others critics have, like Ryan, Walter Scott, and the *Examiner*, been unwilling to take the Devil at his word, or to take him as the voice of the author: Wolf Z. Hirst represents the drama in Aristotelian form, claiming that

Cain's (and Lucifer's) sacrilegious indictment of God, though not dismissed in debate, is rejected by means of the tragic pattern of irony, conflict, peripeteia, and *anagnorisis*.<sup>471</sup>

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<sup>469</sup> Ryan, p.138.

<sup>470</sup> *Familiar Letters of Sir Walter Scott*, 2 vols (Edinburgh: David Douglas, 1894), II, 127 (18 December, 1821).

<sup>471</sup> Wolf Z Hirst, 'Byron's Revisionary Struggle with the Bible', in *Byron, the Bible, and Religion*, 77-100 (p.92).

While the reversal (*peripeteia*) and the recognition (*anagnorisis*) are important, it is more precisely the character construction (*ēthopoeia*) which undermines Lucifer's claims.

Nonetheless, the controversy has raged for nearly two hundred years. Some readers have asserted that the drama is rendered impious by the arguments of the two most vocal characters, which do have apparent discursive dominance because, as the *Investigator* and Hirst note, they are not explicitly and thoroughly refuted in dialogue. Readers have, however, disagreed with one another quite considerably regarding the degree and even the existence of the alleged impiety. In such a situation, it is simply not possible to refer to contemporary, or subsequent, reception as 'proof' of the work's impiety, its violation of religious ideology, because the one evident fact is the lack of uniformity in the ideology with which it is compared.

### **Lucifer**

The alleged impiety of *Cain* is found particularly in the arguments of Lucifer. While Cain also contributes some comments, Lucifer is much more vehemently opposed to God, and has more to say on the topic. Lucifer, then, becomes the leading witness for the prosecution of God: the 'evidence' against God is almost entirely Lucifer's accusations, *hearsay*, and so the character, and especially the reliability, of the witness is a primary consideration. A part of that character is his relationship with his immediate audience, Cain, and also with the wider audience, the readers of the work. Lucifer has been described by some readers, contemporary and modern, as a Prometheus-figure,<sup>472</sup> bestowing the gift of knowledge upon humanity, in defiance of divine tyranny. Marchand, for example, writes,

Byron conceived of Lucifer not as the "Arch-Fiend" and enemy of mankind, but as their defender. [...] He too takes on a Promethean character and is a champion of humanity against an authoritarian and arbitrary deity.

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<sup>472</sup> Steffan, *Lord Byron's Cain*, p.266.

Marchand later adds that “Lucifer is a Utilitarian”, quoting his words in 2.2.456-64 (“form an inner world”, etc).<sup>473</sup> This second comment is particularly peculiar, considering Lucifer’s attitude to humanity. The first claim, and the reference to “the champion of humanity” is very similar to a contemporary comment made by Bishop Reginald Heber:

The sarcasms of Lucifer and the murmurs of Cain are directed against Providence in general; and proceed to the subversion of every system of theology, except that (if theology it may be called) which holds out God to the abhorrence of his creatures as a capricious tyrant, and which regards the Devil (or under whatever name Lord Byron may chuse to embody the principle of resistance to the Supreme) as the champion of all which is energetic and interesting and noble; the spirit of free thought and stern endurance, unbrokenly contending against the bondage which makes nature miserable.

In one respect, Heber is precisely correct: this is the ideology which is promoted by the “sarcasms of Lucifer and the murmurs of Cain”, and the self-serving bias of that ideology is hardly surprising. In *Cain*, Lucifer represents himself as a Promethean champion, and, at least initially, Cain supports him. Heber is less accurate in saying, “Of Lucifer, as drawn by Lord Byron, we absolutely know no evil”:<sup>474</sup> in fact, quite a considerable degree of evil is evident in Lucifer’s own comments and conduct in the drama.

Comments like Heber’s may have contributed to subsequent critics associating Lucifer with Prometheus, the champion of humanity against the tyranny of the Olympian gods. A direct, contemporary connection between Prometheus and Lucifer is made in an oft-quoted letter by Thomas Moore:

Cain is wonderful – terrible – never to be forgotten. If I am not mistaken, it will sink deep into the world’s heart; and while many will shudder at its

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<sup>473</sup> Marchand, pp.86, 89

<sup>474</sup> *Quarterly Review*, July 1822, pp.514-5 (2076-7), p.516 (2077). Marjarum apparently follows Heber’s view in saying, “To Byron, the Devil had become rather the principle opposed to authoritarianism” (p.35).

blasphemy, all must fall prostrate before its grandeur. Talk of Æschylus and his Prometheus! – here is the true spirit both of the Poet – and the Devil.<sup>475</sup>

Unfortunately, the nature of the association has been assumed more than it has been interrogated, and Moore's subsequent comments on the characterization have been all too often ignored. Approximately a month and a half later, on February 9, 1822, Moore wrote to Byron,

grand as it is, I regret, for many reasons, you ever wrote it. [...] Particular sects and creeds are fair game enough for those who are anxious enough about their neighbours to meddle with them; but our faith in the Future is a treasure not so lightly to be parted with; and the dream of immortality (if the philosophers *will* have it a dream) is one that, let us hope, we shall carry into our last sleep with us.<sup>476</sup>

One of the “many reasons” for regret was most likely the necessity for Murray to go to court for protection of the copyright: this letter was written on the first day of the hearing. However, the reference to ‘those who are anxious enough about their neighbours to meddle with them’ is an unsubtle censure of satire in Byron's own vein, and it was this letter to which Byron replied, “There is nothing against the immortality of the soul in “Cain” that I recollect. I hold no such opinions”. Further, Moore noted in his journal for October 28, 1821,

dined at Holland House – company, Colonel Anson, Tierney, D. of Bedford &c. &c. – Told them about Byron's Cain – parallel with Milton – wrong for lovers of liberty to identify the principle of resistance to power with such an odious personage as the Devil[.]<sup>477</sup>

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<sup>475</sup> *The Letters of Thomas Moore*, ed. by Wilfred S Dowden, 4 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), II, 495 (30/9/21).

<sup>476</sup> *Ibid*, II, 503.

<sup>477</sup> *The Journal of Thomas Moore*, ed. by Wilfred S Dowden et al, 4 vols (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1984), II, 499.

In the context of Moore's own expressions on the topic, then, "the true spirit both of the Poet – and the Devil" appears far more likely to be a comment upon the art than the figure: Moore is not comparing Lucifer with Prometheus, a comparison which he himself denounces in his own journal, but is, instead, comparing the vividness of Byron's and Aeschylus' portraits of their respective characters.

Other contemporary reviewers compared Lucifer with Milton's Satan, as the poet himself did in his letter to Murray, although the critics' comparisons were most often to the detriment of the former.<sup>478</sup> More recently, Bernard Blackstone says, "Lucifer has much in common with Milton's Satan and is thus a type, also, of the Byronic hero."<sup>479</sup> Peter Thorslev, however, justly notes that

Lucifer is in most respects a typical Byronic hero, in his courage and in his sceptical self-assertion, but he lacks that softness, that sensibility, which the true Byronic hero is never without.<sup>480</sup>

Within Thorslev's schema of character-types, this makes Lucifer a Gothic Villain: the Byronic Hero without William Roberts' "expiatory quality" of loving devotion.

On the other side of the consideration of the Devil, Ryan has noted Lucifer's role as "an accessory to murder", and Corbett comments that

we must be careful of too easily accepting any of Lucifer's assertions. They are inconsistent and meretricious sophistries, meant to confuse rather than enlighten. Byron has no wish to present Lucifer – of all people! – as the purveyor of truth.<sup>481</sup>

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<sup>478</sup> Q.v. *European Magazine*, p.65 (988); William Roberts, *British Review*, XIX (March 1822), 72-102, RR, I, 495-510: p.96 (507); *Evangelical Magazine*, XXX (May 1822), 192-193, RR, II, 998-1000: p.192 (999).

<sup>479</sup> Blackstone, p.245.

<sup>480</sup> Thorslev, p.180.

<sup>481</sup> Corbett, p.152.

It is useful to consider that Lucifer, of all people, would have been immediately identified by Byron's audience as a villain, as the 'father of lies',<sup>482</sup> and, therefore, someone whose word was not to be trusted.<sup>483</sup> It is in this light that the text's representation of Lucifer must be considered: he does indeed present himself as the "champion of humanity" noted by Heber and Marchand, claiming to hold with Cain a sympathy of suffering under the tyranny of God; he also offers to help Cain, and says that he would be of further help to humanity if given the opportunity; most importantly, he preaches the Romantic gospel of forming an inner world to transcend the imperfections of the outer world.<sup>484</sup> None of these actions, however, is as unproblematically philanthropic and Promethean in its consequences as in its expression.<sup>485</sup>

### Sympathy

The character certainly represents himself as virtuous. One of Lucifer's most frequent claims is that of fellow-feeling with Cain and with the rest of creation, of sympathy in suffering. He quite frequently connects this suffering with the acts of the "indissoluble tyrant" (1.1.153), whom he holds responsible, as the ruler of the cosmos, for what transpires there. At other times, he focuses simply upon community with Cain. Thus, on first appearing, Lucifer says to the mortal,

I know the thoughts  
Of dust, and feel for it, and with you.  
[...]

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<sup>482</sup> John 8:44.

<sup>483</sup> Steffan and Ehrstine, in particular, too readily accept the demon's word as the message of the poem and the poet. McGann calls the Devil "a norm of value" (*Fiery Dust*, p.255).

<sup>484</sup> This last is, says Bostetter, why Lucifer "is undoubtedly speaking for Byron" ('Byron and the Politics of Paradise, p.572).

<sup>485</sup> Some critics have taken the valorisation of the Devil in the work of Shelley and Blake as cause for reading him as a hero in Byron's poetry (q.v. Shock, *passim*). However, Byron was neither Shelley nor Blake, and, as Linda M Lewis notes in *The Promethean Politics of Milton, Blake, and Shelley* (Columbia and London: University of Missouri Press, 1992), Shelley also describes Jesus of Nazareth as a "Promethean Conqueror" on line 212 of his *Hellas* (p.174). Prometheus' image in Romanticism is not simple, and his connection with Satan is not close. Further, when Shelley was blamed for encouraging the impieties in *Cain*, he responded: "I have not the smallest influence over Lord Byron in this particular; if I had I certainly should employ it to eradicate from his great mind the delusions of Christianity, which in spite of his reason seem perpetually to recur." (*The Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. Frederick L Jones, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), II, 412).



They are the thoughts of all  
Worthy of thought; – 'tis your immortal part  
Which speaks within you. (1.1.100-1, 102-4).

Within this claim of sympathy, however, is a simple dichotomy of spirit and flesh, and, particularly, a hierarchy of immortality over mortality which threatens to estrange the demonic spirit and the mortal man. This is part of Lucifer's argument throughout, his claim that Cain must transcend the weakness of his mortality so as to be as great as a spirit can be: it is the very thesis argued in vain by the spirits in *Manfred*. In the process, Lucifer is failing to accept Cain's humanity, belying the sympathy which he claims, and drawing Cain towards a cognitive dissonance which could fracture his own identity by causing him to hate his own humanity, leading him towards hating the humanity of others. This consideration then inflects, and questions, all of the Devil's further representations of fellow-feeling. Thus, when Lucifer later casts doubt upon his having been made by God, claiming instead that the seraphs who sing of this creation, "say – what they must sing and say, on pain /Of being that which I am – and thou art" (1.1.134-5), this claim of similarity between himself and Cain has already been restricted by his assertion of the hierarchy of immortal over mortal: if they are similar at all, it is only in the action of rebellion, not in their nature, as Lucifer has already stated. Further, their rebellions are not comparable: Cain is not making war against God at this time, and he never does so in the course of the drama. It should also be noted that Lucifer's claim about the angels' reason for praising God is insinuation, and not argument: he states their difference from himself as a necessity to avoid the penalty of not being as he is, a circular claim that they do what they do so as to avoid not doing it, implying that they act out of fear, and thus further implying his own, and Cain's, bravery, without ever explicitly articulating any of this or thereby rendering it arguable.

Lucifer continues his claim of sympathy with Cain in the direct assertion that God "is alone" (1.1.152), whereas

Spirits and men, at least we sympathise;  
And, suffering in concert, make our pangs,

Innumerable, more endurable,  
By the unbounded sympathy of all –  
With all! (1.1.157-61).

As Steffan notes, the “Thought for a Speech of Lucifer, in the Tragedy of Cain” in a diary entry for January of 1821 (BLJ 8.38) shows that “Byron already considered the never-ending unhappiness of mortal life as one of the ideas of the play and one of the clubs Lucifer was to use on Cain.”<sup>486</sup> By claiming sympathy in Cain’s suffering, Lucifer repeatedly reiterates, and reinforces, Cain’s unhappiness with his own situation, provoking the mortal to “rage and fury against the inadequacy of his state to his Conceptions”: his sympathy is far from disinterested.

Another of Lucifer’s claims is that of a willingness to help Cain in particular and humanity in general. In this, the Devil bestows upon himself the Promethean role of defender of humanity. In fact, a consideration of the development of Lucifer’s early dialogue with Cain reveals an interesting aspect of the former’s character, namely his remarkably adept sales technique. He introduces himself to his prospect, Cain, with flattery (1.1.102-3), appealing to Cain’s pride from the outset. Shortly afterwards, Lucifer claims sympathy with Cain and others (1.1.160-1), and contrasts this with allegations of the solitude of God (1.1.151): he is attempting to forge group unity of the anti-God faction, both by common feeling and by common opposition. He then proceeds to flatter the prospect again (1.1.192-3). His next step is to arraign the conduct of God, his absent competitor, by contrasting God’s conduct with a promise about his own hypothetical conduct in the same situation, a promise which he is in no danger of ever needing to fulfil (“I would have made ye /Gods”, 1.1.202-3). This process is repeated only moments later, to reinforce the contrast:

who is the demon? He  
Who would not let ye live, or he who would  
Have made ye live for ever in the joy  
And power of knowledge? (1.1.207-10).

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<sup>486</sup> Steffan, *Lord Byron’s Cain*, p.4.

The following step is a promise of what he can still do for Cain, in the offer of the prize, or, rather, the bait: knowledge (1.1.212). Having thus buttered up his prospect, having claimed solidarity against his enemy, and having laid the bait, he then proclaims his own disinterestedness whilst again flattering his prospect, implicitly denying any personal advantage in the affair and representing himself as being bound by honour: “we, who see the truth, must speak it” (1.1.240).

At this point, he refers to the prospect’s lack of the prize, the bait, in an off-hand manner (“I speak of what thou know’st not, /With all thy knowledge”, 1.1.245), avoiding the appearance of mocking Cain’s misfortune whilst simultaneously reiterating that misfortune, and implicitly reminding Cain of his own claimed ability to fulfil that need. This brings Cain to his declaration of unending desire, at which point the deal could reasonably be closed:

CAIN:	But thou canst not
	Speak aught of Knowledge which I would not know,
	And do not thirst to know, and bear a mind
	To know. (1.1.246-9).

Lucifer, however, has another aim beyond bringing knowledge to Cain, and so he does not close the deal here, although he does maintain the form of it. When Cain starts to move away from the desire for the prize, Lucifer plays upon his pride to call him back, describing Cain’s wish that he had never been born as “a grov’ling wish, /Less than thy father’s, for he wish’d to know” (1.1.292-93). After a brief interlude into an unsuccessful attempt upon what is quite possibly his own true prize, Cain’s vow of allegiance, he enjoins Cain to accompany him to view the product (1.1.322-23). Unfortunately, the prospect raises an objection relating to a previous engagement with the Devil’s competitor (1.1.323-6). Lucifer overcomes that final obstacle by reflecting back the prospect’s own previous expression of antipathy towards his competitor (“Saidst thou not /Thou ne’er hadst bent to him who made thee?”, 1.1.326-7), and then repeats his invitation (1.1.334).

The prospect's partner enters, and threatens to spoil the whole deal. Lucifer repeats the offer to the prospect while advising against allowing the potentially meddling partner to participate (1.1.345-8), and then, in the course of his discussions with the prospect's partner, again adverts to the product as valuable (1.1.393-5). He converses politely with her, avoiding any offence to his prospect, while repeatedly eliciting the prospect's previously-expressed dissatisfaction with his competitor:

ADAH:	Omnipotence Must be all goodness.
LUCIFER:	Was it so in Eden? [...]
ADAH:	The seraphs <i>love most</i> – cherubim <i>know most</i> – And this should be a cherub – since he loves not.
LUCIFER:	And if the higher knowledge quenches love, What must <i>he be</i> you cannot love when known? [...]
ADAH:	Are you of heaven?
LUCIFER:	If I am not, inquire The cause of this all-spreading happiness (Which you proclaim) (1.1.390-1, 421-4, 485-87).

Adah here demonstrates a knowledge of the spiritual realm, as she does in saying that the spirits above the archangels are “not blessed” (1.1.419). This is a knowledge of which Cain shows no sign. It is also a knowledge which raises a question about Lucifer's own position: if the cherubim know most, and the majority of the cherubim are with God, he ought to be concerned about what the others know which he does not. His purpose here, however, is seduction, and so he simply goes on with his plan, interweaving with the elicitation of dissatisfaction the issuing of statements about his competitor's alleged failings and the foolishness of those who chose him:

LUCIFER:	Higher things than ye are slaves: and higher Than them or ye would be so, did they not Prefer an independency of torture
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To the smooth agonies of adulation

[...]

Since the all-knowing cherubim love least,

The seraphs' love can be but ignorance

[...]

your sire hath chosen already;

His worship is but fear.

[...]

ADAH: To me my solitude seems sin; unless

When I think how soon I shall see my brother,

His brother, and our children, and our parents.

LUCIFER: Yet thy God is alone; and is he happy?

Lonely, and good?

[...]

this all-spreading happiness

(Which you proclaim) of the all-great and good

Maker of life and living things; it is

His secret, and he keeps it. (1.1.383-6, 425-6, 430-1, 474-8, 486-9).

He eventually ends with his final reiteration of the offer (1.1.556-60). The entirety of Lucifer's interaction with Cain in the first scene is a carefully-crafted seduction, not an honest and open presentation of a gift which will be of benefit to the mortal. As in commercial interactions, this is a deal which will cost the prospect more than it will cost the vendor.

### **Romantic Advice**

The Devil does, however, freely give the mortal something. The passages typically cited to demonstrate that Lucifer is a Promethean champion are 1.1.210ff and 2.2.459ff, both of which present solipsistic-Romantic advice from the Devil on how to remain 'free'. These speeches can seem to be the strongest evidence for Byron's partiality to Lucifer, owing to the appearance of similar advice in other works by the

poet: the assumption is that the character who repeats what the poet says elsewhere must be the character who presents the poet's own viewpoint. What the Devil says, however, has a crucial bias. In the first such passage, the mortal expresses the wish that his parents had taken also the fruit from the tree of life,<sup>487</sup> an event which Lucifer claims can be replicated

By being  
Yourselves, in your resistance. Nothing can  
Quench the mind, if the mind will be itself  
And centre of surrounding things – 'tis made  
To sway. (1.1.212-6).

The basis of the claim is not merely resistance, but dominance, "sway", and so it is hardly innocent: Lucifer is promoting the tyranny of which he accuses God. Further, the advice is transparently false: a resistant mind will not grant eternal life, and Lucifer himself has already contradicted this in referring to Cain's "immortal part" (1.1.103), by stating, in response to Cain's expressed fear of death, "thou shalt live" (1.1.109), and by then repeating, "Thou livest and must live for ever" (1.1.116). If Cain is already immortal, he needs none of the Devil's advocated resistance in order to be immortal. The advice stands, nonetheless, as a promotion of reliance upon the mind, and this reliance is repeated in Lucifer's parting words to Cain:

*One good gift has the fatal apple given, –*  
*Your reason: – let it not be over-sway'd*  
*By tyrannous threats to force you into faith*  
*'Gainst all external sense and inward feeling:*  
*Think and endure, – and form an inner world*  
*In your own bosom – where the outward fails;*  
*So shall you nearer be the spiritual*

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<sup>487</sup> William Harness objects to Byron's theology here on the basis that eating the other fruit would be irrelevant as Adam and Eve would already have eaten the fruit freely (see Galignani Edition, p.603), but the poet is biblically correct: in Genesis 3:22, God expels the man from the Garden "lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever", implying that a post-Fall consumption of the other fruit would have reinstated the lost immortality.

Nature, and war triumphant with your own. (2.2.459-66).

In both cases, the advice to form an inner world is not given to improve the human condition, but to strengthen it in its “resistance” against “tyrannous threats”: the motivation is entirely negative. Given Lucifer’s expressed “irrevocable hate” (2.2.442) and his description of God as an “indissoluble tyrant” (1.1.153), it is not difficult to see against whom this resistance is to be directed. The Romantic advice is blended with Satanic propaganda.

### **Lies and Contradictions**

Throughout the drama, a series of inverse parallels throws doubt upon Lucifer’s veracity. As a minor example, just before taking her husband away, the Devil twice tells Adah that Cain shall be returned to her in an hour (1.1.527, 34), supporting each claim by the assertion of his own ability to make this happen (1.1.531-3, 535-8). Cain returns after two hours (3.1.53-4).

More significantly, Lucifer claims to “know all things” (1.1.300), and thus to be able to provide what Cain seeks, and yet says this only shortly after confessing his own ignorance: when Cain asks whether he will be conscious of being ‘resolved into the earth’ after his death, Lucifer replies, “As I know not death, /I cannot answer” (1.1.289-90). Of course, as the *Leeds Correspondent* paraphrases John 8:44, “the Devil is the father of lies, and the truth is not in him”: this was a factor which Byron could reasonably expect his audience to read into Lucifer’s arguments, Lucifer’s representations of God, and Lucifer’s inconsistencies.<sup>488</sup> Lucifer’s repeated statement that Cain will not die (1.1.110, 116), including his claimed knowledge of the post-mortem state in saying to Cain, “thou wilt be /No less than thou art now” (1.1.118-9), is incompatible with his professed ignorance of death.

Further, after Cain asks whether the stars will die, Lucifer merely responds, “Perhaps” (1.1.282), not an answer normally used by someone who has the certainty of

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<sup>488</sup> *Leeds Correspondent*, IV, March 1822, 5-21, April 1822, 110-116, in RR, III, 1256-67: p.114 (1267). Unfortunately, the reviewer reads it as evidence of the meretriciousness of the poem and the poet, rather than of the character.

knowledge. When Cain has said that he has never bowed to God, Lucifer asks him whether this is so, and Cain returns, “Could not thy mighty knowledge teach thee that?” (1.1.315). This also Lucifer does not answer.

Throughout the first two acts, unanswered questions cast Lucifer’s claims and intentions into doubt, and a pattern of inverted parallel expressions undermines and contradicts his claims, damaging his reliability as a witness against God.

Another aspect of the Devil’s veracity concerns the association between himself and the Serpent in the Garden. His own words reject the identification of the two, and the Preface notes that Genesis does not connect them (McGann 6.229.50-53), but this rejection is called into question by the structure of the drama’s discourse, as is Lucifer’s claimed sympathy with humanity.

As noted above, Lucifer’s attempted disassociation from the snake drew some vigorous comment from contemporary critics, who saw the separation as an attack upon the Bible. Nonetheless, in the course of the drama, the Devil and the Serpent are demonstrated to have a great deal in common, despite assertions such as the following:

LUCIFER:	The snake <i>was</i> the snake –
	No more
	[...]
	I tell thee that the Serpent was no more
	Than a mere serpent (1.1.222-3, 231-2).

He goes on to say that future ages might “attribute /To me a shape I scorn” (1.1.236-7), further distancing himself from the reptile. The *British Critic* responded to the character’s assertion with the claim that poet “says that which every child of fourteen, who can read and is not an idiot, will tell him confidently is not the case”. In the course of two entire pages on the topic, it argues that, because serpents cannot speak and Genesis never says that they ever could, and because God would not enter into one to tempt humans to sin, only the Devil can have been responsible for the serpent’s



actions.<sup>489</sup> It appears, however, that the basis of all of this argumentation lies rather in the assertion that “Lord B. has of his own accord laboured through thick and thin to exculpate the character of Lucifer or Satan, from the imputations of Scripture”. Like the *Eclectic Review*’s claim that “Byron disbelieves the whole Scripture narrative”, this claim depends upon a literal reading of the entire Bible as a single, unified discourse. Byron’s prefatory comment does not contradict the whole Bible: it validates the Genesis account, but contradicts Revelation 12:9 and 20:2, the only verses which explicitly identify the serpent with Satan. In essence, the issue is the very narrow one of Biblical literalism: only if the entirety of the Bible is to be taken as absolutely literal does Revelation need to be thus read back into Genesis. This position was thoroughly disputed by devout Christians in Byron’s day, just as it is now, but these conservative reviewers are simply eliding the variance of opinion. The poet, demonstrating a consciousness of the heterogeneity of belief which the conservative reviewers chose to ignore, is recorded by Kennedy as discoursing upon

the stories in the Old Testament, which many who call themselves Christians reject. [...] the history of the creation and the fall is, by many doctors of the Church, believed to be a mythos, or at least an allegory.<sup>490</sup>

The contemporary reviewers were apparently attempting to proclaim their own view as the only one, in the essentially political act of propagating a monological discourse and writing divergence out of existence.<sup>491</sup> In the process, they failed to read the text with due care.

Returning to the claims of the characters, when Cain bemoans his fate as a result of the forbidden fruit, Lucifer replies, “They have deceived thee; thou shalt live” (1.1.109). This exchange is a paraphrase of that between Eve and the Serpent: when

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<sup>489</sup> *British Critic*, 2nd series, XVII (May 1822), 520-40, RR, I, 310-20, pp.531-2.

<sup>490</sup> James Kennedy, *Conversations on Religion, with Lord Byron and others* (Philadelphia: Carey & Lee, 1833), p.81. Byron was correct: Origen and Augustine, for example, read the Genesis account in both allegorical and literal ways.

<sup>491</sup> Schock’s peculiar assertion that “removing the figure of Satan from the temptation of Eve implicitly causes the whole machinery of Fall, Atonement, and Redemption to collapse” (p.104) is simply incorrect: the doctrines of the Fall, the Atonement, and the Redemption only require a human to commit a sin, with no necessity for any tempter at all, let alone any specific tempter, hence the consistent focus in the Bible upon human responsibility for the choice to sin. Q.v. Romans 3-5.

she says that God has told them that eating the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil will bring their deaths, the Serpent replies, “Ye shall not surely die” (Gen 3:3-4). The human’s claim is the same in both cases, as is the other’s contradiction. Another connection appears in Lucifer’s own disclaiming association with the serpent. When alone with Cain, Lucifer admits that he does not act for humanity’s benefit:

there

Are some things still which woman may tempt man to,  
And man tempt woman: – let thy sons look to it!  
My counsel is a kind one; for ’tis even  
Given chiefly at my own expense; ’tis true,  
'Twill not be followed, so there’s little lost. (2.2.209-14).

His intent to harm is demonstrated by the fact that the warning against temptation is given at his own expense. This is not his first admission of such activity: he earlier replies to Cain’s saying, “I rather would consort with spirits”, with

LUCIFER:           And hadst thou not been fit by thine own soul  
For such companionship, I would not now  
Have stood before thee as I am: a serpent  
Had been enough to charm ye, as before.

CAIN:                Ah! didst *thou* tempt my mother?

LUCIFER:    I tempt none,  
Save with the truth (1.1.192-7).

The admission comes via the rhetorical trick of admitting a minor vice to assert a greater virtue (paromologia), trying to cast even his tempting as good. Nonetheless, the statement that “a serpent /Had been enough to charm ye” (1.1.195) implies both a collusion between the serpent and the devil and also a purpose in the manipulative act of ‘charming’ Cain.<sup>492</sup> This, perhaps, explains why Lucifer is so enthusiastic to

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<sup>492</sup> He asks, earlier, why spirits would have any purpose in tempting mortals (1.1.242), after having already admitted that he does this himself (1.1.197), and raising the question of his own motivation in

defend the 'shape he scorns': when Cain says that Lucifer "speaks like /A god", and Adah responds, "So did the Serpent, and it lied", Lucifer objects,

Thou errest, Adah! – was not the Tree that  
Of Knowledge?

[...]

he lied not:

And if he did betray you, 'twas with Truth (1.1.350-3, 4-5).

Not only does Lucifer defend the serpent's honesty, but he does so in terms which directly parallel his description of his own activities: as he himself only tempts with the truth, or so he claims, the serpent betrayed only with the truth. A betrayal with truth is a betrayal none the less. Once more, Adah says to Lucifer, "thou art fairer /Than was the serpent, and as false" and Lucifer replies, "As true" (1.1.392-3), again linking himself with it. Of course, if the serpent is false, and Lucifer is as true, then he is still dishonest: his comparison states only that they are alike, not that either is honest.

The two also provide knowledge with the same effects. Just as Lucifer provides Cain with knowledge so that the man will "know mortal nature's nothingness" (2.2.422), and be both depressed by and convinced of the hierarchy of spirit over flesh which Lucifer asserts from the beginning, Lucifer describes the Serpent as being "*more in wisdom*" than the mortals, as he "foreknew /The knowledge fatal to their narrow joys" (1.1.226-7). What Cain never stops to consider is that the prize with which Lucifer tempts him was the very prize for which Adam and Eve lost the place in Eden which Cain bemoans. When Lucifer says, "that grief is knowledge" (1.1.354), he may as well have said, in Manfred's vein, that knowledge is grief, the very idea which Adah approaches in her recognition that "all we know of it has gather'd /Evil on ill" (1.1.357-8).

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visiting Cain. The answer might well be such as that in the extracanonical *Vita Adae et Euae* [first century BCE/CE], which presents Satan, like the *Qu'ran* does, as being incensed by God's command to bow to humanity (xii-xvi).

These exchanges, along with the reference to the angels being in sight as Lucifer talks to them just as they were in sight when the Serpent spoke to Eve (1.1.555-7), present a consistent association of the two within the text, as, indeed, does the doubled disclaimer of the preface.<sup>493</sup> Byron ‘supports’ the disassociation by citing Bishop Watson, claiming a *sola scriptura* position, but, as E. H. Coleridge notes, “It may be conceived that Watson’s appeal to “Scripture” was against the sentence of orthodoxy.”<sup>494</sup> Interestingly, the text never explicitly defines the connection between Devil and Serpent: it neither takes the orthodox approach of identifying the one with the other, nor the unorthodox approach of firmly discriminating between them. Instead the problem, like the world of *Manfred*, is displaced outside of the simple dichotomy of orthodoxy and unorthodoxy. The poet is creating a new space for belief, outside of the old rules.

Even if Lucifer is being honest when he claims that he was not personally involved in the Serpent’s action, he most probably colluded with the Serpent to ‘charm’ Eve into the first Fall. He thus fulfils his traditional role as ‘the enemy to human happiness’. Following that incident, the humans evidently became wary of the Serpent: Adam describes Cain’s suggestion of defying God as “Serpent’s words” (1.1.35). This wariness would make it necessary for Lucifer to tempt Cain in person, rather than relying again upon a minion or ally.

### **Cowardice, and Sympathy Flawed**

As Lucifer’s own words undermine his claimed difference from the Serpent, they also undermine his claimed sympathy with humanity. The character of the Devil proves to be less than that of a champion, let alone a Promethean champion, and his attachment to humanity is not demonstrated as matching his claims.

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<sup>493</sup> James Kennedy records Byron having raised the fact that Genesis does not mention the Serpent being the Devil, but Kennedy’s account gives no useful guide as to whether Byron is asserting something which he himself believes, or whether he is just looking for a reaction (p37).

<sup>494</sup> Coleridge 5.208n2; Coleridge notes, with a reference to the *Anecdotes of the Life of Richard Watson*, 1817, p.39, that Watson placed his reading of the Bible above his adherence to Church of England doctrine.

The Devil demonstrates a habit of fleeing arguments which turn against him. In addition to the above instances in his dialogues with Cain, he does this in dialogue with Adah. While she is initially overawed by him, and says, "I cannot answer this immortal thing" (1.1.406), she learns to do so, and she repeatedly questions his claims. Eventually, Lucifer asserts that it is the commensurability of his power and God's which allows him to be there:

LUCIFER:   I do divide  
*His*, and possess a kingdom which is not  
*His*. If I were not that which I have said,  
Could I stand here? His angels are within  
Your vision.

ADAH:   So they were when the fair serpent  
Spoke with our mother first. (1.1.552-7).

Lucifer has no reply to this riposte, and, instead, turns and urges Cain again to follow him, promising the knowledge which the human seeks. This is enough to cause Cain to follow him, but he starts to lose his hold on Cain when the mortal comes to understand that the claimed sympathy does not exist.

The dichotomy of spirit and dust established in his dialogue with Cain removes some of the commonality between the Devil and the mortal, but other actions remove yet more. Describing beauty as an illusion of distance (2.2.252-4), and repeatedly denouncing any disagreement with this claim as "delusion" (2.2.252, 272), Lucifer dismisses Cain's feelings for Adah. When the human replies that Lucifer does not understand because he is not her brother, the fallen angel, apparently stung in his pride, retorts, "Mortal! /My brotherhood's with those who have no children" (2.2.273-4). After the mortal points out the obvious logical consequence, "Then thou canst have no fellowship with us" (2.2.275), Lucifer's only response is the weak, unsupported claim that "It may be that thine own shall be for me" (2.2.276). Lucifer later continues his attack upon the value of Cain's affection for Adah, saying, "I pity thee who lovest what must perish", and the mortal responds, "And I thee who lov'st nothing" (2.2.337, 338). At this point, the Devil steers the conversation away from a

topic in which he is only losing ground, but the dialogue has already made clear the fact that a gulf yawns between these two characters, because the demon is evidently unable either to love or to comprehend love. He is utterly devoid of the Byronic Hero's "expiatory quality".

As his claim of sympathy is evidently Cain's primary reason for trusting him, the revelation of the incommensurable difference between them causes a distinct alteration in their relationship. With the demon's attempted rapprochement crippled, the mortal becomes more demanding, and more critical, and is eventually able to turn his critical gaze upon his correspondent:

CAIN: But one of you makes evil.

LUCIFER: Which?

CAIN: Thou! for

If thou canst do man good, why dost thou not? (2.2.393-4).

Cain, unfortunately, does not pursue his own realization here. Once more, the devil's response is weak, only claiming that God should do something because God made humanity. He fails to address the moral implications of his own unwillingness to help, he belies his earlier offers of the assistance which, in God's place, he would have given (namely making humanity into immortal gods, living "for ever in the joy / And power of knowledge" (1.1.209-10)), and thus he thoroughly destroys any claim to being a Promethean champion of humanity. Shortly afterwards, Lucifer returns Cain to Earth and then disappears.

### **Demand for Worship**

One of the most important aspects of Lucifer's behaviour, however, is a parallel which the drama constructs between his own behaviour and his representation of God's behaviour. The comparison is made in part by Lucifer himself, in his claims about what he would have done in God's place (1.1.202-3, 207-10), and appears further through his repeatedly asking the mortal to follow him in the first act. In doing this, he is, of course, asking Cain to take his side against God: this is a partisan,

political act. It becomes most sinister shortly after Adah's appearance, when she invites the apparent angel to be their guest, and her husband repeats the question:

CAIN:                                     Wilt thou?  
LUCIFER:                                     I ask  
  Thee to be mine. (1.1.345-6).

On the surface, Lucifer is merely asking Cain to be his guest, but he is also asking Cain to belong to him, to be entirely his. This follows at a little distance his demand for Cain to worship him. This is a 'demand', and not merely a 'request', because he makes it the "one condition" of imparting his knowledge to the mortal (1.1.302). This conditionality further underlines the fact that the proffered knowledge is not a gift, but an offer of exchange, and the price is rather high:

CAIN:                     Wilt thou teach me all?  
LUCIFER:                 Aye, upon one condition.  
CAIN:                                     Name it.  
LUCIFER:                                     That  
  Thou dost fall down and worship me – thy Lord.  
  [...]  
CAIN:                                     I never  
  As yet have bowed unto my father's God.  
  Although my brother Abel oft implores  
  That I would join with him in sacrifice: –  
  Why should I bow to thee?  
LUCIFER:                                     Hast thou ne'er bowed  
  To him?  
CAIN:                                     Have I not said it? – need I say it?  
  Could not thy mighty knowledge teach thee that?  
LUCIFER:                                     He who bows not to him has bowed to me!  
CAIN:                                     But I will bend to neither.  
LUCIFER:                                     Ne'er the less,  
  Thou art my worshipper; not worshipping

Him makes thee mine the same. (1.1.301-3, 310-20).

This is far more determined than Lucifer's asking Adah why she will not adore the morning star, which is, as Steffan notes, Lucifer's own (1.1.494-502),<sup>495</sup> and the sharp dichotomy expressed in the final sentence ought to have pleased the partisan, conservative critics, but there is more at work here. Significantly, Cain's statement that he has never bowed to God (1.1.310-11) comes many lines after the Devil's demand for worship (1.1.303), and so, by the point at which Lucifer once more backs down and claims that it is all the same, Cain has had considerable opportunity to perform the act of worship and has shown no inclination to do so. Lucifer is abandoning a lost cause, albeit only temporarily: he soon asks Cain to place faith in him (2.1.3), contradicting his claim that Cain is already his.

More critically, in claiming that Cain's not worshipping God makes the mortal Lucifer's, the Devil is representing a zero-sum world in which no independence, no freedom is permitted: by claiming as his own anyone who does not worship God, Lucifer forecloses upon any possibility of actual independence, leaving Cain only the choices of being God's creature or his. This refutes his later statement regarding freedom of allegiance:

Believe – and sink not! doubt – and perish! thus

Would run the edict of the other God,

[...]

I will have none such

[...]

*I will not say*

Believe in *me*, as a conditional creed

To save thee (2.1.5-6, 12, 20-2).

Lucifer has already attempted to make worship a condition of the knowledge for which Cain is desperate, and does not permit Cain to simply be Cain's: Lucifer neither

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<sup>495</sup> Steffan, *Lord Byron's Cain*, p.55.





following him will prevent Adah's tears, when Lucifer never demonstrates any such intention. The Devil wants a follower, not a companion.

## Evil

A further issue of significance as regards Lucifer's character is Bishop Heber's comment that "we absolutely know no evil" of Lucifer. That he is selfish, self-contradictory, and controlling is not enough to damn him, of course. Neither is the fact that he is engaged in perpetual war with the individual whom he describes as a tyrant. It is, however, pertinent that he approves Cain's cursing of his own father:

CAIN: Cursed he not me in giving me my birth?

Cursed he not me before my birth, in daring

To pluck the fruit forbidden?

LUCIFER: Thou say'st well (2.2.23-5).

Such an action is a capital crime in Mosaic Law,<sup>496</sup> and so Lucifer's approval of it here is in direct contravention of Sacred Writ and thus of Georgian cultural norms. Further, this devil is not above being judgemental. Eventually, he says to Cain, "thou art evil" (2.2.220). As Byron says, "the object of the demon is to *depress* him", not to assist him. This is the same letter in which Byron says, "& the sillier Satan is made the safer for every body" (BLJ 9.53), a comment which makes little sense if Byron intended the Devil as a serious mouthpiece for heretical views, as Bostetter claims. As Chew notes, Lucifer, like Milton's Satan, aims "to invade the realm of good and to form a league with mankind, or, if that be impossible, to snare him into evil".<sup>497</sup>

The demon's intentions are also apparent when he steers the conversation towards Abel, away from the issue of himself not loving anyone. He starts by saying, "Thy father loves him well – so does thy God" (2.2.340); when Cain replies, "And so do I", Lucifer snidely comments, "'Tis well and meekly done" (2.2.341), which draws a reaction of surprise, and probably displeasure, from Cain, who exclaims, "Meekly!"

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<sup>496</sup> Exodus 21:17, although that, of course, post-dates Cain in the Torah narrative.

<sup>497</sup> Chew, p.124.

(2.2.342). Cain is not disturbed by identifying Abel as being loved by his father and his God, but he is by the idea that his own love might be the very obedience against which he rebels. Lucifer proceeds to describe Abel as being Eve's favourite, as having Adam's favour, and then as having God's (2.2.343, 45, 49). He moves on, then, to Abel's sacrifices, eventually making Cain agitated (2.2.355-6). He returns to this topic again, shortly afterwards: when Cain asks him about his relationship with Jehovah, he does not answer, responding only by asking about Cain's relationship with Abel (2.2.383). Lucifer consistently constructs a connection between Jehovah and Abel, a connection which apparently leads to the murder. Again, Byron writes that Cain's action is born out of "rage and fury [...] which discharges itself rather against Life – and the author of Life – than the mere living" (BLJ 9.53). In striking down Abel, Cain is actually striking blindly at Jehovah, which accomplishes the Devil's purposes: Lucifer is, as Ryan notes, an accessory to murder, a figure of evil.

### Not Byronic Heroes

With Byron's established pattern of villain-heroes, dating back to the first volume of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* in 1812, his contemporary audience could expect to encounter another figure whose only redeeming grace is his desperate devotion to some pretty woman. The loveless Lucifer is no such figure, as Thorslev notes; Cain comes close to being this, although his devotion is far less desperate than it ought to be. For example, in an exchange in space with Lucifer, Cain reveals that Adah is not his first concern:

LUCIFER:                    what doth  
                                  Sit next thy heart?

CAIN:                         The things I see.

LUCIFER:                         But what  
                                  Sate nearest it?

CAIN:                         The things I have not seen,  
                                  Nor ever shall – the mysteries of death. (2.1.137-40).

Cain's primary interest is the satisfaction of his own curiosity. Consequently, in his desire to view the homes of "the *two Principles*", Cain is prepared to perish merely to satisfy this curiosity, leaving Adah, Enoch, and their mysteriously-unnamed daughter bereft (2.2.404, 7, 8). He also asks Lucifer to let him perish in the abyss of space so that he might not have more descendants and thus 'propagate death' (2.1.68, 76), although this wish could likewise be accomplished by choosing to have no more children while yet remaining with Adah. Once more, he urges Lucifer to leave him in Hades because he is sick of the world (2.2.106). What he leaves behind implicitly includes Adah, but he says, "I am sick of all /That dust has shown me" (2.2.108-9).<sup>498</sup> Cain's love is not great, and is subordinated to his quest for knowledge, and so he leaves Adah to accompany Lucifer at the end of the first act. Cain is no Byronic Hero.

### **Romantic Advice Flawed**

Lucifer is not a Promethean champion of humanity. His claimed sympathy is a falsity, and his offers of help not only prove to be given in his own interest, but to be actually against Cain's interest. He is dishonest, cowardly, domineering, and involved in evil schemes. The character of the Devil is demonstrated by the drama as being diabolical. It becomes necessary, then, to question the possible purpose of using Lucifer as the provider of the seemingly-Romantic advice to form an inner world. Given that the drama so consistently gives reason to doubt Lucifer's claims, why should a claim apparently so dear to the poet's heart be issued from his mouth?

To answer this question, it is useful to consider once more the passages of Romantic advice, and to compare them with other such passages in Byron's work by this time. Here, then, are the two passages of advice by Lucifer, speaking to Cain:

By being  
Yourselves, in your resistance. Nothing can  
Quench the mind, if the mind will be itself  
And centre of surrounding things – 'tis made

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<sup>498</sup> Cain self-identifies as "dust" from 1.1.100, where he first meets Lucifer.

To sway. (1.1.212-6).

*One good* gift has the fatal apple given, –  
Your *reason*: – let it not be over-sway'd  
By tyrannous threats to force you into faith  
'Gainst all external sense and inward feeling:  
Think and endure, – and form an inner world  
In your own bosom – where the outward fails;  
So shall you nearer be the spiritual  
Nature, and war triumphant with your own. (2.2.459-66).

As discussed, there is an evident political motivation to these speeches, and a further crucial consideration in Lucifer's advice is that it comes from someone who is not himself happy (1.1.122), and, therefore, can hardly be relied upon to bring happiness. Further, both of his exhortations concentrate particularly upon the mind: the earlier quotation refers directly to the mind, while the latter refers to "reason" and to 'thinking'. The mind is represented as the site of resistance to God. Lucifer is also the one who constantly promotes knowledge, the comprehension of the ontic world, and reason, which builds upon that comprehension: this stands in contrast to the Romantic pursuit of the inner world of the imagination. Therefore, Lucifer is arguing from a perspective of Rationalism, and is omitting the Sensibility aspect of Romanticism. This is not all that he omits. A usual first point of comparison is a speech delivered by Manfred to the Spirit which comes to claim him, from mortal to immortal:

The mind which is immortal makes itself  
Requital for its good or evil thoughts, –  
Is its own origin of ill and end –  
And its own place and time: its innate sense,  
When stripp'd of this mortality, derives  
No colour from the fleeting things without,  
But is absorb'd in sufferance or in joy,  
Born from the knowledge of its own desert. (M 3.4.129-36).

The immediately evident difference between Manfred's representation and Lucifer's is that Manfred's represents the mind as capable of an independence which can be either beneficial or detrimental, providing itself requital for its own "good or evil". In stark contrast, Lucifer oversimplifies so as to misrepresent the mind as the origin only of good. Another aspect becomes visible when his advice is compared with a comment in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*:

The beings of the mind are not of clay;  
Essentially immortal, they create  
And multiply in us a brighter ray  
And more beloved existence: that which Fate  
Prohibits to dull life (CHP 4.5.37-41).

This representation of Romantic imaginative anagoge is wholly positive, but it contains an element which Lucifer omits: love. It is unsurprising that Lucifer omits love, being without that quality himself. He is, as Anne K Mellor says, "unfeeling thought".<sup>499</sup> Adah notes this, and Lucifer then demonstrates the accuracy of her judgement by his response:

ADAH: I have heard it said,  
The seraphs *love most* – cherubim *know most* –  
And this should be a cherub – since he loves not.  
LUCIFER: And if the higher knowledge quenches love,  
What must *he be* you cannot love when known?  
Since the all-knowing cherubim love least,  
The seraphs' love can be but ignorance:  
That they are not compatible, the doom  
Of thy fond parents, for their daring, proves.  
Choose betwixt love and knowledge – since there is  
No other choice (1.1.420-30).

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<sup>499</sup> Mellor, *English Romantic Irony* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1980), p.39.

The dichotomy between love and knowledge is explicitly constructed by Lucifer in his comment here. Knowledge, of course, is the bait with which Lucifer tempts Cain away from Adah, while love is Adah's counterclaim for Cain's attentions. As Caroline Franklin has commented, Adah "functions, in the structure of the play, as the antithesis of the evil spirit."<sup>500</sup> Thus also Lancelot Shadwell, John Murray's lawyer, in his application for an injunction to protect Murray's copyright, claimed that

the poet puts passages into his [Cain's] mouth, which of themselves are blasphemous and impious; yet it is what Milton has done also, both in his *Paradise Lost*, and *Regained*. But those passages are powerfully combated by the beautiful arguments of his wife, Adah.<sup>501</sup>

## **Adah**

Many critics have not read Adah as being any competition to Lucifer. Thus, the *Investigator* derides the "feeble declarations of the women" against the Devil's sophistry.<sup>502</sup> Other contemporary critics praised Adah's 'feminine virtues',<sup>503</sup> as did Victorian critics.<sup>504</sup> Many more-recent critics simply ignore or disparage her: William H Marshall dismisses her as essentially "uncomprehending."<sup>505</sup> Similarly, Franklin says that she is "All heart and no intellect".<sup>506</sup>

That Adah says, "I cannot answer this immortal thing /Which stands before me" (1.1.406-7) has been taken by some critics as evidence of her incapacity, and yet she frequently does manage to present the immortal with arguments which he cannot answer, such as when she refutes his claim that his mere presence is proof of his equality with God (1.1.552-7). It is Adah who first perceives the threat which Lucifer represents, and also Adah who first notices that Lucifer does not love (1.1.422, cf.

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<sup>500</sup> Franklin, p.233.

<sup>501</sup> Galignani Edn, p.597.

<sup>502</sup> *Investigator*, October 1822, pp. 352-3 (1190).

<sup>503</sup> Q.v. *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* p.216 (184); Francis Jeffrey, *Edinburgh Review* p.67 (990).

<sup>504</sup> Q.v. Steffan, pp.425, 439-41, 447-8, 451-52.

<sup>505</sup> Marshall, *The Structure of Byron's Major Poems* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1962), p.144.

<sup>506</sup> Franklin, p.237.

Cain's eventual realization by 2.2.348). Cain says that Adah does not understand him (1.1.188-9), but, as he never proves himself smarter, her inability to understand him is quite possibly due to the difference in temperament, not intellect.

Adah's virtues have long been overlooked: she is brave, intelligent, and wise. Shortly after meeting Lucifer, when Adah sees that he wants to take her beloved Cain away from her, she is courageous enough to challenge the immortal, and demands, "Who /Art thou that steppest between heart and heart?" (1.1.348-9), presenting an implicit ideology of love as a right and representing Lucifer as a transgressor. This occurs only four lines after she has welcomed him to be their guest: Adah is quick to apprehend the danger represented by the Devil. In fact, as Corbett notes,

her misgiving [about Lucifer] is a subtle commentary upon Cain's gullibility. He who could never 'reconcile' what he saw with what he heard believes, unquestioningly, that this insidious and pervasive spirit speaks like the God he has neither seen nor heard.<sup>507</sup>

When Lucifer rebukes her for accusing the serpent of lying, and validates the knowledge bestowed by the Tree because "truth in its own essence cannot be /But good" (1.1.356-7), eliding the manifold ends to which truth can be used, Adah immediately demolishes his empty sophistry with the declaration that "all we know of it has gather'd /Evil on ill" (1.1.357-8), highlighting some of those results.

Adah asks Cain to remain with her because she loves him, and so Lucifer asks, "More than thy mother and thy sire?", to which she responds with no hesitation, "I do. Is that a sin, too?" (1.1.362-4). In so doing, she is challenging Lucifer to judge her, but the Devil turns instead to claiming that a woman's romantic love for a brother will "one day" be a sin (1.1.364). He then says that it is not currently a sin for her, and so she asks,

What is the sin which is not

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<sup>507</sup> Corbett, pp.153-4.



Sin in itself? Can circumstance make sin  
Or virtue? (1.1.380-2).

This is not a naïve question, but a serious theological consideration which is very important to their entire situation: their exile from Eden, and the impending doom of death, is a result of Adam and Eve's sin, which makes the precise nature of sin crucial to their plight. *Cain* dances around Socrates' questions to Euthyphro, as to the nature of impiety and the nature of divine righteousness: specifically, whether the gods do something because it is good, or whether it is good because the gods do it.<sup>508</sup> Like Socrates, Adah is questioning in this exchange the precise nature of impiety. Lucifer presents his answer to this question, in saying to Cain, "Evil and good are things in their own essence, /And not made good or evil by the giver" (2.2.452-3). This is much the same as his earlier comment about "truth in its own essence", but, this time, Cain has not Adah there to point out the flaw: something like knowledge, which may appear to be good, can have evil results under certain conditions, especially when provided by an evil being for an evil purpose. It is also worth noting that the context of this statement is Lucifer advising Cain to judge the goodness of God by the happiness of Cain's life, an illogical conflation. Therefore, as Adah recognizes upon Cain's return, "Thy guide hath done thee evil" (3.1.51).

When Lucifer describes the angels as worshipping God's omnipotence "not from love, /But terror and self-hope", Adah replies, "Omnipotence /Must be all goodness" (1.1.389-1). Adah's reply is evidently predicated upon a belief that existence, which is a derivative of the will of any omnipotent being who exists, is good: the will of that omnipotent being, then, is a will to generate good. Whereas Lucifer works from a prejudiced Rationalist position, Adah works largely from a position of Idealist Sensibility: her view is, indeed, the anti-thesis to his.

As she remonstrates with Cain over Lucifer, and with Lucifer himself for his charges against God, she is also the one who defends Cain against others. She twice commands Eve to "Curse him not" (3.1.405, 6), and enjoins Adam not to follow his

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<sup>508</sup> Plato, *Euthyphro*, 10a.

wife in cursing his son (3.1.448). Speaking to the Angel of the Lord, she is the one who takes Cain's words from Genesis 4:13-4 that "This punishment is more than he can bear" (3.1.477 ff), and she then beseeches the Angel to "be merciful" (3.1.486). Through all of this, Adah demonstrates the courage to face her parents and her God in their anger, something which Cain himself does not do.

### **Romanticisms**

"Adah is hopeful of building a new paradise on earth through love", as Gleckner states.<sup>509</sup> First, she advises Cain to "Bear with what we have borne, and love me" (1.1.362), representing love as a power capable of Romantically ameliorating life, just as Lucifer represents mind as capable of liberating life from the alleged tyranny of God. Adah develops her representation of love as a generative, creative power: speaking of her and Cain's children, she asks,

Shall they not love and bring forth things that love  
Out of their love? have they not drawn their milk  
Out of this bosom? was not he, their father,  
Born of the same sole womb, in the same hour  
With me? did we not love each other? and  
In multiplying our being multiply  
Things which will love each other as we love  
Them? (1.1.368-75).

This echoes the creation and multiplication of beings and of love in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, albeit here the beings are physically separate: Adah is presenting another version of the Romantic gospel, contrasting a version based in love to Lucifer's version based in thought alone. This reaches its clearest expression shortly before the catastrophe:

ADAH:           Why wilt thou always mourn for Paradise?  
                      Can we not make another?

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<sup>509</sup> Gleckner, p.325.

CAIN:

Where?

ADAH:

Here, or

Where'er thou wilt: where'er thou art, I feel not  
The want of this so much regretted Eden. (3.1.37-40).

This is both a parallel and a counter-argument to Lucifer's advice to "form an inner world /In your own bosom – where the outward fails" (2.2.463-4). Adah's version follows Michael's advice in *Paradise Lost* 12.587.<sup>510</sup> Whereas Lucifer's proffered knowledge and 'reason' leads to the murder of their brother, Adah's proposed Paradise causes no such destruction, as Adah's version has the crucial element which Lucifer's lacks: love. Adah tells Cain that love is the very quality which can overcome the perpetuation of sorrow which Lucifer has represented as being the fate of humanity:

Love us, then, my Cain!

And love thyself for our sakes, for we love thee.  
Look! how he laughs and stretches out his arms,  
And opens wide his blue eyes upon thine,  
To hail his father; while his little form  
Flutters as wing'd with joy. Talk not of pain! (3.1.147-52).

It is unsurprising that Lucifer's advice leads only to misery, as he himself is already miserable, but Adah is not (1.1.463), in part because, unlike Cain, she does not fear what she does not know (1.1.469): her version is evidently the more efficacious. Further, Adah's viewpoint encompasses also the usefulness of knowledge:

I had hoped

The promised wonders which thou hast beheld,  
Visions, thou say'st, of past and present worlds,  
Would have composed thy mind into the calm  
Of a contented knowledge; but I see

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<sup>510</sup> Thorslev erroneously parallels Michael's with Lucifer's (p.179), whereas the archangel's version is based in love.

Thy guide hath done thee evil (3.1.46-51).

Lucifer's position, utterly lacking in love, is lacking in the depth of Adah's more-comprehensive understanding. The tragedy of *Cain* is not just that Cain listens to the Devil, but that he fails to listen to his wife.

There is yet a third strand of Romanticism in *Cain*: Abel's religious Romanticism. When his elder brother is wavering about the sacrifice, Abel insists, "it will calm thee" (3.1.203). This strand is connected with the second: Abel, Adah, and Zillah all mention love in their opening prayers as part of the purpose and nature of God and creation (1.1.12-3, 15-7, 18), making love part of their faith in God's design for a good world. Their conception of God is an Idealist one, identifying God wholly with Good and with Love. Far from being focussed on impiety, the drama is built around this competition between different forms of Romanticism: the romanticisation of knowledge, of love, and of faith.

Cain does come close to following Adah's path: he tells Lucifer that he loves others: "What makes my feelings more endurable, /And is more than myself, because I love it" (2.2.321-2). This is contrasted with a Wordsworthian Naturalist Romanticism when Cain compares Nature with Adah. As Steffan notes, Cain does have a Sensible reaction to natural phenomena:

"Pleasant tears" filled his eyes when he looked at a sunset [2.2.255 ff]. [...] Another ecstatic outburst was his only expression of cosmic optimism. He surmised that an unseen force guided the firefly in its flight and the star on its course [2.1.130-1]. The manner of presenting this deistic thought was romantic. Cain arrived at the idea via his aesthetic sensitivity, his personal observation, and his intuition. It was for him an emotional, empirical truth that was not the result of parental instruction, of individual ratiocination, nor a dictum from authority.<sup>511</sup>

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<sup>511</sup> Steffan, *Lord Byron's Cain*, p.37.

However, after describing the affective virtues of the stars, the night sky, the moon, the sun, the forest, the birds, and the songs of the angels, Cain says,

All these are nothing, to my eyes and heart,  
Like Adah's face: I turn from earth and heaven  
To gaze on it. (2.2.267-9).

Unfortunately, in the end, Cain fails to depend upon his love for her: love-Romanticism does not fail him; he fails it.

One of the initial complexities of *Cain* is the fact that a Romantic argument is placed in the mouth of Lucifer, a character who is demonstrably dishonest. The apparent paradox is resolved in the presentation, in Adah, of another version of the same argument, superior to Lucifer's. Where Lucifer preaches the formation of an inner world based upon reason alone, the poet presents here the formation of an inner world based in love, which will obviate the failings that this drama attributes to Lucifer's lonely dependence upon mind alone. Adah's view forms the Romantic dream. Lucifer is the evil angel, advising Cain to do wrong, while Adah takes the role of the good angel, advising him to do right.

Interestingly, the evil spirits in *Heaven and Earth* identify a missing element in the Serpent's discourse, when referring to humans as

The abhorred race  
Which could not keep in Eden their high place,  
But listened to the voice  
Of knowledge without power (HE 1.3.76-9).

Lucifer's knowledge without love, being ineffective in ameliorating the world, is, indeed, knowledge without power. Lucifer, far from revealing of the Gospel of Romanticism, is presented as a false prophet, and as an unreliable witness against God.

## God

With the contemporary responses furnishing an inconsistent testimony regarding the drama's piety or impiety, and the text's own major witness of the hearsay case against God proving to be of a partisan and unreliable character, the direct representation of God proves crucial. This issue, however, is complicated by the absence of the personal character of God from the drama. Hirst has addressed this in an argument from silence: "God's silence and apparent indifference to innocent suffering lead Cain into a posture of Promethean defiance".<sup>512</sup> God is absent, and Cain is angry, but the drama does not make God the villain. As a result of this absence, the representation of God appears most in parallels between God and other characters, in action, and in the testimony of various individuals. There are also certain theological issues to consider: in particular, the Question of Evil, and whether or not the God of *Cain* is omnipotent.

God never appears in the drama in person.<sup>513</sup> Byron insists in a letter to Kinnaird about *Cain*, "Recollect that I carefully avoided *all profane* allusion to *the Deity*" (BLJ 9.62, 16/11/21, echoed later in 9.103-4, to Murray). The avoidance of direct reference to a deity is an act of piety in a great many faiths, and this is something in which Byron remained perfectly consistent: God never appears as a character in any of his works, and the poet remains critical of other writers, including Milton, who do employ the Deity.<sup>514</sup> Throughout *Cain*, God is represented by various other characters. The very first 'appearance' of God in the drama is the laudatory "God, the Eternal! Infinite! All-Wise!" (1.1.1), the representation of God by a mortal, in the commencement of Adam's prayer.

What contemporary critics particularly noticed about the representation of the Deity in *Cain* was the "levelling" of God and the Devil, i.e. the equation which Lucifer draws between God and himself.<sup>515</sup> Choosing to read Lucifer as Byron's mouthpiece has led

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<sup>512</sup> Hirst, 'Byron's Revisionist Struggle with the Bible', pp.89-90.

<sup>513</sup> The Angel of the Lord is an *αγγελος*, a messenger, q.v. 3.1.493-4.

<sup>514</sup> The Preface to *The Vision of Judgement* comments directly upon Southey's failure to adhere to this principle (lines 70-4).

<sup>515</sup> Q.v. *Literary Gazette*, December 22, 1821, 808-12; December 29, 821-2; January 5, 1822, 4-5, RR, IV, 1430-8: p.810 (1432) and *British Critic*, 2nd series, XVII (May 1822), 520-40, RR, I, 310-20: p.529 (315). Some modern critics have fallen into the same error: Steffan says, "Byron by puffing the

many subsequent critics to describe the character of God in *Cain* in terms of Lucifer's representation; however, as Ryan comments, "Critics have also not perceived clearly that Lucifer's and Cain's indictment of the Almighty as malevolent and punitive is supported by very little evidence in the play."<sup>516</sup> The only evidence of punishment is God's exiling of Adam and Eve from Eden to separate them from the Tree of Life and thus make them mortal, which is not unmerciful considering the sorrows which do befall them in their lives, and God's cursing of the ground, which ends Cain's days as a farmer (3.1.474-6). This is certainly a light punishment for murder,<sup>517</sup> and, in the Genesis narrative, it does not prove to be too terrible for Cain, who goes on to found a city.<sup>518</sup> There is no evidence of malevolence whatsoever.

What the drama does present is an inverse paralleling of God and Lucifer, rather than an equation between the two. One pertinent example of this occurs in a conversation between Cain and his beloved Adah:

CAIN: Well said the Spirit,  
That I was nothing!  
ADAH: Wherefore said he so?  
Jehovah said not that.  
CAIN: No: *he* contents him  
With making us the *nothing* which we are;  
And after flattering dust with glimpses of  
Eden and Immortality, resolves  
It back to dust again (3.1.68-74).

For all Cain's complaint about God creating beings who will die, the difference in behaviour between the God who does not reproach mortality with its littleness, and the demon who says that "this should be the human sum /Of knowledge, to know mortal nature's nothingness" (2.2.421-2), and who, even before the murder, says to

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devil with these artful claims of kindness and wisdom [...] reversed the Manichaeian doctrine, debased and impaired Jehovah, reformed and elevated Lucifer" (*Lord Byron's Cain*, p.54n40).

<sup>516</sup> Ryan, p.140.

<sup>517</sup> Murder was, of course, a capital crime in Georgian England.

<sup>518</sup> Genesis 4:17.

Cain, “thou art evil” (2.2.220), is very clear. Just as, in *Manfred*, it is the Abbot who refuses to judge the magician (M 3.1.58-9) and the Witch of the Alps who does judge him (M 2.2.34-5), so, in *Cain*, God forbears where the Devil does not, and it is the latter who drives Cain to kill. The Angel of God, it should be noted, identifies Cain as the murderer who he is, but does not describe him as ‘evil’. Further, Cain’s implied argument that creating mortals is an inherently wrong act depends upon the undemonstrated presumption that a temporary existence is worse than no existence at all: in contrast to Adah’s, Cain’s view of the world is that it is fundamentally bad, and he places the blame for this upon God.

The contemporary critics’ complaints about the “levelling” of God and the Devil are incorrect. Whereas Lucifer acts to depress humanity, God does not, and the Angel of God is sent to mark Cain in order to protect him from the very fate which fell upon Abel (3.1.498-9), and to say to him,

Who shall heal murder? what is done, is done;  
Go forth! fulfil thy days! and be thy deeds  
Unlike the last! (3.1.517-8).

In this, as in the expulsion from Eden, God acts not as a tyrant or a judgemental autocrat but as a merciful authority, refusing to inflict punishment when the perpetrator is already remorseful, which is much like another instance of forgoing the death penalty, namely Jesus’ injunction to the woman caught in adultery to “go, and sin no more” in John 8:11.

Even the apparent challenges to God reflect positively upon him. The initial set of ‘pious’ prayers by the first family, the first of which, as McGann notes (6.655:1.1-21), echo the Genesis 1 version of the creation sequence,<sup>519</sup> ends on a discordant note with Zillah’s prayer:<sup>520</sup>

Oh, God! who loving, making, blessing all,

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<sup>519</sup> Light (Adam), day and night and sky (Eve), land and animals (Abel), humanity (Adah).

<sup>520</sup> This is noted, in passing, by Steffan, *Lord Byron’s Cain*, p.32.



Yet didst permit the serpent to creep in,  
And drive my father forth from Paradise,  
Keep us from further evil: – Hail! all hail! (1.1.18-21).

Although she begins by ascribing love and blessing to God, she asks to be kept from *further* evil: the comparative acknowledges the previous occurrence of evil, and necessarily raises the question of whether one can expect a God who has allowed one such occurrence not to allow others. This is not the only instance of questioning: Adam asks why God ever planted the tree of knowledge (1.1.32); Eve describes Abel's death as an excessive punishment for her own sin (3.1.385-6); Adah declares that Cain's punishment is "more than he can bear" (3.1.477). The whole family challenge God's decisions, but God never takes the tyrannical step of suppressing such questioning, and, indeed, never performs any tyrannical act. To paraphrase Heber, of God in *Cain* we know no evil.

### **The Question of Evil and Omnipotence**

One question is central to the drama. In an oft-quoted passage, Cain asks, "Because /He is all-powerful, must all-good, too, follow?" (1.1.76-7). Adah later presents an answer to this, saying to Lucifer, "Omnipotence /Must be all goodness" (1.1.390-1), at which point Lucifer asks whether this was true in Eden, questioning whether the Fall were good. Later, in conversation with Lucifer, Cain pursues this further, and asks,

why is evil – he being good? I ask'd  
This question of my father; and he said,  
Because this evil only was the path  
To good. (2.2.285-8).

This question is the central theological issue in the discourse of the drama: the question of the existence of evil in a universe ruled by a good god. The question is extremely complex, and is never answered in *Cain*, although many readers have felt free to read their own answers into the drama.

Lucifer attempts to answer it by an argument from creation: since the world, he says, is evil, God, as the creator of everything, must be evil. Lucifer advises Cain, in his parting words, to judge God's goodness by "the fruits /Of your existence" (2.2.457-8), ironically echoing Jesus in Matthew 7:16, "Ye shall know them by their fruits."<sup>521</sup> The advice is somewhat redundant since Cain has earlier said, "I judge but by the fruits" (1.1.78), before even meeting Lucifer, but it is not meant to be neutral advice: long before this, Lucifer prejudices the judgement himself by claiming, "Goodness would not make /Evil; and what else hath he made?" (1.1.146-7). This representation brings the fruits of Lucifer's own efforts into question, and is itself brought into question by his own further comments. Cain, upon becoming unhappy with the knowledge which he has acquired, says, "my father's God did well /When he prohibited the fatal tree." Lucifer's reply attempts to impugn God, but adds another dimension to the problem of evil, saying that the deity

had done better in not planting it.  
But ignorance of evil doth not save  
From evil; it must still roll on the same,  
A part of all things. (2.2.232-7).

There is nothing which "must" happen in a universe with a truly omnipotent being: everything which does happen there is a derivative of the will of that being.

All of this necessitates the consideration of whether or not God is truly omnipotent in the drama. Both Abel and Cain state, in their prayers over their sacrifices, that God is omnipotent; Adah assumes that God is omnipotent; Lucifer questions why evil exists if God is omnipotent. Nonetheless, the Deity's omnipotence is not clear from this text, and certainly not from Lucifer's erratic testimony. Lucifer refers to God as "the Omnipotent tyrant" (1.1.138), only to say, shortly thereafter, "he made us – he cannot unmake" (142); if God cannot, then God is not omnipotent. Lucifer's implication that God is not omnipotent is in accordance with some of his other claims: he implies that

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<sup>521</sup> Repeated in Matthew 7:20, 12:33, and Luke 6:44.

the Deity wishes to “crush himself” but cannot (154-5),<sup>522</sup> and, of course, Lucifer can only “divide” the universe with God (1.1.552-4) or “battle” against him (2.2.431) if God is not omnipotent, as there can be no competing with an omnipotent power.<sup>523</sup> The Devil later refers to the angels as worshipping “that which is omnipotent, because /It is omnipotent” (1.1.388-9). Once again, Lucifer’s claims contradict each other. Cain is similarly ambiguous in his description of the Deity: he addresses God as “Omnipotent, it may be” (3.1.246), but soon asserts, “thou art omnipotent” (3.1.271).

One possibility is that God is, like Zeus, only ‘omnipotent’ in the sense of being more powerful than all others: ‘the most powerful of all’, rather than ‘possessing all power’.<sup>524</sup> If, then, God is not truly omnipotent, not able to control everything, then the happiness or unhappiness of mortal life is not necessarily a source of reproach to him unless it occurs through his deliberate inaction: if he wishes to prevent it but cannot, he is not to blame. If evil “must” occur, as Lucifer claims, then God cannot prevent it, and cannot be at fault for the fact that it does happen, which means that God cannot be judged for ‘the fruits of mortal existence’ or for the presence of evil in the world, which Lucifer has previously claimed as the means for judging God’s goodness: Lucifer’s arguments contradict one another, invalidating his claims against God.

If, however, Lucifer’s assertions of the Deity’s incapacity are incorrect, and he is truly omnipotent, then the Deity is necessarily involved, by commission or omission, in every event which occurs. As a result, evil can only occur because such a Deity allows it. In this case, the crucial question is whether some higher good, unknown to mortals, can be served by allowing evil to occur, whether, as Adam says, “evil only was the path/ To good”. This cannot be known by any mortal means. In the absence of a direct revelation, a concept in which Byron did not believe (BLJ 2.98, to Hodgson 13/9/11), no secure conclusion is possible, only guesses as to the probability of the existence of this higher purpose. This drama does not choose any definite

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<sup>522</sup> This is a contradiction of his earlier adoption of Adah’s claim that God is happy (1.1.488-9), which he takes up there to accuse God of keeping happiness a secret.

<sup>523</sup> As Joseph notes, “Lucifer claims the status of Antigod” (p.118): he does not demonstrate what he claims.

<sup>524</sup> Q.v. *Iliad* 8.17ff.

answer to the question:<sup>525</sup> in general, Byron's work is more concerned with raising questions than answering them. Again, this touches on the topic of Plato's *Euthyphro*: of Good and God, which is the higher? *Cain* avoids clearly representing God either as good or as not good, and instead considers how such goodness could be identified.

In this lack of specification is the drama's position of piety. It is not impious, because it does not impugn God. It is not pious, because it does not defend God. The contemporary critics were trapped in a zero-sum dichotomy of piety versus impiety, whereas *Cain* displaces these with an aporetic/agnostic position outside of them, a *non-pious* position.

It may be such problems as the complicated interrelations of omnipotence and theodicy which lead to Cain not wholly accepting Lucifer's representation of God. After all of Lucifer's speeches and demonstrations, Cain does, albeit reluctantly, perform a sacrifice to God, and the commencement of his invocation over the sacrifice represents a more complex consideration of God than Lucifer's simple demonization of his enemy:

Spirit! whate'er or whosoe'er thou art,  
Omnipotent, it may be – and, if good,  
Shown in the exemption of thy deeds from evil;  
Jehovah upon earth! and God in heaven!  
And it may be with other names, because  
Thine attributes seem many, as thy works (3.1.245-50).

A goodness which is merely a lack of evil is analogous to a piety which is merely a lack of impiety, and the suggestion of multiple names for multiple attributes raises the idea of a God who only sometimes appears to be good, and who appears to be evil at other times. Cain's address to God nonetheless eschews judgement against the 'evil

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<sup>525</sup> Despite the opportunity afforded by Adam's argument, *Cain* does not, for example, raise Pierre Bayle's argument against this: that a God who allows evil so as to demonstrate good is like "a father who should suffer his children to break their legs on purpose to show to all the city his great art in setting their broken bones" – *The Dictionary Historical and Critical of Mr Peter Bayle*, 5 vols (London: J J & P Knapton, 1734), IV, 515.

of God' which Lucifer proclaims, and, instead, asserts the absence of any definitive pattern of divine morality: "Thine attributes seem many". The true plurality of the drama's ideology glimmers beneath the epiphenomenal discourse of dichotomous poles.

### **Subjective Views of God**

This plurality becomes more visible in the characters themselves. A not-uncommon feature of religion is the attribution of the worshipper's own traits or ideals to the character of the deity, such that the deity is represented as a distilled image of the worshipper. In a similar fashion, Lucifer, in addition to representing God as evil, describes him as being miserable, claiming, indeed, that God is so miserable as to desire suicide:

he is alone  
Indefinite, indissoluble tyrant;  
Could he but crush himself, 'twere the best boon  
He ever granted: but let him reign on!  
And multiply himself in misery! (1.1.152-6).

This comment by Lucifer is more significant for characterizing the speaker than his subject. The Devil admits to being unhappy (1.1.122), and represents immortality as being consistently so (2.1.95-6): he is quite possibly projecting his own unhappiness and his own desire for an impossible cessation onto his enemy here, if there is any honesty in his words. Cain later repeats the same idea:

Why art *thou* wretched? why are all things so?  
Ev'n he who made us must be, as the maker  
Of things unhappy! (2.2.280-2).

Cain, too, is very unhappy at this point, having been depressed according to the Devil's plan. Rather a different view is presented by Adah, who views loneliness with horror, and so is asked by Lucifer,

thy God is alone; and is he happy?

Lonely, and good?

ADAH: He is not so; he hath  
The angels and the mortals to make happy,  
And thus becomes so in diffusing joy.  
What else can joy be, but the spreading joy? (1.1.476-81).

The Devil's response is to turn the question back onto Adah, to say, "ask your own heart; /It is not tranquil" (1.1.483-4). Adah, at least, is not projecting her current mood onto God, although she might well be projecting her general attitude, her belief that love is the solution to everything (3.1.148-9). At this point, Lucifer is the immediate cause of Adah's unhappiness, and if unhappiness is evidence of evil, then he has just implicated himself as a cause of evil, because he disclaims any connection between himself and God. The consistent theme in these representations of God is that the viewers represent God out of their own feelings: their image of God is only an image of themselves. In so doing, the drama presents a very accurate picture of religion as it most often operates, entirely subjectively. This places any conception of any real God beyond reach, problematizing the identification of (im)piety.

Such a mystification of the nature of the Deity is in accordance with Byron's views expressed elsewhere, particularly in the aporetic discourse of *Don Juan*. At a point shortly before or during the composition of *Cain*, Byron wrote in his journal of 'Detached Thoughts',

If according to some speculations – you could prove the World many thousand years older than the Mosaic Chronology – or if you could knock up Adam & Eve and the Apple and Serpent – still what is to be put up in their stead? – or how is the difficulty removed? things must have had a beginning – and what matters it *when – or how?* [...] a *Creator* is a more natural imagination than a fortuitous concourse of atoms – all things remount to a fountain – though they may flow to an Ocean. (BLJ 9.47, #101).

Apart from the entropic end, all that this suggests is tentative theism: it is far from determining any position on the *character* of the supposed Creator. The problem with respect to Byron's god is identical to the problem with respect to *Cain*'s: the available data are too limited to allow for any secure conclusion about metaphysics.

The secure conclusion for *Cain*'s representation of God, however, is that this drama is not impious: it does not arraign God for alleged crimes against creation, and the one character who consistently does so is shown, by the drama, to be a wholly untrustworthy source. The only actions of God visible in the drama are the choice to plant the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil in the garden, which is left unexplained, the expulsion of the humans who transgress the rules set upon them, which is not seriously contested, the refusal to reproach mortals with their littleness, which is contrasted with Lucifer's doing so, and the refusal to condemn Cain any more than to acknowledge the crime which he certainly has committed. All of this is entirely in accordance with the Genesis narrative. Indeed, the drama does stay very close to that version of the story, apart from the introduction of Lucifer as the one who incites Cain to act, a feature which can hardly be described as wildly heterodox. On the other hand, *Cain* avoids piety, also, moving instead into a space outside of the simple dichotomy of piety and impiety.

### ***Heaven and Earth***

Just like the alleged *impiety* of *Cain*, the alleged *piety* of *Heaven and Earth* merits careful scrutiny. Once again, contemporary and modern criticism and the author's attestations must be taken into account, but, once again, there is a significant divergence between the surface discourse revealed by an epiphenomenal reading and the operations of the drama revealed by an analysis of the many parallels within it. For this analysis, the orthodoxy of the characters' discourse must be taken into consideration, but so too must the major themes of the work, including exogamous love and its relationship with dogmatic belief, and the implications which that relationship has for the drama's comments upon theodicy.

The reception of the two dramas has been quite different: in stark contrast to *Cain*, *Heaven and Earth* was received with little contemporary complaint. John Wilson, for example, says, “We confess that we see little or nothing objectionable in it, either as to theological orthodoxy, or general human feeling.”<sup>526</sup> The *Edinburgh Review* and *Gentleman’s Magazine* concur.<sup>527</sup> The *Examiner* once again champions the reasonability of characters speaking in character, saying that no one could object to *Heaven and Earth* unless they objected to *Paradise Lost*.<sup>528</sup> The reviewer for the *Monthly Magazine* expresses what was to prove the ill-founded hope that no one could impute to the author the sentiments of the characters drowning in the Flood.<sup>529</sup> Nonetheless, the *Eclectic Review*, acting in this case as a dissenting voice, contrives to do precisely what the *Monthly Magazine’s* reviewer hoped against:

it betrays symptoms of an exhausted mind, and a malignant, withering scepticism. It is, as we said of “Cain,” not profane; but it strikes, with Satanic boldness, at the character of the Almighty.<sup>530</sup>

There was also a murmur against the intermarriage of angels and women as being ‘absurd’.<sup>531</sup>

The drama’s criticism of orthodox dogmatism appears to have gone largely unnoticed. Writing to Murray about his new work, Byron says, “You will find *it pious* enough I trust” (BLJ 9.59, 14/11/21), and, to Thomas Moore, he claims that “The new Mystery [*Heaven and Earth*] is less speculative than “Cain,” and very pious” (BLJ 9.118, 4/3/22). However, in the consideration of the two dramas, that ‘piety’ appears in a new light: *Cain* was judged ‘impious’ because of the arguments against God

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<sup>526</sup> John Wilson, *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine*, XIII (January 1823), 72-77, RR, I, 196-201: p.77 (201).

<sup>527</sup> Possibly Francis Jeffrey and William Hazlitt, *Edinburgh Review*, XXXVIII (February 1823), 27-48, RR, II, 938-949: p.27 (939); *Gentleman’s Magazine*, XCIII-i (January 1823), 41-44, RR, III, 1138-1141: p.43 (1140).

<sup>528</sup> Possibly Albany Fonblanque, *Examiner*, December 29, 1822, 818-822, RR, III, 1027-1031: p.821 (1030).

<sup>529</sup> *Monthly Magazine*, LV (February 1823), 35-39, RR, IV, 1696-1700: p.39 (1700).

<sup>530</sup> *Eclectic Review*, 2nd series, XIX (March 1823), 210-217, RR, II, 784-788: p.216 (787). In XVII (May 1822), p.419 (770), the reviewer says, “Profaneness is an irreverent use of sacred names and things.”

<sup>531</sup> Q.v. Galignani Edition, p.510n; Thomas Noon Talfourd, *Lady’s Magazine*, second series, IV (January 1823), 19-23, RR, IV, 1238-1243: 19 (1239).



expressed by Lucifer, and, to a much lesser extent, by Cain; *Heaven and Earth* was judged pious because it contains no such arguments. In his letters of 1821-22, Byron appears to be using 'pious' as in *Don Juan*, referring only to surface, not substance. What many readers have overlooked is the way in which the drama questions the goodness of the very piety which it presents.

Like their nineteenth-century forebears, modern critics have paid more attention to *Cain* than to *Heaven and Earth*, and have been rather consistent in their view of the latter's ideas. As McGann notes, "*Heaven and Earth* is hardly read any more", but he himself calls it "flimsy" in contrast to *Cain*'s "richness".<sup>532</sup> Bostetter and Rutherford ignore it; Gleckner and Blackstone barely mention it. Chew describes it as "a study of various degrees of discontent and rebellion at the inadequacy of our mortal state",<sup>533</sup> following Byron's comment on *Cain*, and yet discusses it only briefly. For Joseph, "a traditional theology is accepted without apparent examination".<sup>534</sup> Corbett is quite rare in treating it at length. Marchand says that Aholibamah and Azazel "voice Byron's iconoclastic views as clearly as does Cain or Lucifer", and goes on to opine,

the drama flew in the face of British mores more directly than did *Cain*, whose speculations were generalized and in the cosmic sphere, whereas the illicit love with angels was both immoral and sacrilegious.<sup>535</sup>

The suggestion that the love with angels was both immoral and sacrilegious seems excessive, in as much as it is the violation of no orthodox taboo, and so the complaint against this aspect of the work was so rare and so quiet. However, Marchand is entirely correct in saying that it is more contentious than the earlier drama.

### **Orthodoxy**

In terms of the work itself, the epiphenomenal reading depends upon the comments of the characters, and almost all of the major characters in the drama do express

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<sup>532</sup> McGann, *Fiery Dust*, pp.245, 263.

<sup>533</sup> Chew, p.141.

<sup>534</sup> Joseph, p.124.

<sup>535</sup> Marchand, p.91.

orthodox viewpoints. Raphael is consistently orthodox, urging the other spirits to return to their assigned role; Noah endlessly asserts the necessity of obedience to God's will; Japhet wishes for a different fate for the world, but proclaims God's plan of salvation, including "the Redeemer", to the gloating spirits (1.3.193-206); Samiasa instructs Aholibamah, "own thy God" (1.3.458); Anah is concerned that she is becoming impious because she loves her lover more than her God (1.1.9, 11-13), although Japhet, unaware of this, believes that "she but loves her God" (1.2.22); even Aholibamah, who can be quite iconoclastic at times, declares her willingness to obey God's edicts (1.3.633-9).

On this basis, the drama could appear very orthodox, but this appearance would be misleading, in much the same way that the apprehension of *Cain* as being impious is based upon the surface discourse alone.

### **Unorthodoxy**

There are very fundamental aspects in which *Heaven and Earth* is unorthodox, one of them textual, and the other discursive, but both of which comprise the construction of a counter-narrative to the biblical version of events.

The textual aspect is the source of the story of angels loving women: the extra-canonical 1 Enoch. In European Christianity, 1 Enoch is commonly placed in the pseudepigrapha, the 'false writings', largely because of the thorough failure of historicity in its claim to having been written by Enoch, the fifth-generation descendant of Seth.<sup>536</sup> This drama not only takes its story from that text, but even refers directly to that text as 'prophecy' (1.3.275); being written by a prophet was one of the basic criteria for inclusion within the biblical canon. The use of this text is quite unorthodox, especially by Protestant standards,<sup>537</sup> and is a far greater challenge to orthodoxy than that represented by having Lucifer disown any connection with the Serpent, since the text itself challenges the integrity of the canon.

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<sup>536</sup> Regarding Byron's awareness of 1 Enoch, E. H. Coleridge has a comprehensive note on the translations of 1 Enoch available in western Europe from 1606 (Coleridge, V.302n), and Chew comments that "Eimer proves that he [Byron] had" seen Laurence's 1821 translation (Chew, p.122, referring to M.Eimer, "Das apokryphe buch Henoch und Byrons mysterien," *Eng. Stud.* XLIV, 26 ff).

<sup>537</sup> The Protestant Bible canon being more restrictive than the Catholic and Orthodox canons.

The discursive aspect is the manifesting of a Cainite mythology. This includes Aholibamah's description of Abel as Cain's "foe" (1.3.408), a deft touch of human realism, possibly to be connected with Aholibamah's reference to "strong Cain! who was begotten /In Paradise" (1.3.390-1), which, as Coleridge notes,<sup>538</sup> contradicts the protagonist of *Cain*, who says "my sire still mourn'd for Eden" (C 3.1.508) when he himself was begotten. This mythology could be the cause for Anah describing Lucifer in very Promethean terms, as the lover of the human race, and also, interestingly, as being the Serpent from the Garden:

to the Spirits who have not disdained  
To love us, cometh anguish with disgrace.  
The first who taught us knowledge hath been hurled  
From his once archangelic throne (1.3.665-8).

Similarly, the Chorus of Mortals say, "Eve gave Adam knowledge for her dower" (1.3.868). They also refer to Adam singing "his first hymn of slavery" (1.3.869), evidently meaning slavery to God, much in the terms used by Lucifer (C 1.1.383, 420). This is the same chorus who arraign God for sending the Deluge:

Why should our hymns be raised, our knees be bent  
Before the implacable Omnipotent,  
Since we must fall the same?  
If he hath made earth, let it be his shame,  
To make a world for torture. (1.3.859-63).

These words could have come from Lucifer's lips. This mythology reinforces a tribal division sufficiently strong as to create the "strife" in which Aholibamah could consider turning upon her sister for being tainted with non-Cainite heredity.

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<sup>538</sup> Coleridge, 5.306n.

The versions in *Heaven and Earth* could differ from those in *Cain* because they are presenting the image of a tribal mythology having developed over the intervening years, a mythology in which the Cainites see the brothers as having been enemies, thus somewhat justifying the murder, and also see Cain as having been born in Paradise, making him, and them, superior to the children “of old Adam’s dotage”.<sup>539</sup> Having said that, the myths also differ significantly from the narrative of Genesis, rewriting the sacred scripture to a far greater degree than *Cain* does, even considering the earlier drama’s inclusion of Lucifer. In so doing, these myths form a counter-narrative which is more unorthodox than anything in *Cain*, to a great extent simply because the departure from the “sacred history”<sup>540</sup> is uncontradicted by anything either in the discourse or in the structure of the text. These elements are nonetheless far from being the whole of *Heaven and Earth*’s unorthodoxy.

### **Exogamy**

Another aspect of *Heaven and Earth* is the contrast of ideologies, and, particularly, competing allegiances. This manifests in relation to one of the major themes, exogamy, in that such relationships transgress social boundaries and call into question group affiliation and allegiance. As such, exogamy functions as a symbol for the rejection of dogmatic obedience, and it is widespread in this drama. Roston and McGann point out that the work places significance upon “the idea that the upper and lower worlds in some way need each other, and that each constantly gravitates towards the other despite Jehovah’s decree.”<sup>541</sup> This gravitation of opposites, appearing in the form of exogamous love, is opposed by characters other than the unseen Jehovah. The patriarch Noah says to Shem of Japhet,

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<sup>539</sup> Following the Genesis chronology, the charge of “dotage” in 1.3.392 seems rather unfair as Adam is only 130 when Seth is born, and he lives another 800 years, according to Genesis 5:3-4. Genesis 5:32 and 7:6 put Noah at 600, and Shem, Ham, and Japhet at 100 years of age at the time of the flood, which, according to the same chronology, is at least 1562 years after Abel’s death. Byron never uses any of these numbers, but the life-spans do not seem incongruous with angels rescuing mortal lovers from global deluges.

<sup>540</sup> This phrase is Lord Eldon’s, from his judgement on *Cain*. Vide Galignani Edition, p.597.

<sup>541</sup> Murray Roston and Jerome J. McGann, ‘Orthodoxy and Unorthodoxy in *Heaven and Earth*’, in *The Plays of Lord Byron: Critical Essays*, ed. by Robert Gleckner and Bernard Beatty (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1997), 291-300 (p.296).

Still loves this daughter of a fated race,  
Although he could not wed her if she loved him (1.2.93-5).

Anah is apparently forbidden to Japhet because she is, in Noah's words, "Condemn'd" (1.3.494), which Noah understands as an indisputable edict. While the edict might descend from God, the reader sees only Noah's word here. Raphael speaks of Satan in much the same terms of forbidden love, demonstrating the self-denying attitude which Noah would apparently like to see from Japhet:

I loved him – beautiful he was: oh heaven!  
Save *his* who made, what beauty and what power  
Was ever like to Satan's! Would the hour  
In which he fell could ever be forgiven!  
The wish is impious (1.3.580-4).

Raphael's love for Satan is counteracted by the 'pious' acknowledgement of a higher authority's judgement upon the beloved. Japhet, however, is not so pious, and is willing to rewrite the divine edict to save his beloved:

by exchanging my own life for hers,  
Who could alone have made mine happy, she,  
The last and loveliest of Cain's race, could share  
The Ark (1.3.384-7).

The drama's schema is not as simple as the Disciples being bigoted and the Rebels being pluralistic and tolerant. Hearing that Anah would survive only to be alone with the descendants of Seth, Aholibamah indignantly demands,

dost thou think that we,  
With Cain's, the eldest born of Adam's, blood  
Warm in our veins, – strong Cain! who was begotten  
In Paradise, – would mingle with Seth's children?  
Seth, the last offspring of old Adam's dotage?

No, not to save all earth, were earth in peril!  
Our race hath always dwelt apart from thine  
From the beginning, and shall do so ever. (1.3.388-95).

Although Japhet is speaking to Samiasa, Aholibamah not only answers, but answers in the first person plural, assuming the right of speaking collectively for herself and her sister. This is then explicitly made part of a tribal concept which represents exogamy as being worse than the extinction of the tribe. Interestingly, one of the final comments in *Cain* also addresses intermarriage: Cain laments, over the body of his murdered brother,

*he* who lieth there was childless! I  
Have dried the fountain of a gentle race,  
Which might have graced his recent marriage couch,  
And might have temper'd this stern blood of mine,  
Uniting with our children Abel's offspring! (C 3.1.556-60).

Aholibamah's honoured forefather holds rather a different view than she on intermarriage between his children and those of his sibling, and yet on much the same issues: he wishes that he could have reduced the force of his own blood. *Heaven and Earth* turns away from Cain's display of virtue. Further underlining the division between the Cainites and the Sethites, Japhet denounces Aholibamah as having "Too much of the forefather whom thou vauntest" in her (1.3.399). However, when Japhet suggests that Anah is more like Abel than like her ancestor Cain, Aholibamah interrupts him, exclaiming,

And would'st thou have her like our father's foe  
In mind, in soul? If *I* partook thy thought,  
And dreamed that aught of *Abel* was in *her*! –  
Get thee hence, son of Noah; thou mak'st strife. (1.3.408-11).

The threat implied by the aposiopesis declares Aholibamah's exclusive tribal identification very emphatically. She is not alone in holding such strong views, as is

first demonstrated when Japhet meets on the mountainside the gloating spirits who reproach him for surviving the destruction of his own kind. In the process, they validate both group unity and collective xenophobia:

Who would outlive their kind,  
Except the base and blind?  
Mine  
Hateth thine

As of a different order in the sphere (1.3.144-8).

In their xenophobia, the spirits are just as bigoted as the humans, and it is in the light of such pervasive racism that condemnation of the human-angel exogamy must be viewed. Japhet, who has a very evident ulterior motive, says to Anah,

unions like to these,  
Between a mortal and an immortal, cannot  
Be happy or be hallowed. (1.3.369-71).

In a moment of rare coincidence of opinion between father and son, Noah also objects to such relationships:

Woe, woe, woe to such communion!  
Has not God made a barrier between earth  
And heaven, and limited each, kind to kind? (1.3.474-6).

The reference to the residents of earth and heaven being limited “kind to kind” is reminiscent, first, of Genesis 7:14 describing the inhabitants of the Ark, being the family of Noah and the animals in their pairs:

every beast after his kind, and all the cattle after their kind, and every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth after his kind, and every fowl after his kind, every bird of every sort.

It is also reminiscent of the Genesis 1 version of the creation narrative, in which plants, fish, birds and land animals are each made ‘after their kinds’.<sup>542</sup> The only genealogy given in this first section of the Bible is that of the line of Seth: the line of Cain remains completely unmentioned, and is implicitly extinguished in the Flood. Byron quite possibly noticed this heavy focus upon groups, and is playing upon it here. *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage*, in particular, demonstrates his dislike of racial prejudice, and *Heaven and Earth* condemns the prejudice by placing the same antipathy in the mouths of almost all of the characters, from the Disciples to the Rebels. They are united in their separatism.

This antipathy to exogamy is not the only evidence of tribal or group feeling here. Samiasa is first mentioned by Aholibamah as

warring with the spirits who may dare  
Dispute with him  
Who made all empires, empire (1.1.84-6).

Raphael also refers to this division in the immortal ranks, between the angels still loyal to God and those who fell with Satan (1.3.566ff). First, however, he issues the plaint

why  
Cannot this Earth be made, or be destroyed,  
Without involving ever some vast void  
In the immortal ranks? (1.3.561-4).

He is so blinded by his attachment to his own group, by his desire for that group to remain united, that he does not even pause to consider the fate of the humans destroyed along with the earth. His excessive obedience to dogma blinds him to compassion, and his focus upon the division among the spirits creates two very distinct group identities: the good angels and the evil demons. Raphael’s comparison

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<sup>542</sup> Genesis 1:11, 12, 21, 24, 25.



of Samiasa and Azaziel's departure with Satan's fall underlines the fact that the two lovers of women are not going to join Satan, and are thus creating a third side, the mere existence of which serves to problematize the simple dichotomy of good versus evil. The third side is introduced when Aholibamah, while invoking Samiasa, refers to God and then asserts,

thee and me he never can destroy;  
Change us he may, but not o'erwhelm; we are  
Of as eternal essence, and must war  
With him if he will war with us (1.1.119-22).

This declaration sounds very much like Lucifer's eternal war with God in *Cain* (C 2.2.431-2), and Aholibamah places the responsibility for the conflict solely upon the interference of the Deity, whose jurisdiction she questions.

The representation of the bigotry of anti-exogamous feeling exposes the injustice of such feeling, and, in particular, its loveless nature in contrast to the love which it condemns. While the prejudice is frequently represented as being based in group identification, it is not a necessary feature thereof. Thus, identification with the group appears in a more positive form in Japhet lamenting being among the few who are to survive the Flood:

Oh, men! my fellow-beings! Who  
Shall weep above your universal grave,  
Save I? Who shall be left to weep? My kinsmen,  
Alas! what am I better than ye are,  
That I must live beyond ye? (1.3.14-8).

The group affiliation remains, but what gives it value here is compassion, just as the lack of compassion turns other iterations of such affiliation into bigotry. To paraphrase Bostetter, this is Byron's most deliberate and violent attack on a shibboleth

of Calvinism: as Ray Stevens notes, Japhet struggles to understand his election,<sup>543</sup> and it is his sympathy which causes that struggle. The feeling of conflict is exacerbated by the jeering of the evil spirits, who demand,

And art thou not ashamed  
Thus to survive,  
And eat, and drink, and wive? (1.3.135-7).

They reiterate the virtue of sympathy, reinforcing the ideology of collective responsibility. When Japhet seeks to rescue Anah, she replies with a similar thought:

could I dare to pray in his dread hour  
Of universal vengeance (if such should be),  
It would not be to live, alone exempt  
Of all my house. (1.3.430-3).

The desire to avoid living alone is, obviously, motivated in large part by a desire to avoid the guilt of being the lone survivor, but that includes within it the desire to be a part of the group and to share in the collective fate.<sup>544</sup> This appears to have been a sentiment of the poet himself: Kennedy records Byron as having said that “If the whole world were going to hell, he would prefer going with them, than go alone to heaven.”<sup>545</sup> Like the drama’s, the poet’s comment privileges sociality above obedience.

The result of all of the conflicting group loyalties is, of course, to throw the whole concept of group affiliation into doubt. Why choose one, when so many are available? In the immediate context of the drama, this points to the reasonability not only of Japhet being concerned for the myriads who will die in the Flood, but also the reasonability of the angels or God being concerned for their fellow beings, rendering conspicuous the absence of divine mercy from the narrative. The value of group

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<sup>543</sup> Stevens, ‘Scripture and the Literary Imagination: Biblical Allusions in Byron’s *Heaven and Earth*’, in *Byron, the Bible, and Religion*, 118-35 (p.121).

<sup>544</sup> Q.v. Stevens, p.127.

<sup>545</sup> Kennedy, p.45.

allegiance is placed in opposition to the value of compassion, of love for others; the value of dogmatic obedience is contrasted with the Idealist pursuit of pure virtue.

## Love

Contrasted against the bigotry of the anti-exogamous attitude are the characters' professions of love, by Japhet for Anah, but even more strongly by the women and the angels. In each case, this is the pattern, familiar from the Byronic Hero, of the individual who rebels against society in desperate devotion to the love-object.<sup>546</sup>

Aholibamah asserts that her love is at least as great as that of her immortal lover, Samiasa: "Thine immortality can not repay /With love more warm than mine" (1.1.101-2). When Japhet says that the angels' love has doomed them (1.3.357-8), Aholibamah pronounces that

If they love as they are loved, they will not shrink  
More to be mortal, than I would to dare  
An immortality of agonies  
With Samiasa! (1.3.359-62).

Neither Samiasa nor Azaziel, both of whom are present, comments upon Aholibamah's assertion, but it does apparently frighten Anah, who, rather than declaring what Azaziel should do, instead promises him,

I would resign the greater remnant of  
This little life of mine, before one hour  
Of thine eternity should know a pang. (1.3.364-6).

Aholibamah's conception of the angels' love is that it should induce them to cross the species boundary, as they already have to some degree. The anticipated assumption of mortality by the angels is apparently irrevocable, however, and thus of a far greater

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<sup>546</sup> Notably, the Giaour, Gulnare, Kaled, and Alp (once he has converted), all have exogamous romantic attachments, and Selim and Manfred have incestuous or near-incestuous ones, which face a similar degree of social obloquy.

degree than their actions thus far. Anah's representation of her own love is of a similarly complete devotion of herself to her lover.

When Raphael appears, and announces the angels' choice of doom with the women or a safe, unaccompanied return to their "fit sphere" (1.3.554), both of the women advise their immortal lovers to abandon them rather than forfeit God's grace (1.3.643, 659). The women's love does extend as far as self-sacrifice. In this, the women and the angels take on a glimmer of the Byronic Heroes: fallen characters whose redeeming virtue is a desperate, loving devotion. They are not fully developed iterations of that type, however.

The angels themselves are beings of comparatively few words, although Samiasa answers Noah's "Woe, woe, woe to such communion!" with an argument from example:

Was not man made in high Jehovah's image?  
Did God not love what he had made? And what  
Do we but imitate and emulate  
His love unto created love? (1.3.477-80).

Noah remains unconvinced, and, when Azazel further questions whether they are not justified by their desire to save the mortals, the patriarch rejects the idea with the reasonable assessment that "Were your immortal mission safety, 'twould /Be general, not for two, though beautiful" (1.3.491-2). Japhet's love is not quite so egocentric, since he does extend his request to include Aholibamah, despite her inveterate hostility towards him: he asks the angels to "save this beautiful – *these* beautiful /Children of Cain" (1.3.350-1), and he further expresses a wish that the rest of the population could be spared (1.3.704-11). Nonetheless, the angels and one mortal are at least trying to save someone more than the predestined few, while Noah himself refuses to contemplate helping anyone other than his own immediate family. Further, the angels demonstrate their faithfulness to their lovers when they refuse Raphael's command to return to the heavenly host with him (1.3.714-6): Samiasa declares, "We have chosen, and will endure" (1.3.717); Azazel concurs, "He hath said it, and I say,

Amen!” (1.3.718). In so doing, they lose their celestial power and their connection with God (1.3.721-2), but prove, like the women, that their exogamous devotion is more important to them than are their lives.

Where, in *Cain*, love is contrasted with knowledge, in *Heaven and Earth*, love is contrasted with prejudice and with dogmatism. This is introduced early, when Anah says, “I love our God less since his angel loved me /This cannot be of good” (1.1.12-3), and is the major theme of the text. Shortly thereafter, she represents her affection as an act of heroic transgression: “Great is their love who love in sin and fear” (1.1.67). The first term in that dyad opposes love not merely to dogmatism but to orthodoxy, adopting the ancient trope of the greatness of love being demonstrated by the degree of opposition which it must overcome, and configuring that opposition as divine disapprobation.

The competition between love and orthodoxy reappears when the angels descend to meet the women, trailing a rainbow behind them (1.1.149-52). The Genesis flood narrative ends with the creation of the rainbow as the sign of God’s covenant to never again destroy all flesh (Genesis 9:9-17); the appearance of this symbol of hope being here attached to the angelic lovers connects their love with salvation, contrasts the woman-angel relationship with the mortal-deity relationship, and again calls into question God’s own love for creation. If the angels could save part of creation, why does God not do so? Why is *Heaven and Earth*’s God, in Japhet’s words, “the Omnipotent who makes and crushes” (1.3.62)? This, along with the parallels which contrast Japhet’s attitude with Noah’s and so place God alongside the Patriarch, brings the righteousness of God into question.

While the consistent discourse of many of the parties to the drama, mortal and immortal, opposes any exogamous relationship, those engaged in such relationships are fiercely committed to them. Since the hostility to exogamy is not based upon any conclusion which is demonstrated as being reasonable within the course of the drama, the value of love and the worth of those admirable individuals who feel love are directly contrasted with the prejudice, resulting in its being condemned. This condemnation, in turn, lends weight to the drama’s argument against dogmatism.

## **Dogmatism**

The dogmatism of the characters, especially evident in the words of the archangel Raphael and the patriarch Noah, is demonstrated particularly in the opposition between their behaviour and such basic social mores as consideration for the sufferings of others: that generalised love for humanity which is labelled 'sympathy' or 'compassion' is, for some characters, mitigated by adherence to an ideological code, which is to say that concern for other people is placed into competition with allegiance to an idea. This conflict creates such bigoted reactions as the antipathy towards exogamy, and it further has implications for the representation of the righteousness of God.

Raphael is determinedly orthodox, considering "impious" even his own wish that Satan could be forgiven (1.3.584). Thus, he departs from the scene saying, "Farewell, thou earth! ye wretched sons of clay, /I cannot, must not aid you. 'Tis decreed!" (1.3.804-5). The doubling of the modal auxiliary, the transfer from the negated dynamic ("cannot") to the negated deontic ("must not"), bespeaks the true nature of the situation: the archangel *will* not assist the humans, because their deaths are decreed. Obedience is more important to him than sympathy is. This motif is also visible in the contrast between his urging Noah not to condemn his own son, saying, "Patriarch, be still a father! smoothe thy brow" (1.3.764), and his own shortly subsequent behaviour towards Azazel, interrupting the latter's attempt to reassure the frightened Anah with the denunciation, "Rebel! thy words are wicked, as thy deeds /Shall henceforth be but weak" (1.3.784-5).

Noah, described by Samiassa as "the patriarch, who hath ever been /Upright before his God" (1.3.340-1) and by Japhet as being righteous enough to save his children (1.3.380-2), is similar to Raphael, but even more rabidly dogmatic, and this is most frequently demonstrated in contrast with his own son. As E H Coleridge famously says, "Byron said that it was difficult to make Lucifer talk 'like a clergyman.' He

contrived to make Noah talk like a street-preacher.”<sup>547</sup> Almost immediately upon appearing, Noah begins to proclaim God’s judgement of others: he questions his son Japhet’s purpose in being on Ararat, which he himself describes as “an evil spot /Upon an earth all evil” (1.2.91-2). In an irony not to have been lost upon Byron, “the mountains of Ararat” are the place where the Ark comes to rest as the Flood recedes,<sup>548</sup> and so the place was subsequently regarded as holy. When Noah’s other son Shem advises him not to stay in such a place, the patriarch proudly proclaims,

Do not fear for me:  
All evil things are powerless on the man  
Selected by Jehovah – let us on. (1.2.102-4).

His own safety fails to engender any sympathy for the plight of others. When he finds Japhet in the company of Anah, Aholibamah, Azazel, and Samiassa, his way of urging his son to leave them is a warning based upon the women’s imminent demise, for which he shows so little concern as to speak of it in front of them:

What

Dost thou here with these children of the wicked?  
Dread’st thou not to partake their coming doom?

JAPHET:           Father, it cannot be a sin to seek  
To save an earth-born being (1.3.464-8).

Interestingly, Japhet’s response to his father immediately addresses sin, the religious judgement of action. This action by Japhet is entirely orthodox,<sup>549</sup> but its Idealist valuation of life-saving is very starkly contrasted with the dogmatism of his father, in an opposition which has constituted one of the fundamental concerns of Christian theology from the earliest days. Noah singularly fails to address Japhet’s statement here, and turns, instead, to questioning the actions of Samiassa and Azazel. Further,

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<sup>547</sup> Coleridge, 5.309n.

<sup>548</sup> Genesis 8:4. Mt Ararat was also the home of the legendary founder of the Armenian nation, q.v. George Eric Mackay, *Lord Byron at the Armenian Convent* (Venice: Office of the Poliglotta, 1876), p.25.

<sup>549</sup> Q.v. Matthew 22:39, John 15:13, 1 John 4:19.

while Noah claims to not be judgemental, saying, “I am /But man, and was not made to judge mankind” (1.3.480-1), he very shortly proceeds to do exactly that, judging his own offspring:

JAPHET:           Let me die with *this*, and *them*!  
NOAH:             Thou *shouldst* for such a thought, but shalt not: he  
                      Who *can*, redeems thee. (1.3.498-500).

It is also noteworthy that the patriarch makes the claim about not judging men as a prelude to a claim about not judging angels, only to then proceed to tell angels that their actions “Cannot be good” (1.3.488). It is thus unsurprising that his condemnation of his son’s wilful attempts to save humans is vehement. When Japhet begs for mercy for Anah and Aholibamah, Noah rebukes him fiercely:

                      Wouldst thou have God commit a sin for thee?  
                              Such would it be  
                              To alter his intent  
                      For a mere mortal sorrow. Be a man! (1.3.691-4).

Whence Noah derives this idea is uncertain, and the Hebrew Scriptures are replete with examples of God altering his intent in precisely this regard: repeatedly promising to punish Israel for its wickedness and unfaithfulness, only to later relent. The Bible contradicts Noah, and, while there is no anachronism in this early patriarch being unaware of such things, the poet’s audience ought to have been well aware of this. Corbett curiously describes Noah’s claim as “an extraordinary theological point, possibly more offensive to Christian orthodoxy than anything else in the work, or in *Cain*”.<sup>550</sup> Undaunted, Japhet continues to call upon God for mercy:

                      Oh God! be thou a God, and spare  
                              Yet while ’tis time!  
                      Renew not Adam’s fall (1.3.704-6).

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<sup>550</sup> Corbett, p.186. While Noah’s expression is extremely unusual, it is unclear how Corbett reaches this particular valuation.



The exhortation to God not to renew Adam's Fall is an interesting one, because it places responsibility for that event with the Deity, and, by comparing the impending Deluge with that Fall, represents the Fall not as wrong because of the mortal's sin but as wrong because of the human suffering. Further, in calling upon God to 'be a God', he is using the characteristic of mercy as the identifying feature of God, making mercy a necessary condition of being recognised as the true, Ideal Deity. This exhortation is further emphasized by the fact that it falls between Noah's instruction to him to "Be a man! /And bear with what Adam's race must bear, and can" (1.3.694-5) and Raphael's to Noah to "be still a father!" (1.3.764) and cease railing at his son. In each case, the speaker enjoins the audience to adhere to an ideology which both are thought to share, and to behave 'better' than before: the difference highlighted by the parallel, however, is that the virtue to which both Japhet and Raphael appeal is empathy, whereas the trait to which Noah appeals is the vice of pride.<sup>551</sup> This structure of three paralleled appeals reiterates and emphasizes the nature of the activity itself: calling upon an individual to adhere to a moral value. Japhet is calling God to account, and God is not responding.

Noah's censorious response to this Idealist appeal is "Silence, vain boy! each word of thine's a crime" (1.3.712). Again, Noah's position is directly contradicted in the Bible: when Moses is on Mt. Sinai, the Israelites start to worship the Golden Calf and so God threatens to destroy them all and start again with Moses' offspring; Moses' response is to say to Almighty God, in an act of stunning bravery, "Turn from thy fierce wrath, and repent of this evil against thy people", and so "the LORD repented of the evil which he thought to do unto his people."<sup>552</sup> What Japhet attempts, in pleading, "be thou a God", is precisely what Moses does, and Moses is never criticized for this action. *Heaven and Earth's* Noah, however, falls well short of the Bible's Moses. When Japhet continues to insist that he cannot leave Anah to die, Noah instructs his insistent-merciful son,

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<sup>551</sup> Proverbs 16:18, "Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall."

<sup>552</sup> Exodus 32:12, 14, cf. Abraham's discussion with God over the treatment of Sodom in Genesis 18:7-32, and the complaint of the Angel of the Lord in Zechariah 1:14. Moses is not a unique instance of this in the canon, or even in the Torah.

Then die  
With them!  
How dar'st thou look on that prophetic sky,  
And seek to save what all things now condemn,  
In overwhelming unison  
With just Jehovah's wrath! (1.3.756-61).

The contrast between father and son is enough to condemn the one and vindicate the other. Japhet then asks, "Can rage and justice join in the same path?", to which his father replies, "Blasphemer! dar'st thou murmur even now!" (1.3.762, 3). While Noah is consistently obedient to the instructions which he has apparently received, it is Japhet who acts in the scripturally-prescribed philanthropic role, and this contrast, further underlined by the fact that Noah fails to show any compassion for the condemned, does, indeed, make the patriarch sound like a fire-and-brimstone street preacher. *Heaven and Earth* thus highlights the disjunction between the Christian discourses of love and of dogmatism, effectively opposing orthodoxy to itself, in a move more ideologically radical than anything else in Byron's representations of religion.

### **Theodicy**

As this dogmatism is a zealous adherence to the commands of God, the character of God is also called into question by this association. Noah's viciousness, in particular, raises the question of who could declare him so uniquely righteous.

Aholibamah is the most vehement questioner of dogmatism in the drama. When Noah's son tells them that the obliterating flood is coming, she asks, "Who shall do this?" and he replies, "He whose one word produced them." To this, she demands, "Who *heard* that word?" (1.3.454-5). Her disbelief sounds remarkably like Lucifer's in *Cain* 1.1.134-5, questioning the idea that God was the creator of everything, but Japhet answers in part by calling upon her immortal lover:

JAPHET:           The universe, which leaped

To life before it. Ah! smilest thou still in scorn?  
Turn to thy Seraphs: if they attest it not,  
They are none.

SAMIASA: Aholibamah, own thy God!

AHOLIBAMAH: I have ever hailed Our Maker, Samiasa,  
As thine, and mine: a God of Love, not Sorrow. (1.3.455-60).

Earlier, Aholibamah refers to “the Almighty giver /Who folds in clouds the founts of bliss and woe” (1.1.117-8), combining joy and sorrow into the one godhead. Later, having encountered much more woe in the potential loss of Samiasa, she constructs this distinction between images of God, and Japhet possibly learns from her, when he later calls upon the Deity to “be thou a God, and spare”. In doing so, Aholibamah and Japhet both take the Idealist step of questioning the true divinity of a god who could be so unsympathetic to humanity as to inflict the Flood upon the world. The drama contrasts the Idealist image of God with its own ‘realist’ image of God, making the former look far more moral than the latter.

Even such apparently minor details as the person of Japhet’s friend Irad contribute to the attack upon dogmatism. The identity of this character is not very clear: he is not one of Noah’s sons in Genesis,<sup>553</sup> and the *Dramatis Personae* of *Heaven and Earth* lists “Irada” as a separate figure from “Noah and his Sons”, but Irad does speak to Japhet of “our father’s herds” and “our tents” (1.2.31, 40). This, however, is complicated by the fact that Noah’s son Shem refers to Japhet as ‘going forth to meet with Irad’ (1.2.84-5), which suggests that Irad and Japhet do not live in the same place. Irad’s possessives could be exclusive of his audience, thus meaning “our [but not your] tents”, with “father” referring, as in common in biblical texts, to someone more distant than ‘immediate male ancestor’; it could even be Methuselah, Noah’s grandfather, who died in the year of the Flood, and would then be the patriarch of the extended family.<sup>554</sup> It is most likely that Byron is not rewriting the name of one of Noah’s sons without any explanation of the fact, and so Irad is not going into the Ark.

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<sup>553</sup> The third son is Ham, who does not appear in this drama (Genesis 5:32).

<sup>554</sup> Q.v. Genesis 5:26, 28, and 7:6.

He appears, at first, to have been introduced for a single scene merely to allow Japhet to express his unrequited love for Anah in dialogue rather than monologue. However, his brief appearance reveals some interesting implications. Irad speaks of “the sons of Cain” in the third person, and contrasts them with his and Japhet’s group: “they try to barter with us” (1.2.32, 33). This clearly makes Irad one of “Seth’s children”, the people of whom Aholibamah is so contemptuous (1.3.391-2). Irad is therefore one of Japhet’s kinsmen, whom the latter mourns, questioning why he himself should outlive them (1.3.16-8). Irad is to be drowned, and his introduction to the drama serves further to underline the fact that people of whom the drama presents no wickedness will perish in a cataclysm which cannot then appear to be anything but unjust in itself.

The critique of dogmatic obedience also includes a mother offering her child up to Japhet, and saying,

What hath he done –  
My unweaned son –  
To move Jehovah’s wrath or scorn? (1.3.837-9).

The child is too young to be anything other than innocent, and the scene is designed to turn the audience against the engineer of the massacre.

Describing this very situation, Aholibamah says that “the race of Cain /Must lift their eyes to Adam’s God in vain” (1.3.618-9). This raises an interesting issue with regard to the biblical doctrine of the willingness of God to help those who call upon him, namely the fact that the reliability of his aid is often explicitly predicated upon the righteousness of the applicants.<sup>555</sup> Thus, “the race of Cain” would, according to the Bible texts, only have a reasonable expectation of divine help if they were righteous. The Genesis account of the Flood specifies the reason for the Deluge: “GOD saw that the wickedness of man *was* great in the earth, and *that* every imagination of the thoughts of his heart *was* only evil continually” (Genesis 6:5). In 1 Enoch, the angels who descend to the women are also responsible for teaching humanity all kinds of

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<sup>555</sup> Q.v. Psalm 50:7-22, et al.

“immorality”, including sorcery: the activities which incite God to unleash the Deluge.<sup>556</sup> In *Heaven and Earth*, however, the wickedness of humanity and the justification of their destruction are not at all clear. Thus, the Spirits with whom Japhet argues on Ararat exult in the fact that

No more the human voice  
Shall vex our joys in middle air  
With prayer;  
No more  
Shall they adore (1.3.161-5).

At least some of the doomed humans have been worshipping God. Japhet, whose conferred innocence and salvation is promised by Raphael (1.3.766-9), is nonetheless denied “the reprieve of our young world, /For which I have so often pray’d” (1.3.319-20): neither his imputed righteousness nor his father’s can rescue anyone beyond the immediate family from their doom.

Shortly after saying that her race will receive no help from God, Aholibamah tells Samiasa,

Obey him, as we shall obey;  
I would not keep this life of mine in clay  
An hour beyond his will (1.3.637-9).

This willing acceptance of God’s judgement, which is the humility demanded in the dogmatic discourse in the Bible, is in enormous contrast to her own earlier assertions that she and her lover will war with God if God tries to interfere (1.1.121-2), and is echoed by the drowning mortal who says,

Blessed are the dead  
Who die in the Lord!

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<sup>556</sup> 1 Enoch 7- 9

[...]

blessed be the Lord (1.3.883-4, 893).

Nonetheless, not one of these demonstrations of obedience gains any of the condemned any respite from the catastrophe. Most ironically, the first two lines of the drowning mortal's speech above are quoted from Revelation 14:13, wherein they describe the righteous martyrs, the most celebrated of all Christians. The strength of *Heaven and Earth's* critique of orthodoxy lies in the fact that it adopts orthodox discourse to deliver its message, to reveal that the action of the worldwide Deluge contravenes the biblical and orthodox representation of God as righteous. Further, the Flood is represented by the Spirits as being ultimately vain:

When the great barrier of the deep is rent,  
Shall thou and thine be good or happy? – No!  
Thy new world and new race shall be of woe –

[...]

This remnant

[...]

shall give again to Time

New beings – years, diseases, sorrow, crime –

With all companionship of hate and toil,

[...]

still struggle in the mortal chain,

Till Earth wax hoary;

War with yourselves, and hell, and heaven, in vain,

Until the clouds look gory

With the blood reeking from each battle-plain;

New times, new climes, new arts, new men; but still,

The same old tears, old crimes, and oldest ill,

Shall be amongst your race in different forms;

But the same moral storms

Shall oversweep the future (1.3.127-9, 87, 90-2, 207-16).

Although these are evil Spirits, with a vested interest in making Japhet unhappy, the drama's audience have the advantage of history to show them that the 'predictions' came true. The cataclysm is, therefore, shown not only to be unjust in its synchronic application, but to be worthless in a pragmatic, diachronic view, as an attempt to end the alleged wickedness of humanity. This same speech includes another, even more cutting, assault upon orthodoxy, in what is a parody of a Biblical passage:

Where even the brutes, in their despair,  
Shall cease to prey on man and on each other,  
And the striped tiger shall lie down to die  
Beside the lamb, as though he were his brother (1.2.177-80).

This is a parallel to the Messianic Paradise predicted in the Bible, and so it parodies the biblical representation of a future of hope, with animals coming together to die rather than to live.<sup>557</sup> It is much closer to Lucifer's claimed sympathy in suffering than is anything which transpires in *Cain*. By adopting biblical discourse and subverting it within a biblical narrative, that narrative's moral position is inverted: orthodoxy is shown to be immoral, and its god to be wicked. Corbett thus describes this god as "the most powerfully conceived source of human anguish in Byron's dramas", and Alan Richardson calls him "not the judge of revelation but the incomprehensible creator and destroyer of Job".<sup>558</sup>

This representation of God by his actions is contrasted starkly with the Ideal God, the God of love and compassion, whom Japhet and Aholibamah envision. In as much as the contrast makes the 'real' God of the narrative appear wicked, it makes the Ideal God of the characters' hopes appear correspondingly virtuous.

The orthodoxy of *Heaven and Earth* is subverted by a clash of ideologies in an extreme situation. A single family of the Elect are about to be rescued from a

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<sup>557</sup> "The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fating together; and a little child shall lead them. And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together: and the lion shall eat straw like the ox" (Isaiah 11:6-7).

<sup>558</sup> Corbett, p.36; Alan Richardson, 'On the Borders of *Heaven and Earth*', in *The Plays of Lord Byron: Critical Essays*, 301-320 (p.302).

cataclysm in which everyone else will perish. Japhet, quite naturally, wants to rescue others, first of all the woman whom he loves, and then also those with whom he shares no more than his humanity. Through a series of inverse, contrastive parallels, the orthodox side, as represented by Raphael and Noah, are presented as heartlessly dogmatic, which, by virtue of the contrast with the common ideal of compassion, makes their dogmatism appear morally wrong. This structural representation is further reinforced by the only visible aspect of God's character in the drama being the unleashing of the cataclysm. Through the paralleling of xenophobic bigotry with zealous dogmatism, the whole drama acts to construct an opposition between love and obedience to an inscrutable deity who is willing to obliterate almost the entire human race in an act which will not bring any lasting improvement.

### ***Cain versus Heaven and Earth***

Both of these dramas are concerned with biblical topics, and both are concerned with love. In the earlier work, love competes with knowledge as the basis of Romantic reinvention of the inner world; in the later, love is contrasted with dogmatism as a mode of behaviour. The great difference, then, is that the central theme of *Cain* is ideological, but not specifically religious, whereas the central theme of *Heaven and Earth* is directly religious. The epiphenomenal discursive positions are the ones to which contemporary readers, and some subsequent readers, have responded. In *Cain*, the surface position is Lucifer's anti-orthodox commentary; in *Heaven and Earth*, it is all of the characters' acknowledgements of the sovereignty of God. Crucially, the apparent position in each drama is undermined, in *Cain* by the representation of Lucifer as a biased, self-contradicting witness with a strong and malevolent ulterior motive behind his dishonesty and manipulation, and in *Heaven and Earth* by the representation particularly of the orthodox figures of Noah and Raphael as blindly dogmatic, heartlessly unsympathetic to the suffering of multitudes. Where *Cain* expands upon, but does not significantly alter the biblical narrative, *Heaven and Earth* threatens to undermine the canon with an uncontradicted counter-narrative. Noah, who declares his own son deserving of death for impious thoughts, is noticeably less virtuous a figure than Abel, who forgives his own murderer. The characterization of major figures in both dramas belies their discourse.



The representations of God are also starkly different. In neither case does the Deity appear on the stage, but both show his actions. In *Cain*, he is contrasted with Lucifer in his treatment of mortals, and the worst which can be said of him is that he fails to intervene to prevent them from harming themselves. In *Heaven and Earth*, he massacres most of the population of the world. The Flood provides plenty of opportunity for criticism of any God who would order such a catastrophe, and, while this drama does take up some of that, it focuses far more heavily upon the response of subordinate beings, of humans and angels who ought to object, like Moses, to a divine decree which is not justified in the text. It therefore divides the Deity and humanity. God is never even represented, as in *Cain*, by the traditional herald, the Angel of the Lord. *Cain* is about a human committing murder; *Heaven and Earth* is about God committing near genocide while his followers look on approvingly.

This presence of an evil God highlights the absence of the desired, good God. The Idealist strain is clear in *Heaven and Earth* where the values to which the dissenting angels, the women, and Japhet adhere are more virtuous than are the actions of the dogmatic patriarch and archangel. God is implicitly condemned for not being as Ideal, as admirable, as he could be. Like *Cain*, *Heaven and Earth* displaces its ideal position outside of the simple dichotomy of heterodox impiety or orthodox piety, this time by introducing a murderous God, and raising against him the Romantic hope of a worthy, Ideal God. The apparent impiety towards the evil God is replaced by a piety towards the good God.

In *Cain*, the essentially Idealist belief in the ameliorating effect of religious behaviour and religious belief underlies the comments of contemporary critics who opined that the drama would have served the ends of “any enemy to human happiness”, any devil, by “loosening the foundations of faith” in those so unwary as to read it,<sup>559</sup> that it could “shock modest and pious delicacy”,<sup>560</sup> and that Byron was mistaken in thinking “that the publication of his sentiments will not be disadvantageous to mankind.”<sup>561</sup> Part of

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<sup>559</sup> *London Christian Instructor*, V (April 1822), 202-6, RR, IV, 1585-9: p.204 (1587).

<sup>560</sup> *Edinburgh [Scots] Magazine*, 2nd series, X (January 1822), 102-14, RR, V, 2191-7: p.113 (2197).

<sup>561</sup> Francis Jeffrey, *Edinburgh Review*, XXXVI (February 1822), 413-52, RR, II, 918-38: p438 (931).

the criticism of the unorthodoxy of the sentiments expressed in *Cain* was a reaction not merely to the theological challenge posed by Lucifer's arguments, but to their ideology's potential psychological effects and the attendant social challenges. This could well explain why Francis Jeffrey, one of the very best contemporary readers of Byron's work, objected to this particular drama.

There are several other reasons for the contemporary critics' misreadings. One consideration is the very nature of the business of criticism at the time: the reviewers were often reading the considered texts very quickly, in order to publish their reviews before their competitors'. This, naturally, led to epiphenomenal reading, taking the surface of the drama as its message. Another is the politics of the day: critics aligning themselves with particular ideological factions, such as in the *Eclectic Review's* championing of biblical literalism, or with more simply political factions, such as in the *Gentleman's Magazine's* reference to George IV having been offended by *Cain*. Yet a third is the expectation of Byron's work and Byron's own character, as well as of his poetic characters, which may well have predisposed a number of critics to find impiety in *Cain* because it was Byron's poem, particularly considering that *Cain* appeared after the first five cantos of *Don Juan*. *Heaven and Earth* may then have been exonerated because the protagonist is the righteous son of a biblical patriarch. A fourth is the operation of the simple dichotomy espoused by these critics, leading them to conclude that a poem is either pious or impious. The distribution of these elements, in varying degrees, across the broad field of critics would go far towards explaining why the responses of critics were so different to one another.

Modern critics have all too frequently followed the contemporary critics, apparently on the fundamentally-historicist basis that the people of the time must have understood the orthodoxy of the time. The error in such an assumption lies in the unrepresentative nature of the comments of a few contemporary literary critics, especially when those critics were not reading with sufficient care, and were thus reacting to ideas which the dramas themselves undermine. Reading more deeply than the epiphenomenal discourse reveals that *Cain* is not impious, and *Heaven and Earth* is not pious.



## Conclusion

There is a reverent impatience of forms, and there is an irreverent impatience of them. An irreverent impatience for formal dogma means impatience of all spiritual truth; but a reverent impatience of formal dogma may be but the expression of the feeling that truth must be larger, purer, nobler than any mere human expression or definition of it.<sup>562</sup>

Byron's representations of religion are not nearly as negative as has often been assumed. Although heterodoxy, in particular, is frequently condemned in his poems, the basis of condemnation is most often an orthodox value system. Singularly positive references to sincere religious belief are also common.

*Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* demonstrates the unrepresentative nature of the conservative, contemporary criticisms of Byron's work. While some people's religious sensibilities were offended, others' were not, which precludes the assumption that the poem was impious in its own cultural context. Religion, in fact, is one of the many victims of corruption in the poem, and thus an object of sympathy. A tolerance for Catholicism is evident from this early stage. The validation of religion operates specifically in respect to an idealised, pure version of faith: although the reality may have fallen, the hope of redemption remains. Throughout, central Christian values such as mercy and philanthropy are employed to identify this desired ideal.

When Islam is criticized in the *Eastern Tales*, it is the same Christian values which are used as the basis of judgement. Frequently, direct comparisons are drawn between Islam and Christianity, and the younger faith is consistently represented as the poorer. These comparisons are certainly judgements of weaknesses of Christian practice as much as they are of failures of Islam, but they nonetheless validate Christianity in the process, most particularly by challenging Islamic orthodoxy, but only Christian

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<sup>562</sup> William Boyd Carpenter, Bishop of Ripon, in Arthur Hallam Tennyson, *Alfred, Lord Tennyson: A Memoir* (London: Macmillan, 1899), p.259.

heteropraxy. Significantly, it is Christianity which is associated with love, and with the love-objects of the Byronic Heroes, whereas Islam is associated with the oppressive authorities against which they rebel.

*Manfred* turns from religion proper to the most heterodox variant: magic. Despite the opportunity afforded by its fantastical setting, it is fairly orthodox. The poem validates the faithful believers, and operates within a world which is under the rulership of one deity who is, at the very least, not evil. The hero's profession is an affront to strict orthodoxy, but the Byronic Hero is always a rebel, and is made to be admired nonetheless: unorthodoxy is shown to be positive even while orthodoxy is not made to be negative. This commences the poet's problematization of the simple dichotomy of orthodoxy versus heterodoxy, moving away from the previous discrimination between orthodoxy and heteropraxy, but still in the direction of the Ideal image of faith.

The Christian values reappear in regard to *Don Juan*, as do misreadings of the poem, where its coarseness leads some readers to imagine that it is impious, rather than deliberately, rhetorically impolite. Its moral framework is inherently religious: as war is idolatry in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, so war is Hell in *Don Juan*. Once again, an ideal, pure religion is the desired replacement for an evident, fallen religion: heteropraxy is the object of the poem's critique. The idealised religion achieves its strongest emotional expression in a Marian devotion which could not be accepted by contemporary critics in a fiercely Protestant Georgian Britain, but which is nonetheless coherent with the poet's expressed emotional attachment to faith. The doubt which applies to everything else does not touch the idealised, romanticised Virgin, and anagogical belief is preferred to epistemic faith.

The most persistently misread of all the poems are *Cain* and *Heaven and Earth*. The former is apparently dominated by Lucifer's impiety, but the Devil is not to be trusted, and the God of the poem is as virtuous as Lucifer is wicked. If it is true that "Byron was not a philosopher", perhaps this was because he saw that belief could exist in spite of clever arguments against it. *Heaven and Earth*, on the other hand, is the most ferocious assault on orthodox belief in Byron's oeuvre: its pious preachers

are vicious bigots, and its God is a genocidal monster. It even adopts orthodox discourse so as to subvert it by firmly associating it with murder on a far greater scale than Cain's. Nonetheless, alongside the image of the monstrous God of the tale is raised the image of a more virtuous, more admirable, ideal God in the hopes of Aholibamah and Japhet. Even more forcefully than *Manfred*, these two biblical dramas problematize the dichotomy of orthodoxy and heterodoxy, validating instead an Ideal faith outside of that simple dyad.

Although only a selection of Byron's works have been considered in this study, much the same patterns are found in others. McGann describes *Cain's* Lucifer as "a norm of value", and further declares that "He represents the "Eternal Spirit of the chainless Mind," and as such occupies a positive role in Byron's moral scheme".<sup>563</sup> The phrase quoted from Byron is from the 'Sonnet on Chillon' (line 1), a paean to liberty, ending with Bonnivard's marks in the stone of his prison, which "appeal from tyranny to God" (line 14): God, not Lucifer, is associated with Liberty. *The Prisoner of Chillon* is, after all, about a family who perish for their faith (1.11-14, 21-4), placing sympathy with the believers and their belief. Religion is also a natural part of the context of such historical pieces as *The Two Foscari*, *Marino Faliero*, *Mazeppa*, *The Prophecy of Dante*, *The Lament of Tasso*, etc, and positive statements of faith are expressed in them all. *Morgante Maggiore* is the most challenging to Christianity, and yet the challenges are Pulci's, not Byron's, as Byron himself noted in his defence of *Don Juan's* liberties.

What Byron himself believed, upon one day or the next, is rather a more complex matter, but what remains clear is that his work demonstrates a consistent valuation of a reflective, critical belief in a good God. At some points, he validates the concept of the Incarnation, which means that the label 'Deist' is unuseful. The appeal of the Incarnation might have been simply the virtuous act by a virtuous, Ideal God.

The Idealist position recurs throughout Byron's work, and constitutes the most consistent aspect of the representations of religion. The specific instances of Idealism

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<sup>563</sup> McGann, *Fiery Dust*, p.255.

vary, but the mode of thought persists: although the religion manifest in the world is corrupt, as the world is corrupt, the Ideal of religion remains pure. The Ideal of God also remains pure. As Gleckner notes of *The Two Foscari*,

if it is Marina, the younger Foscari's wife, who implores heaven, "Oh, thou eternal God! Canst *thou* continue so, with such a world?" (I, i, 211-12), the question is also Byron's, and the play his affirmative answer.<sup>564</sup>

By separating a good God from an evil dogmatism, God is preserved as a morally worthy object of admiration.

There are other considerations in operation here, however. The first is that such Idealism is not unusual in religious contexts, and actually forms the basis of many 'liberal' variants of religious systems. Jesus of Nazareth's idealist essentialisation of Jewish belief is an excellent example of this, and, as has been demonstrated, Byron was certainly not alone in his liberal religious views in his own time. The second is that such an Idealist view of religion is an inherently Romantic one. The Romantic ameliorative reinvention of the world can easily be transferred across to an ameliorative reinvention of religion, and connections between Romanticism and religion are well known. As T E Hulme says,

The instincts that find their right and proper outlet in religion must come out in some other way. [...] Romanticism, then, and this is the best definition I can give of it, is spilt religion.<sup>565</sup>

When this 'spilt religion' then mixes with the original kind, the result will be a hybrid, which was taken as impurity and thus impiety by some of Byron's contemporaries. Its only irreverence, however, is directed at an exclusivist, prejudicial orthodoxy. Far from being impious, it is only non-pious.

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<sup>564</sup> Gleckner, p.318n.

<sup>565</sup> T E Hulme, 'Romanticism and Classicism', in *Romanticism: Points of View*, ed. by Robert F Gleckner and Gerald E Enscoe, (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1970), 55-65 (p.58).

This radical reinvention of religion was even, as Ryan notes, a feature of Byron's period:

public religion in England was in a transitional state that offered hope and apparent opportunity for genuine change in the spiritual temper of the country. This was the spirit of the age that conditioned British Romanticism, a spirit of religious spontaneity and innovation, and this destabilizing, liberalizing impulse was not confined to the sphere of religion only but had broad social, economic, and political implications as well.<sup>566</sup>

It is unsurprising that an aesthetic, and therefore ideological, movement like Romanticism ought to influence art and religion together. The characteristics of this Romantic movement were, of course, visible at the time:

My intention is not to follow the steps of that inimitable author [Cervantes] in describing such total perversion of intellect as misconstrues objects actually presented to the senses, but that more common aberration from sound judgment which apprehends occurrences indeed in their own reality, but communicates to them a tincture of its own romantic tone and colouring.<sup>567</sup>

This passage, from Walter Scott's 1814 novel *Waverley*, presents a clear, contemporary description of 'romantic' re-creative behaviour, well before the term was capitalised or applied to the works of Scott's and Byron's own time. Another pertinent description appeared in 1807, in Georg Hegel's *Phenomenology of Mind*:

self-consciousness has got beyond the substantial fullness of life, which it used to carry on in the element of thought – beyond the state of immediacy of belief, and beyond the satisfaction and security arising from the assurance which consciousness possessed of being reconciled with the ultimate reality [...] [it] now desires from philosophy not so much to bring it to a knowledge of what it is, as to obtain once again through philosophy the restoration of that

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<sup>566</sup> Ryan, p.29.

<sup>567</sup> Scott, *Waverley* (London: John C Nimmo, 1898), p.32.



sense of solidity and substantiality of existence it has lost. [...] What it wants from philosophy is not so much insight as edification. The beautiful, the holy, the eternal, religion, love – these are the bait required to awaken the desire to bite: not the notion, but ecstasy, not the march of cold necessity in the subject-matter, but ferment and enthusiasm[.]<sup>568</sup>

This description of self-consciousness having deconstructed its own beliefs and thus seeking after new values is a perfect description of the religious attitude of Byron's poetry: sceptical without being anti-religious, orthodox to much Christian belief, or to the *Bible*, and yet also pluralistic in their views, the poems construct a belief to admire, replacing the cold rationalism of scepticism or the harsh discriminations of dogmatism. The reason for this can be simply expressed in the idea that Byron's work involves the romanticisation of religion. Notably, Ryan describes Shelley as doing much the same: "he made a point of distinguishing the authentic character of Jesus Christ from the misconstructions of it fostered by what he called "the popular religion."",<sup>569</sup>

This may seem a peculiar assertion regarding a poet often described as 'despairing', such as in McGann's comment that "despair is not the meaning of his poetry, it is its condition of being".<sup>570</sup> However, another of his comments is more accurate: "Byronic Despair is the reflex of an Ideal attachment in precisely the same way that Shelleyan Hope is the reflex of his Idealism."<sup>571</sup> It is apparently true that his despair springs from his idealism, and the world's failure to match that. However, a crucial factor is that Byronic Despair is *over*-matched in its vigour by Byronic Determination, founded upon an often-unvoiced, but nonetheless influential Byronic Hope, which is why he managed to produce poetry at all. The struggle against self-doubt is constant, but the romantic images of heroes dying for their beliefs are just as steady. Fairchild claims the doubt as Byron's failure, in that "Byron's intellectual self-sufficiency, however, is

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<sup>568</sup> Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Mind*, trans. by J B Baillie (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1930), pp.71-2.

<sup>569</sup> Ryan, p.195, quoting Shelley's 'Essay on Christianity'.

<sup>570</sup> McGann, *The Romantic Ideology*, p.131.

<sup>571</sup> *Ibid*, p.127

not the triumphantly outreaching self-sufficiency of the true romantic spirit”.<sup>572</sup> To make such a claim, however, is to exclude what Kant describes as “reflective belief” from ‘true’ Romanticism, and to found a new dogmatism for an ideology already past.

Romantic religion’s weakness is in the chaotic nature of its very motivation. As Frederick Copleston notes of the Romantic spirit,

there was a tendency to depreciate fixed universal moral laws or rules in favour of the free development of the self in accordance with values rooted in and corresponding to the individual personality. [...] there was a tendency, with F. Schlegel for example, to emphasise the free pursuit by the individual of his own moral ideal (the fulfilment of his own ‘Idea’) rather than obedience to universal laws dictated by the impersonal practical reason.<sup>573</sup>

As an essentially individual, idiosyncratic belief, Idealism lacks the ideological apparatus of institutionalised belief: the reinforcing systems of preachers and texts, and their tools of sermons and ceremonies. Like Deism or Quakerism, lacking centralisation, it lacks homogeneity, and its iterations are highly variable. This is, of course, related to Byron’s well-known *mobilité*, the fluid and ever-moving position of the cultural outsider. Its continuity lies not in its expressions, which are not formulated as unalterable creeds, but in its mode of thought.

A crucial issue of this mode of thought is that it does not stop at the rejection of orthodoxy. Had it done so, it would have constituted impiety. However, by presenting a positively-valued alternative, constructed from values of orthodoxy itself, Byron’s works move far beyond mere infidelity and into a new fidelity to an essentialised aspect of the old faith. It is not piety, at least as much of his audience understood that, but it does contain an impulse towards belief.

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<sup>572</sup> Fairchild, p.416.

<sup>573</sup> Copleston, p.14.