

**REPRESENTATIONS OF THE EAST
IN THE POETRY OF BYRON:**

A Study in Culture and Identity

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ABSTRACT

Edward Said's notion of 'orientalism' is explored with reference to a cross-section of Byron's narrative verse, taken chronologically. Particular focus is placed on two textual loci, namely, the concepts of 'culture' and 'identity'. These concepts form the basis of a close reading of both the texts themselves, and the manner in which Byron's personal and textual personas shape the narrative and are in turn influenced by their social context. An additional theme of exile is considered, and forms the bridge between a historical analysis of the verse, and current political reality as it is depicted in J.M. Coetzee's recent novel, *Disgrace*.

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INTRODUCTION: Autobiography and Representation – An Argument

In considering Byron's poetry, we are drawn into the problem of interpretation from the very first line of verse. The particulars of the text's historical presence (its cultural context, the ideological imperatives it promotes or challenges, the responses to its publication, etc) immediately impinge upon our critical faculties in such a way as to demand a politicized response. To borrow a phrase from Fredric Jameson, "literary history is here everywhere implied" (1981: 11). The assertion draws attention to the contest for meaning which occurs as an intrinsic function of any process of reading – an act which he views as unavoidably ideological. It matters little which section of Byron's verse we choose to begin with; what is instead of more immediate relevance is the fact of its authorship. "The main appeal of Byron's poetry," we are told by Northrop Frye, "is in the fact that it is Byron's" (1963: 174). Frye's articulation is characteristic of much historical Byron criticism and persists in residual or even concrete form to the present day, with comparatively little emphasis being placed on the artistic merit of the poetry itself.

The correlation which exists between the events narrated in the poetry and the particulars of Byron's own life is of interest not for their revelatory impact, but rather for the way in which they reify the relation between the text, the author and the reader. Robert Gleckner's caution against judging the text in a superficially biographical way, instead of probing beneath what he rightly calls the "forbidding surface of [Byron's] language and prosody" (1967: xii), draws our attention to the essentially ironic nature of the verse.¹ It is of course a commonplace of Byron criticism to refer to such structural "irony," but an early response to Byron's poetry may provide a useful point of departure and reveals something of the difficulty in penetrating the multivalent narrative layering of his verse.

We must of course admit the force of Byron's personality from the outset. It is clear from Byron's own writings that his public presence often manifestly influenced the way in

¹ Gleckner's study, *Byron and the Ruins of Paradise*, remains influential, as Andrew Nicholson's recent bibliographical survey of Byron criticism indicates (q.v. O'Neill 1998: 94).

which his poetic creations were received. In *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, to take an obvious example, the reader is urged not to interpret the chief character as anything but a poetic creation:

A fictitious character is introduced for the sake of giving some connexion to the piece; which, however, makes no pretension to regularity. It has been suggested to me by friends, on whose opinions I set a high value, that in this fictitious character, 'Childe Harold', I may incur the suspicion of having intended some real personage: this I beg leave, once for all, to disclaim – Harold is the child of imagination, for the purpose I have stated. In some very trivial particulars, and those merely local, there might be grounds for such a notion; but in the main points, I should hope, none whatever.

(*CHP*, Preface)

The elaborate disclaimer provides an indication of the profoundly problematic relation which arises in a consideration of any of Byron's poetry, namely, the reader's (not to say, the critic's) habit of seeking within the poetical text for evidence of the poet's identity. Byron's celebrity status alone would have been sufficient to encourage the reading public's inventive curiosity; but perhaps it is the renunciation itself, in the above passage, which invites speculation. In creating the melancholic figure of what would soon become recognizable as the Byronic hero, and perhaps due especially to his express denial that the character resembled himself, Byron effectively created a market in which the chief commodity became the "Byronism" of his literary creations through which his readers sought to extract the details of his private life. Elfenbein's (1995) study concludes that it is precisely Byron's heroes' lack of definition which encourages such a process of "curiosity about the origins of the hero's situation" (47) – here transferred to an eroticized reading of the poems' most elusive character: the author himself. Unavoidably then, Byron rapidly fell under the influence of his readers' wilful interpretations.

Ironically, it is Byron's own as it were 'premature' exposure to the cult of consumerism, which engulfed him in his literary role as 'Lord Byron,' that partially inseminated his poetry with the desolating irony which we may recognize, if in germinal form, as the effect which Jameson refers to much later as postmodernism's "depthlessness." In Byron's verse the term has limited application, but nevertheless registers a confluence of economic conditions which reproduces a surprisingly similar aesthetic. Once labelled and

commodified in terms of a perceived “Byronism,” the author’s deployment of character, and his own tendency towards dandyism, assumed a dialectically antagonistic relation to his reading public even as he exploited the marketability of his literary image. Byron’s reaction against his own commodification and his simultaneous participation in its perpetuation registers the consequent loss of meaning, on an artistic level, which manifests itself in the form of the hollow sense of ennui from which his various protagonists suffer.² Their common underlying motivation is the elaboration of a *negative* causal chain – journeys undertaken not in order to achieve good or great deeds but to escape bad ones; quests not to redeem themselves but to execute a terrible vengeance upon an equally villainous enemy. At best, as exemplified in *Childe Harold*, the motivation is simply to escape the overwhelming sense of nihilism or purposelessness inherent in society, with little concern for any *positive* achievement.

In *CHP*, the source of Harold’s malaise is an uncertain “fullness of satiety” (q.v. 1. 4) coupled with his sense of alienation in a society whose artifice he can no longer accept. It is this absence of purpose or meaningful identity which propels him abroad on an equally uncertain “pilgrimage”. And it is only in escape, through the severance of exile, that Harold finds some relief – but only fleetingly, as he discovers that in the end there can be no escape from the memory of his former existence. In the *Turkish Tales*, it is similarly a sense of lack or loss which motivates the protagonists’ turbulent progress: for the Giaour,

² The sense of emptiness which we encounter in Byron’s verse may be associatively linked, in the twentieth century, to such artistic movements as Dadaism and Pop Art. A comparison with, particularly, the latter movement may offer an insight into the mechanism of Byron’s own representational practice. Frederick Hartt (1989) describes Andy Warhol as a “speciali[st] in the boring” (940), whose art “functions on the basis of devastating wit, anti-aestheticism, and... positive nihilism” (938). Born in a similar period of frustration, the Pop Art of Warhol’s screen prints emulates the artificiality of 1960s popular culture in a way not dissimilar to Byron’s characters’ pervasive sense of ennui which critiques his society’s class and cultural hypocrisy, and plays upon the same form of commodification which Byron’s verse underwent. My purpose here is not, however, to overstate the case for a postmodern reading of Byron, but to encourage a series of consonances by which we may extend the boundaries of our critical inquiry. As with Warhol’s iterative art, which acquires its emotive force through the act of mechanical repetition, Byron’s use of the figure of the Byronic ‘hero’ operates in a field of literary-historical connotation which draws from the previous versions via a process of accretion. The result is a gradually emergent vision in which his society’s social and ideological structures are debunked by the reflexive gaze of a figure that (repeatedly) internalizes the hollowness of the world in which he exists, in the form of inescapable guilt, failure, despair and spiritual desolation. Another of Warhol’s artistic offerings, an 8 hour film on the Empire State Building, focuses the unblinking gaze of the camera on the New York City landmark and thereby effectively deconstructs its iconic status by casting it as banal, much as Byron’s unflinching satire reveals the basic purposelessness of Europe’s high society.

his loss of Leila and the attendant guilt for his act of vengeance haunts him and stands in place of the love which once gave his life purpose. Again, exile provides a kind of escape but also effects a form of unceasing punishment for the unrepentant (and thus irredeemably damned) main character. In name alone, the Giaour's sense of dislocation and loss is self-evident and serves as an index of what it means to be in exile – a condition both of physical separation as well as mental alienation or anguish. In *The Siege of Corinth*, Alp is likewise both an avenger of lost love (Francesca's) and a terrible instrument of retribution against a society that has exiled him without just cause. He too suffers under the weight of his actions, as exile and traitor, but is compelled to act against his native Venice in defence of his own honour.

In *Don Juan*, Byron's treatment of the aforementioned negativism is rendered through the devices of irony and parody (frequently parody tellingly also becomes pastiche), and becomes the primary reason and support for the narrative itself. Here finally, a shift is made from the use of character as the main vehicle for the deployment of such nihilism to its assimilation into the narrative frame itself. In this sense, Don Juan may be said to represent the least "Byronic" of Byron's antiheroes. Since Juan is cast as a youth for whom every occurrence is in the nature of a formative experience, the loss of love and position he repeatedly undergoes has none of the poignancy of a fallen Giaour, or an Alp – or even a Harold. Unlike Childe Harold, Juan's initial outlook on life is not jaded and he apparently has much to learn. Nevertheless, as we follow the course of Juan's maturation, there emerges once more the powerful sense of life's basic nihilism. But the main rhetorical thrust of *Don Juan* is located in the narrative itself, in the caustic voice of the narrator, whose innuendoes and sarcasm tear down the fragile stability of his society's moral-ideological edifice with an almost perverse enjoyment. The reader's habit of reading autobiographical meaning into Byron's writings therefore heightens the devastating effect of his attacks on the cultural value-set that the objects of his derision represent.

The combination of personal and political motivations evident in each of the above poems shapes the Byronic (anti)hero along strongly Satanic lines, with emphasis firmly placed on the protagonist's rebellion and innate pride above all else – traits which are a

source of great strength as well as the protagonist's greatest weakness. This categorization of the figure of the exile in such strongly stylised terms – as Satan-figure, or rebel – alludes to the high degree of socio-political regulation which western society seeks to impose upon its citizens, and also reflects the severe moral censure placed upon those who deviate from social custom.³ As the eminent Orientalist scholar Edward Said argues, “the power of culture is potentially nothing less than the power of the State” (1983: 10). Culture consequently becomes for him:

a system of exclusions legislated from above but enacted through its polity, by which such things as anarchy, disorder, irrationality, inferiority, bad taste, and immorality are identified, then deposited outside the culture and kept there by its institutions.

(11)

Such a rendering of cultural hegemony makes it unsurprising, then, that the poems' various protagonists, acting as the agents of social change, rebel against their circumstances. Indeed, it is this aspect which lends them the reader's sympathy even as they transgress their culture's most sacred taboos – of miscegenation, religious and political apostasy and culminating in their desperate acts of treason. For Said, the condition of exile represents not only the deleterious operation of cultural hegemony upon dissidence or difference, but also supplies the one means through which an equitable critique of culture may be made. He writes:

The more one is able to leave one's cultural home, the more easily is one able to judge it, and the whole world as well, with the spiritual detachment *and* generosity necessary for true vision. The more easily, too, does one assess oneself and alien cultures with the same combination of intimacy and distance.

(1995: 47)

What is apparent from the above assertion is Said's emphasis on the importance of humanism in one's engagement with the world. The attendant faculty of “true vision,” however, seems a little more remote and depends on the exile's capacity (and

³ As Fredrick Jameson puts it, “the concept of good and evil is a positional one that coincides with categories of Otherness. Evil thus, as Nietzsche taught us, continues to characterize whatever is radically different from me [or, one's culture], whatever by virtue of precisely that difference seems to constitute a real and urgent threat to my own existence” (1981: 115).

willingness) to embrace his circumstances in the terms which Said describes. The plurality of vision available to one situated outside of the *saturating* effect (q.v. 1983: 9) of a cultural edifice may certainly grant to the exile an objectivity which is unavailable to those locked within the dominant discourse but this requires his participation in a process of *defamiliarization* in which cultural stereotype is replaced by a real engagement with his new context. Somewhat contradictorily, Said's view in this respect apparently limits itself to the non-western exile. This tendency to regard all of western society and its cultural expressions as reproductive of the same degree of hegemony disregards the influence which liberal western writers and thinkers have had in producing a gradual change in perceptions about the East, as Mohammed Sharafuddin argues in his book *Islam and Romantic Orientalism*. He writes: "Each period allows only a certain latitude of free play. One must therefore acknowledge partial contributions... as notable achievements, and not repudiate them as compromised and incomplete" (1994: xviii).

In Byron's own condition of 'exilic marginality' (Said's term) we encounter a resistance to the prevailing binary laws of cultural stereotype, against which his own depictions set themselves and which present a version of Oriental life which is more sympathetic and more *real* than the contemporary practice of reproducing the Orient from within the repository of prior western literary representations. This overly textualized habit of Orientalist representation has important implications for the question of authority in Byron's verse as well: whilst Byron's writings may be said to reproduce his own sense of social alienation via the figure of the exile, positing anything beyond the simple figural nature of the representation slips into the sphere of speculative criticism. If we take Said's suggestion that one of the forms by which a culture extends its hegemony is via the act of appropriation, or *speculation* in the literal sense, then the significance of the tendency to 'biographize' Byron's poetry along particular lines becomes apparent.

The tendency to read Byron's assumption of an Eastern identity as a means of escaping his society's moral constrictiveness, for instance, may well have been a motivating factor for him. However, to state the fact baldly is tantamount to accepting the stereotyped notion of the Orient as rampantly sensual. In promoting a particular 'reading' of Byron, the reader or critic thereby also deploys his or her own set of cultural affiliations. For this

reason, the contest for authorial identity forms a pivotal part of our understanding of the text as a site of *continuing* struggle. As Said argues, the habit of misrepresentation is due to the involvement of the representer with his society's "universe of discourse":

The real issue is whether indeed there can be a true representation of anything, or whether any and all representations, because they are representations, are embedded first in the language and then in the culture, institutions, and political ambience of the representer.

(1995: 272)

None of Byron's poems are autobiographical in the same way that Wordsworth's *Prelude* may be said to be autobiographical. They do not bear the author's imprimatur, as the latter work does through its alternative title of "Growth of a Poet's Mind" and its subtitle, "An Autobiographical Poem." Indeed, as the earlier quotation shows, Byron went to some lengths to ensure that his early poems would be regarded as fictional, rather than as allegorical, works. Nevertheless, the public interest in Byron's personal life, accessed via his poetical writings, formed the basis of much of his literary reputation. As a representative part of Romantic sensibility, with its emphasis on personal subjectivity, the verse narratives are naturally shaped by the protagonist's inner psychological life. What is unusual in the case of Byron is how insistently the protagonists are identified with the author himself, rather than being perceived as expressions of his (or the reader's) artistic sensibility.

Part of this effect may be located in the problem of genre which is presented by the term, "autobiography." Since the late eighteenth century it has referred to a distinct literary category, at once slightly disreputable and with pretensions toward a more serious style. For this reason, by the nineteenth century, we observe a distinction being drawn between autobiography on the one hand, and memoirs on the other. The 'vulgar' style of personal writing which tried to "excite prurient curiosity that may command a sale" attributed to the latter is eschewed, in the case of autobiography, in favour of writings of greater moral weight. "Autobiography should rather belong to people of 'lofty reputation' or people who have something of 'historical importance' to say," one 1829 reviewer of *Blackwoods Magazine* remarks (q.v. Marcus 1994: 31 – 2). However, this hierarchical ordering of writings of self-representation unavoidably raises the question of authorial intention. The

status of the individual work is thus seen to depend upon the veracity of its author's integrity and honesty. The problem with such a mode of classification, as Linda Anderson puts it, is the circularity of the argument: "Trust the author... if s/he seems trustworthy" (2001: 3).

Even in the case of so clear and apparently reputable an author as Wordsworth, the process of revision which the text of *The Prelude* undergoes makes it clear that any unified presentation of the self is impossible. This is so as much because Wordsworth's personal identity was subject to change over time (and through textual revision) as it was subject to the aesthetic and ideological imperatives implicated in the processes of such representation. "We assume that life *produces* the autobiography as an act produces consequences," Paul de Man writes, "but can we not suggest, with equal justice, that the autobiographical project may itself produce and determine the life" (1984: 69). In this sense, taking de Man's cue, we may say that all representations are self-representations. Subject to such technical considerations as those outlined above, the textual reproduction of a life therefore unavoidably diverges from the actual life of its author as a natural effect of its language of discourse.

Any delineation of what does and does not comprise 'a life' assumes a certain process of prioritising; and in selecting certain aspects for inclusion the choice implies a concomitant series of exclusions motivated by similarly subjective considerations. If favourable, as most autobiography tends to be, the literary equivalent of 'putting one's best foot forward' produces an uncharacteristically sanguine image which glosses over actual circumstances. This may prove to be a fertile ground for the psychoanalytical critic, but as a text it is clearly distorted by its author's project of self-aggrandizement. If unfavourable, the effect is often ironic (as Byron) or sensationalist (De Sade may serve as a useful model here). Whilst the latter mode is certainly more interesting in its expression, it can hardly be said to present a more accurate portrait.

Derrida, in his 1980 essay 'The Law of Genre,' raises the additional point that what shapes a text's 'autobiographical' style is its participation in a tradition, or what may be termed a 'dynastic relation,' between texts which reproduces "family characteristics."

Thus the specific inclusions or exclusions which shape the genre, and the specific text, are motivated also by a genealogical aesthetic imperative. In taking as its model such factors which are external to the question of self-identity, the autobiographical text assumes a form which is *overdetermined*. The artificial separation proposed by a genre distinction is flawed from the outset since “genres are so clearly implicated in the literary history and formal production that they were to classify and neutrally describe” (Jameson 1981: 107). In designating itself as ‘autobiographical,’ a text immediately and unavoidably also exceeds the act of self-representation through the very process of its execution. Whether from the point of view of the author or the reader, no stable or certain reproduction of the self is possible – only a varied and varying series of *misrepresentations* or *misreadings*. This slippage of meaning in autobiographical writing, which De Man terms ‘de-facement’, is merely one instance of the inability of *all* language to act as a concrete means of organizing reality into a coherent system. That is to say, any system of representation achieves coherence through an organizational fiction which is itself a rhetorical deployment of language.

The interpretation of Byron’s verse along autobiographical lines provides an illustration of the essentially figural nature of writing. Without the means to fix authorial intention in place, textual meaning becomes a function of the reader’s own authoring of the work. Ironically, it is also this effect which most problematizes the reader’s insistent inscription of the text as a psychological artefact or record of its author’s character. Byron’s initial disclaimers against such misreadings (q.v. *CHP*, Preface) gradually give way to a collusion with the reader’s wilful process of rewriting to the extent that, in *Don Juan*, the narrator appears indistinguishable from the reader’s image of the author. In collapsing the textual apparatus of the narrator, Byron’s rhetoric reconstitutes the putative author in such overly literal terms that the reader’s own project of inscription is undermined.⁴ However, if his narrative strategy effectively debunks his own “Byronism,” it does so by deploying the author as a trope for the ostensibly absent narrator. That is to say, both

⁴ Cf. David Simpson’s suggestion that “It is not the poet’s business to provide meanings; he aims rather at deconstruction, at the creation of vacancy” (1979: 81).

author and narrator are exposed as the literary constructs that they are, and against which neither the writer of the work, nor the text's various readers, may contend.⁵

This effect registers in Byron's use of irony as his primary vehicle for relating to the world both within and outside of his text. Unsurprisingly, the keywords in his *oeuvre* revolve around the concept of hypocrisy in its various guises, and draw attention to the ulterior nature of all representations. His awareness of the instability of narrative to reflect reality, moreover, provides him with a means for questioning other forms of identity. In particular, the texts I have chosen for analysis are concerned with issues of cultural identity in which a similar process of wilful interpretation is at work in reading meaning into the non-western world according to an established cultural aesthetic, which Edward Said refers to as the practice of "Orientalism" (q.v. 1995: 12). The concept of the Orient, present in the West primarily as a text, reflects the region as a locus of culturally construed, *overdetermined* meanings which are in dialogue with the structures of knowledge and power through which the West extends itself and against which it defines its own socio-political identity. This binary treatment of the Orient, as Said observes, "has less to do with the [actual] Orient than it does with 'our' [i.e. western] world" (Ibid). Whilst Byron's depictions of the East are themselves inextricably bound to his own historical and cultural consciousness in the manner in which Said describes, his ironic treatment of his society's structures of representation in regard to the East calls into question the accuracy of the depictions in the same way that his treatment of narrative calls into doubt the certainty of authorial identity.

Forced into such rhetorical 'games', the poetry acquires much of its potency from the interplay between the poet's and the public's competing versions of the poetical 'self' – construed both personally with regard to Byron, as read through the lens of his various characters and contested via narrative; and culturally, as symbols in a field of Orientalist representation. Gleckner's assertion of the "essential irrelevance of biographical evidence" (1967: 19) underscores the polemical nature of the dispute for personal as well as cultural identity which this engenders, and his statement that "the most revealing commentary on the poems is the poetry itself" (xvii) strikes me as quite apposite. This

⁵ Q.v. Simpson 1979: 191.

tension in identity, which Jerome Christensen argues is both Byron's own creation and (as a response to the public's "Byronic" construct) a target of his contempt, also elicits a response from him via a series of increasingly elaborate dissimulations which, in *Don Juan*, he claims sees Byron "jettison this language" and "foregrounds his impatience with the mysteriousness of his earlier representations" (1993: 62). I am however not convinced that this is what occurs. The apparent perspicuity in fact deconstructs the notion of any clear and accessible relation between the reader and the author, as I have argued above. If Byron's verse "jettisons" one form of narrative expression, as Christensen suggests, it is replaced by another which is perhaps the more effective for its greater subtlety or apparent verisimilitude. As my chapter on *Don Juan* will argue, it is rather the *return* to the earlier narrative methods of *Childe Harold I - II*, albeit in very different narrative *voice*, that finally places the quest for "Byronic" identity beyond the purview of the reading public. Having discarded the spurious notions of *purpose* evident in the earlier work, Byron's mature vision is at once lighter in tone and more ambiguous.

Linda Anderson's observation on the structure of Augustine's *Confessions* sheds an additional light upon the question of pilgrimage. "The outward journey is a false journey," she writes, "becoming meaningful only in retrospect by being realized as a return" (2001: 20). This is self-evidently true of Byron's narratives, and in particular in reference to *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* which stands as the seminal text in his search for a cultural as well as a personal identity. As Roy Pascal puts it, "the author does not so much remember the past as recast it, grasping and reshaping himself in the process" (q.v. Anderson 2001: 19). This applies equally well to the figure of Harold whose absence registers the changed view Byron has taken of his narrative 'pilgrimage.' The change in expression from the first two cantos registers this effect in the most unequivocal terms, as the meandering figure of Harold is replaced by the voice of a clearly more focussed author-narrator. Despite the greater cohesion and artistic coordination of the concluding cantos, however, one is left with the impression that in the end it is a less sincere or accurate portrayal. In giving form and direction to the progress through *CHP*, Byron effectively removes the authenticating 'plotlessness' through which one ordinarily

encounters the world. In its place he sets a narrative aesthetic which instead privileges a final *dénouement*.

It has been the tendency for modern literary critics, set against a reductive biographical approach to criticism, to err in the other direction and to focus too closely on a work's textuality. Lacking the canonical certainty of a pre-Barthesian literary edifice, the fragmented multiplicity of 'texts' through which we now conceive 'literature' threatens to dissociate the act of writing from its *raison d'être*, namely, the historical context which gave rise to the text in the first place. In effect, the ideological contest for cultural meaning embodied in the text of the verse narratives continues unabated from the original moment of the text's dissemination in its society, though obviously today the specific terrain of Byron studies has narrowed from a popular to a literary-critical field of disputation. To assert that the issues of representation over which my analysis will range are as socially relevant then as now is thus to argue that our *ways of reading and representing* still deploy a similar aesthetic – in the projection of western images of the East, for instance, or in relation to the issues of authority or a text's function. As Fredric Jameson points out in his introduction to *The Political Unconscious*,

texts come before us as the always-already-read; we apprehend them through sedimented layers of previous interpretations, or – if the text is brand-new – through the sedimented reading habits and categories developed by those inherited interpretive traditions.

(1981: 9)

That is to say, there are no critically unbiased readings. The opinion that Frye presents as a truism is, thus, a truism for specific *historical* reasons. Our second task is therefore to relate the text to our present position, and consider its relevance in the context of present-day critical practice. By re-evaluating the version of literary-critical history which Frye's statement represents, I shall suggest a less categorical means of reading Byron's poetry – what Jameson terms "false consciousness", and against which he opposes the "class struggle within theory" (1981: 12). In respect of this projected aim, I am guided by Susan Sontag's call, in her influential essay 'Against Interpretation' (1964), to resist the tendency to produce a totalizing theory of art, or of individual art-works. She writes that:

Interpretation is not (as most people assume) an absolute value, a gesture of mind situated in some timeless realm of capabilities. Interpretation must itself be evaluated, within a historical view of human consciousness. In some cultural contexts, interpretation is a liberating act. It is a means of revising, of transvaluing, of escaping the dead past. In other cultural contexts, it is reactionary, impertinent, cowardly, stifling.

(7)

Jameson further contends that, since “interpretation is not an isolated act” but one in which “a host of interpretive options are either openly or implicitly in conflict,” at best, interpretive practice resolves itself into a tradition of stronger and weaker *misreadings* (1981: 13). Much of my purpose in analysing the poetry will therefore be to elucidate the dialectical modes whereby competing ideological positions (as texts-in-the-world) seek to endorse a particular point of view, and to consider what is implied in terms of what Jameson calls a “particular interpretive master code” or grand narrative.

Byron is himself of course not exempt from the process, and in discussing the question of representation I view the two aspects of identity and culture as mutually reinforcing. In Byron’s writings, the affirmation of identity through a process of identification leads to an often ambiguous duality or kind of virtual double standard which problematizes the reader’s own tendency to codify the text according to a predetermined cultural value-set, via a process of representational inversion. In place of a simple reproduction of oriental stereotype, Byron’s depictions often cast aspects of eastern life and culture as positive in a way that calls into question the supporting structure of binary oppositions which elevates the West above a non-Western *Other*. Frequently, he identifies strongly with eastern culture in opposition to what he views as a morally degenerate West. Using Said’s notion of a “contrapuntal” process of reading (q.v. 1993: 59), I will examine this aspect of Byron’s work which, whilst it often works subversively to deconstruct stereotypical notions of the orient, nevertheless finally organizes the depiction according to a distinctly western ethos. Byron writes, for instance, in a note to Stanza 73, Canto 2 of *CHP*, the following comment:

The Greeks will never be independent; they will never be sovereigns as heretofore, and God forbid they ever should! but they may be subjects without

being slaves. Our colonies are not independent, but they are free and industrious, and such may Greece be hereafter.

From the above quotation it becomes clear that Byron's concern with Greek independence, and indeed with the East itself, serves primarily an allegorical function which organizes itself around European political and social circumstances. There is a lesson to be learnt, a moral to be observed – but only if one is a westerner. It is worth noting here that the tone of the marginal notes and commentaries differs markedly from that found in the poem proper. Frequently, the notes work to undermine the positive view of Eastern culture found in the verse. This raises an additional problem of interpretation: poetically, and for certain vested political purposes, Byron's verse operates to challenge institutional prejudice. Yet his as it were 'official' view recants many of the claims made there in favour of a less radical line, and operates to promote his own position as Greece's 'liberator.' Whilst Byron's image of the East in his poetry does something to modify the traditional view, his irony (however reflexive) is ultimately skewed toward a critique of *western* structures and ultimately confirms Spivak's assertion that:

No perspective *critical* of imperialism can turn the Other into a self, because the project of imperialism has always already historically refracted what might have been the absolutely Other into a domesticated Other that consolidates the imperialist self.

(1985: 253)

The disturbing sense of identification with the project of British imperialism in Byron's footnote (q.v. "Our colonies") assumes a right to rule over what is regarded as an implicitly inferior, if phyletic, culture.⁶ This effect is perhaps best conveyed by the circular movement evident in the poems I shall examine: in each, the narrative describes a journey into the east and a subsequent return to the precincts of Europe. However much the various protagonists may identify with aspects of eastern culture, these subversive tendencies are finally subsumed and contained within the context of a return to origins. In this sense, Byron's rebellion against his own society might be construed as a gesture of Oedipal succession in which an ageing (and outmoded) European paternalism is forcibly replaced by a more modern, vigorous and relevant version of itself. As such, the East acts

as a means to this end rather than representing an end in itself. The inscription of non-Western culture in terms of a 'central', mainstream, European cultural ethos displaces the truly *other* and instead raises an image of the *Other* which is merely a simulacrum, or convenient model through which the cultural 'centre' may be challenged. In effect, no real departure from the original cultural frame has occurred on a cognitive level. Of this habit of representation, Said writes:

William Beckford, Byron, Goethe, and Hugo restructured the Orient by their art and made its colours, lights, and people visible through their images, rhythms, and motifs. At most, the 'real' Orient provoked a writer to his vision; it very rarely guided it.

(1995: 22)

The key word in the above quotation is "restructured." What to the naked eye appears genuinely Oriental in its exteriority is thus, rather, a representation which takes its cue not from its local geographical or cultural context but from the western writer's cultural consciousness. As Said later notes, the westerner's vision of the East "implicates *definition of the object with the identity of the person defining*" (249).

A final methodology I wish to incorporate in my consideration of Byron's poetry is Said's notion of "secular criticism." Arguing against the modern literary establishment's tendency to retreat into an overly textual, and thus socially dissociated, engagement with the world, Said proposes a return to real relations in which text is not separated from the material conditions which gave rise to its production in the first instance. Of the American academy he writes that:

literary theory has for the most part isolated textuality from the circumstances, the events, the physical senses that made it possible and render it intelligible as the result of human work.

(1983: 4)

Said's stress on the text's "worldliness," or its attachment to external reality, forms a crucial part of what he sees as the intellectual's responsibility to society to evaluate, demystify and challenge the ideas which are disseminated through the culturally

⁶ As McQuillan says of de Man's critical practice, "the most decisive indication of the concerns of a text [is] to be found in its margins" (2001: 14).

symbolic act of writing. The tendency for literary critics to shut themselves away from social engagement and to rehearse what he asserts has become an overly specialized, ‘priestly’ ritual locked in its own introspective processes leaves it with increasingly less to say about the society from which it emerges:

Specialization and professionalism, allied with cultural dogma, barely sublimated ethnocentrism and nationalism, as well as a surprisingly insistent quasi-religious quietism, have transported the professional and academic critic of literature – the most focussed and intensely trained interpreter of texts produced by the culture – into another world altogether. In that relatively untroubled and secluded world there seems to be no contact with the world of events and societies, which modern history, intellectuals and critics have in fact built.

(1983: 25)

My own critical practice will accordingly be less concerned with articulating an elaborate ‘theology’ of criticism, and shall instead focus closely on the link between text and society, in terms of the criteria of culture and identity which I have outlined above. I believe the most useful function my dissertation may perform is to suggest ways in which an insight into the operation of Byron’s verse may be applied to present-day circumstances, as a continuation of the resistance to the Orientalist mode of representation which threads its way through such diverse fields as news media, policy and area studies, art, literature and politics. Perhaps more so than ever before, a clear and unaffected understanding of the influence of cultural archetypes upon “the world of events and societies” is crucial to limiting the harmful effects of such ingrained prejudice. Of course, in an academic discussion of limited scope, I cannot hope to effect this desire here; but inasmuch as the thoughts and ideas expressed in my dissertation represent my own political affiliation, it asserts some small degree of social advocacy.

CHAPTER 1: *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*
Byron's Imaging of the East

I.

Before arriving at the first line of verse of the poem proper, the reader of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* (*CHP*) is required to peruse a series of prefatory sections of text. An epigraph in French is followed by the preface, to which is attached a later insertion, in the form of an 'Addition to the Preface.' A verse dedication, 'To Ianthe,' constitutes the final frame and it is via this circuitous route that the reader is inducted into the poem's opening stanza.

The effect of such a series of framing devices is to situate the poem firmly within the tradition of a European literary readership.⁷ The French epigraph, taken from De Monbron's response to an article in the Parisian newspapers, further contextualizes the poem as a part of the popular tradition of literary travelogue. De Monbron's travels and his literary report, however, concern the state of affairs within his own country:

"L'univers est une espèce de livre, dont on n'a lu que la première page quand on n'a vu que son pays. J'en ai feuilleté un assez grand nombre, que j'ai trouvé également mauvaises. Cet examen ne m'a point été infructueux. Je haïssais ma patrie. Toutes les impertinences des peuples divers, parmi lesquels j'ai vécu, m'ont réconcilié avec elle. Quand je n'aurais tiré d'autre bénéfice de mes voyages que celui-là, je n'en regretterais ni les frais ni les fatigues."

– *Le Cosmopolite, ou, le Citoyen du Monde*, par Fougeret de Monbron. Londres, 1753.

De Monbron's description of the universe as a "species of book" is particularly apt in relation to a consideration of both Byron's own poetical productions, as well as Edward Said's notion of Orientalist representation since both take the text, and textual representation, as the primary means through which western society encounters other cultures.⁸ His notion that the first page tells the tale of one's own country is significant, as it suggests the primacy of one's native culture to all subsequent acts of perception. The

⁷ Referring to M. H. Abrams, Alan Rowes argues that *CHP* evinces a " 'sustained colloquy' with Europe, its history, landscape, art and present" (1999: 130). This emphasizes Byron's commitment to a distinctly Euro-centric perspective despite writing of scenes far distant from Europe.

formative nature of a person's relation to their society thus acts as a frame which influences how the wider world is viewed in much the same way as the opening page of a book organizes the subsequent narrative and supplies its structural logic.

There are however many pages, and even in the context of his own country De Monbron notes that there is much diversity. This circumstance defines for him the nature of the problem: the tendency to regard deviation from the known or familiar social frame as a sign of inferiority, even within the narrow circle of the local, leads to what for him is a needless division. In his article, De Monbron encounters this effect within the microcosm of French society, which appears to him ugly and destructive in its prejudice. Moreover, his efforts to reconcile these differences have failed: "I hated my country," he writes, in a gesture which indicates his disappointment at his country's intolerance. Applied more broadly, De Monbron's comments may be taken to critique the ingrained racial intolerance which divides the larger society and perpetuates hostility between nations and cultures. This tendency to xenophobia takes its origin, according to David Spurr,

in anxiety over the preservation of cultural order and in the need to designate the unknown by a set of signs which affirm, by contrast, the value of culturally established norms.

(1993: 77)

For Byron's purposes, the use of the quotation as an epigraph to his poem serves to question the hypocrisy of British society – in its class pretensions, as well as in the irresponsibility of its politicians' conduct in matters of foreign policy.⁹ We can detect in the tone of De Monbron's writing the same sense of alienation which drives Harold abroad, and which would later see Byron exile himself from British society.

The travel writings of the period tend to privilege the perceptions of the western visitor, with the emphasis falling upon a first-hand experience of the world and representing the tourist as superior in sensibilities to the inhabitants of the foreign locations that he

⁸ Q.v. Said: "the Orient studied was a textual universe by and large; the impact of the Orient was made through books and manuscripts" (1995: 52). Q.v. also Sharafuddin 1996: 193.

⁹ Byron's trenchant criticisms of the British foreign secretary, Castlereagh, as well as the Duke of Wellington and Lord Elgin are well documented.

visits.¹⁰ This implied detachment from the narrow view of the merely local asserts for the traveller, apparently occupying an objective 'external' position, an access to the broader picture which places him as uniquely able to view and to interpret the regions through which he travels. As Said notes, travel to the East is always in the nature of a *return*, in which what is encountered serves as a visual confirmation of prior knowledge (q.v. 1995: 167).¹¹ The resulting travelogue – as a written record of these impressions – offered to homebound European readers an apparently reliable version of the foreign lands.

The veracity of such a rendering, however, is subject to a number of profoundly problematic social and situational curtailments. The most immediate and obvious obstacle is that of language: for which the traveller, however much he might deduce from visual observation, could at best frequently offer only a cursory surmise. As Said puts it:

The eccentricities of Oriental life, with its odd calendars, its exotic spatial configurations, its hopelessly strange languages, its seemingly perverse morality, were reduced considerably when they appeared as a series of detailed items presented in a normative European prose style.

(166 – 7)

The difficulties presented by language often posed this dilemma for Byron during his travels through the Levant, and, while he was admirably committed to learning as much of the foreign languages he encountered as was possible, his actual knowledge of many was rudimentary at best; and of some he knew but a few words. This made his reliance on interpreters often indispensable, and with their assistance he was able to participate actively in the social and political life of the countries he visited. However, although the use of interpreters provided a means of communicating across the language barrier, it provided no guarantee of intelligibility. The vast cultural differences between Europe and the East ramified through every act of perception or representation, and what was

¹⁰ The emphasis upon travel in foreign lands as a series of points on a map, or a list of names on an itinerary, underscores the detached nature of most westerners' engagement with the scenes through which they travel.

¹¹ As Said notes, particularly of the Near- and Middle-East: "From at least the second century B.C. on, it was lost on no traveller or Eastward-looking and ambitious Western potentate that Herodotus... and Alexander... had been in the Orient before. The Orient was therefore subdivided into realms previously known, visited, conquered, by Herodotus and Alexander as well as their epigones, and those realms not previously known, visited, conquered" (1995: 57 – 8).

perceived or represented was often a function of the agent's cultural and social orientation.

Raymond Williams, in *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (1983), calls the term 'culture' "one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language." Mainly, he notes, this is due to its use in conflicting models of thought and through its widespread linguistic dissemination. Each variant form, however, contributes to the understanding we have of the concept and broadens the terms of reference. Williams discerns three separate linguistic strands of meaning, as follows (90):

- (i) the independent and abstract noun which describes a general process of intellectual, spiritual and aesthetic development, from C18;
- (ii) the independent noun, whether used generally or specifically, which indicates a particular way of life, whether of a people, a period, a group, or humanity in general;
- (iii) the independent and abstract noun which describes the works and practices of intellectual and especially artistic activity.

From the above definitions, it is apparent that the term contains a number of nuances which are not easily distinguishable. This inherent complexity, Williams advises, ought not to be elided in favour of a singular 'true', 'proper' or 'scientific' meaning.¹² Rather, he argues that

it is the range and overlap of meanings that is significant. The complex of senses indicates a complex argument about the relations between general human development and a particular way of life, and between both and the works and practices of art and intelligence.

(91)

Williams's emphasis on "relations" draws attention to the critical role of context, and its inseparability from the concatenation of events and circumstances which gives rise to the specific forms which cultural expression takes. Culture, we may say, is determined by its difference from other social formations and by its growth through a dialectical process of interaction. The etymological development of the English term 'culture,' as Williams

points out, expands outward from images of growth (as in ‘agriculture’) to include a metaphorical dimension which gradually acquired, through its close association with the German usage *kultur*, strong class associations (q.v. 89).¹³ The extension of such a class distinction to include the wider world, in the binary comparisons of ‘superior’ and ‘inferior’ cultures, naturally subordinated observed differences from local custom as negative in much the same way as De Monbron’s description above describes. Thus, the etymological changes in words associated with the concept of ‘culture’ often map out a history of social attitudes.¹⁴

If we apply this understanding of the term ‘culture’ to our discussion of the differences inherent between the societies of Europe and the East – where the term ‘the East’ has traditionally stood as the generic term for the combined Asiatic and Levantine regions – then the gap in concordance between the two becomes apparent. The differences between Europe and the East are not merely the superficial difficulties of language, geography or custom, to be solved by a simple decoding of foreign speech or protocol, but ramify far deeper. The very terms ‘language,’ ‘place’ and ‘custom’ assume vastly greater proportions when re-interpreted as cultural modes of expression and representation. The nature of the disjunction between literal meaning and idiomatic or cultural meaning extends to the level of the symbolic, as base to superstructure, and their associated meanings can only be fully comprehended and accounted for by apprehending this duality in social affiliation.

This circumstance of cultural double-vision poses a difficult question of interpretation. This is evident for instance in the section ‘To Ianthe,’ where Byron dedicates the poem to the young Lady Charlotte Harley and calls her the “Young Peri of the West,” (l. 19). The fusion of Persian myth with a Western subject, in the common imagination, at once conjures up images of an exotic and erotically charged Orient. Such an effect – quite

¹² As Sharafuddin argues, in the case of Orientalist representation, the general also defines the particular (q.v. 1996: 193).

¹³ Cf. ‘high art’ versus the satirical mime-word *culchah* (Williams 1983: 92).

¹⁴ An apt example of this is the word ‘uncouth’, which has a denotative meaning of ‘unknown’. The additional connotations which attach to it, of ‘uncivilized’, ‘rude’, ‘barbaric’, etc. arise from the tendency noted earlier, of preferring what is known and familiar. Anything different or unknown, by contrast, is regarded with suspicion.

opposite to Byron's representation of Lady Charlotte as an unattainable beauty – is not derived from the image itself, but what is more significant, from the West's tendency to interpret all Eastern imagery in terms of a few dominant cultural representations.¹⁵ As Martin Forward notes in his discussion of the intersection of myth and history in representations of Islam, Said's assertion that "the prurience that drove the West's interest in the Orient, particularly Islam, was its emphasis upon the harem, the submissiveness and voluptuousness of women and the insatiability of men" (Holm & Bowker 1994: 100) largely holds true in respect of western literary treatment of the region. Byron's usage draws upon this tendency to reproduce his effect; but in associating the Oriental sensuality of the harem with the innocence of a young *English* noblewoman he problematizes the entire mechanism. The moral detachment provided by an all-permissive myth of oriental sensuality is denied, and the reader is somewhat shocked to contemplate the implications of its deployment in the context of a morally sober Europe.¹⁶

Byron's purpose here should not be read literally – in eroticising the young Lady Charlotte (still a mere girl), Byron's narrative thrust is directed at revealing the operation of cultural stereotype rather than implying actual sexual interest in her. As such, his depiction is directed at challenging the reader's view of the Orient as an all-permissive society which lies outside the realm of morality, and suggests rather that such a view is a fabrication which provides the westerner with a convenient justification for the expression of his own desires. Byron's depiction is so successful partly because of his own ambiguous sexuality. He had in the past been strongly attracted to youthful innocence, notably in his homoerotic love for the cherubic John Edelston during his time

¹⁵ Said's survey of European literature on the East stresses the seminal role of such early Orientalist texts as George Sale's 'Preliminary Discourse' to the Koran (1734); Simon Ockley's *History of the Saracens* (1708, 1718); Antoine Galland's translation of the *Arabian Nights* (1704 – 1708); and, especially, Barthélemy d'Herbelot's monumental *Bibliothèque orientale* (1697). Of the latter he writes: "With the exception of Johann H. Hottinger's *Historia Orientalis*, which appeared in 1651, the *Bibliothèque* remained the standard reference work in Europe until the early nineteenth century. Its scope was truly epochal... In such efforts as d'Herbelot's, Europe discovered its capacities for encompassing and Orientalizing the Orient". What is most significant is its descriptive method: "the *Bibliothèque* did not attempt to revise commonly received ideas about the Orient," Said writes, "For what the Orientalist does is to *confirm* the Orient in his readers' eyes; he neither tries nor wants to unsettle already firm convictions" (1995: 64).

¹⁶ However, as his later portrayal in *Don Juan* reveals, such moral rectitude is more a matter of appearances than actual social practice (q.v. 13. 25).

at Cambridge (q.v. Grosskurth 1997: 56).¹⁷ The reference to Lady Oxford in lines 15 – 18, with whom Byron was having an affair, further suggests his attraction to Lady Charlotte as a more perfect and youthful version of the ripe pleasures of her mother. Indeed, the whole of Byron's lyric is shot through with suggestions designed to arouse, if not to satisfy, a sexual response:

Glance o'er this page; nor to my verse deny
That smile for which my breast might vainly sigh,
Could I to thee be ever more than friend...

(ll. 31 – 33)

Such is thy name with this my verse entwin'd

(l. 37)

The decorous phrasing of the verse, which on the surface appears quite innocent, reveals an erotic interest which would likely not have been apparent to the young Lady Charlotte. The particular virtue of the rendering, though, is that it partly succeeds in phrasing itself in the gallant language of the courtly love tradition. This partly offsets the sexual overtone; but it is in the image of the *peri* that Byron properly succeeds in confounding his reader. In detecting Byron's sexual intentions towards Lady Charlotte, the reader must first have participated in her eroticisation via the image of the *peri*.¹⁸ If Byron is lascivious then his point is that the reader is engaged in a literary tradition that is quite as predatory: the harem is thus demonstrably more present to the Western imagination than it is institutionally prevalent in the Orient. What is alarming about Byron's rendering of the question of sexuality is that he has reversed the direction of appropriation, and writes from a pointedly Eastern perspective: the description in Stanza 3 of 'To Ianthe,' read

¹⁷ The dedication, 'To Ianthe', reinforces this association. Ianthe is a character in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* who is transformed from a girl to a young man in order to be married, and thus recalls Byron's love of Edelston – here transformed in the eternal youth of the Lady Charlotte whom he will never see grow old (q.v. l. 23). The term itself is taken from the Greek *ion*, 'violet' and *anthos*, 'flower', an image which in the context of our discussion suggests defloration, but is here endlessly delayed. Byron's point, in introducing an erotic charge to the description, is not intended to be taken literally. It is rather in the jarring suggestion of illicit love that the image exerts its influence upon the reader. He mocks the notion of scandal here as much as he satirizes the western reader's own hypocritical tendency towards prurience in respect of Oriental women.

allegorically, casts Byron in the role of an aged and potent sultan who claims a European child for his sexual pleasure:

Young Peri of the West! – 'tis well for me
My years already doubly number thine;
My loveless eyes unmov'd may gaze on thee,
And safely view thy ripening beauties shine

(ll. 19 – 22)

As a reading of Byron's other verse reveals, a sultan's affections for his harem inmates are seldom a romantic attachment, and thus we need not discount the reading on that head. The epithet "loveless" in fact equivocates well with Byron's mock-serious style. In *The Giaour*, for instance, Hassan's concern to recover Leila is more in the way of lost property than lost love. Likewise, Gulnare's escape with Conrad in *The Corsair* bespeaks a similarly "loveless" relationship between her and the Seyd. Transposed into a western literary tradition, the power of the aged sultan which would ordinarily command respect of the most abject kind instead rehearses a narrative form of Oedipal triangle in which he becomes cuckolded by the main characters' daring exploits. That this is a *western* depiction is without question: both the sultan's despotic grasp on power and Islam's stern condemnation of adultery barred such satirical treatment from finding an expression in Eastern society.¹⁹

Byron's depiction of himself as a Pasha-figure embodies the threat of Eastern incursion into a sanctified Western domain; it is also a moment of identification in which he confronts and confesses his own sense of difference from the society that he would shortly forsake for a life of self-imposed exile. The tendency towards 'cant' – or social and political hypocrisy – was something Byron strongly rejected, and he found in the image of the Eastern noble a figure for whom nothing was forbidden: in this role he could

¹⁸ Often mistaken to be simply an Oriental version of the fairy of European folklore, the originally Persian myth of the peri (Persian *parī*) stresses a strongly physical relation: "Sexual love and marriage between *parīs* and humans are recurrent motifs" (q.v. *Encyclopedia of Islam* 1995: 271 – 2).

¹⁹ The discussion of the subordinate role of women under Islam in Bosworth et al.'s *Encyclopedia of Islam* offers the following observation: "According to the Kur'ān, The Elect will meet again those who were virtuous among their ancestors, wives and descendents... only wives are mentioned... The commentators remain silent on the fate of virtuous women who have remained unmarried, and give the impression that the daughters of Eve are definitely at a disadvantage in comparison with men" (1995: 582).

speaking or acting without reserve. Attached to the status of Eastern potentate was the additional freedom to pursue one's sexual inclinations to the fullest extent: and the vaunted Oriental dedication to sensual pleasure, including pederasty, was all-permissive in this respect. In a description of Byron's penchant for Oriental dress, Eisler writes: "While he was wearing the gorgeous robes, questions of gender were blurred. In his fantasy Byron now became what he beheld: an Oriental potentate, powerful and free, to whom nothing was forbidden," (1999: 223). His intimacy with John Edleston, which remains shrouded in ambiguity, was perhaps an instance of forbidden love of this kind. Byron's deviant sexual tastes thus discovered a sanctuary in the figure of the Pasha from the shame and threat of criminal prosecution that English society advanced. By assuming an Eastern identity he could express his own dissidence, and thereby he could also interrogate many received notions of the period.²⁰

Gramsci's view of culture as falling within the realm of civil, rather than political, society stresses the volitional aspect of Byron's writing (q.v. Said 1995: 6). Unlike the mechanisms of domination which are entailed in the exercise of political power (the army, the police, the central bureaucracy), he argues that the expression of cultural opinion operates by consent. Whilst few of Byron's readers may have held a particularly enlightened view of non-westerners, they nevertheless authorized his (frequently critical) speculations by electing to read and discuss his poems and his life. Under the repressive influence of the political establishment of the day, Byron's writing not only challenged his country's political practices, but also revealed an alternative means of relating to the East.

The familiarity which Byron had with the Orient supplied him with an escape from the narrow constraints of a morally and politically repressive English society; it also provided the basis for a powerful counter-critique of its ideological precepts. Using an Eastern context, he could cite Rousseau, Voltaire and Gibbon (3. 77ff; 104 – 106ff) to ask what

²⁰ As Elizabeth Wilson points out (citing Paul Schmidt) the question of deviant sexuality may be read along two quite disparate lines: "Because Western culture has delegitimized [homosexualism], reducing it to the status of psychological aberration, it has been experienced as a state of alienation and negation, when it might more constructively be seen as a cultural potentiality. Yet the very marginality of the lesbian and the queer is a privileged viewpoint from which s/he gains a different perspective of critical vision" (1998: 45).

had become of Europe's own high ideals, and reveal an Orient which seemed more humane – and certainly less tainted by artifice or hypocrisy. A frequent, and most effective, trope he employs is to use the abhorrent image of the Eastern tyrant to confute the idea of a more reasonable, or moral, Europe. What worse tyrant, after all is said, than a Napoleon?

But the question of the Eastern tyrant, despite this dialectical deployment, remains a problematic figure. Byron naturally enough places his heroes in opposition to the tyrant in several of his tales; but in others the very heroes are tyrants themselves: Conrad in *The Corsair*, for instance, or Selim in *The Bride of Abydos* who are both pirate leaders. What makes them worthy and noble characters, however, is their status as freedom fighters. In *The Corsair* Conrad's own small island kingdom is under threat of conquest by the sinister figure of the Seyd – a tyrant against whom Conrad's own villainy stands as an act of righteous rebellion, while in *The Bride of Abydos* Selim is revealed to be the true heir of the former ruler; Giaffer, the present ruler, is a usurper and it is from this circumstance that Selim raises a pirate band to help him win back his rightful place.

For Byron, the figure of the tyrant held a curious fascination. Remodelled as 'freedom fighter', the role permitted him an access to unlimited authority. Politically this provided him with a means of prosecuting his own designs upon a Greece which he viewed as hardly worthy of its own independence but nevertheless requiring to be freed from the Turkish occupation under which it languished. In a note to *CHP* he writes:

The Greeks will never be independent; they will never be sovereigns as heretofore, and God forbid they ever should! But they may be subjects without being slaves. Our colonies are not independent, but they are free and industrious, and such may Greece be hereafter.

(201)

Finally, his familiarity with the East conferred upon him the status of Orientalist expert. Byron's inclusion of authentic linguistic fragments of the cultures he encountered places him as a lay version of the more rigorous Orientalists such as d'Herbelot and George Sale. But where the latter men produced a system of knowledge about the East that sought to contain, define and ultimately subjugate it, Byron's usage sought to challenge

and unsettle any comfortable confidence in the West's knowledge of Oriental culture. In a discussion of Byron's deployment of foreign words in his poetry, Philip Martin remarks upon the disruptive effect which the exotic diction has upon a reader's appreciation of the poem:

Tophaiques and Osmanlies however, were likely to mean nothing to Byron's reader, but were nevertheless liable to inspire vaguely exciting and possibly even erotic feelings about the mysterious East. Having travelled, a tophaike to Byron was nothing more thrilling than a musket. It is therefore with considerable self-amusement that he serves up exoticism as a commodity for his reader, an amusement that can be detected in his deliberate indulgence in the art of sinking after the Popean manner.

(1982: 51)

Byron's abuse of the ordinary reader's ignorance of Eastern languages debunks the deployment of stereotype contained in notions of Oriental exoticism, and emphasizes the dangers inherent in relying upon generalized assumptions of the kind that Orientalist knowledge made available. That is not to say that such knowledge was merely inaccurate; as Said points out, such a methodology would not withstand much scrutiny (q.v. 1995: 6). Rather, it is in the "style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between 'the Orient' and (most of the time) 'the Occident' " (2) that finally invalidates the representation. Denys Hays's notion of the "idea of Europe," which he describes as "a collective notion identifying 'us' Europeans as against all 'those' non-Europeans" (7) supplies the frame through which all interpretation of the Orient, and indeed of the non-Western, is viewed. By definition, then, what is perceived is assumed to be inferior (if not outright hostile) to the West.

Martin's argument might be taken to suggest that Byron's familiarity with foreign words and phrases granted him a special insight into the foreign cultures that he represented so convincingly in verse. It is with considerable irony then that we might reconsider it in the light of his later comment, where he says that such word-play places Byron as "a mind which amuses itself by realizing the absolute governance of idiom over meaning" (52). While this is certainly an intentional effect of Byron's poetic representations, the powerful shaping influence of the idiomatic depiction is an effect which in the end Byron himself cannot avoid. The same Tophaike-wielding Osmanlies – in the form of the

Suliotés that he lauds in 2. 72. i – xi – ultimately prove to be something other than the noble savages of *CHP*, and his later dealings with the Sulioté tribesmen in Cephalonia ended disastrously, as his journal entries for this period reveal (q.v. BLJ, 11: 31 – 32).²¹ Byron's readers erroneously suppose the exotic words to depict an exotic reality, and Byron's mistake is of a similar order. If Byron is able to understand the foreign words by having them translated, he is nevertheless unable to make proper sense of the Suliotés. No merely analytical examination of a society's language can yield up its cultural codes, and Byron mistakes the tribesmen for the idiomatic conception he has of them – drawn not from a knowledge of the people themselves, but from prior Western literary depictions.

The habitual misprision or misrepresentation of all Asiatic, Middle- and Near-Eastern countries by the generic terms of 'the East' or 'the Orient' by European writers demonstrates a marked failure to grasp the significance of the link between the cultural code (or the symbol) and a society's cultural products. In extremity, and recognizing that these products are substantially different in both form and expression from Western ideological representations, a single blanket term of difference is applied. The resultant discourse of anything 'Eastern' therefore assumes the form of a proposition which concerns itself not with registering the nature and degree of these differences but rather with recognizing difference indiscriminately. Such a cultural calculus stresses a qualitative rather than a quantitative analysis, in which all discussions of 'the East' can at best be called a discussion of 'the non-Western.'

The question of cultural interpretation is only partly addressed by examining the artistic and intellectual output of its society – whether in reference to its mythology, religion and literature; or its political or economic structures. Of far greater moment is the vantage point occupied by the interpreter; and in Byron's case this is frequently the decisive condition. The difficulty in achieving a balanced view of a foreign society's structures is resident on both sides of the cultural divide: the problem is not only inherent in the act of

²¹ Eisler notes, "They were not the brave Suliotés of war chants on the beach, They were mercenaries 'not quite united among themselves in anything except raising their demands upon me'," (1999: 730).

perceiving the foreign, but also in escaping the representational structures of discourse through which one habitually perceives.

Byron's rendering of his Levantine experiences into verse is therefore of necessity framed according to his own cultural and ideological precepts. For this reason, the opening to the poem proper orients itself in relation to classical Greece despite the fact that Harold's point of physical departure is England. The invocation of the muse which opens the first stanza of Canto 1 stands as both a conventional Western literary appeal to classical antiquity, from whence it seeks to affirm its own worth, and as a moment of cultural appropriation. The muse here is no foreign entity, but a figure which has become completely assimilated into European literary and artistic representations, and which presides over Western arts as both inspiration and guardian. Byron's sighing over "Delphi's long-deserted shrine" in line 6 pays homage to the site's sacred relation to the arts, and laments the decline of a nation which once occupied the first place in artistic endeavour. Where once poets thronged, there remains only a shattered remnant of the site and the sound of a "feeble fountain." His invocation of the muses refers to these daughters of classical antiquity as "the weary Nine" (l. 8), and casts them as the residual memory of a lapsed epoch.

If the muses of classical antiquity are now awoken only by dint of "the minstrel's will" (l. 2), the implication is that the poet's relation to his art has changed profoundly. The classical notions of inspiration are here supplanted with the Romantic will to power, which finds inspiration through the spirit of the poet himself. Indeed, in line 8, the speaker declares that he will not "wake" the muses. If he can salute their beneficent influence, he also recognizes that they are of a past age and that his poem is similarly of another, less sacred order. For this reason he finally renounces the blessing of the muse upon his "lowly lay" (l. 9). The Greeks themselves have forgotten their own heritage, and present-day Greece seems to Byron to be a poor image of its former self.

The antique worlds of "Hellas" (q.v. l. 1) and Rome are to Byron quite literally a more familiar terrain than the modern Greek state through which he traverses. His impressions of the landscape and its people are always expressed in nostalgic terms, as a falling away

from the golden age of Greek classicism. Throughout the course of the poem the many images of ruin perform a descriptive function which extends beyond the level of their physical presence in the Greek landscape: they serve also as a ubiquitous sign of Greece's decline, the collapse of civilized values, and as a reminder of an irrevocably lost glory. The allegorical tenor is here unmistakable. On the personal level, he locates in the fractured imagery of the Greek scene a metaphor through which he can represent his own state of inner conflict and division. He is "a ruin amidst ruins" (4. 25). The identification posits the political dissidence Byron felt towards Britain's destructive imperialist policies,²² as well as the estrangement he experienced in the face of mounting public criticism of his private life.

What is most apparent in the opening stanzas of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* is the archaic turns of phrase which the poem deploys. Stanza two typifies the Spenserian tone which resonates through the canto:

Whilome in Albion's isle there dwelt a youth,
Who ne in Virtue's ways did take delight;
But spent his days in riot most uncouth,
And vexed with mirth the drowsy ear of Night.
Ah me! in sooth he was a shameless wight,
Sore given to revel and ungodly glee;
Few earthly things found favour in his sight
Save concubines and carnal companie,
And flaunting wassailers of high and low degree.

Byron's use of the Spenserian verse-form and its stock of archaic phrases is pointedly ironic in its thrust: for Childe Harold is no chivalrous knight errant but a man of his own time and place. The cynical humour implicit in this device mocks the narrow virtues of his fellow Britons, or what Jerome McGann, citing Andrew J. George's editorial gloss of these stanzas in his edition of the poem, calls an "ironic attack upon the sensibilities of the conventionally moral," or the "propriety bound attitudes of conventional British morality" (McGann 1963: 58 – 59). An underlying structural irony, omitted by McGann's analysis, is the ease with which Byron uses the Spenserian verse form – a distinctly

²² The acquisition by Lord Elgin of the marbles from the Parthenon in Athens, and the ensuing débâcle, is a pertinent example and one which Byron criticized trenchantly (q.v. *CHP* I. i. 6; I. xii. 100 – 104; and Notes, 189 – 191).

western literary convention – to describe the East. This recalls Said’s claim that western artists “restructured the Orient by their art and made its colours, lights, and people visible through their images, rhythms, and motifs” (1995: 22) and emphasizes the synthetic texture of Oriental representation through their depictions. The archaic verse-form, then, rehearses not only the rhythms of a western poetical sensibility but also introduces the associated quest motif. Whilst the poem may convey the reader through Oriental scenes, its point of origin is distinctly European and British – the “Albion” of l. 2 sets the opening scene in the period of medieval romance, and places Harold as a version of mock knight-errant on “pilgrimage” to crusade in the Holy Land. Byron’s use is, however, ironic and any notions of purpose rapidly dissipate in the face of a modern political landscape in which romantic idealism is clearly misplaced.

Instead of noble feats performed by honourable heroes, Byron’s poem introduces a distinctly unbowdlerized anti-hero who seems quite oblivious to the notions of chivalry that the verse-form traditionally espoused. Harold’s picaresque travels through the East also present the reader with a frank appraisal of what he encounters. War is not glamorized as noble and glorious, but is depicted more honestly as a kind of atrocity committed by unscrupulous and power-hungry governments. In his travels, too, the description of local inhabitants is presented as they are experienced. The Spanish women, for instance, are represented in unapologetically sexual terms and they project a simple vitality which stands in marked contrast to the artifice and pallid, pious temperament of the typical Englishwoman. “Albion” itself seems a far cry from a vision of moral perfection. As Harold’s pilgrimage penetrates further eastward his representations of Albania, Greece and Turkey assume in contrast an air of rugged vitality.

Opposed to a morally and socially ossified England, Byron’s depiction of the East seems liberating. Harold’s departure from England, or what he terms “Eremit’s sad cell” (l. 4),²³ launches him into a running narrative which, from the moment he bids his final farewell to England in the ‘last Good Night’ passage (l. 13. i – x), propels him across the English Channel and through the Portuguese landscape at breakneck speed. We observe

this movement in several of the stanzas, which act as a conduit for what seems to be as much a flight *from* England as it is a journey *to* elsewhere. Or, as Harold carols in l. 13. x:

‘With thee, my bark, I’ll swiftly go
Athwart the foaming brine;
Nor care what land thou bear’st me to,
So not again to mine.’

Harold’s departure from home is sudden and final. His disenchantment with a life of idleness in l. 4 triggers in him a moment of existential crisis not dissimilar to Sartre’s notion of ‘nausea’, and he resolves to leave. Despite having run “through Sin’s long labyrinth” (l. 5), he finds that his former pursuits evoke only suicidal ennui: “With pleasure drugg’d he almost longed for woe, / And e’en for change of scene would seek the shades below” (l. 6). For Harold, and by association we may say for Byron, even the pursuit of pleasure becomes dull in a society that demands of its citizens a strict adherence to moral conventions – the result is a schizophrenic condition in which all social behaviour becomes caught in a web of hypocrisy.

Upon quitting his native country, Harold bids farewell to none, but proceeds directly to the first leg of his journey:

Childe Harold had a mother – not forgot,
Though parting from that mother he did shun;
A sister whom he lov’d, but saw her not
Before his weary pilgrimage begun:
If friends he had, he bad adieu to none.

(l. 10.)

The journey Harold undertakes is here termed a “weary pilgrimage,” but in effect the destination is unknown. Indeed, the movement in the first two cantos is if anything a movement away from any kind of final resolution; it is only much later, in the conclusion to Canto 4, that Byron manages to advance a unified sense of purpose. The initial cantos

²³ This develops the notion of Harold’s social constriction and alienation: ‘eremite’ is, literally, another term for a hermit or a recluse. That he calls his native country such a “cell” suggests an extreme sense of existential isolation and disconnection from his society.

are a journey of disillusionment and despair at the human condition, or what McGann terms as Byron's "process of 'becoming'" which finds expression as "a condition of mental anguish and futility" (1968: 49) in *CHP 1 – 2*.

The sheer rapidity of the departure, as it strains to distance itself from thoughts of a still imminent England, only slows once Harold has placed a firm barrier between himself and his native land. The first pause for breath, on the narrative level, occurs at l. 27: "So deem'd the Childe, as o'er the mountains he / Did take his way in solitary guise." The reason for Harold's urgent desire to escape England is not simply a narrative expedient, and here it is worth remembering the semi-autobiographical form that *CHP* assumes. The scenes it describes, as Byron tells us, were modelled on his own travels (q.v. Preface). Byron had good personal reasons to wish to place some distance between himself and the reach of England: he had run up considerable debts and was being hounded for payment by his creditors. In a letter of 8 February 1809 to his lawyer, John Hanson, Byron writes:

I am *dunned* from Morn till Twilight, money I must have or quit the country, and if I do not obtain my seat immediately, I shall sail with Ld. Falkland in the Desiree Frigate for Sicily. – I have a considerable sum to pay tomorrow morning and not five pounds in my purse; something must be done, pray favour me with an answer, and permission to draw for a few hundreds.

(*BLJ*, 1: 192)

Byron's debts had risen to close to £12,000 by the time of his departure (q.v. Eisler 1999: 171). In addition to securing a release from the claustrophobic world of the English social circuit, Byron's tour would also permit him a respite from his creditors. Images of flight occur at numerous points in the text prior to Byron's arrival in Lisbon, from the moment Harold boards ship. At l. 12 he experiences a sense of relief, as:

The sails were fill'd, and fair the light winds blew,
As glad to waft him from his native home;
And fast the white rocks faded from his view,
And soon were lost in circumambient foam

The sense of release is so tangible as to seem that nature itself celebrates Harold's release. For Byron, doubtless it was the fast-fading rocks of the English shore which

conveyed to him most strongly his sense of new-found freedom. “Eremitic’s sad cell” of earlier (l. 36) might easily have become realized as the Debtor’s Prison. Thus liberated, Harold takes to singing his ‘last Good Night’ to his homeland. If the tone is sometimes nostalgic, it also leaves the reader in no doubt as to Harold’s sense of escape. At l. 13. vii he sings: “But I, who am of lighter mood, / Will laugh to flee away” and concludes the song on a celebratory note – of onward travel. The first line of the stanza directly following the song emphasizes this effect of inner relief with a corresponding moment of narrative action: “On, on the vessel flies, the land is gone” (l. 14). The resonant epizeuxis of the first two words is particularly effective in conveying the sense and speed of Harold’s flight from his native land. We might also discern Byron’s own urgency in the narrative voice that phrases it thus.

All the anxiety of flight is at once dissipated when the Portuguese shore comes into view: “Oh, Christ! it is a goodly sight to see / What heaven hath done for this delicious land!” (l. 15). Even before he steps ashore, Harold is swept up by the vitality of the landscape and he happily allows the abundant distractions of Lisbon to absorb his attention. The stanzas which follow hurtle along through a myriad of different scenes, and transport Harold through Lisbon’s dirty streets to the mountain splendour of Cintra (l. 18 – 26). Despite the altered location, though, he is not yet completely free of England: the Peninsular War still rages through Europe, and British vessels lie at anchor in Lisbon’s harbour. This causes Harold to reflect on political events, and the stanzas to l. 26, rather than slowing, tend to gain pace with the added concerns which this engenders. Byron was to discover that his status as an English lord was to prove useful to his travels. Britain’s political alliances with Portugal and Spain granted him, as one of its high-ranking citizens, considerable liberty of movement and also provided him with a sympathetic reception in these countries. He was quick to exploit this advantage, and would don his splendid regimentals when meeting with resident officials or nobility. Since Britain also had significant imperial interests in the Near East more broadly, the influence of his rank continued to be of use even beyond the borders of Europe.²⁴

²⁴ See, for example, the account of Ali Pasha’s relations with Britain (q.v. Eisler 1999: 208 – 9).

Harold's sojourn in Cintra proves to be a tempting kind of paradise. The "Eden" of l. 18 is refused by a conscious effort in l. 27 where Reason and a developing moral sense urge him on. Harold's earlier desire to "traverse Paynim shores, and pass earth's central line" at l. 11 suggests that his pilgrimage is not merely concerned with place, but demands a deeper analysis. The marked lack of a point of final destination to his journey, despite its description as a 'pilgrimage,' implies that what is of importance is a moral progress rather than a simply geographical one. The term "Paynim" derives from the Latin root *paganismus*, or 'pagan,' the chivalric term for a Muslim and thus describes an adversarial relation between East and West which is rooted in a history of conflict. However, as Byron's verse proceeds to show, the clean distinction between Christian saint and Muslim infidel was by no means an untroubled one. Far from being a noble contest which tested the faith of the respective combatants, the bloodshed was rather motivated by the rapacity of power-hungry rulers eager for conquest, a theme which is taken up a little later in his treatment of the clash between Moor and Christian in the context of Spain's victory over their Muslim invaders.

From what we know of Byron's sense of dissidence, it is apparent that he locates in the East a freedom which was not possible in a Western context. If the fetters of his social constriction have loosened slightly in Portugal, he was still not free from its influence. There was the obvious British military presence to consider, but, more than this, there were large populations of British expatriates living in practically every large town he entered. His social interactions were therefore regulated by the same orthodoxy as before, if not quite as pervasive. For this reason, then, he urges himself, in the persona of Harold, further east and onward to Spain at l. 28:

To horse! to horse! he quits, for ever quits
A scene of peace, though soothing to his soul:
Again he rouses from his moping fits,
But seeks not now the harlot and the bowl.
Onward he flies, nor fix'd as yet the goal
Where he shall rest him on his pilgrimage;
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.

From the above discussion, it is clear that Harold has embarked upon a course of personal development, though at the present moment he does not see how he might accomplish such growth. What matters is that he should continue in his progress and not succumb to his previous vice: the aversion to women and drink, in the stanza above, stands in contrast to the earlier depictions of Harold. He is no longer the “shameless wight, / sore given to revel and ungodly glee... concubines and carnal companie” (1. 2. xiv – xv; xvii). It will, however, be some time before Byron is able to advance his poem beyond the existential confusion which subsists in the need for perpetual movement.

The autobiographical style in which *CHP* is written requires us as readers to consider the psychological development of its protagonist. While Byron the man is refined out of existence in the poem, we do have access to both Byron the poetic narrator, or narrative voice in the poem, and to Harold who stands as an *alter ego* for the absent Byron. Since the poem is also written during the course of his travels, and often resembles a kind of verse journal, the thoughts which flow through the narrative constitute the process of development (not always linear) that the poet’s mind undergoes. It is worth remembering, though, that Byron’s mode of narration is an artistic device which he manipulates according to his own will: thus although the narrator-Byron may not possess self-knowledge and must develop along with, and often in response to, the poem’s action, the artist-Byron is nevertheless in control of his poetic material. Indeed, it is at the level of irony where we may catch glimpses of this detachment, despite the obvious identification which subsists between Harold and Byron at the moment of the poem’s production.

For Jerome McGann, who raises this issue in his study of *CHP* in *Fiery Dust*, Byron’s views are of less importance than the psychological insights which they permit. When reading his assessment, we can detect Frye’s evaluation, cited earlier: “His opinions, as ideas, are strictly of secondary poetic importance; what matters is that they are his, and that in them we can read the temper of his mind” (1968: 53 – 54). In fact this rendering stretches back to Goethe, who much admired Byron’s poetry for its spontaneity but deprecated its reflective instances.

The shift in scene from Portugal to Spain, the next point in Harold's journey, celebrates the beauty of the Spanish landscape but also laments its domination by Napoleon's military campaign:

O'er vales that teem with fruits, romantic hills,
(Oh, that such hills upheld a freeborn race!)
Whereon to gaze the eye with joyaunce fills,
Childe Harold wends through many a pleasant place.

(1. 30)

We note here a decided detachment of interest apparent in the person of Harold. Whilst the voice of the poetic narrator might be said to reflect on the great misfortune of Spain's current situation (via the parenthetical aside) we see none of this kind of reflection in Harold, who wanders through the landscape quite unmoved by the events which occur around him. This may partly serve to reflect a dissociation between the narrator and Harold that Byron was at pains to stress. More significantly, though, it also reveals an instance of Byron's re-assessment of the events that were occurring around him. Since he only commenced writing *CHP* several months into his trip, the intervening period would have given him ample chance to reflect on the political changes which were unfolding around him. His experience at first hand of the reality of political events that were transpiring in Europe seems to trigger in him an awakening and we may detect in the narrator a slow emergence from the political apathy of Harold. This also hastens the collapse of Harold as *alter ego*, and unsurprisingly he occupies less and less of the verse as Byron becomes increasingly drawn into direct contact with the life of the society through which he moves. He would later become an ardent supporter of Spain's fight for freedom.

At 1. 34 – 36 Byron recalls Spain's historic repulse of the invading Moors. The victory is celebrated as a triumph of valour expressed in chivalric terms. Both adversaries, "Moor and knight, in mailed splendour drest" (1. 34), are portrayed as worthy contenders, and they battle for a noble religious cause which is celebrated in song for posterity. Despite the victory, however, the images of bloodshed in which both adversaries, apparelled

respectively in “Paynim turban and Christian crest,” lie slaughtered in the field sound the keynote. The victor’s trumpet call is drowned out by the cries of newly widowed women:

Red gleam’d the cross, and wan’d the crescent pale,
While Afric’s echoes thrill’d with Moorish matrons’ wail.

(1. 35)

The description, which puts a human face to the depredations of war, reveals the cost in real terms and the contest between Moor and Christian, viewed as noble and glorious, is debunked and shown to be mutually destructive. The “roundelays” which in earlier celebrated such ritual violence become “worthless lays, the theme of transient song” (1. 43).

The images retold in song find an analogue in the modern age, as Napoleon’s relentless warmongering repeats the cycle of slaughter and spurs Byron on to sound a rallying call to Spain (1. 37) in a desperate bid to check the advance which harks back to the savagery of earlier times. The Peninsular War is however distinctly unchivalric and has as its impetus not religious zeal but a greedy and power-mongering tyrant. Napoleon is described as “Gaul’s vulture” at 1. 52, and Byron asks the reason why so many must suffer on account of “one bloated Chief’s unwholesome reign” (1. 53). Spain is itself much altered in the circumstances. In place of the noble knights of yore stands a beaten nation, kept from capitulation by British military intervention. All around, fields are strewn with the bodies of dead soldiers – at Talavera (1. 41); Albuera (1. 44); and Andalusia (1. 49). Thus subdued, Spanish resistance metes out its vengeance by stealth:

Sharp is the knife, and sudden is the stroke;
And sorely would the Gallic foeman rue,
If subtle poniards, wrapt beneath the cloke,
Could blunt the sabre’s edge, or clear the cannon’s smoke.

(1. 40)

If the Spaniards are defeated militarily, Byron nevertheless finds their tenacity admirable. But whilst admiring their energy, he is appalled by their excessive violence. Politically, this extreme behaviour frequently becomes irrational and all productive notions of

freedom – for Spain “her well asserted right” (1. 90) – become confounded by acts of vengeance: the cry of “ ‘War even to the knife!’ ” (1. 86) leaves no quarter for reasonable conduct. The consequence is a bloody spiral of slaughter, which is horrid to Byron in its inhumanity and little better than the open warfare of before. For McGann, the Spaniard has a correlative in the figure of the Suliote. He argues that:

The treatment of the Suliotes in Canto 2 is similar to that of the Spaniards. Though the Suliotes are “Fierce,” they have the concomitant virtues of courage and strength. (2. 65) Ali Pasha, their leader, is also their prototype. He is marked with “a tiger’s tooth,” and the poet predicts of him: “Blood follows blood, and, through their mortal span, / In bloodier acts conclude those who with blood began” (2. 63).

(1968: 52, footnote)

An important difference in the present Spanish context, however, is the internecine nature of the strife. In the absence of the Old Enemy, the war sweeping through Europe could not be viewed in the customary binary terms. Consequently, Byron is able to locate the savagery usually ascribed to Eastern society within the bosom of Europe itself. Spain’s plight is such that, having exhausted her soldiers, the numbers are filled by a corps of women who continue the fight. The Maid of Saragoza at 1. 54 – 58 stands as an image of desperation and, though Byron’s description praises the Maid’s courage, his larger consideration is the inhumanity which the war has introduced into a once civilized, or at least chivalric, society. In the image of the Maid, the Spanish women’s traditional depiction as “black-eyed maids of Heaven” (1. 59) is marred by the effects of war. They are “unsex’d” (1. 560) and assume for him an unnatural ferocity.

The Spanish women’s virtue and vigour in such circumstances prompt Byron to a comparison. “Spain’s dark-glancing daughters” (1. 59) find an Eastern correlative in the figure of the houris – the beautiful inhabitants of the Muslim paradise.²⁵ This recalls Byron’s later description of Donna Julia, in *Don Juan*, where the link is made even plainer. Donna Julia is praised for the sensuous “darkness of her Oriental eye” (1. 56), and her half-Spanish, half-Moorish origin injects an erotic piquancy into the description.

²⁵ The term ‘houris’ is derived from the Arabic *hūr*, plural of *hawrā*, which refers to the large, dark eye of the gazelle; and, by extension, signifies a woman who possesses similarly large, dark eyes. The feature is

Byron's gaze focusses upon the figure of a single Spanish woman: chin, lips, glance and cheek are admired in turn (l. 58). The tender erotic depiction stands in jarring contrast to the violence of warfare that engulfs them, and is emblematic of the inhumanity of the wholesale death and destruction. He admires the Spanish women for their pursuit of freedom, as well as for their physicality. In these aspects they more closely resemble the Eastern women that he has encountered in his travels than the "paler dames" of England who are "languid, wan, and weak," (l. 58).²⁶

Throughout the description, the Spanish women – as the houris – are given a powerful sexual charge, and this is where Byron locates the source of their vigour. He asserts however that the Spanish women are "no race of Amazons, / But form'd for all the witching arts of love": they are ferocious, but such emotion is "the tender fierceness of the dove / Pecking the hand that hovers o'er her mate," (l. 57). Such a rendering secures a houri-like innocence for these warrior-maidens even as it emphasizes the horror of a war which spares none. As Catherine Franklin notes, "[Byron] brings back the 'feminine' focus on romantic love, and uses the genre to do something new – to present sexual relationships in an overtly political light" (1992: 14).

When Byron began composing *CHP* he had already crossed into Albania and spent some length of time in an Eastern setting. This exposure had a profound influence on him, and his first-hand experience of a culture quite different to his own caused him to reconsider many of the notions he had hitherto taken for granted. The eroticism of the Orient was a literary commonplace, and, while he participates in the myth, he discovers that the reality of place and circumstance rapidly outstrips the narrow bounds of a literary convention. Consequently, Byron's thinking assumes a dialectical form in which East and West participate in antagonistic relation. We may observe this process at work in the above discussion of the Spanish women, where the Maid of Saragoza provides a point of contact. Both warrior and seductress, she represents two quite different strands of social representation. Politically, as we have observed, she stands in place of the fallen men of

characteristic of the virgins of the Muslim Paradise (q.v. Bosworth et al., 1995: 581), who are noted for their sensuality.

²⁶ Cf. the participation of the female characters of Zuleika, Khaled and Gulnare in acting to secure their freedom in the *Turkish Tales*.

Spain – a figure determined and wilful in defence of her home and territory. However, for Byron, to observe her beauty recalls her more customary role as lover. Her participation in the war does little to mitigate this perception, and indeed spurs the erotic impulse on. In witnessing her struggle, the outward signs of exertion suggest to him the symptoms of sexual arousal. Her call to arms, at l. 54, uses this very term: “aroused”, she sets aside guitar and anlace. Throughout the description, her former mildness is contrasted with her martial vigour: “Oh! had you known her in her softer hour,” the narrator declares. Via this process of comparison, Byron uses the figure of the Spanish Maid to interrogate both Western and Eastern notions of sexuality and, we may say, of cultural virility. The result of these appraisals challenges the received notions of conduct, and places in their stead a less sophisticated but more sincere and vital mode of existence.

The process is repeated in relation to notions of cultural ethics. Thus when Byron writes that “The West must own the Scourger of the world” (l. 52), he is pronouncing a relative assessment in which Western tyranny, in the person of Napoleon, is seen as no better than the popular notion of Oriental despotism. At the time of writing, Byron had met with Ali Pasha, a man notorious in his cruelty and harsh in his command of his Albanian domain. Byron has Harold meet the selfsame Pasha at l. 47 and he offers the following description:

He pass'd bleak Pindus, Acherusia's lake,
And left the primal city of the land,
And onwards did his further journey take
To greet Albania's chief, whose dread command
Is lawless law; for with a bloody hand
He sways a nation, turbulent and bold.

If we compare this representation of the Pasha with the scenes of bloodshed witnessed earlier in the fields of Spain, and elsewhere, it becomes difficult to draw a useful distinction between Eastern despotism and the West's own depredations. The comparison serves to suggest that the West may in fact surpass, in both extent and degree, the Orient's reputed inhumanity. While the Pasha's tyranny is limited to his own small region of the earth, it appears that Napoleon's imperial designs know no bounds. Since his

invasion of Egypt in 1798, he already occupied the role of 'Eastern' tyrant in addition to being master of his European battlefields.

A very peculiar and precipitate break occurs in the narrative at l. 60, where Byron introduces five stanzas which celebrate his visit to Parnassus, in Greece. This is also their *raison d'être*, as Byron finds himself so moved by the sight that he cannot resist descanting on its praises immediately. The verses hark back to the opening stanza of the canto, and rehearse the same basic theme of homage and nostalgia. The juxtaposition moreover forces a comparison between his present location and the Spanish scenes of violence which his poetry was recounting. As Gleckner notes:

With all the sense of the contrast between the world of Parnassus and the modern world that he has shown us thus far in *Childe Harold*, and will continue to show us with greater and greater intensity, the poet is painfully aware that the mountain is but the splendid ruin of another kind of paradise. Its very reality, which he insists upon mocks modern man's dream of attaining its heights.

(1967: 63)

The reader is thereafter returned to the Spanish scene with only slightly less vertiginous violence, as Byron continues where he left off. The Spanish women, "Andalusia's maids" (l. 64), are further extolled as a kind of earthly muse, thoroughly sexualized since they are "Nurst in the glowing lap of soft desire" (l. 654), and thus they are cast as the classical equivalent of the houris – a just reward should the old heroism prevail. At this point, as Marjorie Levinson notes, Byron's thinking with regard to notions of heroism is still open to imaginative reworking (q.v. 1986: 124 – 8); it is only later, in his disappointment with the actions of its most representative avatar, Napoleon, that his views begin shifting towards the cynicism which defines the narrative voice in *Don Juan*.

The stanzas 72 – 79 shift scene from the fields of battle to the social pursuits of the Spanish, and recount the spectacle of the bullfight. In part, the description stands as a parody of the rites of chivalry, here transposed onto a civic scene, which have featured earlier. The bullfight takes as its analogy the jousting tournament of medieval Europe, as is made clear by reference to the arena's identification with "The lists" (l. 720), into which the matadors enter: "on gallant steeds, / With milk-white crest, gold spur, and

light-pois'd lance, / Four cavaliers" (ll. 729 – 731). The Spanish women, 'ladies' who "lovely glance" (l. 735), seem to spur these 'knights' on. But the effect serves to heighten the parody, as several stanzas earlier Byron has written a less stylized account:

The throng'd Arena shakes with shouts for more;
Yells the mad crowd o'er entrails freshly torn,
Nor shrinks the female eye, nor ev'n affects to mourn.

(l. 68)

Whilst Byron is certainly shocked that "Spain's dark-glancing daughters" of earlier, who are described so tenderly at l. 58, can be so unmoved by such graphic violence he is also transfixed by the spectacle himself. Though its physicality seems to him grotesque, the description of the bullfight also pulses with vitality. If we consider the energy of the bullfight in comparison with the chivalric references, it is apparent that the jousting seems pale by contrast. Also, and more to the point, the comparison shows up the decorum of chivalry as being essentially no better or more refined than the travesty of the bullfight. As a form of social event, the bullfight moreover reveals a basic hypocrisy to proceedings in the prayers to the Virgin (l. 71) and the lechery of the spectators who excite mock-amorous excitement between each other (l. 72). By analogy, the social artifice surrounding the event has as its correlative the less dramatic but no less hypocritical social circuit of English society which Byron would depict later in the English cantos of *Don Juan*.

Before the canto concludes, the lyric 'To Inez' appears. The earlier themes of despair and flight are repeated here, with an important variation: Harold's separation from his native land becomes now the condition of an exile. He makes it clear that the reason for his exile is located within himself, and stems from a difference he detects between himself and the society that he once inhabited:

What Exile from himself can flee?
To Zones, though more and more remote,
Still, still pursues, where-e'er I be,
The blight of life – the demon, Thought.

(ll. 857 – 860)

The earlier image of the “Hebrew wanderer” at l. 854 is particularly apposite, as both Harold and Byron pursue their course further eastward. We might detect in the Middle-Eastern figure of Moses the sense of longing for a homeland that would characterize Byron’s later life, as a desire to escape the reach of Western dominion. Certainly the description locates Harold in an existential wilderness as he is haunted by his own doubts – and feels completely dissociated from his former ways and friends. The canto closes on this resonant note of uncertainty; and any sense of final destination, or even useful progress towards such an end, seems quite irrelevant. Hope for Byron still resides in pushing further on with his journey, and it is to Greece that his pilgrimage now travels.

II.

The second canto opens with a salutation to Homer, through the use of the epithet “blue-eyed,” (q.v. McGann’s note: 282). The description is applied to the goddess Athena but, in a recursion which is now quite familiar, the homage Byron pays to the classical figure is rather a lament of lapsed glory. Images of ruin abound throughout the canto, and the focus is rapidly directed at the modern Greeks and their social circumstances. The physical ruin of classical sites that Byron sees all around him becomes a trope which he uses to describe the degraded state of present-day Greece and her inhabitants:

Look on this spot – a nation’s sepulchre!
Abode of gods, whose shrines no longer burn.

(2. 3)

The lack of spirit which Byron notes in the modern Greeks is linked to their condition of bondage under the Turkish occupation, and their long oppression. The Greek nation of classical times is become a society “From birth till death enslav’d; in word, in deed unmann’d” (2. 74); consequently, the modern Greeks have become a nation of “hereditary bondsmen” (2. 76) with little in common with their heroic forebears. The image of the skull at 2. 5 assumes symbolic significance as it represents not merely the death of a single Greek, but the death of Greek thought and culture *in toto*. This effect is

reproduced by the deployment of architectural terminology to describe the shattered skull: “broken arch”; “ruin’d wall”; “chambers desolate”; “Ambition’s airy hall”; “the dome of Thought, the palace of the Soul”; and “lonely tower” (2. 6) all make clear the connection between art, thought and the ruined classical sites. By linking the images of the skull with those of the ruined monuments, Byron also conveys the finality of what has occurred: as with the deceased owner of the skull, there is no possibility of resurrecting Greece’s former state. Greek art and philosophy, along with its ancient and noble heroes, are extinct.

What remains of importance to Byron, however, is the enduring significance of the ruins and what they represent. Taken as the source and inspiration of all cultural expression, Byron’s artistic interest in Greece emphasizes the aspects of loss in a manner which, paradoxically, seems to imply that in the end it is the Westerner, and not the Greek, who feels the loss most deeply. This is a tendency which Said notes in his introduction to *Orientalism*. A report by a French journalist during the 1975 – 1976 civil war on the devastation of downtown Beirut remarks: “it had once seemed to belong to... the Orient of Chateaubriand and Nerval” (1995: 1). The effect of such a comparative description illustrates the mediated way in which western perception operates in imaging the East. What is apprehended is a vision of the East presented via the medium of its novelists, artists, politicians and historians, whose writings manufactured a reality out of the various literary texts and which effectively defined what the Orient was. As Said asserts, “Orientalism is after all a system for citing works and authors,” (23) in which Nerval, and indeed all who sought to represent the Orient, participated. Nerval’s descriptions of village scenes in Syria derive not from the landscape itself, he points out, but from E. W. Lane’s study of Egypt from which Nerval in fact quotes verbatim. As Saree Makdisi notes in a commentary on Scott’s Oriental tale, *Waverley*:

The exoticism of the Orient cannot be approached simply by reading what is supposed to be an Arabic or Turkish (or Indian, or Chinese) text. Rather, the Orient fundamentally requires the mediation of the Orientalist, who alone is capable of understanding all of its complexities and dangers, and of communicating his or her understanding to other Europeans. This is precisely the effect of the enormous weight of the notes at the end of William Beckford’s *Vathek* and each of Byron’s *Turkish Tales*, for these notes do not convey useful

information about this or that detail of Oriental culture so much as they convey a sense of the “vast complexity” of the Orient to the sheltered European reader. Because each noted reference in the main body of an Oriental tale necessarily brings up a dozen other references, the overall effect of the notes is not to clarify things, but rather to make them more obscure – and hence reinforce the need for the intervention of the knowledgeable or informed authority figure (the Orientalist).

(1998: 205 – 206)

Such an accretive, iterative process elides any authentically Eastern reality by citing from the works of such already established Orientalist authorities. With each subsequent repetition, regardless of accuracy or local applicability, the description becomes thus more firmly fixed in the system of representation through which the East is apprehended. The odd sense of *déjà vu* experienced by the reporter is thus to be expected; in thinking of the Orient at all, it is via the habitual tropes and depictions that the region, its culture and its people take their expression in the western consciousness. The result is a tightly structured body of knowledge from which little deviation was possible. Implicit in this act of representation is the sense of possession – it is “Nerval’s Orient,” or “Chateaubriand’s Orient,” against which the Orient itself stands out as unaccountably foreign. We may speak quite intelligibly about “Byron’s Orient,” which describes a region which has been appropriated by his political-cultural vision. The consequent loss that is felt is thus a nostalgic tribute not to anything connected with the land or its people but rather to the signs through which the writer traces the myth of Orient. However, whilst I agree with Makdisi’s argument *vis-à-vis* the reifying effect of textual cross-referencing, it is necessary to include the proviso that in his case the effect unsettles notions of Orientalist authority more than it reproduces its stereotypes in unaltered form. As a kind of lay Orientalist, Byron’s depictions, whilst certainly not more representative of actual Oriental life, nevertheless challenge the established body of Orientalist knowledge by raising his personal experience of the East in opposition to its broad generalizations.

Said’s observation on the effect of the western presence in the East provides a useful index of the ideological reworking of the Orient as ‘theme.’ “To be a European in the Orient *always* involves being a consciousness set apart from, and unequal with, its

surroundings,” he writes. “But the main thing to note is the intention of the consciousness: What is it in the Orient for?” (1995: 157). This returns us to the central question of the poem, namely, how we are to interpret its status as pilgrimage. At the outset, it is precisely the *lack* of purpose that suggests to Byron the undertaking: to embark upon a journey and thereby to arrive at some as-yet-unknown destination. Inasmuch as his poetry acted as the interim between departure and arrival, it branded him with the mark of Cain and represented in verse what he failed to accomplish in deed. His castigation of the Greeks’ acceptance of their lot under the Turkish occupation in fact communicates more concerning his own sense of disempowerment than it relates to the condition of Greek subjugation. Whether via the figure of a Harold or some later version of author-narrator, his implication in his poetical themes is clear, and marks a version of political action through verse.²⁷

Byron’s assertion that poetry is not his “primary vocation” (q.v. Grosskurth 1997: 58) registers this transitional attitude and alludes to his political ambitions, which would gradually find an expression, ironically, in the Greek struggle for independence.²⁸ The impact his intervention would have on the region, moreover, reproduces the same notion of possession encountered earlier, in the reference to “Nerval’s Orient.” We may speak quite intelligibly about “Byron’s Greece,” a circumstance which marks his inclusion in the Orientalist fold, as one of the westerners who performed the service of reclaiming Greece as a lost province. Said, in his analysis of the varieties of written representations of the East, depicts artists such as Byron as “writer[s] for whom a real or metaphorical trip to the Orient is the fulfilment of some deeply felt and urgent project” which, he asserts, relies upon “the sheer egotistic powers of the European consciousness at [its] centre” (1995: 158). As I have argued above, this is certainly applicable to Byron; and Said’s elaboration, that an interpretation of the Oriental imagery evinces a form of

²⁷ As Paul de Man points out, a distinction can be drawn between the “cognitive” and the “performative” aspects of autobiographical texts. Byron’s ‘excuse’ for not taking political action simultaneously provides the impetus for his verse renderings. According to de Man the performative, that is the act of writing, will always be in excess of the cognitive dimension in order to stage the ‘real’ drama of the ‘self.’ Paradoxically, he argues, the text generates the guilt in order to justify the excuse rather than the other way round (q.v. Anderson 2001: 49 – 51).

²⁸ In his later novel, *Tancred* (1847), Benjamin Disraeli’s statement that “the East is a career” provides a sense of Europe’s (and especially Britain’s) growing investment in the Orient as both the site of its richest colonies, and as the theatre of military and political aspirations.

“Romantic restructuring,” is also true but to a less determinate degree than he suggests. Byron’s vision, after all, is fixated with the impossibility of restoration; at best, he argues, the Greeks may be “subjects without being slaves” (*CHP*, footnote: 201) but there is no question of a return to classical times.

To his mind, then, the true loss can only be properly felt by one such as him for whom the legacy of classical Greece yet endures, at least in hallowed memory. At 2. 86 he writes:

While strangers only not regardless pass,
Lingering like me, perchance, to gaze, and sigh ‘Alas!’

In comparison, the Greeks seem quite insensate. Their domination by the Ottomans has effected a cultural corrosion which reduces not only their present condition to that of bondsmen, but also effaces their former achievements in Byron’s view. There can be little doubt that Greek national pride suffered under Ottoman occupation, but Byron’s vision of Greece in terms of a nostalgic classical-age longing reveals the same tendency to categorize Greek society along Orientalist lines. Beyond the images of ruin, we encounter little of actual Greek society; time and history stagnate; and what subsists is an ossified representation which cannot escape the confines of classical antiquity. In no way does it represent actual circumstance. The representation, moreover, is self-perpetuating: all present-day Greek achievements automatically refer back to former times, and inevitably fall short of their former glory. At 2. 10 Byron offers the following depiction:

Yet these proud pillars claim no passing sigh,
Unmov’d the Moslem sits, the light Greek carols by.

The allusion to Gray’s ‘Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard’ (1751) in the above lines develops the sense of inconsequence which Greece has suffered under since its decline from classical times. Once the centre of power and influence in antiquity, what remains now is as provincial as Gray’s nameless churchyard - a nation of people for whom “Knowledge to their eyes her ample page” no longer unrolls (q.v. ‘Elegy’, l. 49). History itself seems to have forgotten Greece and, what is worse, the verse suggests that its own citizens have lost the memory of their former greatness. The land ages, generations live and die, and not a page more is added to the record. To Byron, the only useful purpose

which Greece now serves, apart from its role as a land of monuments, is as a warning to “the boast of heraldry, the pomp of power” (q.v. ‘Elegy’, l. 33) of the present age, which is in his view no less prone to decline.

Despite the weightiness of classical Greek culture in such phrases as “massy stone”; “unshaken base”; and “grandeur” of the lines preceding this quotation (ll. 82 – 83; 86), what shocks Byron is the contrary condition of ‘lightness’ which the Greek holds in opposition to this lost history. The levity of the Greek is an indication not only of his irretrievably lost cultural heritage, but also of his final degradation. In this sense, then, Byron excludes the modern Greeks from his notion of a ‘civilized’ modern society despite their noble origins. In their current state, he dismisses them as even incapable of changing their lot: “But ne’er will freedom seek this fated soil, / But slave succeed to slave through years of endless toil,” the narrative asserts (2. 78).

In a moment of disarming political honesty, he reflects that intervention by Western nations will not free Greece of its condition of bondage. France, or Britain, would merely replace the Turks as master and leave the Greeks no better off than before. Stanzas 11 – 15 put the argument plainly: even without wresting control of Greece from the Turks, the agents of British imperialism – here in the form of Lord Elgin – display no hesitation in plundering the classical sites for their own nations’ gain. If the Greeks are to be free, Byron asserts, “themselves must strike the blow” (2. 76). However, he sees no possibility of this occurring, as his words early in the canto have shown. He asks: “Where are thy men of might? Thy grand in soul?” (2. 2); and his hopeless appeal to the mythical figure of Achilles (l. 120) emphasizes the Greeks’ servile condition. If they detest their state of oppression, nevertheless they “rail in vain, / Trembling beneath the scourge of Turkish hand,” (2. 74).

In contrast stands the Turk, whose very appearance commands respect:

The bearded Turk that rarely deigns to speak,
Master of all around, too potent to be meek

(2. 58)

The numerous images of the Turk which occur throughout the canto represent him as both powerful and savage. The figure of the Delhi moves silently through the Turkish domain, but the description of the “cap of terror” (l. 518) that he wears conveys well the dread that his presence instils in the inhabitants of the occupied territories.²⁹ As noted earlier, the image of Ali Pasha in stanzas 62 – 63 stands as a prototypical representation of Turkish rule. The Delhi reproduces the same fierceness displayed by the Pasha on the local level; and like the Pasha, is not overtly brutal in his ordinary existence. The Turk’s dual nature is to Byron a kind of conundrum, and he finds it remarkable that one such as the Pasha can appear so mild when he is famed for his cruelty. In a sense, Byron is surprised to find the Pasha hospitable at all and his response provides an index of prevailing Western views of Eastern culture as inherently uncivilized and morally corrupt. As Jameson notes,

The central point to be made is not so much that he [i.e. the *Other*] is feared because he is evil; rather he is evil *because* he is Other, alien, different, strange, unclean and unfamiliar.

(1981: 115)

On the level of cultural representation, this recalls the ways in which Saladin was depicted as a monstrous figure by western historians, artists and writers. In Sir Walter Scott’s *The Talisman* (1825), an alternative view is put forward in which it is Richard I and not Saladin who is portrayed as the more barbaric. In his introduction to the poem, Scott writes:

Richard I, wild and generous, a pattern of chivalry, with all its extravagant virtues, and its no less absurd errors, was opposed to that of Saladin, in which the Christian and English monarch showed all the cruelty and violence of an Eastern sultan, and Saladin, on the other hand, displayed the deep policy and prudence of a European sovereign.

Nevertheless, it is in Saladin’s participation in a distinctly European notion of ‘civilized’ behaviour through which he is vindicated. Thus it is less the characters’ personal identities which matter so much as their affiliation to western tradition. In action, Richard I resembles not an Occidental tyrant but an Oriental one; Saladin not an enlightened

²⁹ *Delhi*: a fierce warrior, a title of honour bestowed by the Turks.

sultan but a European sovereign. Discursively, then, any mobility is denied by the very terms of reference which affirm a western superiority over the East. On the same point, Spurr cites Brantlinger's argument:

Somewhat anachronistically, the chivalric ethos is presented in language that makes it sound remarkably like the ideas of progress and civilization which nineteenth-century Britain uses to advance its imperial role in the Near East and the Holy Land.

(1993: 114)

The role reversal which Scott's depiction effects here emphasizes the dangers inherent in the prototypical savagery of the East, located not merely in the barbaric customs of place or culture but within the psyche of the westerner himself. By implication, Richard I's misconduct is construed as a kind of reckless ill-discipline in which the proprieties of a civilized mind are overthrown by an irrational return to a more primitive state more commonly associated with the backwardness of Oriental society. Indeed, the notion of such a return to savagery is a constant threat to the westerner who ventures into the East, as the ubiquitous fear of "going native" suggests. This also posits a psychoanalytical notion of culture, whereby 'primitive' thoughts assume the identity of a repressed id that is kept in check by the higher mind of a civilized western tradition. The disturbing reversal which Scott presents as a kind of schizophrenic condition which fractures the western consciousness is indicative of an underlying historical anxiety.

Historically, the Ottoman Empire loomed as a threat to Europe for centuries. This circumstance is closely tied to the notion of Eastern sexuality, and we may detect in Western depictions of the East a strong desire to refute this former relation. Read in sexual terms, the Orient possessed a phallic potency which for a very long period threatened the West's own cultural and political desires. The comparatively recent ascendancy of the West did not alleviate this anxiety, and Western cultural productions bearing the Orient as its theme retain much of the anxiety that Europe experienced under the threat of invasion. For this reason, the tendency to cast the East in a historical frame (as backward, primitive, technically inferior) can be viewed as a cultural expedient: in so doing, the Westerner might comfortably contemplate the Turk from a position of superiority. This effectively serves to castrate the historically virile Turk, and removes

even the memory of Europe's former inadequacy. The more arcane and backward Eastern culture is represented as being, the greater would be the superiority that the West is able to assert over the East.

Such a project of representation, however, is *overdetermined* in its insistence upon a political superiority over the East. In emasculating the Orient, the images of an erotic and seductive East, politically neutered but morally subversive, acquire new vigour and threaten to unravel western notions of control, order and reason from within. On the erotic level, as Byron's descriptions show, the East evinces a vitality which is virtually absent in his society. What little remains has, in his view, undergone a process of repression due to the emphasis in British society on the primacy of social respectability. In comparison with the tame, well-regulated libido of England's "languid, wan and weak" (l. 58) women stand the Spanish maids who, through their symbolically dark houri-like eyes, are associatively linked with the mythical sensuality of the Orient. The image of Eastern sexuality, itself a construct of the West's ambiguous relation of desire and disapproval *vis-à-vis* the East, thus appears as a threat to Western notions of morality. In order to circumvent this, western engagement with the Orient is frequently framed as a burlesque. Thus images of Eastern virility are, accordingly, often presented with the express purpose of titillating the reader. If a concession is thereby made to the vitality of Eastern sexuality, this is permitted only in the context of perverse behaviour. In this way, the allure of Oriental sexual freedom is recast as deviant. Such a rendering serves to contain the danger implicit in a sexuality which calls into question the virility of Western desire even as it allows the reader an access to the erotic experience. Recast as 'perverse' or 'bestial', the European reader could admire the Orient's energy but was ultimately dissuaded from identifying with its practices; and the more staid sexuality of the West was instead preferred as more 'civilized' and proper.³⁰

Of course, as Byron's treatment shows, this is by no means assured – particularly as his critique hinges on the pervasiveness of hypocrisy in his society. As a form of romantic

³⁰ Q.v. Jameson (citing Bergson): "comedy has the function of preserving social norms by castigating deviancy with ridicule" (1981: 107).

irony,³¹ Byron's exposure of Europe's susceptibility to Oriental sensuality unpicks the dialectical sleight of hand and reconfirms the tenuous control that western morality has once outside the precincts of Europe. His various protagonists are all ensnared by Oriental women, and we may say that the narrative line allegorises the political relation between West and East. The shift to a region at a remove from the culture of Europe, as Peter Knox-Shaw points out, implicates the piquant eroticism of the Tales with the expression of political dissidence. He argues:

On the premises that distance (and time in this context is often caught up mythically in space) swallows all but essential traits, writers found in the tramontane a way of cutting through parochial manners, and of brushing aside the delicacy skirting issues such as male aggression or the sexual desires of women. For all their aura of enchantment, oriental tales could tell home truths, truths that were as often political as erotic, which no doubt accounts for their infrequent association in the period with the art of subculture or with emergent nationalism. In the preface to *The Corsair* Byron calls attention to the presence of an Irish subtext in the orientalism of Moore.

(1993: 56)

In the final section of the canto, Harold's journey takes him to Albania where he encounters another version of Eastern tyrant, in the figure of Ali Pasha. The Pasha's reputation (to the West) as the "Mahometan Buonaparte" (Eisler 1999: 208) recalls the depiction of Scott's Saladin, and offers a similarly ambiguous image for comparison – in this case, with Napoleon. Ali Pasha is a tyrant in the Oriental mould; brutal, cruel, and immoral. However, his reputation as a political negotiator places him as a distinctly modern figure. How, indeed, is the westerner to reconcile the union of East and West in the very phrase itself? Either one must admit the basic savagery of the Pasha's Oriental nature and read it as the worst kind of indictment – a tyrannical Napoleon-figure, but more extreme in degree. Or one must admire the Pasha's presumably unique adaptability in acquiring a concomitant degree of Western acumen – in other words, the term is high praise. The phrase acts as a perfect paradox, since to admit either is to concede too much:

³¹ David Simpson defines this effect as follows: "The movement which has been described [q.v.] as that between comment and metacomment could be taken to define the strategy of irony as it is most commonly understood. This involves fixity and stability, the provision of a point of view from which we can deliver a judgement. The movement from metacomment back into comment, which we have also described [q.v.], can then be seen to involve another level of irony – the irony of irony" (1979: 22). Cf. also his discussion

if a tyrant, then he is merely following a Western model; if a brilliant negotiator then he trumps his European betters.

Byron's solution is simple but radical: he admits both views, in a continuing dialectic which interrogates both West and East with equal vigour. Of the Pasha he writes:

Ali reclin'd, a man of war and woes;
Yet in his lineaments ye cannot trace,
While Gentleness her milder radiance throws
Along that aged venerable face,
The deeds that lurk beneath, and stain him with disgrace.

(2. 62)

Whilst acknowledging his expectations of the tyrant, he yet admits that the Pasha is also a man who appears quite civilized. Napoleon provides the Western model for comparison, and although we are never presented with a direct image of him, he is a ubiquitous presence in Harold's travels. The carnage of his passing mars the landscape and suggests a tyranny which seems far more severe than that of the Pasha's. In the final analysis, though, it is tyranny which Byron reacts against and in this respect both figures stand condemned. This assessment will culminate in a later canto with Byron's 'forgiveness curse,' in which he presents a vision of future hope which rejects the regressive cycle of violence and reaction (q.v. 4. 135).

From the figure of the Pasha we pass on to the local inhabitants of Albania. At the very outset they are a perfect model of their chief, as Byron's first words on the matter make clear: at 2. 58 he speaks of "The wild Albanian," and he develops this image further. The Albanian is a potent figure who moves confidently through the landscape: "Here the Albanian proudly treads the ground" (2. 59). Later in the canto he declares, "Fierce are Albania's children" (2. 65), and praises their reputation as fearless warriors. The tenor of Byron's descriptions casts the Albanians as both barbarous and noble. They are feared for their ferocity and brutality in war, yet their nature is simple and generous. "Less barbarians," he writes, "would have cheered him less," (2. 66).

on page 101, where the division of the narrative voice into comment (as narrator) and metacomment (notes accompanying the text) reproduce a version of this 'Romantic' irony.

Thus he celebrates the simple virtue of the Albanians and, in stanzas 67 – 68, Byron has Harold relive an event in his own travels through the region. Upon being shipwrecked along the Albanian mainland en route to Patras from Janina, Byron and his travel group were met by a band of Suliotes. These fierce tribesmen, Greek Albanians and thus enemies to the largely Turkish crew, might have been expected to dispatch the party with little compunction but instead treated the group hospitably and provided safe passage through their territory. In their verse rendering Byron casts them as unsophisticated but noble-hearted warriors in whom can be found the true flame of Greek independence.

In stanzas 71 – 72, Byron celebrates the Suliotes' spartan lifestyle and we are made privy to one of their rituals. Byron, in the figure of Harold, stands somewhat aloof but is nevertheless entranced by the raw intensity of the proceedings:

Childe Harold at a little distance stood
And view'd, but not displeas'd, the revelrie,
Nor hated harmless mirth, however rude:
In sooth, it was no vulgar sight to see
Their barbarous, yet their not indecent, glee

(2. 72)

This description stands in stark contrast to the carousing of his youth, from which he fled at the start of the poem's action (cf. l. 6). In place of the ennui which afflicted him there, the Albanian ritual appears vibrant and all the more appealing because of its lack of artifice. Moreover he seems completely at ease among these rugged tribesmen, despite the very different social context. The images which induct Harold into the ritual – the blazing fires, the “red wine circling fast” (2. 71) – all work to excite in the reader a sense of the camaraderie that Byron experienced. The wild war-song which concludes the Albanian section possesses an eerie resonance and seems to echo with a tribal rhythm which is hypnotic in its intensity. The song opens with the untranslated, and perhaps untranslatable, word “Tambourgi!” (l. 649), which in its very foreignness transports us into the bosom of the wild tribesmen. Like Byron, we are unable to grasp the significance of the word but we detect in the strange and harsh syllables the same power which animates the warriors. The words themselves pulsate with energy, and capture the

exoticism of the Suliotes, their ferocity (they “half sang, half screamed” the lay, Byron writes in the line directly preceding the war-song), and their simple courage.

The song’s imagery works to reinforce these characteristics, and Byron presents the Albanians as a force of nature who are unstoppable once they are provoked: at l. 656 the tribes descend from the plains “like the stream from the rock” and are unsparing in exacting their vengeance. “Macedonia sends forth her invincible race” (l. 661) and lays waste to all who oppose. The blood-red scarfs of line 663 prefigure the carnage, and recall the Macedonians’ earlier appearance alongside the Delhis at 2. 58. These latter follow fast on their heels into the fray: in a dread image in lines 687 – 688, these terrible warriors “come dashing in blood o’er the banks” and complete the devastation. The waves of warriors extend deep into Europe: “Dark Muchtar,” Ali Pasha’s son, reaches the Danube unchecked (l. 685); and on a second front the “Muscovite” is driven back (l. 688).

What Byron presents is effectively a moment of apocalypse, and this recalls Europe’s ancient fear of invasion by the Ottomans. By placing the moment of conquest in the war-song, however, he presents the Oriental as a threat to civilization by portraying him as bent on invasion. Europe’s own imperial ambitions are thus given a scapegoat for mounting a campaign of conquest. However, the Ottoman threat was no longer a factor during Byron’s lifetime. We may thus interpret the song as a form of wish fulfilment, in which an ever more aggressive and tyrannical Europe is finally defeated through the very means of control that it tries to utilize. The vision of apocalypse is what David Simpson calls ‘Romantic irony,’ or, the irony of irony. It appears that, in ghoulishly celebrating Europe’s massacre at the hands of the Eastern warriors, Byron is in fact more concerned with making a point about political freedom. We may apply this reading with equal felicity to the fast crumbling Ottoman empire, or to the rising European imperial powers of the day.

Byron’s tone is curiously admiring of the Albanian hordes’ bloodlust, given that he has found the earlier scenes of battle so appalling. At line 666, however, he offers a motive: he imagines that the Albanians may “teach the pale Franks what it is to be slaves.” Thus

he views the tribesmen as a strike force against oppression – here, acting against Napoleon. Later, Byron was to become involved in the Greek fight for independence and use the same Suliotes in a bid to break Turkish rule, as alluded to earlier in the chapter.

The song also functions as a further indictment of the Greeks' lack of spirit. Byron makes this point quite dramatically, by concluding the song on a note of fearsome resolve: "view us as victors, or view us no more!" (2. 72. xi). Directly following on this is the return to the Greek scene:

Fair Greece! Sad relic of departed worth!
Immortal, though no more! Though fallen, great!
Who now shall lead thy scatter'd children forth,
And long accustom'd bondage uncreate?

(2. 73)

While whole tribes of Albanians charge to their death, it is difficult to find even a single Greek who will answer the call to freedom. The remainder of the canto repeats the lament cited above, and Byron punctuates the final stanzas with questions and sighs which seem to ring out hollowly. As with the close of the first canto, there is a distinct lack of achievement as Canto 2 reaches its conclusion. As Jerome McGann puts it:

Knowledge is not the end of Byron's journey, and although death is its limit, it is not its purpose. Knowledge is the end of *The Prelude*, but in *CHP* the insights are momentary and partial, and they only serve to help the pilgrim along the way. The ultimate purpose of Byron's journey is not cognitive, illuminating, but existential, trying.

(1968: 138)

Even Harold, the alleged hero of the poem, has not been seen since before the Albanians' war-song; and it is perhaps fitting that he is not in view now. The end of Canto 2 also marks the cessation of work on *CHP* for several years. When Byron returns to it in Cantos 3 and 4, he has emerged from the wilderness which seems to engulf the present fragment. In these later cantos, we move gradually through Germany, Switzerland and Belgium to the first of two moments of transfiguration. The Alps dominate Canto 3 as an imperfect intermediate destination for the pilgrimage, and in Canto 4 we travel through Italy from Venice to Rome until we reach the second, perfect site of pilgrimage: St.

Peter's Basilica in Rome, which stands as the highest symbol of spiritual achievement in the poem. However, I view the later two cantos to differ entirely in purpose and execution from those examined here, to the extent that I believe they represent two entirely different poetical achievements. For this reason, I shall close my analysis at this point and consider next a selection from the *Turkish Tales*, which develop upon the themes that have thus far been examined.

CHAPTER 2: *The Turkish Tales* Romantic Politics and the East

I.

In its final version, the text of *The Giaour* unites a series of poetic fragments to form a somewhat disjointed narrative. The poem takes up some of the themes begun in *CHP*, such as the representation of Greece through images of ruin, but also deploys a range of radically new and experimental devices. The chief of these is the fragmentary nature of the poem's structure, which purports to be a series of authentic fragments of oral poetry that Byron has attempted to set in order. This arrangement signals a number of marked changes in his method of writing. In place of the self-conscious authorial presence of his earlier poetry, there is almost nothing of the poet present in the narrative of the poem proper. The poem's events are alleged to be based on the song recounted by an Eastern bard, who has garnered his material from a few of the local inhabitants of the region.³² By this process of layered representation, Byron lays claim to the veracity of his descriptions by appeal to an original Oriental source.³³

The poem opens on a sombre note, with the image of a grave dominating the description of the Greek landscape. The composition of the image, as the reader familiar with *CHP* would expect, charges the scene with an air of desperation and from the very outset signals the plight of modern Greece. This effect is conveyed quite powerfully by the simple scene which is narrated in ll. 3 – 4:

That tomb which, gleaming o'er the cliff,
First greets the homeward-veering skiff

In a footnote, Byron remarks that the grave is supposed to be that of Themistocles, a heroic figure of ancient Greece famed for his victory over the Persians in 480 BC.³⁴ The "Athenian's grave" of line 2 stands as a metonymy which links the modern Greeks with

³² Q.v. Marjorie Levinson's discussion of the poem's critical treatment as "a kind of Rashomon tale featuring multiple narrators" (1986: 115).

³³ Q.v. Jerome McGann's discussion in *Fiery Dust: Byron's Poetic Development* (1968: 141 – 164).

³⁴ Cf. also *The Siege of Corinth*, ll. 341 – 344, which recalls the Greek victory over the Persians.

their illustrious but lapsed past; and the later description of Greece at ll. 68 – 102 makes clear the association: the grave is an image not only of the demise of Greek heroism, but also of the languid state of all Greeks. The phrase at line 91 captures the sense of political desolation: “ ’Tis Greece, but living Greece no more!” Since the gravestone is also the first object visible to the returning fisherman, it serves to emphasize the hopelessness of his situation: something like the epitaph to Dante’s entrance to hell³⁵. The gleam which lends lustre to the stone is the reflection of the setting sun, and reiterates the lapsed state of Greece’s golden age. An additional resonance is contained in the irony that the Greeks, once victors over the Persians, are now enslaved by an East over which they were once masters.

The figure of Themistocles is also particularly apt in relation to Byron’s personal circumstances. After his military success the Athenian statesman lost influence, was ostracized and eventually fled to the Persians in Asia Minor, where he died. On the biographical level these circumstances resonate with Byron’s own position in English society. The Coriolanus-like act of changing allegiance is a recurring motif in Byron’s literary and social life. In response to the damning reviews of *Hours of Idleness* by the critics of *The Edinburgh Review*, for instance, he abandoned his Scottish origins in favour of an English literary identity with the publication in 1809 of his satirical poem, *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*. From his newly adopted position he attacked the establishment he had originally hoped would confer literary honours upon him. Similarly, when he was vilified by the English for his deviant lifestyle he elected to leave England and live in exile in the Levant. From this perspective, the antagonism evident in much of Byron’s poetry towards English society is at least partly influenced by his reaction to such treatment.

In this process of comparison, particularly in its adversarial aspects, we may detect in Byron’s representations of lapsed Greek heroism the continuing class struggle which Fredric Jameson contends is at the root of all Western narratives; and which codify texts, as the historical imperative which shapes all cultural productions. In this sense, the tendency to anthologize Byron’s fragment poems under the rubric of ‘Turkish Tales’ is a

³⁵ Cf. *Giaour*, l. 276.

misnomer. The so-called 'Turkish Tales' are in dialogue less with their Eastern setting than with the Western political establishment from which they take their origin and against which Byron defines his own political position. Jameson's notion of the text as a form of "cultural artefact" which projects a political message or "socially symbolic act" (q.v. 1981: 20) provides us with a key to unlocking the ulterior motives behind the verse depictions.

Themistocles represents this narrative tension: as a failed hero, we may trace a line of comparison through the Athenian statesman to the Giaour (as prototypical antihero) and Napoleon with its terminus in Byron himself. The key figure in the associative chain is Napoleon, who for Byron once represented the overthrow of a lingering feudalism in Europe. The political sway of the great monarchies, after the overthrow of their hegemony on power in the cataclysmic moment of the French Revolution, shifted to the traditionally disenfranchised men of Europe, the bourgeoisie. In this, Byron stands as a figure somewhat marooned between the two competing worlds: he is a lord by title, but his liberal views and vocal opposition of the Regency government link him closely with the interests of the common man.³⁶ However, both Napoleon's accession to imperial power and his subsequent inglorious defeat cast him as irrevocably fallen. In the Spanish section of *CHP*, as we have seen, Napoleon's rapine seems little different from the earlier tyranny.

As several poems of the period reveal, Byron's disappointment is thoroughgoing: in 'Ode to Napoleon Buonaparte' (1814), he disparages both Napoleon's vaulting ambition and his meek acceptance of defeat: "Yet better had he neither known / A bigot's shrine nor despot's throne," (ll. 71 -- 72) he writes. Much of the rest of the ode is given over to the high cost of Napoleon's imperial ambition: "Earth hath spilt her blood for him" (l. 82), and the speaker laments: "Thy evil deeds are writ in gore" (l. 90). The penultimate stanza mocks what Europe's liberator has become: "Vain forward child of empire! Say, / Are all thy playthings snatched away?" What had for Byron once seemed to hold the promise of revolutionary social change, whilst still effected in part by the *Code Napoléon*, becomes

in the later actions of Napoleon a recursion to the forms of the *ancien régime*.

Commenting in 'On Napoleon's Escape from Elba,' the disdain is summary: "From Elba to Lyons and Paris he goes, / Making *balls* for the ladies, and *bows* to his foes" (ll. 3 – 4). In 'Ode from the French' (1815), he laments Napoleon's change from his role as a liberating "soldier citizen" (l. 24) whom not "all the despots banded" of Europe could resist, to his succumbing to "ambition's sting" which saw "the Hero sunk into the King" (ll. 28 – 33). The only positive tribute is to be found in nostalgic pieces such as 'From the French' (1815) and 'Napoleon's Farewell' (1816), which recall the early years of Napoleon's rise to power, when he appeared as Europe's liberator. Without a worthy hero, Byron's projection of the desolation of a world without salvation finds expression in the hollow figure of the Giaour, himself a version of the statue "with fronts of brass and feet of clay" (q.v. 'Ode to Napoleon Buonaparte, l. 27). This rehearses the same imagery of ruin through which Byron would characterize himself (in his role as author-narrator) as "a ruin amidst ruins" in *CHP* (4. 25).³⁷ The associative link thus drawn between these fallen heroes and the author suggests Byron's own sense of inadequacy in the circumstances.

What appears in the opening stanzas of *CHP* to be an escapist flight away from the constriction of a repressive social system, in the figure of Harold, becomes by 1816 a necessary journey into exile for Byron himself. The year 1816 marked Byron's permanent departure from England; it is also the year in which he published *The Siege of Corinth*. The tale's main character, Alp, rehearses in dramatic form the same feelings of betrayal that Byron expressed over his ostracism by contemporary English society; and, considering also his wife's own alarm that Byron had "turned Musselman" (q.v. Blackstone 1975: 132), the autobiographical tenor of the work is obvious. This is true of Byron's writings more broadly, as Northrop Frye points out: "The main appeal of Byron's poetry is in the fact that it is Byron's" (1963: 174). Frye is concerned to stress

³⁶ We may detect in Byron's brief parliamentary career something of a desire to emulate, in small, the great achievements of the *Code Napoléon* in his own country, though his inspiration was short-lived (q.v. *BLJ* 5: 'Debate on the Frame Work Bill in the House of Lords,' 27 February 1812).

³⁷ I find Robert Gleckner's notion of a "private-public voice" to be a convincing argument *vis-à-vis* the question of autobiography and representation in the person of what I have called the 'author-narrator'. Gleckner writes: "In the poetry... we hear a public-private voice, broadcast across the land, yet in its very publicness capable of a kind of intimate revelation" (1967: footnote, xvii).

the dramatic impact of its author upon the public's interest in his writings, but the phrase serves equally well to emphasize the close connection between Byron's poetry and his own life experiences. However, the act of literary retaliation which is suggested by the autobiographical link between Alp – or, between the Giaour – and Byron is problematized by Byron's own status as exile. He is always first a Westerner, and despite his many attempts at assuming an Oriental identity he never succeeds in suppressing this circumstance. Despite his incorporation into Eastern society, he remains the English lord. Since his own countrymen regarded him as a political apostate and a social outcast, Byron found himself consequently trapped in a cultural double bind. This circumstance is reflected in the stateless condition of the characters in his poetry – the quintessential Byronic hero is a culturally isolated wanderer, ostracized and exacting revenge on a society that has betrayed him but who is never able to find sanctuary in his adopted Eastern surrounds.

The poem's second induction, comprising lines 7 – 167, appears to shift scene to an altogether more positive setting. In place of a desolate shore, the verse celebrates Greece and its many islands as "Edens of the eastern wave" (l. 15). The sense of return which this description suggests, of rediscovering in an Eastern context a version of perfection since lost in the West, articulates also the exile's desire to find acceptance. However, as Said points out, the state of exile is one of dissociation: "You cannot go back to some earlier and perhaps more stable condition of being at home; and, alas, you can never fully arrive, be at one in your new home or situation" (1994: 39). The figure of the Giaour personifies this sense of dislocation, now operating on the existential level, and the poem's auspicious beginning rapidly darkens into the same ominous imagery of the first six lines. Images of death again dominate the descriptions before fading into the familiar eulogy for the passing of Greek sovereignty.

In an ironic inversion, lines 7 – 8 have the bard salute Greece with the words, "Fair clime! where every season smiles / Benignant o'er those blessed isles". He describes the tides as "laughing" (l. 14); and the mood reproduces a kind of timeless midsummer

idyll.³⁸ At ll. 16 – 26 the mildness of the climate is apparent, as “transient breeze[s]” release sweet odours from the ripe blossoms of trees. However, for the lonely figure of the Giaour, the depiction can only stand for an Eden which he has long since lost. Haunted by the memory of Leila, he can know no inner peace regardless of the beauty of the world around him.

The description of the rose and the nightingale, at ll. 21 – 26, draws from the repertoire of Oriental imagery that would have been familiar to Byron’s European readers, and supplies the setting with a typically Eastern flavour. In a footnote to l. 22, he refers to the Persian origin of the image and also refers to the songbird by its Eastern name, ‘bulbul’ (q.v). However, in the verse rendering he prefers the more familiar European term of ‘Nightingale’ despite the obviously Oriental term for the rose, ‘Sultana,’ located immediately prior to it. The discrepancy, which is clearly an intentional one, reveals something of the cultural complexity inherent in the image of the songbird. The heterogeneous phrasing of the verse registers the point of contact between East and West, which is here thoroughly sexualized in the figure of the nightingale’s proverbial love of the rose. This enacts, in latent form, the equally proverbial sensuality of eastern women (to western men) who have not yet come in view, but which the narrative anticipates and delays through its visual imagery.

On the level of cultural representation, the replacement of the original Persian term, bulbul, with an English one indicates a process of complete appropriation and assimilation of the Eastern image, to the extent that it acquires a separate cultural significance altogether and operates as a symbol for the subordinate nature of the relation between East and West. The juxtaposition of a typically Oriental term, ‘Sultana’, with the distinctly Western term, ‘nightingale’, in a single phrase recalls the process of cultural exchange whereby both the image and the legend passed into currency in English. It also highlights the text’s localized cultural crisis: Greece stands as the geopolitical frontier between West and East, and as a site of struggle the location is particularly apt for unraveling cultural connections which have become obscured by a growing European

³⁸ Cf ll. 27 – 29.

imperial confidence. Byron's depiction thus stages a representational tug-of-war, with Greece as the battleground for a cultural capitulation of the East.

The idyllic Greek setting assumes in ll. 27 – 28 a comparative aspect, as it is contrasted with the more sober climate of Europe:

Unbent by winds, unchill'd by snows,
Far from the winters of the west,

The idealized description of the East offered here, as a region of perpetual summer, reiterates the paradise motif of earlier (q.v. l. 15). It also portrays the Greek landscape as essentially changeless despite the decline of its civilization. The landscape preserves something of the original greatness of classical-age Greece, and the descriptions of its fecundity allude to its germinal role as the cradle of Western thought. However, its representation as an eastern Eden affirms that its timelessness is preserved only in the frame of a Western historical record.³⁹ As such, it exists as a cultural space that is severed from the realities of what Greece has become in the interim. The old values for which it stands are incongruent with the political events which have overtaken the scene, as the verse articulates in a later section:

What can he tell who treads thy shore?
No legend of thine olden time,
No theme on which the muse might soar
High as thine own in days of yore,
When man was worthy of thy clime.

(ll. 142 – 146)

The remembrance of ancient Greece is for Byron the image of a moment frozen in time, and preserved forever on the static page of its great classical writings. This Eden, like its biblical namesake, is forever inaccessible across the vast abyss of time. The shift away from the stasis of an eternal but lost past is made at ll. 34 – 45, but the text gives no immediate or direct indication of this temporal shift. The repetition of 'And' at the start

³⁹ Byron does not use the more appropriate Greek term, Arcadia. His preference of Eden serves to link classical Greek culture with what he sees as the moral regression of western Judeo-Christian society.

of lines 34, 35 and 36 creates a deceptive sense of continuity with the preceding description. The reader finds himself wrenched quite suddenly away from the mesmeric descriptions of Greece's natural beauty and catapulted into the menacing present when it becomes obvious that the lines refer to the contemporary state of affairs. Through a series of graduated images, the scene rapidly darkens: a "grotto, meant for rest" (l. 36) contains a "pirate for a guest" (l. 37) and concludes with the brutal killing of a fisherman at ll. 45 – 46. The change in narrative mood is made particularly shocking because it deploys the same pastoral imagery as before, which delays a proper decoding of the action until the reader has progressed some way into the description. Apparently positive terms such as "grotto" (l. 36), "rest" (l. 36), "guest" (l. 37), "sheltering cove" (l. 38), "peaceful prow" (l. 39), "gay mariner's guitar" (l. 40), "evening star" (l. 41), and "shaded" (l. 43) equivocate with the more uncertain "pirate" (l. 37), "Lurks" (l. 39), "stealing" (l. 42), and "muffled oar" (l. 42). Finally, in the image's concluding couplet, the reality of the modern situation is brought home: the base acts of looting and murder are clearly inconsistent with the notion of Greek heroism and reiterate Byron's earlier sense of disillusionment.

The same landscape which is celebrated as the birthplace of western culture is transformed, in the course of the ensuing description, into a wilderness which harbours only danger and death. What was once a land which seemed made "as if for Gods" (l. 47) becomes a kind of hell ruled by demonic tyrants. The biblical imagery becomes similarly inflected by the shift into the present time, and casts the occupying force as Satanic:

It is as though the fiends prevail'd
 Against the seraphs they assail'd,
 And, fix'd on heavenly thrones, should dwell
 The freed inheritors of hell

(ll. 62 – 65)

The depiction of the Turks here is not charitable, and invokes the worst of the West's anti-semitic sentiment. It also rehearses the longstanding anxiety which centuries of conflict with the Turks, now a spent force, had engendered. The role of the Turk as a

demonic presence in the events of history is a pervasive motif in Byron's writings, which vacillates between praising the courage of the adherents of Islam and condemning the depredations of its despotic rulers. The notion of the Turk as a Satanic presence is however quite apposite in the context of the historical anxiety that Europe felt towards the East: the Hebrew origin of the word 'Satan' denotes an 'adversary', or (in verb form) 'to oppose'. For Byron's purposes, the chief use of this association is to draw out the West's own tendencies towards tyranny – whether in the figure of a Napoleon, by *de facto* conquest, or of a Lord Elgin.

Said argues that it is via the process of depicting the Orient, and Orientals, as basically inferior to the structures and societies of Europe that motivated the West's confidence in its own cultural supremacy. The dream of Empire is founded, he suggests, on the depictions propagated by Orientalist discourse stretching back centuries. Referring to the attitudes expressed by the inheritors of the later colonial expansion which followed on from these imperial designs, he writes:

During the early years of the twentieth century, men like Balfour and Cromer could say what they said, in the way they did, because a still earlier tradition of Orientalism than the nineteenth-century one provided them with a vocabulary, imagery, rhetoric, and figures with which to say it.

(1995: 41)

He traces the steady progress of this impulse toward expansion through the developments in art and literature of Europe's right to govern large tracts of foreign lands, which would find in the *mission civilisatrice* its most eloquent expression and justification.⁴⁰

Included in his definition of Orientalism, Said posits the notion of a "dynamic exchange between individual authors and the large political concerns shaped by [Empire]" (15), a contrapuntal reading which Jameson supports in his disclaimer against the superficial distinction between cultural texts which are deemed "social and political and those that

⁴⁰ Cf. Southey's suggestion, in *Thalaba* (1801): "So one day may the Crescent from thy Mosques / Be pluck'd by Wisdom, when the enlightened arm / Of Europe conquers to redeem the East!" (5. 6). Whilst Sharafuddin notes that in this instance Southey's narrative is proposing a redemption of the East *as East*, it is clear that Western conquest is preferred in place of any attempts to represent change from within Oriental society. Even though Southey employs an ostensibly Oriental protagonist, this really amounts to the insertion of an agent of Western change.

are not” (1981: 20). As a function of the text’s worldliness, then, the depictions reify or reconfirm the political impulse – either to acquire, or to retain, those colonial assets that are represented. This is a point Saree Makdisi supports in her study, *Romantic Imperialism*, where she argues that:

To understand British romanticism as more than merely a random collection of literary texts – as a specific cultural formation – requires us to locate it as an event within the historical map of modern imperialism and modern capitalism.

(1998: xi)

Makdisi argues in a later chapter that the processes of Orientalist discourse, and the literatures which are associated with it, underwent a radical change in the modernization which the period of the industrial revolution inaugurated. This is in opposition to Said’s argument that there exists a continuous Orientalist history from ancient Greece to the present day (q.v. Said, 1995: 69); likewise, Said’s claim of an unchanging “essence” (q.v. 42, 50, 72) to the discourse is disclaimed. Instead, she asserts that this new Orientalism “emerged in a dialectical, mutually enforcing, and symbiotically related association with the new paradigms of imperial rule” (1998:115).

Even in so ironic a treatment of this theme, Byron’s verse nevertheless registers the desire inherent in the West’s will to dominate the Oriental other – of which, it must be noted with a similar sense of irony, Byron’s verse itself participates. In its overreaching desire to offer an authentic image of the East, the poetry of necessity performs an imaginative conquest of the terrain that it describes. As with the later administration of the colonial territories, however, the achievement is less perfect than the surface conformity may at a glance lead one to believe. In the final analysis, the vision is always from the perspective of the known and the familiar: protagonists who are outcast but nevertheless rooted in their past; projections of an Orient which always reconfirm an all-too-familiar aesthetic; narrative intrusions which expatiate on European humanist ideals; and a structure of representation which orients itself in relation to a Western readership.

The transition from the vibrant imagery of the Greek landscape, still bearing traces of its former glory, to present-day Greece elicits from the speaker a stark comparison. Lines 68

– 102 depict Greece as a recently dead body, which yet retains much of the bloom of life. This returns us to the leitmotif of the poem's introductory section, namely, the theme of death as a trope for the debased condition of modern Greek society. The representation appears to be a deeply personal reaction to what Byron had witnessed at first-hand during his time in Greece; and the footnote to line 89 makes it clear that he is not merely employing a cleverly contrived conceit but is responding in a profound way to what he perceived as the spiritual death of a nation.

Greece's illustrious past has granted it a kind of immortality, which is represented by the almost living appearance of the corpse. However, since the spirit has departed it matters little how the corporeal frame is preserved. For the speaker, it lingers as a painful residual image of the now irrevocably lost life, which is made more poignant by the beauty of its form. The narrative progresses from the detached first phrase, "He who hath bent him o'er the dead" (l. 68), to the increasingly personal relation drawn in line 93, "We start, for soul is wanting there", which reveals the speaker's intimate involvement. In line 94 the speaker says, "Hers is the loveliness in death" and the personification here assumes an almost tangible identity. The representation of the Greek state as a familiar and still beautiful woman's corpse (q.v. ll. 94 – 95) effectively converts the description into the rhetoric of tragedy, in which Greece is the protagonist and history provides the unravelling plot. The depiction of Greece as feminine moreover serves to represent both what is most admirable in the classical Greek heritage (her arts, sciences and civilization which are glossed in the text as "beauty," q.v. l. 73), as well as the weakness which led to the collapse of that society. In contrast to the heroic, masculine Spartans who upheld Greek supremacy, it is ironically the female form which depicts the failure of that same body of men. This gendered comparison deploys the familiar tropes of inconstancy and weak will which are traditionally ascribed to women in a patriarchal society, and which represent here not only the ancient fall of Greece but also allude to the emasculated condition of the modern-day Greeks who dishonour the memory of their more illustrious

forebears by their meek acceptance of their lot under the Turks.⁴¹ This is a point that Byron's verse reiterates throughout his *oeuvre*.

In an earlier section, we considered the question raised by Said in which he asks of the Western presence in the Orient, "what is it in the Orient for?" In his role as poet, we have already noted the impact which the verse renderings have in terms of framing and representing the Orient according to his own political and cultural affiliations. As a locus of personal desires, Byron's version of the Orient also articulated his resistance to the new constellation of ideologies which was emerging with the advent of industrialism. In addition to the obvious question of political power, the industrial revolution introduced an economic impetus to the drive towards colonial expansion, which focussed initially on the transformation of rural England before directing its attentions abroad. During this period of internal restructuring, the Orient stands as an alternative to the changes which were transforming the social landscape. As Makdisi suggests, the Orient represents for Byron "a place from which to escape such ideologies and their privileging of the modern and the European" (1998: 120). Referring to the Orient as "the greenest island of my imagination" (q.v. *BLJ*: 358), Byron's position *vis-à-vis* the emerging industrialism registers his disavowal:

Byron's Orient was a place to which one could flee from English domesticity, from Christianity, from modernity: a space from which one could critique these emergent constructions, and in which one could celebrate alternatives to them.

(Makdisi 1998: 120)

The "tyrant's power" of line 87 resonates with a double meaning which operates in counterpoint with this depiction. Figuratively, the phrase alludes to the image of death as the grim reaper. This casts the lapse of classical Greek society on the level of fate, as a historical eventuality which could not have been avoided, and thus anticipates the future fall of modern society. It also acknowledges the irreversibility of the changes which were sweeping through Europe. On the literal level, the phrase alludes to the Turkish

⁴¹ Q.v. Billie Melman's argument that "The Orient came to be the opposite of a rational and rationalizing West, superior and identified as 'masculine.' The oriental female apotheosized that Orient's 'otherness.' ...the reconstruction of the Orient cannot and *should not* be separated from the construction of the notion of Empire and from modern Imperialism" (1992: 316).

occupation of Greece, and expresses dismay at the violation. However, it also raises questions about Britain's own involvement in the subjection of Greece. In this sense, 'Tyranny' is a phrase which seems as applicable to the depredations of the British archaeologists and politicians as it does to the Turks' military rule of Greece, and especially since British interests in the Near East were not limited to the cultural sphere. The Ottoman empire, though crumbling rapidly in Byron's time, still controlled key strategic regions around the Mediterranean. This circumstance prompted Britain to support Turkish rule in order to secure its own position in the theatre of European politics. Through this kind of indirect political intervention, the plight of the Greeks was materially affected by British foreign policy in arguably the same degree that Greek nationalism was suppressed by Turkish occupation.

The repeated salute to the valour of ancient Greek heroes, such as Themistocles in lines 3 and 113 (q.v.); the "Clime of the unforgotten brave!" in line 103; and the Spartans in line 109 serve as an incitement to their descendants. If the modern Greeks could not revive their former glory, the speaker argues, they could at least cease to be slaves. He urges them in lines 114 – 115: "These scenes, their stories not unknown, / Arise, and make again your own". This sentiment expresses Byron's concern that the Greeks themselves had forgotten their own history. In his role as freedom fighter for Greek independence, his strong identification with the heroism of the past would form an important motivation for his own participation, and for the political emancipation of the Greeks. Byron's support of Mavrocordato, during his participation in the Greek struggle for independence in the years 1823 – 1824, is ardent precisely because he believed that the Greek leader might succeed where his own literary creations had always failed. The section concludes with an expression of grief at present conditions, which accords well with the tone of mourning that has echoed throughout. On the autobiographical level, the inefficacy of Byron's literary creations (as political texts) mirrors Byron's own sense of inconsequence in the world.

II.

In considering *The Giaour*, it is perhaps surprising to discover that the events of the poem proper have no obvious connection with the introductory sections. The Greek setting becomes merely a backdrop for a tale which concerns itself with the relation between a Christian West and an Islamic East via the confrontation between the eponymous hero and an observing Muslim, both of whom stand as representatives of the standoff between their respective societies. In order to comprehend this radical shift in focus, it is necessary to recall the historical circumstances in which Byron allegedly hears the oral recitation of the original tale. The Advertisement to the poem supplies the following details:

The story, when entire, contained the adventures of a female slave, who was thrown, in the Musselman manner, into the sea for infidelity, and avenged by a young Venetian, her lover, at the time the Seven Islands were possessed by the Republic of Venice, and soon after the Arnauts were beaten back from the Morea, which they had ravaged for some time subsequent to the Russian invasion. The desertion of the Mainotes, on being refused the plunder of Misistra, led to the abandonment of that enterprise, and to the desolation of the Morea, during which the cruelty exercised on all sides was unparalleled even in the annals of the faithful.

The above description emphasizes the condition of Greece as a site of struggle for several nations, to the great detriment of the local population which had no will to resist. From the historical details supplied, the poem's action is set shortly after 1779. The notes to Wolfson & Manning's edition of the poem point out that "Greece's subjection then is meant to evoke its subjection by the Ottomans in 1813" (1996: 790). But, more than this, the competing wars between nations other than the Turks draw attention to the fact that colonial expansion was not the sole province of a nefarious East, to which one opposed the West as liberating force. Russia and Venice, themselves both ostensibly 'civilized' nations, were equally culpable of the rapine which devastated large tracts of Greece. The effect of such a historical frame is to draw East and West into a comparative relation which exposes the obvious political motivations of the warring factions and debunks the notion of an unaccountably savage and encroaching East.

These framing mechanisms prime the reader for the descriptions which follow. In each instance, the imagery present in the poem has both political and existential connotations which interact with the literary relation drawn between West and East. On the artistic level, Byron's depictions serve to challenge the European voice which speaks for the Oriental. His direct experience of the Near East allowed him to critique the ways in which Western literary representations of the Orient worked to support a discourse of cultural supremacy over another, non-Western, society and which did not offer an accurate account of its culture or lifestyle. In this respect Byron's attention to the minutiae of Eastern custom, attire or language registers an objection to the summary treatment of Oriental life, and authorizes his own vision of the East. His detailed and authentic textual depictions of Eastern life raised a serious challenge, both philosophical and literary, to the stereotypical vision of the East which defined the popular conception of Eastern life. The problem with Western treatment of the East, as Said points out, is the:

tendency to make realities not so much out of the Orient as out of its own observations... To look into Orientalism for a lively sense of an Oriental's human or even social reality – as a contemporary inhabitant of the modern world – is to look in vain.

(1995: 176)

Whilst Byron's verse does not escape this tendency – we have seen earlier how his depictions serve his political purposes – it nevertheless registers an important shift away from the mythically saturated versions of the Orient contained in such texts as William Beckford's *Vathek*. The tendency in the literature of the period to take the Orient more seriously, as it were, and to depict it with ever greater precision also marks the influence of a growing imperial interest in the region. Whilst not quite performing the functions of Napoleon's *Description de l'Egypte*, the travel narratives of Western tourists nevertheless contribute to the knowledge of the Orient in a significant way.

The epithet, "Giaour", given to the protagonist in line 190 identifies the narrator as a Turk. Consequently, the narrative bias casts the intrusion of the Giaour, as foreigner, in strongly negative terms. In the following line, the narrator declares: "I know thee not, I loathe thy race". This categorical statement presents the Turk as unreasonably hostile, and immediately draws a line of division between the Christian West and an Islamic East.

This binary organization of the opening scene along such strongly defined racial lines implicates the reader in a similar process of affiliation. Shocked by the Turk's summary and violent condemnation of the nameless but clearly *un*Oriental rider, the reader's natural response is to side with the Giaour. Indeed, the extreme reaction of the Turk would seem to justify, if not actively encourage, a similarly prejudiced response in the reader as an act of racial solidarity. The reader's anti-semitic sentiment is thus placed at the fore from the very opening of the poem. The history of struggle between Europe and the Middle East is, however, one in which both parties have actively participated, and the Turk's statement is, ironically, as much a reflection of Western attitudes to the East as it is an exaggeration of the facts. The phrase is thus applicable to both, and calls into question all notions of moral precedence in the continuing conflict.

Byron would develop this terrible notion of racial hatred, which he casts as an instance of genocide in the Napoleonic wars, and offer his 'forgiveness curse' in *CHP 4* as humanity's only sane method of escape from its implications. In the present description, the adversarial relation between East and West remains an image of nightmare, and expands to include a repertoire of associated Satanic imagery in the ensuing descriptions. Ironically, in line 202, it is the Venetian who is demonized and not the Turk. The reader is thus reminded that the ubiquitous Western religious perspective is not the only model: here, the Giaour becomes a version of Eblis, the Islamic Satan. This unexpected reversal vividly illustrates both the xenophobic intensity of feeling which permeates West-East relations, and the dehumanizing effect this has upon both populations. As McGann notes, "Vengeance, or the 'mutual interchange of wrong for wrong' is, in Byron's poetry, the focal Satanic element, and the story of the Giaour is an attempt to explain its nature" (1968: 156).

The opening lines of the poem proper rapidly convey the reader from the political events which frame the poem to a deeper sense of a world in crisis:

Who thundering comes on blackest steed,
With slacken'd bit and hoof of speed?

(ll. 180 – 181)

The image depicts the Giaour as a figure of the spiralling political events which were sweeping across the face of Europe. Torn apart by revolution and scourged by Napoleon's horde, the actions of men and nations assumed a horror that was unknown in earlier times. The placement of the Giaour in the East in 1779 prefigures these events, and gives his appearance the terrible force of prophecy. The speed of the horseman's passage through the scene provides a sense of the momentum of the changes that were reshaping the face of Europe, and his thunderous gallop links the image to the biblical representations of Apocalypse.⁴² This depicts the Giaour as one of the horsemen of the Apocalypse, whose appearance would inaugurate an era of extreme suffering. The portentous symbolic nature of the Giaour's presence is reinforced by the later imagery, in lines 196 – 197, which is used to describe him. His glance assumes the terrific force of the "evil eye", a phenomenon of supernatural significance in Eastern lore and capable of inflicting mortal harm on those who behold it. As McGann notes,

[the Giaour's] appearance is dangerous because it is self-revelatory, is an emblem of his own inner vision. Thus he seduces the observer into a painful sympathy, like the ancient mariner, by drawing a blithe wedding guest to look upon those hidden terrors which have their source and pattern in man's own heart.

(1968: 152)

The watching Turk recognizes in the Giaour a mortal threat not limited to himself, but one which menaces his whole culture. By phrasing the opening lines, cited above, as a question our attention is drawn to the transgressive nature of the Giaour's presence. His appearance in the Turkish domain prompts in the Turk a sense of dread, which suggests that the intrusion is not an isolated or unexpected incident:

Right well I view and deem thee one
Whom Othman's sons should slay or shun.

(ll. 198 – 199)

⁴² In the book of Revelation, God's pronouncements, as well as the events which occur, are accompanied by great thunder, which represents the exercise of divine power.

The use of the impersonal pronoun, “one”, in the first line underscores the representative nature of the Giaour as the first of perhaps many thousands of Westerners poised to sweep in conquest through his nation’s domains, in a military seizure of territory not dissimilar to the crusades of centuries earlier. This representation stands as an indictment of Europe’s descent into the barbarism of war. The moral consequence of this chain of events, as the image of Apocalypse suggests, is the total destruction of civilized society. In this way, Byron links the earlier fall of the Greeks with contemporary events in Europe. In place of the ancient ruins of classical Greece, he offers the ruined landscapes of modern battlefields.

On the psychological level, however, the Giaour is not the agent of Western imperialism that he seems to the Turk. His own sense of dislocation in the scene operates in counterpoint with the Turk’s depiction, and is indeed deepened by such a reception. If he is to the Turk a representative of empire, he is to himself a person in flight from the very regions which menace the Turk’s domains. His dark brow and frightening career through the Turkish landscape is in this rendering not the ominous assault that the Turk’s culturally inflected imagination supposes it to be, though it certainly preserves the same sense of desolation. For the Giaour, this desolation is concerned rather with the regions of his own soul. The same imagery of religious Apocalypse apprehended by the Turk serves to represent his own descent into a kind of inner psychological hell. As he recedes from view, this sense of interpretive complexity is suggested by the phrasing of the description. We may thus glean two quite differing meanings from the lines 202 – 203:

Though like a demon of the night
He pass’d, and vanish’d from my sight,

From the perspective of the Turk, the Giaour appears a nightmare manifestation that invades his domain. The demonic simile in line 202 links the earlier religious imagery (ll. 62 – 67) of revolt with the Turk’s vision of Apocalypse and seems to confirm the worst. But from the perspective of the rider, we may discern something of the inner torment that later becomes apparent when we learn that he pursues a personal vendetta against Hassan, the tyrant who has killed his beloved Leila. In this reading, the simile serves not as an image of universal destruction, as in the Turk’s conception, but rather reproduces its

spiritual equivalent on a personal level, by pronouncing an anathema on the soul of the Giaour. The later phrase at line 207 is rendered similarly ambiguous: “his dark courser’s hoofs of fear” represent at once both the Turk’s fear of an invading Western power as well as the Giaour’s own sense of despair at his fallen spiritual condition.

The ambiguity is momentarily resolved in lines 212 – 213 when the Turk recognizes the Giaour for what he is, namely, a solitary rider who “flee[s]” through the landscape. However, the recognition lasts but for a moment; almost immediately the Turk’s wary imagination transforms the scene back into a vision of impending conquest. Remarking upon the Giaour’s trajectory he asks, “Why looks he o’er the olive wood?” (l. 221). The response is as immediate and as certain as it is reactionary: the symbol of the “crescent” connotes not only the presence of a Moslem town but also designates the Islamic East as a target for appropriation by an all-conquering European imperialism for which the Giaour acts as agent. The brief description given of the city confirms its vulnerability to such conquest:

The crescent glimmers on the hill,
The Mosque’s high lamps are quivering still:
Though too remote for sound to wake
In echoes of the far tophaike,
The flashes of each joyous peal
Are seen to prove the Moslem’s zeal,
To-night, set Rhamazani’s sun;
To-night, the Bairam feast’s begun;
To-night –

(ll. 222 – 230)

The Giaour’s sudden arrival has found the city unprepared for staging its own defence. Instead, it is discovered in the pacific exercise of its religious customs. This depiction justifies the Turk’s anxiety that his country is prone to invasion but, more interestingly, the description offers a view of Eastern society that was not often considered. The usual notion of the Orient as uncivilized and lethargic is replaced here with a structure of cultural practices which suggests rather the spiritual enlightenment of its inhabitants. In place of the reputed luxury and extravagance of Oriental society is the regime of religious ritual fasting of Ramadan, a month-long period of abstinence. Feasting is limited to the

festival of Bairam which, by contrast, lasts only two or three days thereafter. The portrayal inevitably raises questions of the West's own cultural practices, in particular the degree to which its own esteemed Christianity elicits a similar response from its devotees. Byron's many diatribes against the tendency towards 'cant', or hypocrisy, of his fellow Britons suggests that the West may well be the worse off in the comparison.⁴³ However, the event which dominates the entire poem but which is never directly represented, namely, the death by drowning of Leila, leaves the impression that both societies are guilty of inhumanity in their own way.

The Turk again marks the Giaour's countenance at lines 230 – 231 and asks: "but who and what art thou / Of foreign garb and fearful brow?" in the moment before the rider passes by. As before, the question connotes a sense of fear and foreboding in the observer. The Turk displays a strongly xenophobic reaction to the Giaour's foreignness, which rehearses the historical antagonism between Europe and the East on a personal level. Far more than a question, the Turk utters a suspicion of the Giaour's intent as a function of this oppositional relation. The pause, described in lines 218 – 220 as "A moment," is prolonged until line 260. In the intervening lines, we are presented with an image of the Giaour that repeats the Turk's earlier apprehension. In addition, it creates a dramatic irony which operates in counterpoint to the Turk's interpretation, by simultaneously depicting the Giaour's inner emotional state. From the perspective of the Turk, the "dread" of line 234 settles into "Hatred" in the following line, and the Giaour's movements appear to justify this shift in emotion: his arm is "fiercely raised" (l. 241) and is "sternly shook" (l. 242) in what appear to be racially antagonistic gestures. However, as we learn later, the Giaour's actions are tied to his outrage with Hassan for murdering Leila and do not express a hatred for Islamic society, as the Turk assumes. The Giaour's outward appearance of "Christian crest and haughty mein" (l. 256) in the end reflect neither his cultural loyalties nor his attitude to the Eastern lands into which he has entered.

⁴³ Q.v. Byron's comment, "I have been in some of the most oppressed provinces of Turkey; but never, under the most despotic of infidel governments, did I behold such squalid wretchedness as I have seen since my return, in the very heart of a Christian country" (*BLJ*, 'Frame work bill speech,' 27 February 1812).

Lines 261 – 276 describe the Giaour’s inner emotional state, and provide an insight into the “dread” (l. 234) that so disturbed the Turk. The passage provides the first hint that the Giaour’s motives are personal, and not political. The earlier comparison of the Giaour’s flight with that of the “hurled on high jerreed,” in line 251, is thus particularly apposite. Byron’s footnote informs us that the jerreed is a blunted Turkish javelin, used most skillfully by eunuchs in a popular Turkish sport. The significance of the comparison again reproduces an ambiguous dual meaning: as a phallic symbol of the Giaour’s singularity of purpose, his penetration into the Turkish territory violates the Turk’s domain in the most direct fashion. However, since the javelin is both blunted and associatively linked with eunuchs, the image also connotes the final ineffectiveness of the Giaour’s revenge quest. As with the javelin’s flight once it is hurled, the Giaour’s course is similarly set and cannot be arrested once set in motion; but despite his dedication to the act of reprisal, the achievement of his vengeance will not bring him peace. The emphasis on *personal* vengeance moreover makes it clear that the Giaour is not concerned to act as a political challenger to Turkish rule. Lines 277 – 287 introduce Hassan and represent the Giaour as an approaching “Simoom” (l. 282).⁴⁴ The Giaour’s presence is thus no Western invasion, but is articulated in terms of an Eastern aesthetic which represents the Giaour as the accidental prosecutor of Islamic law:

The curse for Hassan’s sin was sent
 To turn a palace to a tomb;
 He came, he went, like the Simoom,
 That harbinger of fate and gloom,

(ll. 279 – 282)

The deeply personal nature of the Giaour’s revenge quest becomes thereby sanctioned by Eastern society as the moral consequence of Hassan’s tyranny. In this way, the Giaour acts as an agent of Eastern morality despite his unwelcome intrusion into the Turkish domain. But, regardless of his utility, he remains excluded from Oriental society and cannot achieve proper agency in his Eastern context except as the anomalous

⁴⁴ Byron’s footnote describes the Simoom as “The blast of the desert, fatal to every thing living, and often alluded to in eastern poetry” (q.v).

representative of divine justice. Once this has been achieved, he is marginalized and remains only as a shifting presence.

The Giaour's participation in Eastern society places an increasing distance between himself and his Western origins. The phrase "faithless Giaour" in line 458, apparently expressing the narrator's disapproval of the protagonist's non-Islamic character, later becomes an articulation of the Giaour's apostasy to his own religion: Hassan, upon encountering the Giaour in the pass, declares him to be "Apostate from his own vile faith" (l. 616). The nature of the Giaour's disavowal extends to include his rejection of all signs of his former cultural affiliation, and we read that he has shed his original "foreign garb" (q.v. l. 231, 615) for "Arnaut garb". It is only Hassan's recognition of the Giaour's "pallid brow" (l. 611, cf. ll. 236 – 239), his "evil eye" (l. 612) and his "jet-black barb" (l. 614) that permits identification.

The Giaour's translation into an Eastern figure is not simply a matter of convenience, but instead confirms his rejection of his origins. Conversely, Hassan has more in common with the depictions of a tyrannical Western conqueror such as Napoleon despite his obviously Oriental character. Hassan is revealed to be a tyrannical leader, as the description at lines 529 – 532 makes plain:

The pistols that his girdle bore
Were those that once a pasha wore,
Which still, though gemm'd and boss'd with gold,
Even robbers tremble to behold.

The description suggests that Hassan's claim to authority is lodged as much in his brutal tyranny as in his ownership of the heirlooms of authority. The fear which these items betoken in the robbers offers an ironical commentary on Hassan's own abuse of his position. His grasp on power is superficial and shows him to be more debased than the robbers who, despite discerning the value of the ornate weapons, nevertheless respect the office they represent. This effectively casts Hassan as a violator of his society's natural law, and his tyranny violates his culture's political structures in a way that the Giaour never does in his Eastern context. For this reason, the Giaour comes to represent an

instrument of Oriental justice.⁴⁵ This effect is propagated via the many forms through which his revenge is expressed: as the “evil eye” of Eastern superstition (q.v. ll. 196, 612); as the demon sent to punish Hassan (q.v. l. 202); as the curse he signifies in response to Hassan’s sin (q.v. l. 280); and as the Simoom which represents a natural retribution (q.v. ll. 282 – 287). His treachery is further confirmed in the warnings of a holy seer, at lines 1075 – 1076:

His doom was seal’d – he knew it well
Warn’d by the voice of stern Taheer

Hassan’s palace and its luxury is the only gregarious display of opulence in the poem and offers in its excess the typical view of Oriental splendour, as many Western texts depicted it. However, the reference to “the boundless East” in line 452 illustrates the marked difference between the hedonistic celebration under Hassan’s aegis – where “Millions of lamps proclaim’d the feast” – and the modest celebration of the festival of Bairam of earlier, at ll. 226 – 230, where the emphasis is instead upon the event’s unadorned religious significance. The contrast between Hassan’s wealth and the simple pastoral life of the region serves to deconstruct the notion of a “boundless East” by linking it to the exercise of tyranny, which is here disclaimed. Indeed, Hassan’s palace seems a place dominated by pleasure domes, and it is from the “Haram” that he departs to pursue the Giaour (l. 439). The very reason for his ire is similarly concerned with the figure of Leila, who represents for him the pinnacle of sensual delight as well as his private property. In contrast, Leila represents for the Giaour the epitome of true love and her residence in the harem is viewed as an imprisonment from which he seeks to liberate her. However, the relation between Leila and the men in her life is only described from the male perspective. Leila’s silence, in death, is a narrative convenience which effectively removes her ability to speak for herself. Her silence is taken to equal consent, but we only have the Giaour’s assurance of that. Did she love him in return, or merely wish to secure her own freedom from Hassan?

⁴⁵ The word ‘Islam’ means “submission.” However, this refers to religious deference to Allāh and not to the practice of tyranny. The Koran in fact explicitly condemns tyranny as a particularly severe transgression of Islamic law. It is, interestingly, viewed as ‘illegal,’ and thus binds all of its followers, whether peasant or ruler, equally (q.v. Sharafuddin 1996: 67, 278).

As a representative of the Oriental female in Eastern society, Leila's social and personal freedom is interrogated in the image of the "Kashmeer" butterfly, in lines 388 – 421. The butterfly represents the locus of both beauty and power for the Oriental woman, which exists in direct proportion with its rarity. But like the prized insect, her very access to power risks containment in the institution of the harem. As the narrative observes, "Woe waits the insect and the maid" (l. 401). Escape from such a fate is at best transitory, a "chase of idle hopes and fears, / Begun in folly, closed in tears" (l. 399). Whilst still free to enjoy her own freedom, Leila is depicted as the capricious "insect-queen of eastern spring" (l. 388); but the very beauty which gives her value in the patriarchal structure of her society also threatens her autonomy by attracting the attentions of a powerful suitor. She thus becomes the property of Hassan, who inters her in his seraglio. But it is clear that his treatment of her fails to satisfy the freedoms she has lost. Once won, she becomes no more than a pleasurable distraction:

The lovely toy so fiercely sought
 Hath lost its charm by being caught,
 For every touch that woo'd its stay
 Hath brush'd its brightest hues away,
 Till charm, and hue, and beauty gone,
 'Tis left to fly or fall alone.

(ll. 404 – 409)

The arbitrary power which Hassan has exercised upon her confirms his status as tyrant, manifested here in the domestic sphere in his role as "stern Hassan" (q.v. ll. 516 – 518). It is from such a circumstance that Leila elects to "fly" rather than "fall". Her willfulness in this regard is unexpected, and Hassan ironically finds himself once more in pursuit. However, the earlier joys of the chase are this time absent (q.v. ll. 439 – 442). As Caroline Franklin notes in her book *Byron's Heroines*, "Byron's use of the passionate heroine [serves] to endorse an anti-authoritarian stance" in the poem (1992: 14). The indifference of the Nubians who guard the seraglio (q.v. ll. 465 – 466) suggest that they are in sympathy with Leila, and, while they do not actively assist her in escape, they do nothing to hinder her flight either.

Lines 473 – 518 celebrate Leila’s beauty, in a narrative written from the Turkish perspective. The verse deploys a stylized description of the dark-eyed Oriental beauty, in terms similar to those found earlier in the image of “Spain’s dark-glancing daughters” (q.v. *CHP*, l. 59); and in the figure of Donna Julia (q.v. *Don Juan*, l. 56). As noted earlier, this depiction is linked to the representation of the houris of the Islamic paradise. Thus we find in Leila the same reference to the “Gazelle”-like eyes (ll. 473 – 475) which casts her as both sacred and sensual. Hassan’s treatment of Leila as “A soulless toy for tyrant’s lust” (l. 490) jars with every aspect of her depiction, and her escape is seen as a justified release from a harsh and undeserving husband. The catalogue of her praises restores to Leila something of the dignity which she lost in her marriage to a tyrannical husband. Hassan’s revenge killing of her merely confirms his tyrannical nature and sets in motion the Giaour’s own act of vengeance.

While every effort is made to present the situation from the Oriental perspective, and to supply authentic reasons to support the narrative’s undergirding message that tyranny is unacceptable in any cultural context, it is difficult to escape from the influence of Byron’s own political aspirations in the East. In this sense, we may consider the tale as a kind of textual proving ground in which Byron seeks to assert his own ideological creed. The ideas on liberty and equality which are embodied in the Giaour’s act of freeing Leila can be viewed as a rehearsal, in literary form, of Byron’s own later participation in the Greek struggle for independence. They also express the political ideas which most influenced Byron, and the tale’s apparent autobiographical consonance serves to confirm that he is setting forth a model for use in the larger political context.

This realization reveals the constructed nature of the Turkish narrator, and unravels much of the apparent authority of its speaker. In place of a representative Oriental voice which recognizes injustice spontaneously and which speaks out against it, the true impetus is lodged in a Western system of ethics as it is promoted by Byron as poet, through the figure of the Turk. Despite the congruency of purpose, the section thus cannot be said to represent the cultural structures of an East which is in fundamental agreement with the propositions of a Western ethic of injustice, asserted by the narrative on Leila’s behalf. This is at best an imposed ethical imperative, which is quite accidental to Leila’s own

personal desire for liberty from Hassan. On the social level, no such sanction exists. This is confirmed in the Giaour's own words, which ironically construct him as more able to represent the Oriental position. Of Leila's murder by Hassan, he says:

Yet did he but what I had done
Had she been false to more than one.
Faithless to him, he gave the blow;
But true to me, I laid him low:
Howe'er deserved her doom might be,
Her treachery was truth to me

(ll. 1062 – 1067)

The salient point is of course that the Giaour views her death as justified on some level, even if he feels similarly obliged to mete out his own revenge in turn. We may consider Leila's violation against Hassan to be both personal and social. As Hassan's wife or concubine, her flight constitutes a personal betrayal. Since the harem is also a recognized institution in Turkish society, her betrayal also constitutes a form of social misconduct punishable under Turkish law. The Giaour's admission paradoxically affirms the legitimacy of Leila's fate even as he laments her demise. Instead of insisting upon the injustice of Eastern legal custom by opposing it with a Western ethic, the Giaour simply accepts the cultural reality of his context.

From the outset, the poem's dark conclusion is insinuated: the title, *Giaour*, conveys the sense of inexorability to the nameless hero's destiny. He is a man out of place and time, and identity. But in the concluding lines of the poem, despite his status as apostate, the Giaour requests a Christian burial as he gives confession to a Jesuit monk:

'...lay me with the humblest dead,
And, save the cross above my head,
Be neither name nor emblem spread,
By prying stranger to be read,
Or stay the passing pilgrim's tread'

(ll. 1324 – 1328)

It appears that, in the final analysis, the Giaour too finds himself unable to escape from his origins despite his ardent disavowal. His confession serves to reflect the poet's own

sense of alienation, which finds consolation in the oblivion of a nameless grave. The cross, however, does not represent an act of repentance in either the religious or the cultural sense. In line 1202 he says to the monk, "But talk no more of penitence" and adds, "this grief / Looks not to priesthood for relief" (ll. 1206 – 1207). Instead, he mocks the monk's very attempts to shrive him of his guilt. A footnote to line 1207 indicates the Giaour's apathy, and in line 1213 his scornful reference to "purchased masses [which] proffer grace" shows his profound distrust of the church and, we may say by association, of his own Western roots. The image of the grave returns the reader to the poem's opening lines and links the Giaour to the unmarked tombs of Themistocles and Hassan. The paradox suggests the Giaour's final isolation, where he finds himself unable to accept his origins, and unable either to find sanctuary in his Eastern context. For all that, he remains defiant as he proclaims Leila his "truth" (q.v. l. 1067).

III.

The Siege of Corinth, published in 1816, revisits a number of the same themes which Byron raised in *The Giaour* several years earlier. The renegade figure common to all of the *Tales* is again present in the figure of Alp, who also bears the closest resemblance in circumstance and attitude to the original Giaour than any of the other tales' anti-heroes. The two poems appear to reproduce an almost identical *dramatis personae*, with the notable difference that they operate in inverse relation to the unfolding narrative. In place of the Giaour's intrusion into an Islamic East, as a representative of an all-conquering Western imperial power, we witness in *The Siege of Corinth* instead a massive assault by the Ottoman Turks on the city of Corinth, which stands as the gateway to Europe and is defended by a garrison of Venetians.

Similarly, we may identify many of the characters which occur in the earlier poem as performing an analogous role in the siege, but inhabiting a different cultural orientation. For instance, in place of an Oriental love interest in the figure of Leila we are presented with Francesca, an Italian woman who is Alp's beloved. Hassan too finds a correlative in the person of Minotti, replacing the Eastern tyrant with a Western delegate of similar

persuasion and holding a similar sway over Francesca as Hassan did over Leila. This completes the same Oedipal triangle as before, and the particulars of the conflict differ only in their altered social context. This altered social relation has, however, a significantly different impact on the poem's moral. By situating the action in the historical context of the Turkish invasion of Greece, the 'threat of Islam' is here given a real dimension.⁴⁶ Under these circumstances, the Giaour's "apostasy" is pale in comparison to Alp's active participation in his country's defeat.

The stylized nature of the Tales, along with their recurring themes of love / power, links them with Jameson's description of 'romance' (citing Kenneth Burke): he argues that "the category of Scene tends to capture and to appropriate the attributes of Agency and Act, making the hero over into something like a registering apparatus for transformed states of being... in short, the whole semic range of transformation scenes whereby, in romance, higher and lower worlds struggle to overcome each other" (1981: 112). In the Tales, this takes the form of revolutionary struggle against the tyranny of an Oriental despotism. The central character, in this sense, features in a cameo role as he plays out a personal melodrama with the larger political conflict forming the backdrop.

This period also signals Byron's permanent departure from England following increasingly strained personal circumstances, and his rejection by polite society following the separation scandal with his wife, Annabella Milbanke. Given this state of affairs, it is unsurprising then that in *The Siege of Corinth*, fresh emphasis is placed on the condition of the exile. Many of the poem's structural features appear to mirror the turbulence of Byron's own life, and at times the representational innuendo is clearly meant to achieve this effect. Francesca's role in the narrative, in particular, captures well the troubled relations Byron had with his wife. Her curse in stanza 21, for instance, seems tailored to the moral rigidity which characterized her in Byron's recollections of their life together (q.v. Grosskurth 1997: 246 – 258).

⁴⁶ In fact, this fear was exaggerated, as Martin Forward points out in his study. He writes: "The myth of a united and powerful single Muslim nation is challenged by history. For example, the Ottoman Sultans claimed that the caliphate was passed to the Ottoman Sultan Selim by the last 'Abbāsid caliph in 1517. However, there had not really been a universal caliphate since the fall of Baghdad in 1258... The caliph provided the myth of a united and politically powerful *ummah*, when the reality was, for many centuries, a variety of Muslim leaders holding power over particular areas" (Holm & Bowker 1994: 115).

However, where previously in *The Giaour* the main character's personal revenge quest had superseded the political consequences brought about by his actions, in *The Siege of Corinth* it is above all the political significance of Alp's actions which is stressed. His participation in the Turkish assault is in the first instance an act of retribution for a betrayal practised upon him by his own countrymen:

To him had Venice ceased to be
Her ancient civic boast – 'the Free;'
And in the palace of St Mark
Unnamed accusers in the dark
Within the 'Lion's mouth' had placed
A charge against him uneffaced

(ll. 84 – 89)

Firmly subordinate to this political dimension is his personal interest in Francesca. This is made clear later in the poem when Alp, upon being confronted by Francesca's ghost, rejects her pleas for him to abandon his attack on Corinth (q.v. ll. 518ff) despite his feelings of personal attachment to her. Byron's choice of historical context for the tale's setting, namely the Turkish invasion of the Morea in 1715 (q.v. Advertisement), reproduces an East which still posed a serious threat to European nations of the period. *The Siege of Corinth* can thus be seen to represent in many ways the siege of Europe itself, and Corinth's capture signals a dire threat for the lands beyond. The most striking articulation of this sense of tension is conveyed via the repeated references in the text to the perimeter walls of Corinth often to the virtual exclusion of the very defenders who guard it, indicating the critical importance of the city as a physical barrier against Eastern incursion.

The first mention of the wall occurs in line 44, where it is described as rapidly disintegrating under the sustained cannon fire of the Turks. As a physical barrier, Corinth's walls comprise the geographical boundary between East and West, and its capitulation threatens to admit the Turkish horde into the heart of Europe. The Turks' construction as barbaric is central to their representation in the Western eye, and the

ranks of invading Ottomans rapidly invoke the earlier Satanic imagery of *The Giaour*. As Jameson notes:

The concept of good and evil is a positional one that coincides with categories of Otherness. Evil thus, as Nietzsche taught us, continues to characterize whatever is radically different from me, whatever by virtue of precisely that difference seems to constitute a real and urgent threat to my own existence.

(1981: 115)

Thus the walls of Corinth also represent a moral boundary or bulwark between the Christian West and an Islamic, or anti-Christian, East.

The siege progresses from the first assault on Corinth's walls in stanzas 2 and 3, to its weakening in stanza 6. The impending capitulation is represented in Apocalyptic terms, and bespeaks the sense of foreboding with which the Westerner regarded the Turks' incursion into Europe. Finally, in stanza 10, the worst has come to pass as Corinth's walls are breached. The narrative description offers a stark image: "The wall is rent, the ruins yawn" (l. 185). This bleak depiction anticipates the devastation that will follow shortly, in an imaginative leap that transforms the site of conflict into a metaphysical wasteland, into which the numberless dead fall as into mass graves. Corinth's collapse signals the fall, in the Western imagination, of all civilization and the ruins which yawn threaten to swallow all of Europe.

However, at the very brink of victory the action is suspended by the onset of night. This naturally heightens the tension, and permits the reader an insight into Alp's own contradictory participation in the unfolding events, which I shall examine shortly. The echo of the Muezzin's call to prayer, in lines 221 – 238, stands in vivid relief to the ferocity of the day's fighting and offers an ironic reminder that Islamic culture is not merely contained in the warfare of its soldiers.⁴⁷ Far from reinforcing the Turks' sense of divine sanction, the sound has a melancholic effect: "It struck even the besieger's ear / With something ominous and drear" (q.v. ll. 231 – 232).

⁴⁷ Blackstone asserts that this call to prayer unleashes all of Byron's irony. In its declaration that "there is only one God, and that Muhammed is his prophet," Blackstone argues that Islam "excludes other faiths and other races," and that it is a "fanatical, warlike religion" (1975: 123), apparently forgetting that to the Turks this was historically true of Christianity in like degree.

Alp's walk abroad permits an opportunity to reflect on the ignominious defeat of modern Corinth. Byron contrasts this with the imagery of classical Greece in stanza 14, and compares Corinth's weakened wall with the impregnable image of Parnassus, which is described as Greece's great "craggy battlement" (q.v. l. 330). In both form and stature, the classical image stands as an exemplum of lapsed greatness which, like the heroes of Greek antiquity, yet retains its old lustre. As a cultural icon, the site of Delphi is unconquerable. The Greeks themselves who once occupied Corinth are similarly portrayed: the legend of Spartan military prowess is recalled (q.v. l. 344) and nostalgically celebrates a period in which Greece too was unconquerable: "Their phalanx marshal'd on the plain, Whose bulwarks were not then in vain" (q.v. ll. 359 – 360) stands as a poignant reminder of Greece's debased condition in the current conflict – they are not even participants – and the intrinsically inferior condition of the modern combatants.

In its role as a barrier to the Ottoman incursion into Europe, Corinth's wall marks the dividing line between West and East; or, we may say, between the 'civilized' and the 'savage' according to the dialectic of binary oppositions which is deployed by the Eurocentric narrator (q.v. ll. 1 – 2). The description of the wild dogs that tear the flesh off the fallen soldiers in stanza 16 emphasizes Corinth's position as a bastion against the barbarity which exists beyond the borders of Europe, and the later comparison of the Turks to wolves in stanza 23 makes clear the association. Elsewhere they are depicted as jackals (q.v. ll. 281 – 286) led by Alp in his role as the proud renegade.

The first indication of the Turks' barbarity is suggested by their virtually unlimited numbers, as portrayed in their arrival *en masse*: the "gleam of twice ten thousand spears" on the horizon (l. 27) presents a formidable sight to the Corinthians pent up in their stronghold. In lines 34 – 35, the sheer massed numbers of the Turks are again emphasized: "And far and wide as eye can reach / The turban'd cohorts throng the beach." The description of the Turks' descent to the plains surrounding Corinth suggests the tidal rush of waves, as they converge around the city. Their march "downward to the Isthmian plain, / from shore to shore of either main" (ll. 28 – 29) conveys a sense of the

Turks' irresistible strength in numbers. The image of an approaching tidal wave recurs in Stanza 24, where the assault is compared to the natural force of the spring tide:

As the spring-tides, with heavy splash,
From the cliffs invading dash
Huge fragments, sapp'd by the ceaseless flow,
Till white and thundering down they go,
Like the avelanche's snow
On the Alpine vales below;
Thus at length, outbreathed and worn,
Corinth's sons were downward borne
By the long and oft renew'd
Charge of the Moslem multitude.

(ll. 694 – 703)

Unlike the natural phenomenon, however, the description of the moon's inability to affect the ceaseless tide of war casts the conflict as a perpetual affront to the natural order (q.v. l. 385: "the powerless moon beholds them flow"). Whilst the critique certainly condemns the Turks' invasion, its emphasis is on the continual strife between nations. The "tideless sea, / Which changeless rolls eternally" (ll. 381 – 382) therefore stands as an indictment of imperial Europe as much as it condemns the local invasion of Corinth by the Turks.

As the Turks stand poised to attack, in Stanza 2, the description offers further indication of their apparent barbarism. The composition of the invading force suggests a motley mob of ill-disciplined troops. In the course of the description, a varied collection of undifferentiated "Moslem" (l. 31) and "Arab" (l. 36) mingles with "Spahi" (l. 32), "Tartar" (l. 37), and "Turcoman" (l. 38). Byron's footnote to the latter species of Arab assists us in this appraisal, by indicating that "The life of the Turcomans is wandering and patriarchal: they dwell in tents" (q.v.). The Spahi too lacks the organization of his Western counterpart: he is "a member of the Turkish irregular cavalry."⁴⁸ An etymological survey of the term suggests little better: 'Spahi' is taken from the Persian *sipahi* for 'soldier' from *sipah*, connoting 'army'. The term is historically linked to the term "sepoy", used to describe native Indian soldiers under British discipline. The undercurrent of the depiction thus appears to be that if the Turk is not under European

⁴⁸ Q.v. *Oxford English Dictionary*.

governance, then he ought to be. In comparison to the specialization and order of a European military force, the Turkish army appears to be in disarray, a depiction which rehearses the binary notion of its comparative lack of sophistication.

Despite this apparent disunity, however, the Turks are a proficient fighting force and in lines 32 - 33 we observe the Ottomans' chain of command: "the dusk Spahi's bands advance / Beneath each bearded pacha's glance".⁴⁹ The loyalty and coordination of the assembled army is assured by the presence of the pashas, each of whom commands the absolute respect and the very lives of his men. It is perhaps Byron's own eye for detail which makes it possible to rework the Turks' apparent barbarism into an assessment which in fact confirms their skill "in war's black art" (q.v. l. 52) that seemed initially to be the sole province of the Westerner. Whilst the determination of the Turkish soldiers appears to present a united front against Europe, and apparently reproduces a heroism which is lost to the West, it is in fact the desperate obedience of men who risk certain death if they defy their leaders' command. The same tyranny is represented in the figure of Ali Pasha in *CHP* (q.v. my earlier analysis in Chapter 1). In each of the *Turkish Tales*, too, the situation is repeated: in *The Bride of Abydos*, Giaffir turns out to be a tyrant like Hassan, as well as a usurper. In *The Corsair*, it is the Seyd who proves to be a tyrant and not Conrad, despite the latter's epithet of 'pirate'; and in *Lara* the corrupt nobles are challenged by Lara who represents the voice and opposing arm of the commoners who suffer under their rule.

In the vanguard, the Moslem sign of the crescent is visible (q.v. ll. 30 – 31), and this immediately draws attention to the political nature of the engagement: here, Christian saint meets Moslem infidel in a battle which signals more than mere military contest. As before, the symbols of crescent and cross connote the moral and ideological nature of the clash. Notions of loss and victory thus assume a far more culturally significant relevance, and raise serious questions about the respective civilizations' sense of constitutional integrity. What would defeat mean morally for the West? Such speculation recalls earlier historical capitulations of Western civilization, such as the fall of Rome to barbarian

invaders, and conveys well the sense of tension that Europe was under in its engagements with its Eastern rival. In fact, the depiction of the Turks as barbaric expresses precisely these historical anxieties, and serves simultaneously to consign them as morally inferior to a more 'civilized' West in a rhetorical gesture which seeks to contain the ideological threat of Islam. This reproduces Jameson's observation that:

What is really meant by 'the good' is simply my own position as an unassailable power center, in terms of which the position of the Other, or of the weak, is repudiated and marginalized in practices which are then ultimately formalized in the concept of evil.

(1981: 117)

In a cultural dialectic so concerned with its own moral integrity, the Turks are depicted not only as savage but are also demonic. Their presentation in the second stanza, read in these terms, recalls the grotesque crowded chaos of form of an Heironymus Bosch painting⁵⁰. To the observing Corinthians, the Turks' foreignness suggests a sinister and inhuman aspect which is confirmed in the significance they attach to the battle. The scene rapidly darkens as the descriptions of the siege assume a metaphysical character. The heat of battle in line 116 transforms the plains of Corinth into an infernal landscape of fire, and in line 118 the "thunder-like" roar of the cannon anticipates the descent into Apocalypse:

And as the fabric sank beneath
The shattering shell's volcanic breath,
In red and wreathing columns flash'd
The flame, as loud the ruin crash'd,
Or into countless meteors driven,
Its earth-stars melted into heaven;
Whose clouds that day grew doubly dun,
Impervious to the hidden sun,
With volumed smoke that slowly grew
To one wide sky of sulphurous hue.

(ll. 122 – 131)

⁴⁹ The image of a bearded Oriental tyrant is a recurring archetype. We see for instance a similar depiction in the figure of Hassan in *The Giaour*: "Then curl'd his very beard with ire, / And glared his eye with fiercer fire" (ll. 594 – 595).

⁵⁰ Cf. Harpham's definition of the grotesque as that which combines familiar forms in unnatural and contradictory ways (1982: 11). The result is profoundly disturbing, and in the figure of the Turk it is his very cultural 'otherness' which makes him seem such to the Westerner.

The imagery of “red and wreathing columns” (l. 124), “meteors” (l. 126) and “earth-stars” (l. 127), “hidden sun” (l. 129), “volumed smoke” (l. 130) and “sulphurous” (l. 131) presents a vision of Doomsday. Corinth is depicted as the site of the West’s Armageddon, and its destruction threatens the collapse of all order. The Corinthian anxiety expressed in line 61, earlier, becomes in the later stages of the siege a fear that grips the neighbouring territories as well. The pall which clouds the sky and stretches beyond the horizon provides a vivid visual depiction of an advancing doom, and the clamour of battle, “that annihilating voice” (l. 715), “makes the distant cities wonder / How the sounding battle goes, If with them, or for their foes” (ll. 711 – 712). These apprehensions effectively convey the sense of cataclysm which the West anticipates.

It is, however, Alp who bears the brunt of the West’s cultural vilification. Lines 70 – 71 make it clear that he was once a man of worth in his society. His betrayal and subsequent pre-eminence as a warrior in the Turkish ranks therefore mark him out for special censure. In the Western cultural imagination, his betrayal casts him in the role of the anti-christ. In his role as “Adrian renegade” (q.v. l. 69) his actions assume a Satanic aspect. In lines 140 and 154, for instance, we learn that he has dropped the name of “Lanciotto” for his new name of “Alp” in much the same way as “Lucifer” was exchanged for “Satan”. As with the arch-devil, Alp’s betrayal of his society is viewed as a consequence of the sin of pride:

They did not know how pride can stoop,
When baffled feelings withering droop;
They did not know how fate can burn
In hearts once changed from soft to stern;
Nor all the false and fatal zeal
The convert of revenge can feel.

(ll. 275 – 280)

The lines above ironically also express a legitimate reaction to Alp’s own feelings of betrayal by the Venetians and, far from revelling in the revenge he exacts, he finds himself in a profoundly contradictory existential situation. As Sharafuddin argues,

It is Alp's tragedy that his renunciation of the Christian alternative can only leave him the equally unacceptable Muslim alternative. Politically, for Byron, Islam is at once a promise of release, and a recognition of impasse. Nowhere is his *orientalism* more *realistic* than in his refusal to turn Turkey into a sentimental oriental refuge.

(1996: 262 – 263)

As a Venetian, he is an outcast and as a Turk he is viewed with barely less suspicion. The association with pride is reiterated in line 283, where the image of the lion is used to depict Alp's character⁵¹. Lines 305 – 306 provide further evidence of his lapse into mortal sin; however, his troubled conscience is the result of a powerful repression which is later resolved. We may detect in the figure of Alp a projection of Byron's own political desire to assume the role of freedom fighter, as he would later do in the Greek struggle for independence. Despite Alp's (and Byron's) participation in an Eastern campaign, the same sense of foreignness is evident in their view of Oriental custom and neither is able to accept it fully. The 'Turks' response is similarly inflected, as the narrative suggests:

But still his Christian origin
With them was little less than sin.
They envied even the faithless fame
He'd earn'd beneath a Moslem name

(ll. 269 – 272)

Despite assuming the appearance of a Turk himself, it is Alp's profound cultural dislocation which prevents him from either accepting, or being accepted by, his adopted Eastern society. Alp's condition of cultural betrayal finds expression in his psyche as a weight of guilt which reaches its climax in the night's cease-fire before Corinth is conquered. As he finds himself poised on the brink of victory, the disturbing contradiction of his Venetian origin forces him to face up to the implications of his own role in its defeat. Stanza 13 provides vivid physical and psychological evidence of the torment this realization awakens in him:

His head grows fever'd, and his pulse
The quick successive throbs convulse;
In vain from side to side he throws

⁵¹ The lion is traditionally a trope for the sin of pride.

His form, in courtship of repose;
Or if he dozed, a sound, a start
Awoke him with a sunken heart.

(ll. 287 – 292)

The odd phrasing of line 290, “in courtship of repose”, conveys quite powerfully the sense of Alp’s desperation to be at peace with himself. Despite the attempt, he cannot quell the disturbance which plagues his conscience. The line directly following those quoted above provides a jarring image of his existential struggle: “The turban on his hot brow press’d” presents a visual depiction of the discordant cultural loyalties which reside in him. As with the earlier depiction of the Giaour, Alp’s inner state is at odds with his exterior. The repression of his act of turning traitor wracks his conscience until he finally confronts the consequences of his decision in his meeting with Francesca, whom we later learn has died.

Francesca’s interrogation of Alp represents the strongest articulation of his culture’s ethical demands upon him, and her challenge rapidly assumes a doctrinal tenor. As Caroline Franklin notes,

The reader is alerted to Francesca’s allegorical significance by the highly-charged tableau of her appearance, sitting motionless with upraised arm and flowing hair in a ruined Greek temple (ll. 501 – 557).

(1992: 69)

The cue is given almost at the outset, when the link with Alp’s act of apostasy is suggested by the opposition contained in lines 522 – 523: “ ’Tis said the lion will turn and flee / From a maid in the pride of her purity”. Her emphasis on the symbolic power of purity over such a menacing opponent invokes a moral imperative which is predicated on the correctness of her ideological position, which in the image operates as a natural law that even the beasts obey. By comparison, Alp stands as a moral aberration who perversely elects not to respect the universal order of things. Francesca’s accusation in the following lines challenges Alp’s very sense of existential and cultural integrity: “Thou hast done a fearful deed / In falling away from thy father’s creed” (ll. 530 – 531). His response to Francesca’s pleas is pragmatic and cynical. Of her seductive promise to

be married, he asks: And where shall our bridal couch be spread? / In the midst of the dying and the dead?" There are greater issues at stake than personal happiness, however much he may desire it: as Franklin suggests, "the shade [of Francesca] articulates the constricting ideology which has killed her doppelganger – the live girl" (1992: 69). Recognizing the insincerity of the ghost's appeal, he mistrusts her motives and rightly rejects her request. When her appeal fails to dislodge Alp from his firm conviction, her arguments become even more dire. In effect, her curse (q.v. ll. 585 – 605) threatens excommunication from all hope of forgiveness, and pronounces an anathema upon him. For her part, Francesca is torn between two rivals: her father, Manotti, who demands her respect and loyalty as a Venetian; and Alp, her erstwhile lover who also stands accused as a traitor to his society. It is only in death that this contradiction is resolved.

Franklin argues that Francesca's transparency in the moonlight (q.v. ll. 516 – 517) "almost cynically indicates her image as an arbitrary sign, whose meaning may be determined by rival ideologies" (71). His rejection of her is thus a symbolic rejection of her role as cultural sign rather than constituting a personal, emotional rejection. This is clear from his subsequent actions, as his sole concern once the city is breached is to rescue her and thereby free her from the social ties which bind her to a culture he cannot respect. Francesca's position is an impossible one, and confirms Ségur's argument (quoted in Franklin) that women's existence "resembles that of a conquered people, who can only hope to ameliorate their situation by the address they can apply to please their masters" (105).

Perhaps the strongest indication of Alp's construction as a rebellious Satanic figure is contained in this confrontation with the ghostly figure of Francesca, as his response to her curse makes clear:

Alp look'd to heaven, and saw on high
The sign she spake of in the sky;
But his heart was swollen, and turn'd aside
By deep interminable pride.
This first false passion of his breast
Roll'd like a torrent o'er the rest.
He sue for mercy! He dismay'd

By the wild words of a timid maid!
He, wrong'd by Venice, vow to save
Her sons, devoted to the grave!
No – though that cloud were thunder's worst,
And charged to crush him – let it burst!

(ll. 606 – 617)

Francesca's appearance before Alp on the eve of the final assault on Corinth, and her curse, perform a purgative function for him as he rejects her pleas for mercy on Corinth's behalf. In finally accepting his betrayal as an act of justified retribution against Venetian duplicity, he releases himself from the guilt of his own alleged 'betrayal' even as he embraces the cultural and moral oblivion which that entails. We may read Francesca's appearance here as a type of psychical projection through which Alp releases himself from the moral and ideological hold which his Western heritage exerts upon him. In recognizing its failings, he indemnifies himself against its censure in an act which nevertheless renders all cultural meanings void for him. In coming to terms with his own condition of exile he attempts to reconstitute his lost cultural framework in purely personal terms.

By seeking out the real Francesca once Corinth's walls have been breached, he pursues a personal truth with which to begin anew in much the same way as Conrad seeks out Medora in *The Corsair*; or as Selim does Zuleika in *The Bride of Abydos*; as the Giaour pursues Leila; or as Beppo returns to visit Laura; or, finally, as Juan laments Haidée in *Don Juan*. In each case, the woman represents an ideal of Western aesthetics which the lead character, after experiencing the wider realities offered by an alternative cultural system, is unable to view in the same light of innocence, or ignorance, as before. The woman's innocence is corroded by the realization that a Western ethics and aesthetics is perhaps not the final word. And, once alerted to this possibility, he cannot thereafter forget the lessons which such an experience of the world teaches.

In the final stanza of *The Siege of Corinth* (ll. 992 – 997) we see the distinction between Christian and Moslem finally collapse. In the imagery of war presented here, it becomes clear that both sides are equally vengeful and destructive:

Some fell in the gulf, which received the sprinkles
With a thousand circling wrinkles;
Some fell on the shore, but, far away,
Scatter'd o'er the isthmus lay;
Christian or Moslem, which be they?
Let their mothers see and say!

This concluding image has frequently been criticized as overly nihilistic; but, if it is read as an indictment of the antagonistic relation between cultures of which the conflict at Corinth is our local example, then it suggests that a more productive and certainly a more sane outcome may be achieved by reassessing matters. Byron would articulate this notion more rigorously as his 'forgiveness curse' in *CHP 4*.

CHAPTER 3: *Don Juan*
Eastern Edens: Western Social Evolution and the Myth of Orient

I.

The text of *Don Juan* is introduced to the modern reader by two preliminary sections, the Preface and the Dedication. Both were published posthumously, but provide a crucial frame to the poem and a commentary on the attitudes of Byron's contemporaries. They also have the effect of throwing Byron's own political stance into sharp relief, as he gives voice to a series of diatribes which deride several of the prominent public figures of the period.

The Preface is ostensibly an attack on Wordsworth's poem, 'The Thorn', but Byron's satire serves to challenge the insularity of the Lake Poets, and of the reading public more broadly. The claustrophobic sense of geographical confinement and, by association, of cultural seclusion, is brilliantly conveyed by Byron's pointed quotation from the poem he lampoons. He cites a description of the dimensions of a small pond: "I measured it from side to side: / 'Tis three feet long and two feet wide"⁵² (q.v. Preface; *Lyrical Ballads*, 1798). He picks up the thread again in the Dedication, where in stanza 5 he says:

You – Gentlemen! by dint of long seclusion
From better company, have kept your own
At Keswick, and, through still continued fusion
Of one another's minds, at last have grown
To deem a most logical conclusion,
That poesy has wreaths for you alone:
There is a narrowness in such a notion,
Which makes me wish you'd change your lakes for ocean.

This depiction draws the Lake Poets into a comparison with Byron's own more wide-ranging poetry, from Child Harold's wanderings through the Levant to the more exotic landscapes of the Turkish Tales and *Don Juan* itself. He seizes upon what he views as the Lake Poets' pretensions to poetic glory, described in line 6 above, and uses the

⁵² Wordsworth later amended these lines, q.v. *Lyrical Ballads* (1798). Whilst it is true that Wordsworth's narrator in *The Thorn* may be highly characterized, this if anything heightens the rhetorical effect of

conventional classical imagery of the laureate to demonstrate their unworthiness to bear the title in the present age. As I have demonstrated in the previous chapters, and as Byron proceeds to do here, the notion of classical perfection – in poetry as in all other spheres – is no longer possible. Such contemptible considerations as money intrude upon the whole endeavour, as he points out in stanza 6, and the verse rapidly becomes a litany of distinctly unaesthetic encroachments upon the poets' aspirations to artistic greatness.

By contrast, Byron himself adopts a quite different stance. In stanza 7, after using the image of the laurel wreath to level an accusation of literary impoverishment at the Lake Poets (q.v. l. 1), he invites “all such as feel the inherent glow” of poetical aspiration (q.v. l. 6) to let posterity judge the worth of their poetry. Ironically, given the satirical nature of the discourse, Byron then avoids further literary disputation. This is emphasized in the following stanza, where he claims that his are “pedestrian muses” (q.v. l. 1). The classical imagery of laurel wreaths (5. 6; 7. 1) and winged steeds (8. 2) is for him at odds with a society whose politics permits social injustice to run rife. Southey's association with the Prince Regent, alluded to in the second stanza, is merely the point of departure; Castlereagh, the Dedication's main target, is followed in rapid succession by the nation's, and the age's, military and political heroes in the opening stanzas of the poem proper. If Byron claims not to follow classical precedent by writing an epic narrative which plunges *in medias res* (q.v. D.J. 6. 1), his political commentary belies this. From the first line, whether we choose to begin reading either of the introductory sections or the poem proper, we are at once immersed in the political machinations of his society. It is worth recalling that Byron felt his own vocation was not primarily as poet, but as a man of action. Thus, the social and political concerns which frame and shape the poetry should be viewed not merely as an essential adjunct to the poem, but as its most important expression. For Byron, all action is political action and his poetry participates in this belief via its many civic concerns, its incisive satire and its political commentaries.

Byron's satire. His critique after all represents a more serious attack on the Lake Poets' political and social position than the burlesque may suggest.

In stanza 10, Byron cites Milton as the true example of what a great poet should be like. He praises Milton's verse for the tenacity of its beliefs, and simultaneously censures Southey for his bias: "*He did not loathe the Sire to laud the Son, / But closed the tyrant-hater he begun*" (Dedication, 10. 7 – 8). The comparison forms the basis for an overhaul of British politics, with Castlereagh firmly in the cross-hairs. Milton is raised as a modern-day Samuel who "freeze[s] once more / The blood of monarchs with his prophecies" (11. 2 – 3) and his association with the biblical figure underscores the moral depravity of the modern politicians. Lines 7 – 8 link Britain's social degeneracy with the familiar notion of Eastern tyranny:

Would *he* adore a sultan? *he* obey
The intellectual eunuch Castlereagh?

This association achieves a powerful rhetorical effect, but Byron does not merely wish to be suggestive here; he is in earnest. The stanzas which follow articulate the case against Castlereagh, as foreign secretary, in detail. Britain's subjugation of Ireland seems to him no less barbaric than the East of popular conception, and Britain's place amongst the 'civilized' nations aggravates the horror of the social injustice. The verse registers this in the strongest terms, as the taboo imagery of stanza 12 makes clear. The bloody Irish conflict is represented not only as cannibalism, but as the cannibalism of a "sister shore" (q.v. l. 4). The moral transgression is thus a double iniquity. Byron's transposition of Britain's role in Ireland into "Ixion's grindstone" (13. 6) reworks the classical image to produce a far more terrible political machine – a perverse rendering which punishes not just one man, but a whole nation.

The classical imagery intensifies not only the depravity of Britain's foreign policy, but it serves also to unravel the pretensions of its laureates. Returning to Southey in stanza 17, Byron delivers the *coup de grâce*. If the consequence of straying from ethical imperatives has such a devastating effect on the integrity of the state, then Southey and others like him stand similarly accused of perverting the course of natural law and are tyrants in the same mould as Castlereagh. Byron's branding of Southey, in the final line of the

Dedication, as “my Tory, ultra-Julian” completes the polemic. The reference is to the emperor Julianus, known also as ‘Julian the Apostate’, a nephew of Constantine who succeeded to power and renounced Christianity in favour of Rome’s ancient paganism. The epithet thus accuses Southey of regressing to a more uncivilized political condition. Unlike the loyalty of Milton, cited above, or Byron’s own constancy to the “buff and blue” colours of the Whigs (q.v. 17. 4), Southey is depicted as a political turncoat who lacks the courage of his convictions. His allegiance is seen as no more than a show: “Apostasy’s so fashionable, too” (q.v. 17. 6). The classical reference in the following line, “To keep *one* creed’s a task grown quite Herculean”, serves to emphasize Byron’s point *vis-à-vis* the Lake Poets’ political associations but functions also to subvert their poetical aspirations. If so basic a notion as loyalty is become an effort demanding “Herculean” strength, then what hope is there for the higher pursuits? All such views seem tainted by the partisan politics of its adherents. Byron’s summary treatment of the age’s great men in the opening stanzas of the poem proper, irrespective of their individual efforts, makes clear his disdain of modern pretensions to heroism in the classical sense. In a society so dominated by the narrow concerns of party loyalties, all men, “Evil and good” (q.v. D.J. 1. 2), are equally unavailing. Even Nelson, “Britannia’s god of war” (4. 1) is a meaningless figure under the Regency. The poem’s opening line, “I want a hero”, suggests not merely Byron’s lack of a proper protagonist for his poem but implies the lack of *any* appropriate hero in the present age.

The phrases which Byron deploys in the course of his commentary demonstrate a strong social concern in the manner of Rousseau. From stanza 12 of the Dedication, the imagery and its attendant argument all resonate with the power of Rousseau’s words at the start of *The Social Contract*, which is worth quoting for direct comparison:

Man is born free; and everywhere he is in chains. One thinks himself the master of others, and still remains a slave greater than they.

(Rousseau 1762: 1)

The undefined “Tyranny” of stanza 12 gradually takes form via the image of the chains in line 7, which are described as “fettters by another fix`d”. The expression emphasizes the

social nature of the bondage and Castlereagh, identified in stanza 11, is vilified as one who is “Cobbling at manacles for all mankind” (14. 6) and who “mends old chains” (14. 7). The archaic nature of the chains conveys the sense of regression that Byron detects in his society, and the following line asserts the moral depravity of such practices. “God and man” (14. 8) are appalled, and the policies which men such as Castlereagh champion constitute an affront both to human reason and to natural law. Byron’s vision of the totalitarian state’s tyranny over its citizens and other nations, suggested in lines 4 –5, offers a strong argument against the Europe of “slaves, allies, kings, armies” that Southey sings so ill (q.v. 16. 7 – 8).

The tyranny takes its final shape in stanza 16, where it becomes clear that Byron is not referring simply, or even mainly, to physical oppression. Of far greater concern is the mental enslavement that induces civilized people to abandon their hard won freedoms:

Where shall I turn me not to *view* its bonds,
For will I never *feel* them?
(16. 1 – 2)

The social changes which are being wrought are not the work of one man alone but “Something of which its masters are afraid” (14. 3). This phrase mirrors Rousseau’s own assertion closely, and stresses the dangers inherent in permitting such political irresponsibility to continue unchecked. Byron raises his own voice in answer, then, and with a pointed irony he dedicates his poem to Southey, as “representative of all the race” (q.v. 1. 2). As Bernard Blackstone notes, “[The Lake Poets] were simply not *au fait* with European political or social affairs; and, what is worse... their self-centredness cut them off from the real human agonies of their age – and any age. Wordsworth’s ‘Still sad music of humanity, not harsh or grating’ is drowned by the howls, screams, curses of the dying at Ismail” (1975: 317).

Despite the evidently unhealthy state of political affairs in Britain, Byron retains hope in the strong liberal tradition that he traces back to Milton. My consideration of Eastern representations in *Don Juan* shall thus resonate on two levels: first, as they relate to the political conditions of a West under the sway of a resurgent conservatism, described

above; and second, as they relate to a more idealistic liberalism, with which Byron identified himself.

II.

Juan's progress through the poem sees him travel from his native Spain to the Greek isles, Turkey, Russia and thence to England. This circuit, from Europe into the East and back, produces changes in him which set him apart from the members of English society who represent the Europe that he once inhabited as a native Spaniard. His alteration forms the basis of a comparison between the narrow cultural tolerance, or virtual xenophobia, as represented by English society of the time and a more expansive, hospitable and humane attitude of toleration fostered by direct interaction with foreign cultures and societies. Such social receptivity, already under strain from Europe's slowly emerging culture of empire-building, would become suppressed with the rise of Victorian-age imperialism and its policy of colonization. In the intervening period, before the rhetoric of Empire had established its moral-religious foothold, articulated for instance in Kipling's notion of the "white man's burden" or the *mission civilizatrice*, the hypocrisy of Europe's righteous hostility to foreign culture is less self-assured. Its depredations are more obvious, and artless in their execution. Byron's own extensive travel and interaction with the larger world enabled him to present a vision of society which looked beyond the merely nationalistic interests of individual European powers to include all cultures in a common humanity, as an alternative to the political aggression which was shaping his age.

Byron's choice of England as the final locale of Juan's journey (as far, at least, as the unfinished narrative progresses) has of course an autobiographical resonance. His own familiarity with fashionable English society gave him a unique insight into its social mechanism, and he could readily expose its hypocrisies⁵³. In addition, though, Britain represented for him the pinnacle of European civilization, as a country whose laws were

⁵³ Byron's irony in calling his poem an "Epic Satire" (14. 99) in the English cantos is quite pointed in this regard.

the most humane and democratic anywhere⁵⁴. But juxtaposed to this was the paradoxical circumstance of Britain's growing imperial interests and her citizens' contracted cultural self-interest. Whatever was foreign was rapidly commodified and appropriated for domestic consumption in the form of "the Exotic", or was viewed with suspicion or disdain as being 'uncivilized' and barely fit for serious consideration by enlightened Western minds. This tendency, however, was not a particularly new trend; it was rather the mandate required for imperial expansion that fuelled the increasingly belligerent attitude towards non-European lands, by way of justifying later incursions.

Juan however begins life as a kind of *tabula rasa*, who is young enough not to be influenced by the ingrained cultural habits of his society. This circumstance permits him to view foreign cultures in a far more impartial light than the settled Europeans from whom he derives his origin. As a version of the amorous character famed of old, Don Juan also derives the additional benefit of being distracted by a continuous chain of lovers – albeit in Byron's depiction he is (at least nominally) the target rather than the prosecutor of his various liaisons. This arrangement foregrounds Juan's personal life over and above the political events in which he finds himself a frequent participant, and the development of his own political views appears to occur almost unconsciously or not at all – being in a way irrelevant to Byron's purposes. Of far greater moment is his moral progress through the cantos, and here he retains a kind of artless innocence which recommends him far above the jaded hypocrisy of the ostensibly more sophisticated characters he encounters. The poem's political message is propagated not via character but through narrative, in the frequent asides or elaborations that Byron includes and which engage the reader directly.

From the very outset, Juan's simple honesty is contrasted with the duplicity of the other characters. Donna Inez, his mother, despite her severe morality, proves in the end to be a poor role-model. Despite wishing young Juan to be raised "strictly moral" (1. 39), he gains a thorough carnal knowledge in his classical studies (q.v. 1. 41 – 45). Donna Inez's

⁵⁴ Q.v. for instance 13. 20: "bold Britons have a tongue and free quill, / At which all modern nations vainly aim".

own carnality is soon shown to be all too robust. Her unpalatably austere and bookish introduction (q.v. 1. 10ff), is revealed to possess some leaning towards desire: the family Missal, at l. 46, is a text ornamented with erotic borders and she “Kept this herself, and gave her son another” Despite such ‘precaution’, however, Juan remains his father’s son. So whilst at l. 50 Juan’s temperament, “Although in infancy a little wild”, is tamed, the narrative hints that this is but a temporary arrangement. Byron’s more insistent articulation of his doubts on the matter, in his role as intrusive author-narrator in the next stanza, leaves the reader in little doubt. The connection between father and son is made explicit here, and harks back to the description of Don José’s earlier foible: “Don José, like a lineal son of Eve, / Went plucking various fruit without her [Donna Inez’s] leave” (l. 18). We later discover that Donna Inez has herself earlier been involved in a liaison with Don Alfonso (q.v. 1. 66 – 67), exhibiting a degree of prurience wholly out of tune with her own wishes for Juan’s virtuous upbringing.

The kernel of this contradiction is contained neatly in stanza 20, where her outward appearance as a kind of “saint” is contrasted with her inner “devil of a spirit”. Juan is described in similar terms, as “the most unquiet imp on earth” (q.v. 1. 25) in a phrase which, via its pointed idiomatic consonance with the descriptions of his parents’ own imperfect morality, anticipates the sybaritic course that his life will take. Juan’s function as representation serves to emphasize the integrity of his plain-dealing nature, always intensely personally construed, which Byron opposes with the artifice of the other characters’ social behaviour. The narrative’s subsequent unravelling of appearances satirizes not only the fictive world of Old Spain but also skewers contemporary Europe by challenging the notion of its moral superiority over other societies. By exposing Europe’s own lack of moral cohesion, the subsequent comparison that is drawn between East and West cannot then be reduced to a binary distinction.

Juan’s liaison with Donna Julia exposes not his own weakness but rather the loveless basis of Julia and Don Alfonso’s marriage. The revelation invalidates much of the social sanction given to the concept of fidelity in this instance, and works to exonerate Juan and Julia’s illicit love affair. Once the illusion has been dispelled, Juan is ejected back into

the world to seek after further adventure. In this way, Byron's employment of Don Juan through the course of the narrative serves to function as a mirror in which the other characters (and, we assume, certain of Byron's readers) are compelled to recognize the artifice and constructedness of their own social circumstances. A brief survey of the poem offers up numerous other victims of Byron's wry method of interrogation, from Lambro to Gulbeyaz, Catherine, Lady Adeline, Lord Henry and other minor characters. The particulars of the social arrangement in each case reproduce a situation similar to that deployed in the earlier *Turkish Tales*, namely, the liberation of a woman held captive by the will of a tyrant-figure, whether literally imprisoned (in a harem, as Dudu; or captive, as Leila) or held in check by dint of autocratic influence (as Haidée, Julia, etc). Juan himself may be classed in both groups.

Byron's great stylistic advance in *Don Juan* resides in the manner in which his characters and situations (however capriciously Byron treats of them) attach themselves firmly to actual social behaviour in a manner that makes his readers complicit in the narrative, as much as it offers a commentary on their own tendencies towards such prejudice. The poem's very levity, by virtue of this representational instability, is the more rhetorically powerful because of the reader's final inability to fix Byron's meanings. Viewed from this perspective is it, we may well ask, merely a poem overly self-conscious of its 'Byronism', or may we discern a more serious intent? I think that any rigorous reading must needs question both the poetry and its attendant politics. Critics such as Northrop Frye rightly allude to the force of Byron's personality; but such a view takes no cognizance of the poem's attempts to politicize the scenes through which it conducts the reader, beyond the scope of a personal response; nor can we thus appreciate the proper extent of Byron's whole poetic vision.⁵⁵ What is required, instead, is a close contrapuntal reading of both the personal and the political aspects in a manner that takes stock of the process of mutual elaboration which such a reading produces in regard to both aspects.

⁵⁵ Sharafuddin asserts a similar view (in his case, respecting a selection of poetical texts which includes Byron's *Turkish Tales*), arguing that:

if we fail to see this [the works' literary quality] then it is because we have failed to take their content – their orientalism – seriously enough... My view is that their literary seriousness and

The opinion expressed at 9. 26, that “He who has nought to gain can have small art,” links the poet’s material circumstances to the process of poetical production and underlines the necessity of engaging both aspects in our reading, if we are to arrive at a fair assessment of his poetry – for Byron, the two aspects are indivisible. The political expatiations via his frequent narrative intrusions are thus not merely of interest for their oblique relation to the poet, but precisely because they constitute an instance of poetical “action” – we are presented with Byron the political activist here, in much the same way as, later, he would assume an active role in the Greek struggle for independence. Even more pointed in light of his subsequent participation in the Greek cause is the following statement of his poetical intention:

And I will war with words (and – should
My chance so happen – deeds), with all who war
With Thought; – and of Thought’s foes by far most rude,
Tyrants and sycophants have been and are.
I know not who may conquer: if I could
Have such a prescience, it should be no bar
To my plain, sworn, downright detestation
Of every despotism in every nation.

(9. 24)

If Byron’s popularity could serve as a platform for launching such a campaign, then the appeal to the public’s taste for such rhetorical “Byronism” could serve the ends of both art and action, which formed the two axes of Byron’s *weltanschauung*. Critics too frequently fail to distinguish the double effects of character and narrative, which operate in tandem and perform quite different functions.

Don Juan is rightly conceived of as the work of Byron’s maturity, but this is so as much for the skill and innovation of its rhetoric as it is for the fact that it successfully fuses Byron’s artistic and political interests in a *realistic* social milieu, however lightly he might treat of the poem’s central character. The earlier poems, whilst possessing great merit as artworks, fall short as political texts due to their twofold removal: as historical

their political seriousness are interdependent, and that an understanding of the one will lead to an understanding of the other (1994: xx).

allegory, and as overly stylized representations. Since Byron's poetry is never exclusively poetical, but attempts also to project a political message, the failure of this aspect of his writing detracts from these earlier poems' total effect. The good work begun in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage 1 – 2* is largely undone in the subsequent two cantos precisely because Byron, influenced by Shelley's admiration of Wordsworth,⁵⁶ abandons his grounded first-hand representations, via Harold or the author-narrator, in favour of a more abstract and poetical representation which is at odds with his political purposes. There are of course other problems in the execution *CHP 1 – 2*, but these are in the main errors of topography and characterization and do not constitute as radical a departure from the foundational premisses of his own thought as do the later cantos. The similarity of approach between *CHP 1 – 2* and *Don Juan* in respect of these criteria, outlined above, is quite striking in places; and the difference between these and *CHP 3* and *4* is even more so.

Byron appears in *Don Juan* to have refined and learnt to control the devices which proved so clumsy and unwieldy in *CHP*. Harold, despite his failure on the level of characterization, is a clear precursor of Juan just as Byron's confident narrator in *Don Juan* is an improvement upon the uncertain and vacillating narrative voice of *CHP*. Both poems (at least initially) make use of a figure fixed in contemporary society who traverses a landscape that reflects the current political mood. Harold's journey through Europe and his observation of the material effects of the Peninsular war have a correlative in the scenes of Suwarrow's campaign against the Turks at Ismail and the projected cantos at Waterloo. The same degree of grounded representational coherence is absent in *CHP 3 – 4*, though aesthetically it is far better coordinated. The admirably conceived "forgiveness curse" of 4. 135, although a brief touchstone of Byron's earlier observations, belies the artificiality of the aesthetic. In the end, the sublime release that St. Peter's offers to the world-weary soul, in the poem's conclusion, is not a realistic response to contemporary society and seems in fact quite retrograde to Byron's own beliefs in the matter. Instead of retreating into static Christian tradition and registering his

⁵⁶ Q.v. Alan Rowe's observation that "[Byron] went on to experiment extensively with Wordsworthian modes of procedure in *Childe Harold 3*" (1999: 131).

dissent via non-participation, Byron's life and later verse advocates if anything a very intrusive and active political involvement in current affairs.⁵⁷

Despite their use of historical allegory, the *Turkish Tales* are far more successful in projecting a coherent point of view than *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* because their frame of reference is taken to be modern-day Greece. The political invective, unlike in the latter poem's final cantos, and despite the *Tales'* allusion to ancient Greek society, operates in a pointedly ironic way. The nostalgic recursion to earlier times is not an instance of vapid wish fulfilment but argues vociferously against the tyranny of contemporary society – whether of Turkish occupier or European imperialist (the two are frequently synonymous) – in the present time.

III.

In *Don Juan*, Juan's progress through the events of the poem offers a culturally inflected assessment of the societies through which he moves. The reader is made acutely conscious of this tendency at the outset, when heavy emphasis is placed on Juan's father's pure Hidalgo blood (q.v. 1. 9). As a Spanish lord, much of Don José's social respectability hinges upon his claims of lineage, and the essential requirement that he be "free from every stain / Of Moor or Hebrew blood". Byron rapidly debunks this insistence upon 'pure blood' by alluding to the deleterious effect that such relentless inbreeding has upon the family line:

they bred *in and in*, as might be shown,
Marrying their cousins – nay, their aunts and nieces,
Which always spoils the breed, if it increases

⁵⁷ As Jean Hall's discussion of *CHP* 3 argues, the achievement of the later cantos is always on the brink of collapsing in upon itself. The poetry sustains the equilibrium of nature in balance with itself for but a moment: "For Byron the achievement of depth offers an escape from self, an annihilation that converts Wordsworthian innerness into yet another form of Byronic surface. And even if he had found it possible to centre self in nature, the Lake Lemman passage suggests that Byron would have experienced this still profundity not as fulfilling, but as boring. Transcendental stillness permeates Lake Lemman but a moment; almost immediately Byron finds it necessary to shatter this quiet by imagining a splendid storm approaching over the Alps" (1987: 138). We may say that *Don Juan*, as the successor to *CHP*, emulates this pattern.

(1. 57)

Juxtaposed to this is Julia, whose very introduction insinuates a vibrancy that is clearly unmatched by the anaemic vitality of the Hidalgos. In stanza 56, the reader's gaze is met by the bold gaze of Julia's own "oriental eye". Its inscription as 'dark', combined with her part-"Moorish origin", summons up the earlier image of the houris once more⁵⁸. This disjunctive association of Eastern religious imagery with European political structures of succession might appear to suggest a moment of social catastrophe, given the emphasis on requirements of 'pure blood'. However, the union of Moor and Hidalgo, via the marriage of Julia's Moorish grandmother into the Spanish lesser nobility, in fact invigorates the flagging line:

This heathenish cross restored the breed again,
Ruin'd its blood, but much improved its flesh;
For, from a root the ugliest in Old Spain
Sprung up a branch as beautiful as fresh;
The sons no more were short, the daughters plain:
But there's a rumour which I fain would hush,
'Tis said that Donna Julia's grandmamma
Produced her Don more heirs at love than law.

(1. 58)

As the latter half of the above stanza demonstrates, however, any suggestion of advantage possessed by Julia's Moorish grandmother is undercut by her apparent immorality. The obviously jarring phrase, "heathenish cross", reinforces the sense of cultural disapproval in the strongest terms. The spectre of miscegenation contained in the "crossing" of Hidalgo with Moor also figures, as a perverse play on the Christian symbol of the cross, as "heathenish", and thus suggests moral as well as lineal corruption. There is no question of a corresponding European immorality, since only the bland fact of the Moorish woman's infidelity is interrogated. The depiction, functioning as a kind of metonymy, moreover grants sexual prerogatives over all such "heathenish" non-Western women and reduces them to little more than a series of erotic images in the eyes of the patriarchal Westerner. If Julia's grandmother performed the service of strengthening the Hidalgo

line, this is reduced to a kind of prostitution for which her just reward is sexual appropriation. Julia, despite being several generations removed, still bears the same burden of guilt. Her description in stanzas 60 – 61, though not overtly stained with the accusation of infidelity (she is “married, charming, chaste” but suggestively also “twenty-three”, q.v. l. 59) is nevertheless subject to scrutiny by the male erotic gaze. The phrasing of the opening lines of Stanza 60, “Her eye (I’m very fond of handsome eyes) / Was large and dark, suppressing half its fire”, articulates not only the Westerner’s erotic interest in Julia as the archetypal oriental woman; the suggested repression is also predicated on the assumption that she has an appetite for carnal pleasure despite her aura of innocence. The mere fact of Julia’s descent from her ‘promiscuous’ ancestor is used to suggest that she may have similar inclinations; and we are additionally left in some doubt as to her legitimacy (q.v. l. 59).

The eroticization of the houris, as discussed in the earlier chapters, effectively eliminates their force as a part of what I have termed the ‘threat of Islam’. By transforming the image of the houri into quaint and titillating images for consumption by the Western male gaze, she becomes subsumed into the European model of representational dominance via its own cultural modes of perception – ethical, aesthetic and otherwise. Byron’s depiction, however, stands in ironic relation to this process. Julia’s ‘oriental’ influence over an obviously vulnerable Juan turns the tables on the West’s traditional means of subversion. Her eyes possess a power of their own which reproduces the influence of the ‘evil eye’ encountered earlier in *The Giaour* (q.v. l. 195) and elsewhere.⁵⁹ Juan, both European and male, becomes the object of sexual attention for Julia in a reversal of the traditional power relation between West and East. The European readership of Byron’s epic is, unusually thus, left to speculate agonizingly over the direction that the unfolding drama is taking. The poem’s worldly-wise tone, in which all parties stand accused of their common human weaknesses, leaves neither Moor nor Spaniard untouched. The later English cantos *et al.* further imply that all people, Byron’s readers included, are equally prone to this dangerous effect. None can have recourse to a

⁵⁸ Cf. also l. 104: “Julia sate within as pretty a bower / As e’er held houri in that heathenish heaven”.

⁵⁹ Q.v. Sharafuddin 1996: 242 for a description of this effect.

moral defence of their position without simultaneously exposing their own hypocrisy since all are shown to be subject to their desires.⁶⁰

Julia's participation in Juan's eventual seduction is equally unsettling. In place of a vulgar descent into a purely sexual liaison typical of Western notions of oriental sensuality, her treatment of Juan is extremely tender and affectionate. The contrast between Julia's relations with Juan versus her relations with her gruff husband tend, on the whole, to create sympathy for the former however much society might dissent. Again, a contrapuntal analysis of the two series of relations exposes Don Alfonso's unworthiness of Julia's love (q.v. l. 68, where she discovers her husband's infidelity). Consequently, Juan's innocence provides Julia with a means to sanctify her own desire. In the face of pervasive and institutionalized social duplicity, Juan and Julia's liaison appears more true and sincere than the other characters' legitimate marital relations. Byron's depiction overturns orthodox ideas of morality to present instead a circumstance in which true emotion is the crucial measure of legitimacy, apart from all considerations of social class or heritage. Such an insinuation challenges the legitimacy of Spain's structures of social representation and, by association, offers a trenchant critique of European society more broadly.

Additional reasons are put forward to explain the lapse in moral dignity which Julia's presence occasions. Chiefly, these turn around the notion of climate as it informs representations of morality via a supporting mythos that purports to explain, in naturalistic terms, the innate moral and intellectual superiority of Western civilization. Warmer southern nations are deemed to be prone to heat-induced carnality, as opposed to a colder, more controlled and ultimately more civilized Europe. Julia's original attraction to Juan is reduced to her racial origin in "sun-burnt nations" (l.69). Her sensuality, despite being articulated by a sexually aggressive Western voice, is thus represented as being intrinsic to her nature. The description of her eyebrows as rainbows ("aerial bow", l. 483) and her veins that "ran lightning" (l. 485) serve to confirm the argument on the

⁶⁰ Byron's identification of first love with "Adam's recollection of his fall" as being "ambrosial sin" (q.v. l. 127) inverts the doctrine of original sin and instead casts it as a moment of sublime release.

literal level – she is portrayed as an elemental creature, and prone to her feral instincts. However, the very terms whereby the West seeks to impose a geographical, climatic and, by association, a moral distinction become for Byron grounds for disputation. As he argues, the conduct of “Countries near the sun” (l. 62) in the end differs insignificantly from their more northern neighbours. Julia’s loveless marriage to the aged Don Alfonso is a situation that would test anyone, “through all climes, the snowy and the sunny” (q.v. l. 107), and the later English cantos put this assertion past all doubt.⁶¹

Don Alfonso’s discovery of Juan in Julia’s bedsheets precipitates a confusing series of quasi-religious and cultural stereotypes. As a transgressor of his society’s moral law, Juan becomes a type of Adam who is banished from Paradise – but given the “garden-key” by Julia as a serpentine Eve-figure and forced to flee by a seraphic sword-wielding Don Alfonso (cf. l. 182).⁶² Julia’s earlier deceptions have been perspicuous to the reader throughout the scene, and her own role in proffering to Juan such forbidden fruit as produces his fall from grace seems to confirm the earlier hereditary “heathenish” epithet. Juan is vilified in similar terms, and becomes demonized as an Eastern figure at l. 184, where he is described as “a Tartar” despite his Spanish origins. This jarring disjunction is again overturned at l. 186, where Juan is identified with the ambiguous biblical figure of Joseph. The Protean instability of the images that attempt to capture Juan’s relation to his society (as heathenish outcast or merely erring prodigal son) gives a strong sense of the anxieties⁶³ which his illicit miscegenation triggers, and for which Julia is finally held responsible. Since the reader has already been made privy to Don Alfonso’s own promiscuity, however, the entire episode hovers on the brink of hilarity and makes obvious the hypocrisy of his indignation. Don Alfonso assumes the role of the cuckold, and we can feel but little real sympathy for his plight. In the end, of course, Juan does leave. His departure, though, is one enforced by a society which has become riven by the

⁶¹ Q.v. the description of Lady Adeline at l. 36 – 39 and the narrator’s declaration that “your cold people are beyond all price, / When once you have broken their confounded ice” in relation to Lady Adeline’s inner passion, which is no less intense despite the close check she keeps on it.

⁶² A seraph bearing a flaming sword is said to guard the entrance to Paradise; and the creature’s chief attribute is its fiery temperament (cf. *Paradise Lost*, 2. 512n.). ‘Seraph’ is derived from the Hebrew root *saraph*, meaning ‘to burn’ (Ibid). Of course, Don Alfonso’s oblique portrayal as seraph is an ironic commentary on his own duplicity – and his fiery temper is the result of jealousy.

public exposure of its own contradictions. Donna Inez, under the guise of reforming her young son, effectively exiles Juan from Spain and thereby removes all trace of the threat which his liaison with Julia poses. Both reader and Spaniard alike are left to speculate on the fate of Julia; without Juan, she is reduced to a cipher and Old Spain is once more free to practise its social deceptions incognito.⁶⁴

In contrast to Juan's portrayal, Julia is constant in adversity:

'I loved, I love you, for that love have lost
State, station, heaven, mankind's, my own esteem,
And yet cannot regret what it hath cost,
So dear is still the memory of that dream'

(1. 193)

Juan's own inconstancy, conventionally viewed as a feminine trait, is reflected in his frequently ambiguous sexuality, from his depiction in the above drama as an adolescent possessing a "half-girlish face" (1. 171) to his role as 'Juanna' in the context of the Turkish harem. He is though spared the ignominy of such identification in each instance by virtue of circumstances beyond his control, and which require his acquiescence as a matter of expediency. On the personal level, Juan's greatest achievement is arguably the assertion of his own masculinity. Don Alfonso's discovery of Juan's liaison with Julia offers an instance of this and, like Dudu's discovery of Juan's true gender in the Turkish cantos, the moment precipitates a crisis which forces him to flee or risk execution (q.v. 6. 70ff). It is only much later, in the siege of Ismail, that he is able to act for the first time

⁶³ Q.v also 2. 8. where Juan's voyage is compared to Noah's, as a means to "wean him from the wickedness of the earth, / And send him like a dove of promise forth".

⁶⁴ We may usefully apply Teresa de Laurentis's analysis of Jury Lottman's semiotics of plot construction to Julia's (and Juan's) textual status, in which she claims that his description is predicated

on the *single* figure of the hero who crosses the boundary and penetrates the other space. In so doing the hero, the mythical subject, is constructed as human being and as male; he is the active principle of culture, the establisher of distinction, the creator of differences. Female is what is not susceptible to transformation, to life or death; she (it) is an element of plot-space, a topos, a resistance, matrix and matter. (q.v. de Laurentis, *Alice Doesn't*, p. 119).

Whilst it may be true that Juan's androgynous depiction does run somewhat counter to this notion, it is in his narrative role as anti-hero that he achieves an ascendancy that is denied to any of the female characters. Despite his evident weakness, he is yet able to surpass them by virtue of his status as the plot's motive force and *raison d'être*. C.f. also 6. 7: "our hero and third heroine".

without reference to a dominant female figure, and the military fame that he wins grants him a limited autonomy in a world which is, for him, controlled by a matriarchy of women stronger and wiser than himself. Ironically, of course, he does also gain a degree of ascendancy in the world of men via his connection with women of power and influence.

Juan's sojourn in Cadiz, *en route* to more distant lands, offers the reader a first glimpse of the exotic in the form of the old slave market (2. 5 – 7). The strange combination of animals and foreign women suggests the picturesque chaos of an oriental bazaar rather than the more familiar marketplaces of the West, and Byron's voyeuristic verse rapidly makes it clear that we have left the cultural precincts of Europe behind. In accordance with the shift into an oriental milieu, the dialectical modes of representation and perception assume a piquant character. The male gaze, here personified in the first-person recollections of Byron in his role as author-narrator, erotically treats of the women whom he views. As before, it is the allure of the oriental eye which so arrests him, and in which he locates carnal desire:

- the veil
Thrown back a moment with the glancing hand,
While the the o'erpowering eye, that turns you pale,
Flashes into the heart

(2. 7)

Such categorization of the oriental woman as an object of sexual desire is again a function of the earlier discourse of race / climate, the effect of a "sunny land of love" (2.7) which links oriental libido with the material imperatives of nature.⁶⁵ The juxtaposition of women and animals in the context of the old slave market thus serves an associative function and draws both into a relation not much different from the West's historical use of the market as a place of barter and exchange and reducing all that is surveyed (women and animals alike) to the status of commodities. As before, however, the oriental woman boldly meets the male gaze and the force of her "o'erpowering eye" plunges him into an abyss of desire which threatens to take possession of him instead.

⁶⁵ Q.v. Franklin 1992: 112.

This reproduces Freud's notion of the Eros-Thanatos struggle, and suggests that the very allure of the oriental resides precisely in the danger she represents – sexually, as well as historically⁶⁶. The closest we approach to such an encounter in the English cantos is with Juan's discovery of the Duchess Fitz-Fulke in her role as the 'Black Friar', and then the effect is nowhere near as robustly sensual. In place of the firm and sensuous tangibility of the oriental woman is the spectral insubstantiality of the Friar, initially assumed to be male, whose corporeal nature is only revealed at the very conclusion of the penultimate canto and, we may say, almost by accident. Even here, though, the Friar's presence is due to Juan's invigorating influence. We are told, at 16. 36, that "The Friar of late has not been oft perceived", suggesting that the Duchess's long-dormant sexuality is piqued by the allure of the exotic which Juan represents to English society.

IV.

Once ejected by Spanish society, Juan journeys Eastward and is shipwrecked in the Adriatic⁶⁷. The narrative characterizes him as delicate and effeminate despite being the sole survivor:

like a wither'd lily, on the land
His slender frame and pallid aspect lay,
As fair a thing as e'er was form'd of clay.

(2. 110)

Juan's androgyny, intact until his participation in the siege of Ismail, serves to bolster the air of innocence which raises him above the artificiality of the society around him. More pointedly, it also emphasizes his subordination to the women he encounters, and who exhibit a degree of conviction and self-assuredness that is unknown to the young Juan. This effect, a structural irony which permeates the entire poem, inverts the conventional

⁶⁶ The power contained in the orientals' dark gaze appears associatively linked with the threat of incursion which the Ottoman empire once represented. Likewise, this is what gives the Giaour such a terrible visage. Q.v. the earlier passage from CHP, which cites the "paler dames of England" who are "languid, wan, and weak" (1. 58) in comparison. By contrast, Haidée's dark eyes are "black as death" (2. 117).

patriarchal relation and draws attention to Juan's marginal condition as exile. His sense of cultural displacement, in the context of the foreign lands through which he travels, inscribes him as an object of curiosity in much the same way that the Western imagination traditionally objectifies and eroticizes the Orient. Byron's verse thus offers a stereoscopic vision of the poem's cultural terrain, in which both West and East participate. In the very act of voyeuristically scrutinizing the poem's Eastern imagery, the reader is made aware that a similar process of perception is at work in the opposite direction.

Byron's detailed description of Haidee is mirrored in turn by her own interest in Juan. The stanzas devoted to a physical appraisal of her are duplicated in her lingering observations of Juan⁶⁷, and bespeak the characters' mutual fascination with an unfamiliar 'other'. On Haidee's part, this is articulated in stanza 129 where she remarks upon Juan's unusually pale pigmentation; and her depiction as an oriental beauty is evident almost from the moment in which Juan awakes from his ordeal. At 2. 117 her eyes, "black as death", project the familiar ocular intensity that serves to identify her as a citizen of the mystical East. This myth of Oriental potency contained in the verse connotes a sense of threat which is entirely out of keeping with Haidee's youth and innocence, but which reiterates the vertiginous sense of danger that her beauty represents to the civilized Westerner's notions of control and moral restraint. Juan finds himself naturally attracted to Haidee, but his own emotion is untrammelled by the anxieties which assail the narrator. The medusa-like power of her gaze, in her type-role as oriental seductress, is more properly read as a projection of the Western voyeur's own repressed desires. As discussed earlier, the fixation of Western desires on the Orient forms an aggressive psychological response to the Orient's historical threat of conquest. In addition, the particular stress placed on the image of the Oriental seductress bespeaks the patriarchal West's own carnality, as the ideological assertion of authority and control filters down to the individual level. The representational structures of domination, intended to express a

⁶⁷ Q.v. McGann's note to *Carto* 2, l. 928 where he alludes to the resonance between the current setting and Homer's *Odyssey*. Q.v. also 2. 127, where the isle is identified as "One of the wild and smaller Cyclades".

⁶⁸ Q.v. 2. 116 – 121 for the text's treatment of Haidee. Q.v. 2. 113 – 114; 143 – 144; 147 – 148; 168; 171; 173 for instances of Haidee's attentiveness to Juan.

civilizational superiority over the East via the discourse of Western male mastery over the feminine Orient, reveal an underlying tension in the West's own rationalist ideological imperatives as the trope is taken up in unexpectedly literal ways. Ironically, in the very act of asserting a political superiority over the Orient, the West's identification of an Oriental woman as the paragon of sexual desire subverts the original terms of the representation.

Byron's later allusion to the myth of the Minotaur (q.v. 2. 155), notably also a Greek myth, emphasizes the sense of taboo inherent in the attraction between Westerner and non-Westerner. The spectre of such miscegenation, motivated as it is by a rampant Oriental carnality, cuts across the grain of a Western ideology which lays stress on rational precepts and threatens to unravel the ethos which binds his civilized society together. The ruins of ancient Greece are here momentarily projected onto the modern world as the perverse image of the Minotaur – half man and half beast – recalls the earlier anxiety of 'bad blood' that contaminates the hereditary lineage of the *Hidalgos*. The classical image suggests the decay which such a lack of restraint engenders, and which threatens the continued existence of civilized society – and casts those who succumb as monstrously illegitimate progeny, possessing a less than human character. Byron's allusion to the myth operates ironically, however, as in the stanza following he points out that "English people are / Fed upon beef" – and in its associations with wartime slaughter (q.v. 2. 156) and cannibalism (cf. 2. 157), the image draws attention to the Europeans' own lack of restraint even without the influence of a seductive East. This recalls the earlier reference to the English treatment of Ireland, under the aegis of Castlereagh, in the *Dedication* (St. 12).

Juan's reaction to Haidee's appearance, whilst not engaged at anywhere near the same level of cultural anxiety expressed via the narrative at this point, nevertheless registers some alarm. At 2. 121 he is startled to discover that Haidee does not wear stockings. The earlier glimpse of "feet and ancles" (q.v. 2. 6) seen at Cadiz's old slave market suggests their status as erotic symbols in a complex semiotics of desire. However, Juan's shock is less that of the voyeur transfixed by the object of his fetish than of one accustomed to his

society's conventions. Here for the first time, perhaps, Juan becomes aware of the ways in which culturally construed meanings can differ. In the context of the Greek isles, such signifiers of sexual desire as might ordinarily excite an erotic response in the Western imagination are here quite inappropriate. Indeed, the disjunction serves to unravel any conventional notions of oriental sexuality as the Western fancy might seek to represent it. The reader, as Juan, is thus obliged to abandon his ideas on the East as the gap between imagination and actual experience widens – even as, on the meta-textual level, the narrative continues to invoke the old myths of the Orient. Byron's dual mode of representation draws these two narrative strands together in counterpoint and, via such a representational irony, he effectively demythologizes the Oriental stereotype.

This effect is again in evidence in his treatment of Haidee's dark houri-like eyes, as it is revealed that Juan too possesses similarly dark eyes (q.v. 2. 131). This coincidence, given the symbolic significance that Byron's representations have generated in respect of the gaze, problematizes Juan's type-identity as Westerner, and resonates with the suggestions of his androgyny that occur elsewhere. The description serves to register Juan's disbarment from the masculine discourse – a function of his status as exile – and casts him as effeminate. The transference of the eroticized eyes of the houri onto the figure of Juan emphasizes his powerless condition, as he becomes himself an object of sexual desire for the women whom he encounters. His displaced social condition effectively neuters him from participation in the male realm of politics, and unsurprisingly, his course for much of the poem follows a trajectory which conveys him to successive series of female paramours. Such an alternative existence, ordinarily conceived of as pre-eminently masculine, is for Juan a further confirmation of his social disconnection, as he finds himself drawn (willingly or not) into a subordinate social relation. The traditional ordering of his society along patriarchal lines is here inaccessible to him, as his exclusion from his native land also disbars him from access to its structures of authority; and his status as foreigner prevents him from accessing the existing structures of patriarchal authority which govern Eastern society.

Juan's awkward position corrupts the traditional relation of East to West which is ordinarily conceived of as operating in one direction, that is, from the authoritative Western subject to the passive Oriental object. However, Byron's earlier descriptions of the power of the gaze demonstrate that the exchange always occurs in both directions (q.v. 2. 7) regardless of political or social affiliation. Such an effect, already infused with the moral danger of loss of self-control when the woman returns the gaze, is in the figure of Juan an expression of extreme cultural anxiety. His inscription as an Oriental parallels the West's own tendency to be influenced by foreign societies despite the high emphasis placed on its own ideological structures. If his dark Spanish eyes are able to reflect the same sensuous intensity as that of the Oriental, then the essential distinction between a rational, 'civilized' Europe and the sybaritic, 'savage' East becomes untenable – in exactly the same way that Byron has earlier demonstrated that geographical location does not confer cultural superiority. The 'threat of Islam' thus operates not only on the level of a literal invasion, as in *The Siege of Corinth*, but also threatens Western ethical structures via its appeal on a sensual level. Ironically, this representation is largely a Western interpretation of the Orient in which differences of custom are read in deliberately erotic terms. All notions of a mundane Orient are overlooked, and the very distance and difference implied by the Oriental milieu permits such expressions of Western desire precisely because it is conceived of as a realm not properly connected with 'real' circumstance. The Orient thus becomes a locus for the expression of repressed desires regarded as taboo and which, outside of the moral precincts of Europe, can be practised without a concern for consequences. As Sharafuddin argues,

The Oriental landscape was necessarily a landscape of distance... which offered no resistance to the dreams of wish fulfillment. It was also an ideal landscape, that is, a landscape of the mind rather than one that was lived in.

(1996: 193)

However, the execution of such desires cannot in the end be separated from the ordinary course of one's existence any more than the inner life of the id can be said to exist separately from the individual's manifest personality. Similarly, Byron's stereoscopic cultural matrix corrodes any notion of a discrete, impervious West. As relative terms,

there can be no 'West' without a correspondent 'East', nor do they exist as hermetically isolated societies.

The meanings which cluster around these two opposing poles, of East and West, are of their nature binary constructions and thus are less concerned to describe actual circumstance so much as they exist to assert perceived difference. Byron's verse proves alarming as a cultural text precisely because he endeavours to present the East at first hand and finds frequent points of consonance between both cultures, which argue against the Eastern stereotype, as exotic, or erotic or mythic. This is not to say, of course, that he is free of such cultural prejudice – frequently this is not so – but his vision is presented with an ironic detachment which unsettles far more than it affirms traditional notions. Once the suggestion has been made that what is seen as "monstrous" might, in fact, be a mental projection of inner fears it then becomes increasingly difficult to accept cultural depictions at face value. As Jameson observes,

The essential point to be made is not so much that he [i.e. the *Other*] is feared because he is evil; rather he is evil *because* he is Other, alien, different, strange, unclean and unfamiliar.

(1981: 115)

It is clear from the outset that Juan's privileged place in the island's society is dependent upon the fact that Haidee is Lambro's only heir and daughter. At 2. 116, before Juan is aware of her status as a pirate-leader's daughter, he nevertheless recognizes the mantle of authority which she wears: "There was a something which bespoke command, / As one who was a lady in the land". The effect of such a characterization operates within the circumscribed realm of Juan's innocent expectations: she is to him, as "the lady of the cave" (q.v. 2. 120), a kind of coastal naiad or spirit of nature come fortuitously to his succour and quite detached from all political considerations. Juan's observation serves merely to confirm, in an unaffected fashion, her inherent nobility in the idyllic landscape into which he awakens. His own innocence, and Haidee's kind attentions, thus transform

the pirate's island into a version of paradise that appears separated from all political concerns⁶⁹.

Juan's resuscitation after his ordeal at sea seems, indeed, to be an awakening into an exotic kind of heaven on earth and marks a definitive separation from his European origins. Haidee's role as *hourai* as she nurtures Juan back to health, however, is clearly ironic – she is careful to conceal him from her tyrannical father (q.v. 2. 130 – 131) and, however benevolently she treats him, we are never in doubt of the fact of his dependence on her goodwill. This circumstance is literally portrayed in Juan's weakened physical condition as well as via the manner in which Haidee and her maid tend to him and clothe him in their petticoats and pelisses (q.v. 2. 133). Here, in what will become a familiar arrangement, Juan is attired in women's clothing and is forced to accept a subordinate role in order to preserve his own life, if not quite his dignity. Even when, at 2. 160, Juan is finally attired in men's clothing he is given none of the local artefacts of patriarchal authority: despite being incorporated into the Eastern milieu by donning Oriental garb, he is deprived of "turban, slippers, pistols, dirk" and his role becomes that of protégé to Haidee. However, this omission is as much a practical expedient as it is an indication of his political impotency: in the brief period between Lambro's departure and his return, the island society is under the gentle matriarchy of Haidee, and requires none of the masculine arsenal in order to achieve its pastoral purposes.

The social transformation which occurs under Haidee's aegis begins with Lambro's departure to sea (q.v. 2. 174ff). The freedom which his absence permits her is presented as a comparison, which identifies Haidee's newfound liberty with the relative freedom of the Western married woman in contrast to the traditional image of her incarcerated Oriental counterpart. Such a depiction seems to affirm the Orient's tendency towards tyranny, in the dominating figure of Lambro. However, as Juan's later adventure as a harem inmate will reveal, such a hardline distinction is by no means automatic – and

⁶⁹ Of course, Byron's narration operates ironically since the reader is made fully aware of the significance, on a political and a social level, of the details which Juan cannot decode. Note especially how the narrative makes plain Haidee's complicity in the deception: she is acutely aware of the artifice of the idyll as at, for instance, 2. 172 – 173, her consciousness of the unreality of things is brought home.

hinges upon context. Byron's interrogation of women in Western society reveals, in fact, a considerable similarity with the Oriental woman's position in Eastern society, as the description at 2. 199 makes clear:

for man, to man so oft unjust,
Is always so to women; one sole bond
Awaits them, treachery is all their trust;
Taught to conceal, their bursting hearts despond
Over their idol, till some wealthier lust
Buys them in marriage -- and what rests beyond?
A thankless husband, next a faithless lover,
Then dressing, nursing, praying, and all's over.

What poses as a virtue ("freedom", q.v. 2. 175) in the description of the Western woman also equivocates with her tendency towards vice, and belies a situational irony which holds her in a similar subjugation to her more visibly incarcerated Eastern counterpart⁷⁰. But whether she takes a lover or seeks other dissipations, her situation is such that "Few changes e'er can better [her] affairs," (q.v. 2. 201). The literal incarceration of the harem finds a correlative in the close-knit and constrictive mores of Western society; and the dinner-parties, soirees and other social occasions permit the Englishwoman, in her role as hostess, a similarly limited space in which to exist as the harem provides for Gulbeyaz⁷¹, or as the island does for Haidee. The consequence of being rejected by her society is as severe, and Byron's description couches the consequences of the Western woman's fall from grace in pointedly Eastern terms to reinforce the parallelism: "Losing the advantage of a virtuous station," he writes, may result in the Englishwoman's removal "From the dull palace to the dirty hovel" (2. 201). Such a juxtaposition works to deconstruct the assumptions which the West applies to the Orient, and reveals unexpected points of cultural connection between the two societies on the level of gender.

The commodification of the Oriental woman by the discourse of male mastery is repeated in the description of the European woman's lot in life: she too is acquired via an

⁷⁰ q.v. also 5. 158 where Byron's ironic description unravels the distinction further. The image of oriental polygamy seems indifferently worse than the grotesque image of monogamy as "that moral centaur, man and wife".

⁷¹ q.v. 6. 25: "Gulbeyaz was an empress, but had been / Perhaps as wretched if a *peasant's quean*".

economic transaction – in which “some wealthier lust / Buys [her] in marriage” (2. 200) – which recalls the earlier image of the old slave market at Cadiz, and anticipates the Turkish slave market in Canto 4 where Juan is sold off to Gulbeyaz. Indeed, as Caroline Franklin points out, Britain’s aristocratic marriage market may be thought of as the “most highly organized system of bartering women for money” (1992: 154). At 12. 13, this social practice is described in disarmingly frank terms:

A young unmarried man, with a good name
And fortune, has an awkward part to play;
For good society is but a game,
“The royal game of Goose,” as I may say,
Where every body has some separate aim,
An end to answer, or a plan to lay –
The single ladies wishing to be double,
The married ones to save the virgins trouble.

The similarly debased treatment of women in both Europe and the East unravels the binary oppositions, of “progressive” versus “backward”, through which the Western narrative seeks to orient itself in relation to rival cultures and compels the reader to question the assumptions of cultural and moral superiority which are propagated through the social structures, at least as it pertains to the question of gender. As Peter Knox-Shaw observes, “the harem repeatedly figures as a metaphor for the lot of women in *English* society” (1993: 57).

Haidee’s description of Juan at 2. 173 as “her own, her ocean-treasure, cast / Like a rich wreck – her first love, and her last” not only depicts him as the object of her affections, but also uses the images of loot, more appropriate to Lambro’s role as pirate, to express an emotional attachment to him. This disjunctive representation serves as a clear reminder of the origins of Haidee’s own authority and influence, and alludes to the impending return of Lambro, who will take a far more literal view of Juan’s worth and sell him off to the Turkish slave-traders. In both cases, Juan finds himself commodified in the same fashion as the women in his society and equally powerless to resist his fate – whether, as in the case of his sojourn with Haidee, he finds it desirable or not. His transit from a Levantine context to a properly Oriental setting thus subverts the typical incursion

into the East, and displaces images of an aggressive Western military campaign with the most unthreatening of all conceivable circumstances: Juan enters Turkey alone, and indentured.

V.

The camaraderie shared between Juan and John Johnson in the opening section of Canto 5 provides a brief connection with his European origins, as we learn that Johnson is an Englishman. The character's name itself suggests a kind of Anglicized version of Juan, and one that displays a typically English prejudice. The xenophobic division of society into the respective binary camps of 'us' and 'them' is immediately introduced, in 5. 13, when Johnson greets Juan:

The only gentlemen seem I and you;
So let us be acquainted, as we ought

Almost every word used serves to emphasize the difference and innate superiority of Western culture in comparison to an East which pointedly fails to match the notions of refinement with which Johnson identifies. The phrase "gentlemen" serves to reinforce this connotation, and paradoxically introduces a class distinction which has no relevance outside of its original social context. The spurious positioning of Juan and Johnson as the "only gentlemen" attempts to assert their elevation above those around them when in fact they are merely indentured slaves like the others. Nevertheless, Johnson discovers in Juan a cultural familiarity which approves his assertion, and he takes this as reason enough that they "ought" to be acquainted. This recognition, by itself, is natural enough but it is the positive value judgements that Johnson attaches to Juan as a Westerner, and conversely his negative assessment of the surrounding populace as an undifferentiated and uncivilized East, that is profoundly problematic on the representational level. The wholesale deployment of such cultural stereotype completely displaces real circumstance, and effectively prohibits all engagement with the non-Western world. In its place stands the Westerner's image of the East, instead of the East itself – a tendency noted by Said in his book *Orientalism*, and which he includes via an epigraph taken from Marx which

reads, "They cannot represent themselves; they must be represented" (Said 1995, frontispiece).

Johnson's later observation on their predicament, however, shows some small degree of utility:

Knowledge, at least, is gain'd; for instance, now,
We know what slavery is, and our disasters
May teach us better to behave when masters.

(5. 23)

The insight which Johnson presents here so matter-of-factly displays not the least suggestion of doubt in the moral acceptability of slavery. The benefit to the individual so enslaved is merely incidental to the humanitarian refinement (if we might term it thus) of the master's role as a benevolent slave-owner. It is assumed as a matter of course that the Westerner, here present in the inclusive "we", "our" and "us" in the above lines, bears the legitimate right of such ownership by virtue of the fact that he will act in a responsible manner. This is a possibility which the cultural dialectic patently denies to Eastern society *in toto*, as a society represented as both backward and savage in comparison to a technically and morally superior West. The sense of complete confidence in the West's right to rule registers the shift away from the historical anxieties of the Ottoman threat, as depicted in Byron's earlier works, and is here firmly placed in relation to the rise of imperialism that was shaping English and European foreign policy.

Juan's present condition stands in stark contrast to this trend, however. If Johnson is able to refer to a greater cultural movement then it is because he has participated in its foundation: we learn for instance in 5. 15 that he has fought under Suwarrow in the Russian campaign against the Turks. Juan has been no such participant, and has none of the political motivations of his companion. His first contact with the East, moreover, is to be of an amorous rather than a warlike character⁷². The description of Juan as "a mere lad", at 5. 12, draws attention to the fact that Juan's whole encounter with the East is in

⁷² Q.v. 6. 28, where the harem is to Juan a "labyrinth of love".

the nature of a formative experience and bears little similarity to Johnson's set views. Byron has him utter an introspection, at 5. 25, which recalls the earlier allusion to Rousseau in the Dedication:

But after all, what *is* our present state?
'Tis bad and may be better – all men's lot:
Most men are slaves, none more so than the great,
To their own whims and passions, and what not;
Society itself, which should create
Kindness, destroys what little we had got:
To feel for none is the true social art
Of the world's stoics – men without a heart.

Whilst this oration is given no space to develop in the present context, it registers Juan's very different perception of social reality. The Eastern slavery which Johnson so dispraises is inverted in Juan's reply, and Juan's argument suggests that the greater danger lies in the West's own access to political power – and here it is difficult to miss the numerous local resonances that such a point conjures up: to Castlereagh, Elgin, Napoleon and the earlier catalogue of 'great' Europeans in the opening canto who all fail to advance European society much beyond the apparent 'barbarism' of the East. In fact, it is not inappropriate to question the very idea of European 'advancement' in the context of such an analysis. Clearly, a system of thought such as that articulated by Johnson, here a representative of imperial oppression, and which does not renounce the basic inhumanity of slavery has failed to appreciate Rousseau's moral and social arguments entirely.

The inversion of conventional European structures of representation, as Juan's analysis above, is continued in the subsequent action. Johnson's notion of an authoritative Western master / Eastern slave relation is similarly turned on its head as both he and Juan are subject to scrutiny by prospective *Oriental* masters, notably Baba, "a black old neutral personage / Of the third sex" (q.v. 5. 26). The inversion could not be more extreme, since Baba is himself an indentured servant to the sultana, Gulbeyaz. The ironic role-reversal here, where a servant is sent to procure additional slaves, is made the more poignant by the fact that Johnson's previous assertion of an innate Western superiority is subordinated to the lowliest of Oriental subjects. The negotiation for Juan's purchase at 5.

28 – 29 mirrors the earlier survey of women and animals by the male gaze in the old slave market at Cadiz. However, in place of the Western voyeur stands Baba, who appraises both Juan and Johnson with an eye for his mistress's sensual pleasure: "The eunuch, having eyed them o'er with care, / Turn'd to the merchant, and begun to bid" (q.v). As with the former depiction at Cadiz, Juan and his companion are reduced to the status of "human cattle" over which the eunuch and the merchant wrangle. This alteration in the Europeans' station is reiterated at 5. 54: "One or two stared the captives in the face, / Just as one views a horse to guess his price". Upon agreement, receipts are issued by the merchant (q.v. 5. 29) which provide a formal confirmation of their condition as objects purchased into the ownership of their new Eastern mistress. However, this arrangement proves to be riven with contradiction, as Juan's roles of lover and slave prove to be mutually exclusive.

Johnson's *blazé* assertion, at 5. 14, that their condition is a matter of "Fortune" reduces the question of personal and political freedoms to the level of coincidence, which Juan rightly resists on principle. However pragmatic Johnson's attitude may be in the circumstances, such a position remains morally indefensible – a case of "might makes right" that Juan's adherence to Rousseau prudently avoids. Juan's position moreover bears a larger structural ramification, and argues against the autocratic policies as deployed through individual characters – despots and tyrants such as Gulbeyaz, Lambro, etc. – and social or political institutions, of the kind that abrogate the rights of the individual.

The vision of harem life into which Juan is introduced, in his assumed role as "Juanna", conveys the reader to the very heart of what to the Western imagination comprises the Oriental mystique at its most opulent and sensuous. Few Westerners had ever been granted access to the Seraglio and certainly no males had penetrated its sanctity at this time. Byron's own descriptions thus depend upon the writings of Lady Mary W. Montagu for their authenticity – a rare occasion for which he could claim no first-hand experience. Juan's assumption of a feminine disguise, at 5. 73 - 80, serves to indicate the transgressive nature of the incursion on both the level of gender and of culture. However,

so unlike the much later narrative of T. E. Lawrence, Byron's protagonist does not pretend to possess supernatural powers of deception nor is he in control of his own circumstances. Despite his precarious position, he nevertheless acts as a conduit through which the reader is able voyeuristically to penetrate the East's most guarded space.

The literal meaning of the term 'harem' denotes a "prohibited place", taken from the Arabic *harama*, which means "prohibit". The aesthetic of the harem becomes to the Western imagination synonymous with the exercise of its own most repressed desires – a vicarious exploration, via the Oriental mode, of taboo that is outlawed in its own moral code and which the East, by virtue of the apparent seclusion which it offers from the moral precincts of Europe, permits full expression. However, Byron's earlier demonstration of the inappropriateness of the tendency to represent the East as sexual *tableau*, for instance in Juan's response to the sight of the Greek girls' bare ankles, reveals the disjunction between a phenomenological representation of the East, through Western eyes, and the functions of Eastern culture separate from such loaded structures of interpretation.

The reader's induction into the harem takes a circuitous detour through an Oriental *mise-en-scène*, which rehearses much of the stereotypical imagery present in traditional artistic and literary depictions of the East. Byron's narrative makes the crudity of these representational devices obvious by his self-conscious and ironic admission of their purpose, at 5. 42:

As they were plodding on their winding way
Through orange bowers, and jasmine, and so forth,
(Of which I might have a good deal to say,
There being no such profusion in the North
Of oriental plants, "et cetera,"
But that of late your scribblers think it worth
Their while to rear whole hotbeds in their works
Because one poet travell'd 'mongst the Turks) –

The description of Juan's "plodding" progress towards the sultan's palace, as well as the elision contained in the phrases "and so forth" and "*et cetera*", emphasizes the repetitive and clichéd style of conventional oriental depiction, and Byron's decision not to elaborate upon such picturesque description marks his own offering out as more true to life than the rehashed literary reduplication of his contemporaries. Similarly, at 5. 52 he disclaims the temptation even to articulate what he sees: "I won't describe; description is my forte, / But every fool describes in these bright days / His wondrous journey to some foreign court". However, the interest of Byron's own depiction can apparently not escape similar accusation despite his efforts at distancing himself from the pervasive aesthetic. In the end, the narrative does usher the reader through the impressively opulent halls of the seraglio and into its inner sanctum, the Oda; and the titillating aspect of Oriental life presented in his vision of the harem appears to repeat and reinforce precisely the notion of representational oversimplification that he seems at pains to avoid.

It is instead the framing narrative context informing Byron's representations of the erotic that permits us to appreciate his larger structural critique, namely, that all such depictions are subject to inscription by the viewer's foreign gaze, or by the writer's foreign pen. This effect is made obvious by the technique of narrative montage used to contrast the descriptions of the Eastern setting with a more familiar European setting. Thus at 5. 58, after a description of Juan's passage through the vast outer halls of the sultan's palace, the focus shifts unexpectedly back to the intimate setting of a "snug study on a winter's night". The disjunctive shift in locus and scale registers both the narrator's sense of displacement from his own culture as well as the anxiety of being overwhelmed by the vastness of a strange and unknown Orient into which he has insinuated himself⁷³. Juan's relation to his surroundings is quite distinct from either the reader's or the narrator's decoding of cultural signifier – whether artefact, locus or inhabitant – and is instead directed towards his own very personal circumstances. His role is not to act as voyeur,

⁷³ Here as always the narrative voice is very personal, and identifies Byron's own exiled condition with the narrator's sense of displacement. These recurrent points of contact between author and narrator present compelling evidence to suggest that the two are, in fact, one and the same person. My analysis thus treats of them both via the term 'author-narrator', though it remains necessary to differentiate 'authorial' functions from 'narrative' ones. Cf. David Simpson's argument that "Speaker and poet come together as distinguished in degree rather than in kind" (1979: 122).

however much his presence in the harem might reveal and however much this may serve the popular interest in the picaresque (and picturesque) tale that the narrator seeks to unfold. Rather, this effect is an ironic feature of narrative manipulation of which Juan, as character, seems almost wholly unconscious.

In contrast, the scene through which he moves so unaffectedly appears to the reader, in voyeuristic mode, to deploy all manner of exotic stereotype – via representations of the Orient’s reputed excesses: of wealth, carnality and an accompanying despotic severity in exercising such ownership. The verse swells under the weight of opulent description:

One wonder’d to do with such a number
Of articles which nobody required;
Here wealth had done its utmost to encumber
With furniture an exquisite apartment,
Which puzzled Nature much to know what Art meant.

(5. 64)

To such description is added numerous other confirmations of Oriental richness, which place the images of wealth at odds with a Western ethic of restraint. Pointedly religious terms are used to inflect the tone of observation. For instance, at 5. 65, the “movables” are “prodigally rich” and the sofas of such a cost that it is “half a sin to sit upon” them. The moral tone of the description also alludes to a more thoroughgoing critique of Oriental culture, and which represents its excesses as marks of moral decay. However, the eunuch Baba, far from being taken in by his surroundings, is quite oblivious to it: “without hardly deigning / A glance at that which wrapt the slaves in wonder” he marches through the halls. The contrast serves rather to draw attention to the Westerner’s own voracious appetite for wealth, and effectively inverts the dialectic opposition implicit in the narrator’s moralistic phraseology. Whilst the argument may hold true for the figure of a despotic sultan, its applicability to the larger oriental population is unfounded. Baba’s attempt to persuade Juan and Johnson to be circumcised (q.v. 5. 69 – 72) further suggests the primacy of Islam in the lives of its adherents, and overturns the insinuation of moral decay; and even the sultan himself makes religious obeisance upon awaking, at 6. 92.

The luxury and wealth of the palace might most usefully be viewed as a material confirmation of the sultan's despotic power. Though we are permitted little access to the sultan himself, by virtue of Juan's marginalized role as harem inmate, the brief sketch that we are provided with recalls the image of the tyrant in Byron's earlier writings. We learn for instance, at 5. 147, that he is a usurper. However, in the limited realm of the harem it is the notion of the gilded cage that provides the clearest image of the sultan's despotism. Like Giaffer in *The Bride of Abydos*, the sultan keeps his own offspring incarcerated for fear of insurgency:

His sons were kept in prison, till they grew
Of years to fill a bowstring or the throne,
One or the other, but which of the two
Could yet be known unto the fates alone

(5. 153)

Likewise Gulbeyaz, as Leila in the *Giaour*, despite her position as the sultan's favourite wife (q.v. 5. 146; 6. 12), is little better off – a “*peasant's quean*” (q.v. 6. 25) – and quite as incarcerated as the other harem inmates, if more luxuriously lodged. Whilst she nevertheless has great power in the context of the harem, and in many respects is quite as tyrannical as her husband the sultan⁷⁴, she remains subject to his will and is compelled to live out her existence in the prescribed bounds of the harem quarters. The depiction of the odalisques, at 5. 26: “a thousand limbs there / Beating for love, as the caged bird's for air” becomes crystallized in the later description at 5. 34, where “like birds” they “sing, dance, chatter, smile, and play”, having made their peace “between them and bondage”. As ever, Byron's narrative operates subversively and the comparison between the functions of the harem and that of “an Italian convent” (q.v. 5. 32) appear remarkably similar. Such an interpolation resists the tendency to classify the East in binary terms, in an attempt to elevate European social structures over their Asiatic correlatives. Through the comparison we see, rather, that certain structures of discrimination cut across cultural boundaries.

Throughout his sojourn in the seraglio, Juan is caught up in a paradoxical struggle to retain some semblance of his own masculinity whilst simultaneously being required to conceal this trait from its inmates. As Blackstone puts it:

[Juan] is here, emphatically, the love-victim; his very masculinity is threatened when the eunuch Baba dresses him in female garments and menaces him with castration (q.v. 5. 75). The Seraglio is a Lesbian world, in which Juan's hermaphroditism offers a mild titillation to Gulbeyaz's sexual palate.

(1975: 312)

This circumstance recreates a representational tension, already touched on in the earlier discussion of Juan's dark houri-like eyes, which disturbs the reader's engagement with the imagery of the harem women. The anticipated titillation is frequently problematized by Juan's intrusion into proceedings, not least because he frequently becomes, quite inappropriately to the Western male reader, the focus of the erotic gaze. Baba's careful attention to the details of Juan's appearance (q.v. 5. 73 – 80) meets with the sultan's approval (q.v. 5. 155); and later, once Juan has been interred in the harem, he is again remarked upon with envy by the other concubines:

After the first investigating view,
They all found out as few, or fewer, specks
In the fair form of their companion new,
Than is the custom of the gentle sex

(6. 37)

Byron's treatment of Oriental women is no less unsettling. Whilst occasionally treating of them erotically, he does so with a self-conscious sense of irony which finally frustrates the voyeuristic impulse even as it serves the more picaresque narrative purposes of Juan's progress through the Oriental milieu. The intersection between erotic gaze and narrative progression denies to the reader the moment of isolation which forms the basis of his erotic fantasy. Instead of an East which exists as a region discrete from the 'reality' of

⁷⁴ Juan's first contact with Baba is framed in terms of his fitness "for the purposed cage" (q.v. 5. 26), in an image which reduplicates the sultan's own domestic structure of control, the 'gilded cage'. Baba also hints at Juan's opportunities for advancement, notwithstanding the condition of Juan's incarceration (q.v. 5. 69).

Europe, and thus situated beyond its encompassing morality, Juan's constant presence underlines the continuity that exists between both worlds and effectively anchors the reader's response in an all-too-real context. Thus, when Juan "ogles" the odalisques' charms, "from breasts to backs", (q.v. 6. 29) the process of voyeurism at work is exposed to plain view. The reader as voyeur, here depicted in the figure of Juan, finds his voyeuristic intentions unmasked even if Juan himself remains in disguise.

Juan's risk of discovery serves to intensify the erotic aspect of the narration, but conversely, it also supplies a striking example of the Western reader's insistence on interpreting the East in purely exotic or erotic terms. The narrative recounts an otherwise unexceptional dormitory existence which, barring Juan's presence, would be quite mundane.⁷⁵ In fact, we might well question Juan's own erotic response to his situation. Given that he is aware that his discovery might lead to a swift demise (q.v. Baba's caution at 5. 92), it is rather more likely that Juan's state of mind is one of extreme anxiety. It is precisely when he is asleep, and unable to exercise conscious control over his actions, that the culminating crisis occurs: Dudu awakes with a scream, and recounts a bizarre dream (q.v. 6. 70) that appears quite incoherent but which Baba, suspecting it to be a metaphor of sexual awakening, deems best to suppress. In the event, Gulbeyaz orders Juan and Dudu's deaths and it is only through Baba's compassion that he is able to effect an escape.

VI.

Juan's flight from the harem marks the turning-point in his journey Eastwards. His subsequent travels follow a steady course back to Europe, and reveal the changes which his exposure to foreign lands has wrought in him. As in *The Siege of Corinth*, the geographical division between West and East represented by the city of Ismail (to which

⁷⁵ On a related point, Sharafuddin observes: "It should be noted that not even the most authentic sources – the records and narratives of travellers in the Orient – reproduced the perspective of the *native Arab*, for whom, presumably, the act of living in his own environment was no more *special* than for the native

Juan next travels) is a site of cultural conflict. However, in the political climate of a modern Europe, it is the Christian power of Russia that threatens the Turkish stronghold on the Danube. In the period between the Ottoman attack on Corinth in 1715 and the Russian invasion of Ismail in 1790, the balance of power had shifted considerably. The ensuing Russo-Turkish wars saw a dramatic weakening of Ottoman imperial influence, and the Turkish empire was thereafter viewed as the “sick man of Europe” – in steady decline until its eventual dissolution in the early part of the twentieth century.

The attack on Ismail thus dramatizes a recovery from Europe’s long period of threat of conquest by the Ottomans, and much of the seventh canto is given over to a triumphalistic celebration of the great Russian general, Suvarov’s (or Suwarrow’s, as Byron Anglicizes it) impending military success. Upon his arrival in the field, we are told, “matters took a different face” (q.v. 7. 47) from the hitherto ineffectual attack on the city; and the soldiers’ “enthusiasm and much applause” seems at odds with the task at hand. Byron’s treatment of the general’s cruel efficiency in warfare offers a trenchant criticism of such triumphalism and casts the Russians’ brutality as profoundly disturbing to any notion of a more civilized, Christian society. The description, at 7. 53, where Suwarrow trains his men by using practice dummies dressed in turbans serves as a prelude to the actual slaughter, and seems to encourage a kind of bloodlust in which the Eastern adversary is depicted in the crudest iconic terms – as “men with turbans, scimitars and dirks”. Johnson’s communication with Suwarrow, at 7. 61, is similarly severe: in place of recounting the party’s escape from Gulbeyaz he says simply, “I became a prisoner to the foe”. Suwarrow’s response is chillingly direct: “You shall have vengeance” – which rehearses a binary logic of reprisal that fails to take into account the mild treatment that Johnson experienced under his Turkish captors.

Suwarrow’s articulation that “plough or harrow / Shall pass o’er what was Ismail, and its tusk / Be unimpeded by the proudest mosque” reiterates the binary distinction described above. The symbolic image of the “proudest mosque”, as before, draws the two societies

Englishman in his. The traveller passed through – to him – unexpected, surprising and strange scenes, and for that very reason the scenes were designed to awaken wonder” (1996: 193).

into cultural-religious conflict and Suwarrow's intent is not merely to conquer; it is to eradicate. The image of the "plough or harrow" makes this clearer still, and the double entendre contained in the latter term connotes both a clearing of ground and a process of torture, 'to harrow'. The process of 'cultivation' suggested by the agrarian imagery is etymologically linked to the concept of 'culture' (q.v. Williams 1983: pp. 87 – 93), and the idea of applying the ploughshare to foreign lands in order to prepare them for a cultural replanting is thus well established. The reference to the ploughshare itself as a "tusk" reproduces the conflict on a ferine level, which anticipates the brutality of the Russian attack on Ismail.

Understood in these terms, Suwarrow's exhortation to glory is heavily ironic. Despite his depiction as a preacher, at 7. 64, it is rather the martial words of slaughter upon which the stress falls: "To *slay* the Pagans who resisted, *battering* / The *armies* of the Christian Empress Catherine" (my italics). The admission, a few lines previous, that "each high, heroic bosom burn'd / For cash and conquest" exposes the depravity of this pseudo-moralistic assertion to plain view. The reference to heroism in such a hypocritical context also recalls Byron's diatribe in the Dedication, and offers a confirmation of his earlier argument.

Byron's salute to Homer at 7. 79 – 81 makes clear the difference between the atrocity of modern warfare and the poetical rendering of war in the *Iliad*. In place of the picturesque focus on the deeds of individual heroes, there exists now only "escalade" (q.v. 7. 78). The catalogue of "Bombs, drums, guns, bastions, batteries, bayonets, bullets" replaces the old heroism, and indeed makes the very notion obsolete. The new image of war is of massed troops, not heroes, of whom Suwarrow can dispose "as so much dross" (q.v. 7. 77). The horrific scale of the massacre entailed by modern warfare is such, Byron asserts, that it cannot be rendered in similarly artistic terms – the modern descriptions are "Hard words, which stick in the soft Muses' gullets" (q.v. 7. 78). Byron's cynicism towards military glory, his adherence to the reality of suffering and waste that war entails, and his reference to " 'fading' martial immortality" all argue against the allure of figures such as Napoleon (referred to at 7. 82) as "butcher[s] in a great business" (q.v. 7. 83).

The graphic descriptions which open Canto Eight reinforce the sense of brutal conquest under Suwarrow's generalship. The classical imagery of "Mars" and "Bellona", we are told in the first stanza, "mean but wars". The profusion of "blood", "thunder" and "wounds" is "Glory's dream / Unriddled", and it is this lurid image which shall inform his own poetry. In place of the Homeric depiction of war as godlike, Byron instead draws from the darker side of classical mythology for his topography. The Russian army is represented as a lion that "march'd forth with nerve and sinews bent to slay" (q.v. 8. 2).⁷⁶ In a second image, the grotesque carnage of battle is presented as:

A human Hydra, issuing from its fen
To breathe destruction on its winding way,
Whose heads were heroes, which cut off in vain
Immediately in others grew again.

(8. 2)

The most noteworthy achievement in the Russian cantos is not Suwarrow's military successes (we may rightly call them also 'excesses', q.v. 8. 123) but rather Juan's rescue of an orphaned Moslem girl, Leila, from the marauding Russian forces. The description, at 8. 92, serves to contrast Juan's very different morality from the cruelty exhibited by the two Cossacks who chase after the young girl:

Two villainous Cossacques pursued the child
With flashing eyes and weapons: match'd with *them*,
The rudest brute that roams Siberia's wild
Has feelings pure and polish'd as a gem –
The bear is civilized, the wolf is mild;
And whom for this at last must we condemn?
Their natures? Or their sovereigns, who employ
All arts to teach their subjects to destroy?

(8. 92)

Juan's intervention also marks a changed relation for him on a personal as well as a social level: he finally achieves recognition in the masculine world of military conquest, but he

does not sacrifice his humanity in order to secure it. Even in the heat of battle Juan's participation is never an act of personal or political hatred, as Suwarrow's oration seeks to encourage in his men. Rather, he acts with "the best intentions" (q.v. 8. 25) and the narrative here equates his conduct in battle with the earlier amorous liaisons as being but another version of life through which he passes as a largely involuntary agent. As with his earlier adventures, he acts without consideration of his political role in the battle (as Johnson quite obviously does) but merely fights as well as he is able in the circumstances. At the close of the canto it is rather Juan's compassion that is emphasized, and we are told that he receives the order of St. Vladimir for this reason: "This special honour was conferr'd, because / He had behaved with courage and humanity... for saving [Leila] amidst the wild insanity / Of carnage" (q.v. 8. 140).

In *Leila*, we also witness Juan's first contact with a female character who does not hold sway over him. Rather, he for once is in a position to determine her fate. Juan's kindness towards *Leila* displays a moral maturity which is gained perhaps because he has himself been denied access to the corrupting influence of an entrenched patriarchy, and can relate on a very humane level to her suffering. Located thus outside of the political framework, he is able to view *Leila* as properly human, and not in Manichean terms as an oriental 'other' – as enemy, or foreigner, or victim.

Juan's success in war gains him access to Catherine's court as a herald; but it is once more his physical appearance that attracts the empress's attention. The narrative descriptions preceding Catherine's interest in Juan set the tone for his participation in the social life of St. Petersburg: he is cast as a cupid-figure, as "Love turn'd a lieutenant of artillery" (q.v. 9. 44), and attracts envious or amorous glances from all quarters. Despite the shift of scene from the Turkish harem to the court of a Christian empress (q.v. 7. 64), there seems little alteration in the nature of Juan's relation to the women he encounters. Catherine's rampant carnality, despite her location in the frigid climes of the North, develops further the argument against the earlier notion of a morality dependent upon

⁷⁶ The earlier "unriddled" suggests an associative link here with the mythological Sphinx – and certainly the army's viciousness supports the association (cf. also 9. 50, where the Sphinx is used as a trope for humanity's destructive tendencies).

purely geographical factors. The comparison, at 9. 59, deploys a series of Oriental images which, ironically, work to deconstruct this stereotypical notion of cultural difference, and at 10. 30 this notion is restated in unambiguous terms when Byron has Juan's Spanish relations admit that "with the addition of a slight pelisse, / Madrid's and Moscow's climes were of a piece". The disjunctive Oriental imagery of "East Indian sunrise" and "Arab deserts" that "drink in summer's rain" locate in Catherine the same sensuality – here depicting her limitless "ambition's thirst" – which was presumed only to exist in Eastern contexts. The narrator's earlier assessment of Catherine's imperial Russia, at 9. 23, is if anything more sinister than its Ottoman counterpart by virtue of its tendency towards totalitarianism: "I deem an absolute autocrat / *Not* a barbarian, but much worse than that".

Catherine's interest in Juan operates in terms which mirror Gulbeyaz's predatory gaze. Both look through imperial eyes which exercise a degree of control and ownership over the world in which they reign as sovereigns, and project an influence that extends beyond the merely ocular⁷⁷. Invested with the authority of such absolute power, the objects of their desire become also targets of their will to dominate. Thus, at 5. 108, Gulbeyaz's erotic engagement with Juan virtually assumes the force of command: "in her large eyes wrought, / A mixture of sensations might be scann'd, / Of half voluptuousness and half command". Despite her possessing "all the softness of her sex" (q.v. 5. 109), it is the cross-contamination of her political power with her femininity which renders her as simultaneously diabolical – as an ambiguous Satan-figure that is seductively "sweet", concealed in the guise of a dissimulating "cherub". Similarly, in the description of Gulbeyaz's feet (previously an erotic symbol), we encounter nothing feminine but only the masculine "self-will" of the tyrant: "they trod as upon necks" (q.v. 5. 111). Under the strain of such a skewed power relation, her interactions with Juan cannot operate outside of her own aura of authority and this renders her access to romantic love a *non sequitur*:

⁷⁷ We are told of Gulbeyaz, at 5. 113, that "Whate'er she saw and coveted was brought", in a transactional arrangement that admits of no failure (q.v. 5. 114). Baba's guaranteed success is perhaps the most certain indicator of the sultana's dread authority, and is nowhere more clearly portrayed than when she instructs Baba to summon Juan and Dudu before her upon hearing of their indiscretion in the harem: "Slave! / Bring the two slaves" (q.v. 6. 112).

Something imperial, or imperious, threw
A chain o'er all she did; that is, a chain
Was thrown as 't were about the neck of you, --
And rapture's self will seem almost a pain
With aught which looks like despotism in view:
Our souls at least are free, and 'tis in vain
We would against them make the flesh obey --
The spirit in the end will have its way.

(5. 110)

The passage above registers Juan's moral objection to such enforced love, which is later equated to lust in his dealings with Catherine, at 9. 77. In her role as sole potentate of Russia, Catherine is able to select her lovers with a freedom that is denied to Gulbeyaz. However, she is no less free from the corrupting power of her status as autocrat than is the sultana and she exercises the same intensity of ocular influence over Juan. As Franklin observes, Juan assumes the role of both male and female in his experiences in the Sultan's harem and the Russian court:

The unusual view of a man used in this way brings home to the reader the humiliating sexual exploitation of women accepted as normal in many societies...

Clearly, the poem demonstrates 'feminine' and 'masculine' behaviour as culturally rather than biologically determined.

(1992: 149 – 150)

We may add that the determining factor in assigning gender tends to be a function of the subject's relation to the question of imperial power.⁷⁸ The description, at 9. 67, in which Catherine gazes upon Juan, impresses upon the narrative her own version of events with the coercive assurance of one well used to being obeyed. "Her majesty looked down," we are told, "the youth look'd up -- / And so they fell in love". The language deployed here presents the two characters as perfectly in tune with the other's reactions, and the visual logic seems to articulate a mutual affection. However, the effect of such intimacy is achieved via a considerable elision: they are neither alone, nor at their ease. It is rather the empress's overarching desire which transforms their difference in station, implicit in the direction in which their respective gazes operate, into the physical attraction

⁷⁸ Q.v. Melman 1992: 316.

registered by the downward or upward inclination of their eyes. However Juan, for his part, has no real choice in the matter. Likewise, it is the empress's force of will that is able to shut out all other considerations, and permits her to act in the serene isolation of her own desires despite her observation by a hall full of attendants.

But the empress's description of Juan's reaction is not accurate, as the following stanza makes clear: "He, on the other hand, if not in love, / Fell into that no less imperious passion, / Self-love". Whilst the two characters do participate in a kind of relation of exchange, it is certainly neither an equal exchange nor are the commodities that are exchanged via their interaction what they each assume it to be – Juan is flattered by the empress's attentions, and Catherine wilfully interprets this to be a response to her own desires. The political ramifications of the characters' interactions are obvious to the onlookers, however, and at 9. 79 we are privy to some of the benefits which attach to Juan's role as protégé. The passage serves, more pointedly, to draw a comparison between Russia and England which reveals the latter society, despite its less autocratic legacy, to be lacking in simple generosity. For now, however, Byron contents himself with the ironic insinuation. At the close of Canto 10, and in the English cantos which follow, he permits full vent to his disdain for the state of British politics.

Juan's period in Russia constitutes perhaps the most serious challenge to his moral growth in the poem. The reference, at 10. 27, to Dante's "obscure wood", suggests the extent to which Juan has lost his way morally. The reference also alludes to the interaction between the process of aging and his moral integrity, which appear to be mutually exclusive functions of his characterization. Juan's success in war, as well as the assurance of his masculinity which his participation has secured produces in him a narcissistic admiration. For the first time, he lapses into a comfortable complacency in his own abilities. As with the earlier description of Gulbeyaz in Satanic guise, he comes to possess an ambiguous aspect: at 9. 47 the narrative informs us that he "look'd [like] one of the seraphim" but that "There lurk'd a man beneath the spirit's dress". Juan's access to manhood, in moral terms, connotes a deterioration in his character. Despite the insinuation, the narrative does not give direct evidence of Juan's behaviour. We are

simply informed that “His youth was not the chastest that might be” (q.v. 10. 54) – a condition linked to his actual age which is described as greater than his appearances suggest: the narrative indicates, at 9. 53, that he has “retain’d his boyish look beyond / The usual hirsute seasons which destroy”.

The growing awareness we have of Juan’s corruptibility is articulated perhaps most clearly in relation to his charge, Leila, where the narrative presents his affection for her in an uncertain light. We are told that his youth prohibits him from assuming a paternal role, and he is also unable to relate to her as a sibling (q.v. 10. 53). The disturbing disclosure that, in the circumstances, “there was no peril of temptation” (q.v. 10. 55) can be read as an allusion to the moral threat which aging, alternatively conceived of as worldly experience, represents in Juan’s depiction. The hint of his moral susceptibility moreover undoes much of the good that Juan has achieved by rescuing Leila in the first place, and leaves the reader in doubt as to how much above her Cossack attackers we are to consider him. As Bernard Blackstone observes,

As the narrative proceeds from Haidee’s island to the Seraglio, from the Seraglio to the Siege of Ismail, and on into the corrupt societies of St. Petersburg and London, Juan’s innocence (which is a matter not of principle but being) is gradually corroded.

...This is the danger run by a purely “natural” innocence without principles – the “unorganiz’d innocence” which Blake said was better called ignorance.

(1975: 313)

In the event, Juan still “loved the infant orphan” (q.v. 10. 55) in a forthright fashion. It should be borne in mind that the insinuation is an effect of narrative speculation and is not based upon any concrete thoughts or actions on Juan’s part. Leila, as the precocious “little Turk” who refuses to be converted, stands in stark contrast to Juan’s dubious morals and presents the reader with an image of purity which seems preferable to Juan’s descent into libertarianism. The reader’s identification with aspects of Eastern culture, for which Leila serves as a vehicle, reveals points of consonance which would ordinarily be rejected out of hand. Byron’s narrative thus uses the juxtaposition to interrogate the West’s own social corruptibility within a Christian context through the perspective of a

non-Westerner in such a way that his reader can only approve of his treatment – despite the dislocation. Such an effect deconstructs the differences between the two cultural perspectives on a human level, even as it accentuates those same differences by referencing Leila’s position as “Turk”. This leaves the reader in an ambiguous cultural space and serves to encourage a more cooperative, tolerant attitude in opposition to the harsh logic of the prevailing grand narrative which seeks to foreclose such lassitude in favour of narrowly ideological imperatives.

Juan’s departure from Russia occurs as a result of illness, and for which climate is finally deemed responsible (q.v. 10. 44). In dialectical terms, we may interpret his illness as symptomatic of the dissipated life he has led in St. Petersburg on a moral level. Juan’s innate goodness, however tarnished it threatens to become through his life experiences, seems the mainstay of his character and appears as indestructible as his enduring youthfulness. In this sense, the illness represents both symptom and cure as it secures his release from Catherine’s court. What is doubly ironic is that Juan’s moral degeneration occurs on the return trip, and outside of the geographical boundaries of the East.

VII.

The shift of scene from St. Petersburg to London sweeps the reader along with Juan and Leila through the heart of Europe, and the hitherto foreign landscape gives way to a more familiar setting as the narrative moves rapidly through Poland, Prussia, Germany and Holland to the cliffs of Dover. The catalogue of place names also reflects a growing sense of recognition, as we move from the broadly national terms of Russia’s “Petersburgh” and “Moscow” (q.v. 10. 49, 58); “Poland” and “Warsaw” (q.v. 10 58); “Prussia” and “Konigsberg” (q.v. 10. 60) to a closer intimacy with place, once Juan enters Germany. Once in the Rhineland, the number of place names which proliferate in the textual description provide an indication of the narrator’s familiarity with the scene through which he moves and include specific references to aspects of the physical terrain. The German landscape thus assumes presence in a way that the foreign landscapes of Asia

cannot achieve. In identifying particular aspects of landscape – the familiar shape of “the castellated Rhine” or the “frown” of the Drachenfels (q.v. 10. 61 – 62) – the narrator articulates his sense of relationship with the scene through which he passes. The term ‘land’ here connotes both a physical and a social space and is also, as the variant referent term ‘fatherland’ suggests, indivisible from its inhabitants’ intrinsic sense of cultural identity.

As much as the Rhine is a physical feature of landscape, it is also a place of residence and a site of historical, social and political moment. The tag phrases “castellated” and “frown” allude therefore to more than simple features of landscape; they also stand as geographical signifiers of Germany’s turbulent feudal history. The numerous other “Gothic” scenes conjure up a plethora of other more diffuse associations which exist in the region’s cultural domain as a version of the collective unconscious which unites its inhabitants via a shared historical memory. The inexhaustible allusive density of the German landscape, at once both temporally remote and symbolically rich, recalls Willhelm Schlegel’s sense of cultural vigour which draws its strength from a final inability to trace traditions to their origins when he writes: “the roots of life are lost in darkness; the magic of life rests on insoluble mystery” (Berlin 1999: 122).⁷⁹ The phrase also conveys the sense of cultural interconnection between the physical aspects of landscape, where seemingly ordinary landmarks as “A grey wall, a green ruin, rusty pike” (q.v. 10. 61) all fuse into a coherent narrative which binds present to past, and which serves to propagate a reassuring sense of primordial stability, or cultural cohesion, during unsettled times which threaten change on virtually every other level of existence. In this sense, the image of a “green ruin” suggests a historically regenerative fecundity which invigorates the German scene.

In contrast to the familiarity of the German landscape stands the vast and unfamiliar East, which despite its far larger extent is passed through much more rapidly. Indeed, it is by

⁷⁹ We may say, not just the “magic” of life but culturally construed meaning itself is preserved through such an unimpeachable social foundation. However, the robustness of a society so assured in its cultural life also reproduces longstanding prejudices which endure with equal tenacity. Forced by substantive

virtue of its unfamiliarity that so little is, or is able, to be articulated about the East – and again, in the very use of the inclusive term, ‘the East’, we are reminded of its monolithic and undifferentiated appearance to the European’s view. Though richly figured in the imagination, Byron’s narrative makes it clear that the physical Orient bears little relation to the fantastical depictions in Western literature. The dissonance between conventional literary representation and the actual physical landscape, its social processes and cultural symbols proves confounding. Only occasionally (perhaps with the sighting of a particularly famous landmark) does the Westerner’s expectation find agreement with his *de facto* experience of the East. Consequently, the traveller finds himself confronted with a largely impregnable landscape which reproduces none of the associative historical resonance found in Europe’s more familiar topography. One effect of such unfamiliarity produces only silence – mountains without recognizable names or histories merely form a picturesque backdrop to the foreigner’s Grand Tour. “History” in this sense is notably the history of Western thought and action, and whatever falls outside of its epistemological framework is consequently viewed as prehistoric – empty of both historical and cultural signification⁸⁰ and subject only to a process of excavation by its own scholars, who provide a suitable context or frame. Another notable effect is the tendency to inscribe landscape in terms which reproduce the viewer’s cultural perspective. Leila’s narrative function, upon encountering Europe, serves to invert the usual representation by replacing an unfamiliar East with what is to her an equally unfamiliar West. The inversion acts as a focalizer which permits the reader to perceive the world through Leila’s eyes, and reveals the process of cultural encoding through which she interprets its foreignness.

Juan’s engagement with Europe (unlike the narrator’s) occurs on a social rather than a political level. But before we are introduced to British society, we are privy to Leila’s baffled misapprehension of her new surroundings – a perceptive process which is instructive, despite her immaturity. Ironically, Leila’s simplistic interpretation of things

changes in political climate, such bias frequently finds refuge in such rhetorical devices as illicit jokes or derogatory slang.

⁸⁰ The priority accorded in travellers’ itineraries to sites which bear significance in Western historical narratives is an obvious expression of this historical imperative.

mirrors the West's own reductive tendencies in its engagement with the East, via its deployment of cultural, religious and political stereotype. At 10. 74, upon viewing Canterbury cathedral, we are presented with Juan's response: "The effect upon Juan was of course sublime". His appreciation, as the matter-of-fact tone makes clear, is based upon his familiarity with its importance as historical and cultural monument and he venerates the cathedral as the burial site of some of the country's great historical figures. Leila's response, by contrast, reveals the powerful shaping effect of her own Asiatic cultural background. Unable to access the Euro-centric structures of cultural-historical knowledge and signification, and embedded in the same East-West dialectic which reduces cultural perception to a process of binary distinctions on both sides of the cultural divide, she responds in an overly literal way when she learns of the cathedral's purpose:

being told it was "God's house", she said
He was well lodged, but only wonder'd how
He suffer'd 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)

The initial effect is humorous from the mouth of a child, and the reader is almost able to dismiss the crude rendering without much thought. However, the final line rings with a potency of feeling which seems both more serious and more intransigent than the rest of the stanza, and strains the limits of the reader's light-heartedness. Leila's imaginative transformation of Canterbury cathedral into a mosque reflects her innocence on the one hand, but also exposes the cultural bias inherent in the oppositional nature of her perception – for her, "God" can mean only Allah. Her interpretation additionally registers the history of rapine which ongoing warfare between Orient and occident has engendered, from the time of the Crusades onwards. The disturbing classification of the non-Islamic West as "Infidels" and "cruel Nazarenes" rehearses the West's own tendency to demonize the non-Christian Orient in wholesale moral terms, and Leila's role-reversal here operates ironically on the level of narrative. In seeking to challenge her cultural

misprision, the reader effectively deconstructs the same perceptual framework whereby the Orient is rendered through western eyes.

In addition, Leila's description of the effect of the protracted wars against Islam conducted by equally fundamentalist Christians gives a sense of the scale of the destruction wrought on regions of the East, which form her homeland. As before, the damage registers not just by the change of political borders but holds deep social ramifications. Since the reader has been witness to the destruction of Ismail, Leila's sense of loss is self-evident. The image of her "bent with grief" conveys the ruination which such an adversarial relation entails – one which takes its toll in lives, and which fractures the very fabric of her society by effacing its artifacts of cultural identity. In empathizing with her shock, the reader is also encouraged to imagine what such destruction might mean in a European context and, for perhaps the briefest instant, an image of Canterbury in ruins flashes upon the mind's eye⁸¹.

Once Leila is installed in English society, however, her experience becomes disturbingly glossed as a "romantic history" or "kind of fashionable mystery" (q.v. 12. 27). The English women's failure to appreciate, as the reader does, the reality of Leila's suffering reduces her past to a version of the fantastical Oriental tale. Leila herself becomes little more than a stereotype, with her "orient eyes" and "taciturn Asiatic disposition" – culturally loaded terms which reduce her to a similarly quaint and not-quite-real entity, a kind of fairy creature whose words are not to be taken quite literally. Byron's earlier portrayal of Leila amidst the carnage of Ismail makes the women's cultural condescension obvious, however, and reveals their contracted view of the world. Unable to view Leila's circumstances for themselves, and unwilling to believe what she recounts, they instead fashion a narrative out of her appearances based upon stereotype, ironically viewing this as more representative of her identity than the description she gives at first hand.

⁸¹ I refer to Keats's notion of 'negative capability', whereby one might enter imaginatively into the existence of another. Byron's use of Leila appears a device expressly designed to encourage this effect in the reader.

Our first view of London is an unglamorous sight: it is “Dirty and dusky”, and is wreathed in “A huge, dun cupola” of smoke (q.v. 10. 82). The jarring fusion of Oriental architectural features with the waste products of modern European industrialism operates to defamiliarize the city in such a way as to convey its utter foreignness to both Juan and (especially) Leila to the reader. The enjambment of the phrase “forestry / of masts” also heightens the change in scene from a pastoral, pre-industrial Oriental setting to England’s rapid state of urbanization. The image also suggests the scale of the destruction of rural England which the pursuit of wealth through industry and commerce entails. “But Juan saw not this”, we are told:

each wreath of smoke
Appear’d to him but as the magic vapour
Of some alchymic furnace, from whence broke
The wealth of worlds (a wealth of tax and paper):
The gloomy clouds, which o’er it as a yoke
Are bow’d, and put the sun out like a taper,
Were nothing but the natural atmosphere,
Extremely wholesome, though but rarely clear.

(10. 83)

The depiction of London’s pollution as somehow salubrious reveals a considerable naïveté on Juan’s part. The narrator’s contrasting reference to a mundane world of “tax and paper” operates to demystify the vision,⁸² and reminds the reader that Juan’s imaginative transformation of London into a place of “alchymic” wonderment correlates with the Westerner’s tendency to view the East in similarly affected mystical terms – as exotic, erotic, etc. What appears ridiculous in Juan’s perception is in fact a habitual process in which the Westerner himself engages, and which results in a similar degree of misrepresentation. As Juan comes to a halt on Shooter’s Hill to survey the scene, Byron’s voiceover makes it clear that what is to follow will expose the depravity of English society – he playing the role of a Virgil, with the Dantesque reader following in the wake of his revelatory footsteps (cf. 10. 27). Indeed, for Byron the analogy serves well to describe his own position *vis-à-vis* English society, and certainly the impression one has

⁸² Writing of the shift to suburban London, Blackstone notes: “the names of ‘rows’ and ‘prospects’ mock the reality; the Paradise theme, hitherto Byron’s basic myth, is degraded” (1975: 327).

of his depiction is of entering the frozen ninth circle reserved for traitors. Juan in this sense operates vicariously, and masquerades as his more successful *alter ego* in a society where Byron himself failed to find acceptance. The return to England, through verse, seems a bittersweet kind of triumph in which he exposes its hypocrisy rather than secures a position of respectability for himself, either as artist or as man. For all intents, Juan is himself unaware of this dimension but always in the background is the intrusive irony and sarcasm of Byron: the author-narrator – commenting, expounding, satirizing all that passes into view and revealing the truth behind appearances.

When the narrative picks up in the following canto, we find Juan delighting in England's reputation as a place where "laws are all inviolate" (q.v. 11. 10). However, he is then straightaway set upon by a band of thieves. This amusing reality check provides the opening salvo (cf. Byron's threat of "broadside", 10. 84) for what will develop into a trenchant critique of British society despite its outward appearance of respectability, and which is further conveyed in Byron's depiction of London as a modern "Babylon" (q.v. 11. 23). Juan's ambiguous description as a "diplomatic sinner" (q.v. 11. 29) coupled with the grandiose reference to London's prostitutes as "pedestrian Paphians" (q.v. 11. 30) pokes fun at the tawdry state of human affairs. Described as "Commodious but immoral", the women serve as a trope for London life in all its variety (cf. 12. 24, "menagerie").

Juan's position as Russian ambassador carries him away from the city squalor and into the company of aristocratic London society. In keeping with the amorous character of his previous adventures, Juan's reputation has preceded him and he discovers himself "extremely in the fashion" with the English women (q.v. 11. 33). The epithet of "bachelor" obtains a double entendre – suggesting both his marriageability, and his refinement (q.v. 11. 47). Juan's presence excites a reaction from young unmarried women and wedded wives alike, and provides the first hint that the morality of the English (representative of the West) may not be altogether that much different from its Oriental rival. His interactions with the men of state, by contrast, are more strained and the question of political affiliation is at once raised, along with the inevitable duplicity which that entails (q.v. 11. 36, 40).

The narrator's advice for one attending the numerous dinners and other social engagements, spoken with an air of personal experience, is revealing. He recommends only caution and patience in "perus[ing]" either "heiress" or "neighbour's bride". Social conduct, it appears, is thus less a question of morality than of obeisance to custom and, unsurprisingly, Juan finds himself shortly embroiled in numerous sexual intrigues once again.⁸³ The treatment of the English women as objects of male desire, to be "ogle[d]" (q.v. 11. 72) and practised upon regardless of their status describes a situation little different from the condition of Eastern women examined earlier. In place of the tyrannical figure of the Sultan who incarcerates his fifteen hundred concubines in the physical structure of the harem is Europe's myriad of petty patriarchs who preside over a social structure which holds women in subjection to male desire quite as effectively, or more so, since it is a systemic feature of social existence. In place of the physical confinement of the harem, the Western woman is enclosed in a gilded cage whose bars are the social conventions which limit her free action, and compel her to play a role which conforms to her society's (historically male) dicta.⁸⁴ So long as she participates in its rituals, the woman is permitted a degree of autonomy but there is never any doubt as to the conditional nature of her freedom: the narrator's allusion to "*politesse*" (q.v. 11. 43) refers not only to the importance of correct speech in aristocratic circles; the term describes also the rigour with which polite society polices the behaviour of its membership. As Blackstone remarks of the shift into an English setting, "We are in a fossilized world, remote from the fluid passions of the Mediterranean" (1975: 332). The Lady Adeline's great social virtue, for instance, is her "calm patrician polish" (q.v. 13. 34). As Caroline Franklin argues,

The character of Lady Adeline is a complex analysis of the artificiality of western femininity: both a masculinist satire of a salon *précieuse* and political hostess and

⁸³ In this sense, Juan's political station of ambassador is incidental to his existential condition in the poem and merely provides a means of transposition from Russian society to that of England. The political dimension of his position is explored instead on the meta-level, via the digressions of the author-narrator. On the level of character, what is paramount is Juan's moral-psychological progress, which operates to interrogate and compare the various societies through which he moves.

⁸⁴ Writing of Lady M. W. Montagu's depictions, Sharafuddin notes: "In particular, she sought to combat the idea that Muslim women were more enslaved by men in the Islamic East than in the Christian West." (1996: 218).

yet, more importantly, a sympathetic rendering of the self-repression of the female libido demanded by English society.

(1992: 160)

The artificial nature of such an effect of role-play is evident in Juan's reflections on Lady Adeline, at 16. 96:

Juan, when he cast a glance
On Adeline while playing her great *rôle*,
Which she went through as though it were a dance,
Betraying only now and then her soul
By a look scarce perceptibly askance
(Of weariness or scorn), began to feel
Some doubt how much of Adeline was *real*

The importance of *appearance*, above all else, is in English society the crucial measure of legitimacy. Such an emphasis reproduces a social mechanism which turns upon hypocrisy in order to conceal its inevitable indiscretions. "What is a lie?" the narrator asks pointedly: "'Tis but / The truth in masquerade" (q.v. 11. 37). Later, we are informed that "good society is but a game" (q.v. 12. 58) in which it is the women who have everything to lose: "in old England, when a young bride errs, / Poor thing! Eve's was a trifling case to hers" (q.v. 12. 64). Despite the supposed virtue of the English, Byron's exposure of the social games that are played reveals that in fact the business of life differs insignificantly from elsewhere, and that promiscuity is quite as rife.⁸⁵ Juan too, though initially unconvinced of the English women's passion – described via the distinctly unromantic montage of "white cliffs, white necks, blue eyes, bluer stockings, tithes, taxes, duns, and doors with double knockings" (q.v. 12. 67) – gradually becomes aware that his evaluation is based on an unfamiliarity with their customs. Later on, however, we are told that the Englishwoman may "take to a *grande passion*" and "be a tornado" (q.v. 12. 77). In this way, through the counterpoint of competing narrative strands – one which casts the West as moral, the other which depicts the East as sensual – Byron's portrayal reveals a surprising similarity of operation on the human level between social circumstances in East and West. The binary nature of the opposition is thus shown to be inappropriate in

⁸⁵ Byron's use of the anonymous "Blank-blank square" as the address of Lord Henry, we are told, is to avoid unintentional embarrassment to any of London's actual residents. He says, "I name not square, street,

assessing culture, and suggests that such a construction serves political ends rather than registering real distinctions.

In the thirteenth canto we are introduced to the Lady Adeline Amundeville, alluded to briefly above, in whose company Juan frequently finds himself for the remainder of the poem. At the outset, the reader is made privy to a liaison between them:

Destiny and Passion spread the net
(Fate is a good excuse for our own will)
And caught them

(13. 12)

However, as the subsequent narrative makes clear, this is not the whole story. The narrator is merely telling the tale “as it is told”, a detail which makes it apparent that their association is a subject of gossip rather than of scandal.⁸⁶ Of the Lady Adeline, indeed, the narrator relates: “Chaste was she, to detraction’s desperation” (q.v. 13. 14). Despite this assurance, the reader is nevertheless left in some doubt: she and her husband, Lord Henry, “seem’d secure” – an equivocal phrase which recalls the earlier aspect of social duplicity and which opens up a space for amorous possibilities which is left tantalizingly uncertain. Juan is at any rate spared this complication, as Lady Adeline assumes the role of mother-figure. In this sense, she is related to the harem-matron in the Turkish cantos, and quite as complicit in her role as hostess as the latter is in her circumstances. The complicity of women in perpetuating the material conditions of their subjection under patriarchy forms a disturbing social backdrop to this representation, and Lady Adeline’s depiction as a coin “Bright as a new napoleon from its mintage” conveys this tension well. By her support of her society’s social structures, she effectively acts as an agent of male power – ascribed worth according to her adherence to a predetermined patriarchal social currency.

place, until I / Find one where nothing naughty can be shown” (q.v. 13. 27). By thus failing to find a suitable location in which to set his fictional household, he insinuates that all of London society is tainted.⁸⁶ This detail contains pointed autobiographical resonance, as Byron was frequently the object of public speculation of this kind. Franklin’s observation that the link between literary reference and reality “indicates that the personal is political” is a useful means of apprehending these passages (q.v. 1992: 120).

Lord Henry stands as a stock figure for the British aristocracy's tendency towards self-aggrandizement, sure in his own sense of self-worth (q.v. 13. 15 – 21). The by-now-familiar English attitude of condescension towards non-Britons is obvious in the way he approves of Juan's deference to himself despite being "in birth, in rank, in fortune likewise equal" (q.v. 13. 20).⁸⁷ It is difficult not to identify Lord Henry with the unfortunate Don Alfonso of earlier, and the dropped reference to "Oedipus" along with Lady Adeline's description as a "Queen-Bee" further compounds the reader's expectations in this regard (q.v. 13. 12 – 13; also "domestic treason" of 13. 26).

In her role as hostess, Lady Adeline shines as an example to the other women. Where the less chaste amongst them require safety in numbers in order not to be led astray by their natural tendency towards vice (q.v. 13. 30), the Inez-like Lady Adeline seems impervious to all hint of indiscretion. And like the austere Donna Inez with whom the poem opened,⁸⁸ there is an undercurrent of resentment from the ranks of 'lesser' women. Lady Adeline's virtues are conveyed in similarly uncomplimentary terms – not exactly negative, but not commendable either. She is "polite without parade" (13. 32); she flatters without dishonour (*ibid.*); and is not given to excessive enthusiasm (13. 35). However, despite her restraint the narrative reveals a far more vibrant creature beneath her appearances: we are told that she is like "a volcano" beneath the "snow", and "smother[ed]" by the smoke of her own repressed passion (q.v. 13. 36). A second image, perhaps more in keeping with her role as hostess, casts her repression as productive of an intensity of passion like to a frozen bottle of champagne which yet yields "a liquid glassful" of concentrated juice which "is stronger than the strongest grape / Could e'er express in its expanded shape" (q.v. 13. 37). Byron's comment that "such are many" serves to implicate the reader, and by extension English society at large, in an unsettling way which persists despite his disclaimer that "I only meant her" (q.v. 13. 38).

⁸⁷ Q.v. also Juan's encounter earlier, with his would-be robbers, at 11. 13: Tom utters the habitual slur against the French despite knowing nothing of Juan's origins.

⁸⁸ This return to origins conveys the sense that very little progress has, or can, be made in the journey of life: cross-culturally, the problems inherent in human relations are essentially the same.

The reiterated emphasis on the mutability of love once confined to the precincts of marriage further hints at the social intrigues that ferment just below the surface of vision. Such an apprehension strains the notion of moral respectability upon which such a society's standards are based, when virtue is more a result of "tact" or dissimulation (q.v. 12. 66) than of actual adherence to a principle. Consequently, the moral judgements passed upon Eastern society appear wholly hypocritical in light of Europe's demonstrated lack of a coherent social morality of its own. In fact, to speak of 'morality' at all as a shaping influence in external cultures is to impose a terribly tyranny upon them. All cultural formations reproduce their own unique structures, and to impose an external moral code of practice is to violate the very terms of the other culture's mode of existence. Byron's frequent references to his poem's "moral" purpose (q.v. for instance 13. 38) must thus be read ironically – in the end, the moral lesson to be learnt is that morality itself is an inappropriate means of evaluating either one's own or another's culture. For Byron's purposes, morality exists rather to reveal the hypocrisy in taking a fundamentalist stance on issues of cultural difference. Morality may serve as an index to acceptable social behaviour within a culture, but even within the confines of one's own culture the limits are evident: a general moral dictum often comes into conflict with personal desire, or actual social practice.

Much space is given over to descriptions of the social activities of wining and dining – so much so, in fact, and in such copious detail, that some commentary is necessary. Byron's descriptions of the various banquets lapse into an excess which puts on display the aristocracy's own tendency towards overindulgence – an accusation more conventionally ascribed to the sensualism and wastage of Eastern culture. We may take as a precedent the feasting reported in *Antony and Cleopatra*,⁸⁹ where Enobarbus's description of the Egyptians' culinary excess can scarcely be said to be more impressive:

Eno. Ay, sir, we did sleep day out of countenance; and
made the night light with drinking.

Maec. Eight wild-boars roasted whole at a breakfast, and
but twelve persons there; is this true?

⁸⁹ Byron has already made reference to *Ant. & Cleo.* at 6. 4. (q.v). Cf. also 15. 53.

Eno. This was but as a fly by an eagle: we had much more monstrous matter of feast, which worthily deserved noting.

(2. 2. 177 – 183)

Against this fulsome quantity of food and drink, which is ironically only a breakfast and thus suggestive of an even greater excess than the description portrays, stands the austere world of Rome with its sober habits and its emphasis on moderation. In English society, the nomenclature is perhaps more sophisticated (*ragoût*, "soupe à la *bonne femme*," etc.) but the same gormandizing is evident in its well-heeled patrons (q.v. 15. 62 – 74; 16. 78) who, disturbingly, have more in common with the Egyptians than with the more moderate Romans despite the elegant diction. What Shakespeare's play usefully highlights in the partisan figure of Mark Antony is the final inconsistency in dividing societies into binary camps, of 'uncivilized Egyptian' versus 'moderate Roman'. Our common humanity is rather a heterogenous mix which encompasses all passions, rational or not, irrespective of cultural imperatives or moral codes. Thus the misleading aspect of *appearance*, already evident in Lady Adeline's outer decorum which conceals an inner fire, is again shown to be an unreliable index of identity – culturally or personally construed.

In the final cantos Juan's attention is preoccupied with the figure of Aurora Raby, a woman whose youth and innocence link her associatively to his previous Greek *inamorata*, Haidee. Aurora has the same "large, dark eyes" which have come to symbolize sensuality (q.v. 16. 31) throughout the poem. However, the shift from the Greek scene to the morally fastidious society of England permits a markedly different expression of feminine perfectibility. In place of the sun-kissed sensuality of a Haidee, represented via the vibrant image of the flower, we discover in Aurora Raby the austere beauty of the gemstone (q.v. 15. 58).⁹⁰ As Franklin notes,

⁹⁰ Cf. also 15. 43, where Aurora is "A rose", but one with "all its sweetest leaves yet folded", thus lacking the vigour and bloom of a Haidee.

Aurora is Byron's portrait of the modern woman: newly confident of her moral value to society, she refuses to be continually judged through the medium of her sexuality.

(1992: 158)

The distance implied by the crystalline structure of the gemstone,⁹¹ at once visually brilliant and physically hard, is evident in Aurora's beauty and her social reticence. Unlike the other women, she is unmoved by Juan's dandyism: "she was nothing dazzled by the meteor," we are told, "Because she did not pin her faith on feature" (q.v. 15. 56), and Lady Adeline is likewise perturbed by her silence (q.v. 15. 53). In analyzing Lady Adeline's somewhat hostile disapproval of Juan's interest in Aurora, the narrator hints at her reasons without offering a conclusive opinion. However, the classical allusion at 15. 49 makes the insinuation clear: like the image of Brutus *vis-à-vis* the emperor Tiberius, Aurora's "pure" presence (q.v. 15. 52) has the effect of exposing the artifice of the social ritual in which she participates.

Juan's access to Aurora hinges upon his return to the innocence of his younger days, before he was transformed into the dandy he has subsequently become. It is clear that Aurora's attraction to him occurs both as a result of the shock which his encounter with the 'ghost' of the Black Friar, and of the sobering alteration which this effects in him (q.v. 16. 31; 91 – 94; 106 – 108). However, the somewhat depressing realization is that, for Juan, such a return to innocence is only ever fleeting and no longer forms a part of his character in the ordinary sense. Despite him having more-or-less been the target rather than the prosecutor of his amorous liaisons, it is clear that his virtue has nevertheless been compromised. The question that is left undisclosed at the poem's end is this: does Aurora represent, as her name suggests, an opportunity for Juan's moral reawakening – or is mimicry now his only avenue forward? It would be difficult to prefer either of these notions, as Juan's growing disgust with polite society has been evident since his sojourn at Catherine's court. But whether this argues for his own emergence into self-awareness appears equally unlikely, given his utility to Byron as a fulcrum for the deployment of his persistent irony. Juan's innate goodness and its gradual corruption in the face of worldly evil requires his acquiescence in this respect, in order to preserve the singularity of moral

purpose which the narrative seeks to promulgate. Any profound state of consciousness in Juan, or any sense of volition in the matter, would destroy the neat structure of the poem on this level.

The poem's projected later cantos were to locate Juan at Waterloo, which suggests a deepening of the fissures that are opened up in the English cantos to include a critique of Europe *in toto* rather than a comfortable and convenient resolution of the kind offered in *CHP*. In this sense, the poem's final form assumes the shape of a devastating cultural critique which debunks the superficial distinctions by which his culture typically sought to define itself, as Western, European, and civilized. In place of such skewed structures of representation, a picture of a common humanity emerges in opposition to the discourse of superiority.

This is not to imply that our cultural vision through the course of the poem is free of prejudice. In fact, my analysis argues quite to the contrary. We are consistently aware, through the figure of Juan, of its birth and existence in a European readership: Juan is the creation of a Western author immersed in the literary and political life of his society, and the writing expresses this consciousness at every turn. Juan exists to challenge its moral and political excesses, and also to promote his creator's very insistent views of life as featured in the consciousness of Europe, despite his condition of exile. In this sense, what is offered cannot claim more than a passing, and superficial authenticity of non-Western cultural life. Inasmuch as the poem suggests a larger world than that conceived by a Western literary tradition, that is to say, inasmuch as it suggests a culture which exists independently of Europe's ability to define it, Byron's art acts as an invaluable corrective. As so often it is difficult to distinguish between "art" and "life" in the poetry, the established notions of culture and identity are likewise corroded by his treatment of Eastern representation through the poem – a vital step in challenging the ingrained historical prejudice which persists to the present day.

⁹¹ At 15. 43 she also "shone like a young star" – another image which implies detachment.

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CONCLUSION: Byron in Africa
Post-Apartheid South Africa and J. M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*

In the space usually reserved for summation, I wish briefly to consider the particular relevance which the figure of Byron may acquire, on a representational level, in a South African context. In accordance with my aim of extending the purposes of literary analysis to embrace real social relations, I will conclude my discussion by examining J. M. Coetzee's recent novel, *Disgrace* (1999), where the main character, David Lurie, views himself as a version of fallen Byron-figure.

Since many of Coetzee's lead characters are in some way alienated from their societies or themselves, we may view the depiction as representative, if ironically so, of a particular sector of contemporary South African existence. For Coetzee, who writes with a similar sense of social alienation which we observe in Byron's works, this comprises his ambiguous relation to the white middle class which provided both a vehicle for his resistance against Apartheid, and also marked his status as a member of the historically privileged class. In his 1987 *Jerusalem Prize Acceptance Speech*, Coetzee writes:

The masters, in South Africa, form a closed hereditary caste. Everyone born with a white skin is born into the caste. Since there is no way of escaping the skin you are born with (can the leopard change its spots?), you cannot resign from the caste. You can imagine resigning, you can perform a symbolic resignation, but, short of shaking the dust of your country off your feet, there is no way of actually *doing* it.

(1992: 96)

This tension in the identity of the white liberal in South Africa hinges upon the same tension which Byron, in his role as whig-liberal, faced in relation to the repressive apparatus of imperialism in his society. In this sense, both Byron's antiheroes and Coetzee's protagonists share a common point of view, namely, that of resisting in some way the political status quo of their respective societies. In each, the same themes of exile and moral incompatibility resurface, and Coetzee's often-stated disavowal of writing as an effective means of bringing about political change echoes Byron's own disavowal of

poetry as a serious (by which he means an effective political) pursuit. The operation of romantic irony in Byron's verse has a correlative in Coetzee's fractured prose, or what may be reclassified, on one level, as the cynical irony of postmodernist representation which his writing conveys.⁹² Both forms call into question their society's ideological structures and, in each, closure is eschewed in favour of a more open-ended conclusion, one in which history remains an integral part of the lives of the characters in a damaged society.

Coetzee has often been accused, quite unfairly, of not offering a sufficiently vocal criticism of Apartheid. Such an evaluation fails to recognize the grounded approach to the effects of the state's policy of racial oppression which his writings seek to represent. Concerning the question of describing the horror of Apartheid torture, Coetzee asks:

How is the writer to represent the torturer? If he intends to avoid the clichés of spy fiction, to make the torturer neither a figure of satanic evil, nor an actor in a black comedy, nor a faceless functionary, nor a tragically divided man doing a job he does not believe in, what openings are left?

(1992: 364)

Coetzee argues against the tendency to represent the atrocities of the Apartheid regime as a kind of "dark lyricism" (365), as do authors such as Sipho Sepamla, Mongane Serote and Alex La Guma (q.v. Coetzee's analysis of their particular literary styles, 364 – 366). He writes, "I am not arguing that the world of the torturer should be ignored or minimized" (ibid), and proceeds to offer the following commentary on Breyten Breytenbach's *True Confessions of an Albino Terrorist*:

Because it is an interim report, a partial biography of a phase of Breytenbach's life, *True Confessions* does not have to solve the problem that troubles the novelist: how to justify a concern with morally dubious people involved in a contemptible activity; how to find an appropriately minor place for the petty secrets of the security system; how to treat something that, in truth, because it is offered like the Gorgon's head to terrorize the populace and paralyze resistance, deserves to be ignored.

(366)

⁹² Q.v. David Simpson's definition (*Irony and Authority in Romantic Poetry*).

What is needed, he contends, is the elimination of “false optimism” (368). As an example of what he intends, he cites a passage from Nadine Gordimer’s *Burger’s Daughter* (q.v. 366 – 368) in which the reductive tendency to view all actions as contingent upon the context of political oppression limits personal action to an either / or scenario: “to *either* looking on in horrified fascination... *or* turning one’s eyes away” (368). However, despite anticipating a revolutionary change to replace Apartheid’s despotism with a democratically free society in which the act of interpretation is not subject to a coercive morality governed by state policy, Coetzee argues that “revolution will put an end neither to cruelty and suffering, nor perhaps even to torture” (368). This apprehension seems to me to be key in understanding the vision which is offered in *Disgrace*, as it appears remarkably consistent with the trajectory which Coetzee’s writing has followed through the course of the political changes which have occurred in South Africa over the past several decades.

Disgrace is a novel which burst upon the world literary scene by virtue of its unapologetic portrayal of the violence endemic in post-Apartheid South African society. The portrayal of its characters and events is written in such vivid, unflinching prose that we may say the narrative presents a hyper-real description of the problems and people that are represented. Part of this effect is generated through Coetzee’s deployment of certain autobiographical features in the character of Lurie. In consequence of this, Lurie acquires a vigour which derives from the reader’s conflation of his views with that of the author much as Harold or Juan is viewed as representative of Byron’s personality. However, in the case of Lurie / Coetzee, the author has taken a particular pleasure in modelling his character’s circumstances very closely on his own. Lurie is, we learn, a lecturer like Coetzee. The abbreviation of the institution for which he works (TUC) is a convenient rearrangement of the letters of Coetzee’s own place of work (UCT). Moreover, the two are approximately the same age and, the reader may suspect, they appear to share similar personality traits. But as I have argued elsewhere, this ambivalent if provocative arrangement is finally irreducible from its parodic or mimetic elements and serves only to reify the character description within its political context.

Perhaps the most effective achievement of the novel is its depiction of the perceived threat to the stability of life for the white middle class under a post-Apartheid regime. The time of the white liberal is over, as Lurie's own position makes clear. Conscious of his own redundancy in a society which has since moved on from the political and, in his case, educational structures which existed under the Apartheid regime, he can at most only mime in an unconvincing way the tasks which formerly comprised his privileged access to power. As Sharafuddin points out, the role of the exile poses a crisis of identity:

The question then arises as to what role is left for such as Byron, who, like Childe Harold sitting among the ruins of the Parthenon, can *see* but cannot *do*, whose knowledge is in inverse proportion to his powers of action. In such contexts, any attempt to act must end in paradox and confusion.

(1996: 260)

What indeed, Coetzee appears to be asking, is the role of the ageing white liberal in a post-Apartheid society? The danger appears to be that he may sink into an uneasy racial solidarity in his attempt to make a stand against the violence which threatens him. The book documents Lurie's interactions with members of the previously disenfranchised community – Soraya, a Moslem prostitute; Melanie, a young coloured student; Petrus, a black tenant farmer on his daughter's smallholding; and others. Where once David would have been insulated from the bruising encounters which result, he now discovers himself unable to relate in any productive way to what occurs; finds himself unable to grasp the continuing nature of the exploitation which his casual engagements with each of them evince. His inability to adapt to the changed circumstances isolates him from the wider society and it is rather Lucy, his stubborn lesbian daughter for whom he harbours a tender parental disapproval, that provides the novel's most lucid and shocking political thrust.

Her decision not only to keep the child which results from her rape by three black men (notably one of the most persistent nightmares in white middle class racial paranoia), but also her consent to marry her tenant farmer, Petrus, embraces a palpably different social milieu from the outmoded ethos of her father. In response, Lurie says to Petrus, “ ‘This is not how we do things, ’ ” (1999: 202), and the narrative continues: “*We*: he is on the point of saying, *We Westerners*”. The sense of division deepens when Lurie encounters Pollux,

the youngest of Lucy's rapists, and he observes that the boy is "the one whom Petrus called *my people*" (206). The narrative records Lurie's reaction when he is incensed into violence himself by the boy's appearance: "Phrases that all his life he has avoided seem suddenly just and right: *Teach him a lesson, Show him his place*". In contrast, Lucy's acceptance of Petrus as husband (which she agrees to in title only), places her under the aegis of an African social arrangement. For such integration, and its guarantee of future safety, she is required to concede ownership of the farmland surrounding her property. Such an arrangement is shocking – for both black and white communities – precisely because it takes such clear account of the racial history between blacks and whites in a country which has traditionally refused to acknowledge any such inequality as at all relevant. The allegorical temper of the description is obvious, and argues for a signal change in the mindset of both communities. The change which is proposed, however, is by no means an easy one; and its circumscribed placement in the context of the rural Eastern Cape, significantly distant from the urban centre of Cape Town, hints at the complexity – perhaps even the impossible complexity – which is implied by *bona fide* social change.

An equally radical suggestion may be found in Byron's verse, in his notion of the 'forgiveness curse' from *CHP IV* (q.v. St. 135), where he argues against the senseless cycle of self-slaughter which comprises human history in favour of a more peaceful and cooperative existence. "And wherefore slaughter'd?" he asks, and answers: "wherefore, but because / Such were the bloody Circus' genial laws, / And the imperial pleasure" (4. 139). With the replacement of the "bloody Circus" of the Apartheid regime by a democratically elected ANC government, one might have hoped for just such a cessation in internecine strife. The work of public reconciliation brokered by men such as Nelson Mandela and Desmond Tutu did much to bring about a bloodless devolution of power but could not reverse the inequalities of the past. Forgiveness, and the granting of amnesty which formed the crux of Tutu's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), could at best act as a symbolic gesture.

The subsequent dismantling of the structures of oppression has left a deep resentment which continues to ferment. The gap in economic means which has traditionally differentiated whites from blacks remains largely intact; and the question of land reform looms large on the political horizon, with little policy in place to address the inequality. Affirmative action practices in the workplace, moreover, heighten racial tensions and are often applied without concern for a properly organized strategy of skills-based implementation. However, the very nature of the discussion along such strongly polarized racial lines provides an indication of the most serious problem of all: the resounding lack of integration, from which (if Coetzee's novel is to be believed as at all representative of current socio-political reality) so many of South Africa's social problems derive. Change in this regard, as the example of Lucy seeks to illustrate, requires change and compromise on every level, and from all parties. At present, even the powers of our country's most eminent novelist can only hint at the upheaval which such a change might produce, and it is a stark and often negative view. Despite having begun the process of liberating itself from the oppression of the past, South African society remains locked in a distressingly binary mode of racial representation.

As an illustration of this, it is perhaps instructive to shift our gaze for a moment back to the urban centre. In the ordinary course of life it appears that, for most members of the white middle class, little has changed in their relations *vis-à-vis* the impoverished black community. There exists still the awkward binary moment, to which Coetzee alludes, in which one "*either look[s] on in horrified fascination... or turn[s] one's eyes away*" (1992: 368). As the suburban motorist waits for the traffic lights to change, the time is taken up by an uncomfortable standoff between him- or herself and the vagrant begging for change (and here the verbal ambiguity is particularly apt). In place of the "dark chamber", it is the urban setting itself and not the prison that now overflows with the images of a lingering oppression, perhaps made worse by the removal of the previously ubiquitous security police. There is, of course, a marked difference between the activities of state torture and the poverty which besets the impoverished black community. Indeed, the situation is not new. Who now is there to blame? Too frequently the very "faceless functionary", against whom Coetzee has previously cautioned, becomes the scapegoat –

it is the government's fault; it is a social problem; history is to blame; or other such evasions.

In light of these social circumstances, the book's title of *Disgrace* can be seen to resonate on a number of levels of connotation. Most obviously, it refers to David Lurie's public disgrace after he is dismissed from his employment on charges of sexual misconduct. The same theme of disgrace links Lurie to the figure of Byron, who also faced public disapproval over his controversial relations with his half-sister, Augusta, and others. Moreover, Lurie's failure to reform his own attitudes in line with the social changes which occur around him further marks his own behaviour out as disgraceful in the rhetorical sense – he has not done enough to reconcile himself with his society. Again, this develops a 'Byronic' tenor in Lurie's depiction and casts him as the rebel who bucks the system. It is with much irony, then, that Lucy says to him: "So you are determined to go on being bad. Mad, bad and dangerous to know. I promise, no one will ask you to change" (1999: 77). What he is to learn, slowly and painfully, is that the time for personal heroism is over. His refusal to conform to the changed social conditions no longer marks a legitimate protest but merely displays his outmoded idealism.

On the level of social allegory, David thus represents an indictment of all members of the white middle class who have insulated themselves from such change by retreating into a private world of privilege, and who thus effectively deny both the past and present reality. The notion of disgrace is not, however, limited to the white middle class. Petrus conveniently disappears when Lucy and David are attacked on their smallholding, and it later emerges that one of the attackers is related to him. He was apparently aware of the men's intention to harm Lucy, and does nothing to prevent the rape. His subsequent manipulation of circumstances in order to secure additional farmland, whilst indicative of a larger political issue in the context of a post-Apartheid landscape, is a morally disgraceful abuse of his position on a personal level. The overarching notion of disgrace is to be found somewhere in the middle ground between these two (racially inflected) poles, in the sense which incorporates society as a whole and which points to the lack of humane treatment between its various peoples.

In opposition to the forms of social disgrace that are represented in the novel, Coetzee offers a version of 'grace' through his depiction of the world of animals.⁹³ Lurie's involvement with Bev Shaw's animal clinic, and his growing respect for the poor creatures which are euthanized there, gradually awakens in him kindred feelings of loss and futility. Through his services to the dogs, he rediscovers a place for himself in his society which, though marginal, seems to answer his need for utility. By accepting this role at the novel's conclusion, he slowly if only half-consciously finds a means of integrating himself into his changed circumstances – socially, as he re-establishes relations with his daughter (q.v. "Visitorship", 218) and, by extension, with the surrounding community; and personally, as he learns humility in the face of a rude disillusionment. The dogs' simple acceptance of their lot and their easy sociability, moreover, suggest a way beyond the cycle of retribution which has defined past relations between a racially divided community. As Lucy puts it to David:

there is no higher life. This is the only life there is. Which we share with animals. That's the example that people like Bev try to set. That's the example I try to follow. To share some of our human privilege with the beasts. I don't want to come back in another existence as a dog or a pig and have to live as dogs or pigs live under us.

(74)

Lucy's point, applied to human circumstances, argues for a more compassionate mode of coexistence altogether. In the context of Coetzee's political allegory, the treatment of animals impinges upon the question of society as a whole and argues for a change also in the treatment of one's fellow human beings. In interview, Coetzee has frequently emphasized the importance of egalitarianism in society as the only way forward from the equalities of the past.⁹⁴

Lurie's sympathetic (though not quite literal) identification with the later Byron is indicative of the problems which reveal themselves through the course of the novel. His

⁹³ Byron too held a great affinity for animals, and similarly viewed them as more 'gracious', q.v. 'Inscription on the monument of a Newfoundland dog' (1808).

⁹⁴ Most recently, in an interview with Anne Susskind (2001), he refers to this aspect of Australian society and cites it as a partial reason for his emigration (34).

apprehensiveness concerning his own ageing finds in the figure of Byron a totem of virility, and he thereby rationalizes his own coercive sexual practices. In defence of his virtual rape of Melanie, he says perversely: “I was not myself. I was no longer a fifty-year-old divorcé. I became a servant of Eros” (52). As he gradually discovers, the reversion to such tropes flies in the face of the political changes which have occurred. Lurie’s clumsy seduction of Melanie through his use of archaic language provides another example of his social disconnection: “The pentameter, whose cadence once served so well to oil the serpent’s words, now only estranges” (16).

It is only much later that he is able to realize this aspect of himself, when he reflects: “From where he stands, from where Lucy stands, Byron looks very old-fashioned indeed,” (160). The chamber opera that Lurie has in mind to compose, *Byron in Italy*, was to be a grand piece which recounts the poet’s last great love. However, in the course of its composition it gradually contracts into something far more intimate: a lament by the countess Teresa Guiccioli to her dead lover, Byron. The displacement of the erotic impulse, and Byron himself, through which Lurie originally conceived the opera marks his own trajectory of development, as he learns to accept both his decline in years and his diminished position in society. In place of Eros, the more muted emotions of pity come to the fore. The planned arias are replaced by a modest banjo accompaniment, which likewise reflects the alteration which he has himself undergone.

The use of Byron as a trope for Lurie’s shifting relation towards his society and his own circumstances captures well the sense of profound unease which political change has wrought upon the country’s social fabric, and upon the life of the white middle class in particular. Read as a kind of ‘State of the Nation’ address, the book’s descriptions are bleak and reflect the great difficulties attached to such change. There is certainly no “false optimism” here. Whilst no solutions are offered, the necessity for cooperation, tolerance and humane interaction between social groups is emphasized in opposition to the tendency to resort to a defensive *laager* mentality in which no progress at all is possible. Lucy’s realistic assessment of the shift in political power acknowledges the inequalities of the past, and seeks to forge a new relation in which all sectors may coexist.

Her refusal to give up occupation of the smallholding, even if she concedes ownership of the land, asserts her right to remain a part of her society. If the final position which she adopts seems unfair or harsh, this is in consequence of the oppression of the past to which she makes due obeisance. Reflecting on her decision to give up the land, she says:

‘Yes, I agree, it is humiliating. But perhaps that is a good point to start from again. Perhaps that is what I must learn to accept. To start at ground level. With nothing. Not with nothing but. With nothing. No cards, no weapons, no property, no rights, no dignity.’

(205)

Byron’s notion of the ‘forgiveness curse’ is again key to understanding Lucy’s point of view. In order to break the cycle of past inequality, which fuels the endemic violence, what is required is a capitulation not just on an abstract level but also on a basic material level. “Not enough to go around,” David rationalizes. The violence becomes thus for him “Not human evil, just a vast circulatory system, to whose workings pity and terror are irrelevant” (98). This at any rate is the solace he takes from “theory”, or the operation of social laws upon helpless individuals. Lucy’s position is of course an extreme one, and does not appear realistic in the context of the larger society. But perhaps this is the point. What is required is a reorganization not just of attitudes and perceptions, but a redistribution of the material gains amassed under the Apartheid system. The absence of reparation for the past makes it concomitantly unrealistic to expect social harmony when there still exists a privileged class of whites that benefits from the skewed relation of old Apartheid economic practices. As Lucy contends, until an equitable settlement is reached it is through violence that reparation will be made:

What if *that* is the price one has to pay for staying on? Perhaps that is how they look at it; perhaps that is how I should look at it too. They see me as owing something. They see themselves as debt collectors, tax collectors. Why should I be allowed to live here without paying? Perhaps that is what they tell themselves.

(158)⁹⁵

⁹⁵ This suggestion, however, is offered speculatively and acts primarily as a polemic against the habitual insularity of the white middle class. Whilst no doubt true in isolated cases, it cannot be said to represent the literal beliefs of most South Africans.

In the context of the novel, the figure of Byron acts as a foil against which the character of Lurie constructs himself, first, in terms of a nostalgic but lapsed existence in which his own egocentric pursuits take precedence: “You behave as if everything I do is a part of the story of your life,” Lucy tells him, “You are the main character, I am a minor character who doesn’t make an appearance until halfway through” (198). Ironically, it is he who has to learn and she who acts as teacher in a role reversal which reiterates Lurie’s disconnection from social reality. Later, as an index of his own failure to adapt to his changed circumstances, Byron comes to represent an overly romanticized version of life which is no longer tenable. For this reason, he finds himself drawn increasingly to the figure of Teresa in his work on the opera – like Lucy, it is her concrete suffering and pathos which are more representative of life than the mythical insubstantiality of the Byronic hero, or even of Byron himself.

Indeed, the concluding message of the novel – and also of my dissertation – is that, ultimately, neither Orient nor Africa can be represented through Western eyes as Marx asserts (q.v. Said 1995 frontispiece). What once appeared to be a matter of course in a European discourse of imperial domination has proven to be the most elusive of all desires. The act of writing may offset this representational impossibility by fictionalising the *Other*, but cannot in the end reconcile actual experience (social, cultural, political) with a Western ethos. As the figure of Lucy demonstrates, the cost of cultural integration is high: it requires the destruction of the ego and a capitulation to an entirely *other* social mode of existence.

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