Byron’s Religions

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Edited by

Peter Cochran

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PREFACE

Some of the papers in this book were given at a conference on Byron's Religions organised by the Newstead Byron Society and the Midland Romantic Seminar at Nottingham Trent University on May 1st 2010.

I should like to thank Ken Purslow, Carl Thompson, and everyone else who assisted in making the day a success.

— P.C.

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Richard A. Cardwell is Emeritus Professor of Modern Spanish Literatures in the University of Nottingham, United Kingdom. He is the author of over one hundred and twenty articles and over twenty books and editions on Castilian, Catalan and Galician writers in the modern period. He has also published comparative essays on European Romanticism, including Keats and Byron. He edited the special bi-centennial issue of *Renaissance and Modern Studies* (1988) on 'Byron and Europe' and *Lord Byron the European, Essays from the International Byron Society, July 1994* (1997). More recently he was the editor of *The Reception of Lord Byron in Europe*, 2 vols, London-New York, Thoemmes-Continuum, 2005. In 2007 he won the prestigious literary Prize, the Emma Dangerfield Award for Scholarship on Lord Byron. His comparative essays include, among other authors, Musset, Coppée, Baudelaire, Verlaine, Mendès, Régnier, Mallarmé and Oscar Wilde. He has lectured internationally in Spain, Portugal, Italy, France, Holland, Denmark, Germany, Hungary, the Republic of Georgia, Brazil, Argentina and the United States. He was also Visiting Professor in the Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore and the University of Colorado at Boulder. He is a Corresponding Member of the Real Academia de Buenas Letras of Seville.

Peter Cochran is responsible for the editions of Byron's works and correspondence on the International Byron Society website. He edits the *Newstead Byron Society Review*, and has lectured on Byron in many countries. For CSP he has edited and written *Byron in London, Byron at the Theatre, The Gothic Byron, "Romanticism" – and Byron, Byron and Orientalism,* and *Byron and Women* [and Men].

Peter Francev is a lecturer at Mount San Antonio College in the suburbs of Los Angeles. Currently, he is the President of the Albert Camus Society US and Editor of the *Journal of the Albert Camus Society* (a joint-publication of the ACS US and UK). He has written articles on Byron and published articles on Camus. He is hoping to continue his postgraduate education with a Ph.D. on Byron in the near future and in his spare time, he enjoys having tea (parties)with his wife and two-year old daughter.

Allan Gregory is Chairman of the Irish Byron Society. He has studied Irish and English literature at University College Dublin, and has a Master's degree in Anglo-Irish Literature and Drama. His doctorate is in Gaelic/English literary translations. His poem *Some Other Place*, written in Irish, was Ireland's contribution to the Symposium on Peace for the Millenium at Roma Tre University in August, 2000, and has been published in Irish, English and Italian. Other literary works include

Remembering Michael Hartnett (Four Courts Press, 2006), with an introduction by Nobel Laureate, Seamus Heaney and *Byron and Orientalism* (Cambridge Scholars Press, 2006), edited by Dr. Peter Cochran. He is a regular participant at International Byron conferences, advocating particular emphasis on the literary relationship between Byron and Thomas Moore.

Wolf Z. Hirst is a former chair of the Department of English of the University of Haifa and now Senior Lecturer Emeritus. He is the author of "John Keats" (Twayne, G. K. Hall, 1981) and "The Warm Scribe: Originality and Rewriting" (forthcoming), and editor of "Byron, the Bible and Religion" (Newark: U of Delaware P and London and Toronto: Associated UP, 1991).

Mirka Horova is academic assistant at the Department of Anglophone Literatures and Cultures at Charles University in Prague where she is working on her PhD on Byron's dramas. Her other academic interests include British and Norwegian Romanticism and Scandinavian literature in general. She has given papers at international conferences in the UK, Greece and the Czech Republic and published articles on Byron and the Norwegian Romantic poet Henrik Wergeland.

Mary Hurst is a part-time lecturer at Edge Hill University where she co-ordinates the Edge Hill Romantic Forum and is co-organiser of a new student Byron conference. Her thesis, completed at the University of Liverpool, was on 'Byron and the Catholic Persuasion'. She has written on Byron and the concept of acedia for 'Byron's Ghost's' and on Byron's employment of confession as a dynamic or not, of the Byronic hero. She is currently working on 'Byron and Solitude'. Other areas of interest include female accomplishments in the novels of Jane Austen.

Lucia Leman (Lucija Stamac) is a Croatian novelist, poet and translator currently on a PhD research on the University of Nottingham. She is focused on the female Mediterranean in Byron's dramas, whereby honouring Byron's classical education and exploration of Western literary and religious cannon. Her previous academic writing (published in Croatia) juxtaposed the figures of Byron and Achilles by the help of Modernist and French feminist myth criticism. Her soon-to-be-published MA thesis (University of Zagreb, 2007) was a De Manian approach to Shelley's *A Defence of Poetry*. She translated John Crawley's fiction *Lord Byron's Novel: The Evening Land* (2005) into the Croatian language.

Ralph Lloyd-Jones is a chartered librarian who works for Nottinghamshire County Council. He has published many biographical articles and papers on Byron and his associates. His contributions to the *New Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* include entries on Byron's servants William Fletcher, Robert Rushton and Tita Falcieri. He is also an authority on Sir John Franklin and Victorian Arctic exploration, findings from his original research having appeared in international journals, books and television documentaries.

Andreas Makrides is a parliamentary reporter for the Athens News Agency. He has written several articles on philhellenism, Byronism and romanticism, with extensive references to the Luddite movement and Byron's parliamentary career and political ideals. He was a founding member of the "Committee for the Protection of Lord Byron's Heritage", established in 1997 to mobilize Greek citizens against mining underneath Newstead Abbey and he is currently working on his Greek translation of *The Age of Bronze*.

Harold Ray Stevens, Professor Emeritus of English at McDaniel College (Maryland), is past president of the Mencken Society. Among his publications are the John Galsworthy volume in the Annotated Secondary Bibliography Series and several essays on Byron that evolved from his doctoral dissertation, 'Byron and the Bible: A Study of Poetic and Philosophic Development' (Pennsylvania 1964). Co-editor of the recently published *Last Essays* volume in the Cambridge Edition of the Works of Joseph Conrad, he has been a member of the American Byron Society since its founding.

Paul Whickman is a Postgraduate Teaching Fellow at the University of Nottingham. He is writing a thesis on blasphemy in the literature of Byron and Shelley. Paul is currently guest co-editor for the *Working with English* e-journal based in Nottingham and is on the organising committee for the *Recoveries: Revisiting the Long Nineteenth Century* conference in Nottingham in April 2011. Paul's other research interests include the history of print culture and obscenity, eighteenth century language theory and Romantic literature more widely.

Friederike Wolfrum is a lecturer and a postgraduate at the department of English, American, and Celtic Studies of Bonn University. She studied in Bonn, where she wrote her M.A. thesis on guilt in Byron's Oriental Tales, as well as at the University of Arizona, where she was on a scholarship

with the DAAD. She is currently working on a thesis on the ideological implications of Romantic myth-making.

ABBREVIATIONS

To economize on space in the notes, the following abbreviations are used for the books referred to. See the Bibliography for further information.

BB:	*Byron's Bulldog, The Letters of John Cam Hobhouse to Lord Byron*, ed. Peter W. Graham, Ohio 1984.
BJ:	*Byron Journal*.
BLJ:	*Byron's Letters and Journals*, ed. Leslie A. Marchand, 13 vols, John Murray, 1973-94.
Coleridge:	*The Works of Lord Byron: A New, Revised and Enlarged Edition with illustrations. Poetry*, ed. E.H.Coleridge, seven vols, John Murray, 1898-1904.
CHP:	Byron, *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*.
CMP:	*Lord Byron: The Complete Miscellaneous Prose*, ed. Andrew Nicholson, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1991.
CPW:	*Lord Byron: The Complete Poetical Works*, ed. Jerome J. McGann and Barry Weller, 7 vols Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1980-93.
DJ:	Byron, *Don Juan*.
HaE:	Byron, *Heaven and Earth*.
HVSV:	*His Very Self and Voice: Collected Conversations of Lord Byron* edited with an introduction and notes by Ernest J. Lovell, New York: MacMillan, 1954.
Kennedy:	James Kennedy, *Conversations on Religion, with Lord Byron and others, held in Cephalonia, a short time previous to his Lordship's Death*, 1830.
LBLI:	Teresa Guiccioli, *Lord Byron's Life in Italy*, trans. Rees, ed. Cochran, AUP Delaware, 2005.
LJM:	*The Letters of John Murray to Lord Byron*, ed. Andrew Nicholson, Liverpool University Press, 2007.
LLB:	Langley Moore, Doris. *The Late Lord Byron*, John Murray, 1961.
Looper:	Travis Looper, *Byron and the Bible, a Compendium of Biblical Usage in the Poetry of Byron*, Metuchen 1978.
Marchand:	Marchand, Leslie A., *Byron: A Biography*, 3 vols Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1957.

Medwin:	Medwin, Thomas. *Journal of the Conversations of Lord Byron at Pisa*, 1824.
NBSR:	*Newstead Byron Society Review*.
NLS:	National Library of Scotland.
RR:	*The Romantics Reviewed*, ed. Donald H. Reiman, Garland, 1972.
TVOJ:	Byron, *The Vision of Judgement*.

If a prose quotation is left-justified only, it is taken from the original manuscript; if left- and right-justified, from a printed source. Codes are as follows:

<Authorial deletion>
<xxxxx> Irrecoverable authorial deletion
{Interlineated word or phrase}
E[ditoria]l A[dditio]n
[ ] Illegible

BYRON'S RELIGIONS: INTRODUCTION

PETER COCHRAN

Byron's attitude to religion is often misunderstood: it is at the mercy of the Byronic cliché, which springs from a partial and inaccurate reading of his work, and the Byronic legend, which springs from a desire to substitute a fantasy-Byron for the verifiable one. This is hardly surprising, for his attitude to religion was misunderstood during his lifetime, and by several of those near to him, who should have known better. On Wednesday November 23rd 1814 his close friend John Cam Hobhouse recorded in his diary (Mansel is the Bishop of Bristol):

> Went to Cambridge. Saw Lord Byron. Voted in the senate House for Dr Clarke, fellow of Trinity, for the Professorship of Anatomy. This is the same Clarke who shot Mr Payne for debauching his sister, and the same who was to have travelled with Lord Byron. Clarke had 135 votes, Woodhouse 60, and Haviland of St Johns 150. The poll opened at two pm and closed at seven. Lord Byron, when he gave his vote, was clapped by the students in the gallery and also when he left the place of voting – this is, they tell me, unique. He looked as red as fire. Mansel, and Dr Clarke contended for the honour of escorting him: this is well for a Bishop to attend upon a poet who has the reputation of an atheist and has done something to deserve it.[1]

From someone as bright as Hobhouse, this is startling (he may be using the word "atheist" loosely, to mean "freethinker", but I don't think so). Byron had done nothing to deserve "the reputation of an atheist". The fact that some of his characters, such as the Giaour, reject Christian solace on their deathbeds, and that he often mocks the priesthood – particularly the Anglican priesthood – does not make him an atheist. It doesn't even make his protagonists atheists. A writer need not agree with his characters' opinions. No-one mocks the Anglican priesthood more than Jane Austen does with Mr Collins, and no-one thinks of her as an atheist.

1: B.L.Add.Mss.47232.

Many years later Byron's widow told her chronicler and champion, Harriet Beecher Stowe:

> 'Lord Byron believed in eternal punishment fully: for though he reasoned against Christianity as it is commonly received, he could not reason himself out of it; and I think it made him desperate. He used to say, "The worst of it is I do believe." Had he seen God as I see him, I am sure his heart would have relented.'[2]

Lady Byron was a Socinian. Had she not been one, the antithetical Byron might have been more enthusiastic about that sect, which denied both the Trinity and the idea that damnation was eternal. For more on this, see the section on "Socinians" in Appendix 2.

Religious education at school

> But – here again – why will I thus entangle
> Myself with Metaphysics? none can hate
> So much as I do any kind of wrangle –
> And yet such is my folly, or my fate –
> I always knock my head against some angle,
> About the present, past, or future state;
> Yet I wish well to Trojan and to Tyrian –
> For I was bred a moderate Presbyterian.[3]

The problem with ascertaining Byron's religious attitudes is that he cannot be trusted. He doesn't want to be known, and always crafts his tone and content in order to tease, or to please what he knows to be his reader's predilections and sympathies. To William Gifford, his "literary father", he wrote with solemnity on June 18th 1813:

> To your advice on Religious topics I shall equally attend – perhaps the best way will be by avoiding them altogether – the already published objectionable passages have been much commented upon – but certainly have been rather strongly interpreted – I am no Bigot to Infidelity – & did not expect that because I doubted the immortality of Man – I should be charged with denying ye. existence of a God. – It was the comparative {insignificance} of ourselves & our world when placed in competition with the mighty whole of which it is an atom that first led me to imagine that our pretensions to eternity might be overrated – –

2: Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Lady Byron Vindicated* (Sampson Low, Son, and Marston, 1870), p.164.
3: DJ XV, st.91.

> This – & being early disgusted with a Calvinistic Scotch School where I was cudgelled to Church for the first ten years of my life – afflicted me with this malady – for after all it is I believe a disease of the mind as much as other kinds of Hypochondria. – – – –[4]

However, in 1821, in the second (and final) entry of his incomplete work *My Dictionary*, he enlarges:

> – I <had> <went> {was} sent at five years old or earlier to a School kept by a Mr. Bowers – who was called "Bodsy Bowers" by reason of his dapperness. – It was a School for both sexes – I learned little there – except to repeat by rote the first lesson of Monosyllables – "God made man – let us love him" by hearing it often repeated – without <having> {acquiring} a letter. – Whenever proof was made of my progress at home – I repeated these words with the most rapid fluency, but <only> on turning over a new leaf – I continued to repeat them – so that the <l> narrow boundaries of my first year's accomplishments were detected – my ears boxed – (which they did not deserve – – seeing {that} it was by ear only that I had acquired my letters) – and my intellects consigned to a new <director> preceptor. – He was a <sweet> {very} decent – clever – little Clergyman – named Ross – {afterwards} Minister of one of the kirks (East I think) under him – I made an astonishing progress – and I recollect to this day his mild manners & good=natured painstaking. […] Afterwards I had a very serious – saturnine – but kind young man named Paterson for a Tutor – he was the son of my Shoemaker – but a good Scholar as is common with the Scotch. – He was a rigid Presbyterian also. – With him I began Latin in Ruddiman's Grammar – & continued till I went to the "Grammar School" (Scotice "Schule" – Aberdonice "Squeel") where I threaded all the Classes to the fourth – when I was re=called to England (where I had been hatched) by the demise of my Uncle. –[5]

Writing not for Gifford but for himself and posterity, Byron emphasises not the predestinarianism he imbibed from his Scots tutors, but the literacy: he mentions no "cudgelling" and no "disgust" here. Christine Kenyon Jones has established that Calvinism was in fact only one of a number of Protestantisms available to churchgoers in Aberdeen in the 1790s.[6] The likelihood is that Byron experienced both English and

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4: Text from NLS Acc.12604 / 4246; BLJ III 63-4.
5: *My Dictionary* (May 1821) text from NLS Acc.12604 / 4057; BLJ VIII 105-8.
6: See Christine Kenyon Jones, *'I was Bred a Moderate Presbyterian': Byron, Thomas Chalmers and the Scottish Religious Heritage*, in Stabler and Hopps (eds.) *Romanticism and Religion from William Cowper to Wallace Stevens* (Ashgate 2006), pp.107-20.

Scottish Episcopalian forms of worship too – Calvinism may have ruled at school, but Episcopalianism on Sunday mornings.

Nevertheless, he seems for the most part to be comfortable – if that's the word – with the idea that he is damned. Logical he wasn't: and the idea that, if one accepts and has faith in the Suffering and Atonement of Jesus, one needn't necessarily be damned, had no appeal to him. Indeed, sometimes in straight argument, sometimes in polemical speeches in his dramas, he rejects the Suffering and Atonement, while accepting the idea of inevitable hellfire. James Kennedy reports him as having actually said, on Cephalonia, "But I do not see ... very much the need of a Saviour ..." (see below, p.333) In *Cain*, Lucifer "instructs" the protagonist thus:

> But He! so wretched in his height,
> So restless in his wretchedness, must still
> Create, and re-create – perhaps he'll make
> One day a Son unto himself – as he
> Gave you a father – and if he so doth,
> Mark me! that Son will be a Sacrifice.[7]

In a play, Byron could and indeed did plead that he was only exercising dramatic verisimilitude: "The two passages cannot be altered without making Lucifer talk like the Bishop of Lincoln – which would not be in the character of the former".[8] But Lucifer's protest is one with what Byron had written *in propria persona* (whatever that may have involved) to Francis Hodgson ten years earlier:

> ... the basis of your religion is *injustice*; the *Son of God*, the *pure*, the *immaculate*, *the innocent*, is sacrificed for the guilty. This proves *His* heroism; but no more does away with *man's* guilt than a schoolboy's volunteering to be flogged for another would exculpate the dunce from negligence, or preserve him from the rod. You degrade the Creator, in the first place, by making Him a begetter of children; and in the next you convert Him into a tyrant over an immaculate and injured Being, who is sent into existence to suffer death for the benefit of some millions of scoundrels, who, after all, seem as likely to be damned as ever.[9]

One character who does show faith in Christ is Japhet *in Heaven and Earth*, but his prophecy is placed in a sceptical context:

7: *Cain*, I I, 161-66. Lines 163-6 were cut from the first edition.
8: B. to Murray, November 3rd 1821: text from NLS Ms.434891; BLJ IX 53-5.
9: BLJ II 97; B. to Francis Hodgson, September 13th 1811.

Japhet (*interrupting them*): The eternal will
Shall deign to expound this dream
Of good and evil; and redeem
Unto himself all times, all things;
And, gathered under his almighty wings,
Abolish Hell!
And to the expiated Earth
Restore the beauty of her birth,
Her Eden in an endless paradise,
Where man no more can fall as once he fell,
And even the very demons shall do well!
Spirits: And when shall take effect this wond'rous spell?
Japhet: When the Redeemer cometh; first in pain,
And then in glory.
Spirit: Meantime still struggle in the mortal chain,
Till Earth wax hoary;
War with yourselves, and Hell, and Heaven, in vain,
Until the Clouds look gory
With the blood reeking from each battle plain ...[10]

In drama, Byron is consistent: just as Manfred's plea that he may suffer in Astarte's stead falls on deaf ears, so does Cain's that he may suffer for Abel. In Shakespearean terms, *Macbeth* and *Coriolanus* are the models, never *The Winter's Tale*. There is no redemption in Byron's dramas.

Thus Byron adheres to the gloomier aspects of Christianity, while rejecting the positive ones. It was Goethe who said that Byron's vocation was to dramatize the Old Testament – he didn't mention the New.

Byron is much more hearty when chastising religious hypocrisy than when contemplating what Jesus actually did and said, and suffered:

... persecuted Sages teach the Schools
Their folly in forgetting there are fools.

Was it not so, great Locke? And greater Bacon?
Great Socrates? And thou Diviner still * –
Whose lot it is by Man to be mistaken?
And thy pure Creed made Sanction of all Ill? –
Redeeming Worlds to be by Bigots shaken,
How was thy toil rewarded? We might fill
Volumes with similar sad illustrations,
But leave them to the Conscience of the Nations.

10: HaE III 193-211.

> * As it is necessary in these times to avoid ambiguity, I say, that I mean, by "Diviner still," CHRIST. If ever God was Man – or Man God – he was *both*. I never arraigned his creed, but the use – or abuse – made of it. Mr. Canning one day[11] quoted Christianity to sanction Negro Slavery, and Mr. Wilberforce had little to say in reply. And was Christ crucified, that black men might be scourged? If so, he had better been born a Mulatto, to give both colours an equal chance of freedom, or at least salvation. (DJ XV sts.17-18 and author's note).

According to this analysis, Christ's suffering was in vain.

At Cambridge

Christine Kenyon Jones has further suggested[12] that while (intermittently) at Cambridge, Byron could, influenced by his Trinity tutor, Thomas Jones, have read William Paley's *Natural Theology*. Paley's book – much read by students at the time – is what we should call an argument for Intelligent Design. However, Byron's attitude to such matters is best demonstrated by a letter he wrote to Jones on February 14th 1807, from Southwell, explaining why he didn't feel it necessary to attend Cambridge at all:

> The subjects for your present Lectures, are undoubtedly interesting, but the "Demonstration of the Being of a God," is, (to me at least) unnecessary. – To expatiate on his "attributes" is superfluous, do we not know them? he who doubts them, does not deserve to be instructed. – To bewilder myself in the mazes of Metaphysics, is not my object. I do not wish to explore in treatises, what I may read in every work of Nature, particularly as I have observed that the most voluminous writers on the Subject, conclude, as they begin. – You will pardon these observations, which proceed from any thing, but a wish to give offence.[13]

11: E.H.Coleridge quotes the relevant debate, in which Canning does not quite use Christianity as B. would have him. On May 15 1823 (two months before B. started this canto) he was replying to Fowell Buxton's motion for the abolition of slavery, and said: "God forbid that I should contend that the Christian religion is favourable to slavery … but if it be meant that in the Christian religion there is a special denunciation against slavery, that slavery and Christianity cannot exist together,—I think that the honourable gentleman himself must admit that the proposition is historically false" – Parliamentary Debates, N.S. vol.ix pp.278-9.

12: Christine Kenyon Jones, *Byron, Darwin, and Paley: Interrogating Natural Theology*, in Wilson, Cheryl A. (ed.) *Byron: Heritage and Legacy* (Palgrave 2008), pp.187-96.

13: BLJ I 108.

His facetiousness speaks volumes. A religion like Christianity, especially the Anglican variety, which spent so much ink defending, justifying and explaining its supposedly immutable and radiant truths, was advertising its own intellectual insecurity in a rather transparent way. Byron, then as later a detester of humbug and cant, may have found, in his "Director of Studies", an easy fall-guy. Say what we like about his intellectual interest in Zoroastrianism, his pretended affinity with Islam, his instinctive affinity with Calvinism, or his confused awe in St Peter's – for the Church of England Byron had only contempt:

> I know this is unpopular – I know
> 'Tis blasphemous – I know one may be damned
> For hoping no one else may e'er be so –
> I know my catechism – I know we're crammed
> With the best doctrines till we quite o'erflow –
> I know that all save England's church have shammed,
> And that the other twice two hundred Churches
> And Synagogues have made a *damned* bad purchase.[14]

He "knows" nothing of the kind; and Westminster Abbey was by its own lights correct to refuse him a place of burial. For Byron, the C. of E. was what cynics called it later – "the Conservative party at prayer". The fact that in his day it was also the Whig party at prayer made no difference. The established church supported the English establishment, and the English establishment was, at the start of the nineteenth century, a long way from Christ.

Bible reading

> A common bible of a good legible print (bound in Russia) I have one – but as it was the last gift of my Sister – (whom I shall probably never see again) I can only use it carefully – and <with> less frequently – because I like to keep it in good order – – –
> Don't forget this – – for I am a great reader and admirer of those books – and had read them through & through before I was eight years old – that is to say the old [*Ms. tear: "Test"*]ament – for the New struck me as a task – but the other as a pleasure – – I speak as a boy – from the {recollected} impression of that period at Aberdeen in 1796.[15]

14: TVOJ st.14.
15: B. to Murray, October 9th 1821: text from NLS Ms.43492: BLJ VIII 238.

Few other readers have found reading the New Testament "a task", and fewer still have found reading the Old "a pleasure" by contrast. However, in his study *Byron and the Bible* Travis Looper finds 1063 Old Testament references in Byron's poetry (of various sorts: exact, approximate, parodic, and parallel), as opposed to 641 New Testament ones. The largest number, 377, are to Genesis, and the fact that Matthew is a distant runner-up with 218 may indicate that if Byron is being truthful about his schoolboy antipathy to the New Testament, he overcame it as an adult.[16] Isaiah and the Psalms are third favourites equal with 104 each, and Revelation fifth with 54.

On Cephalonia, Byron told William Parry "I am sure that no man reads the Bible with more pleasure than I do. I read a chapter every day ..." but then he added, "... and in a short time shall be able to beat the Canters with their own weapons."[17]

Religious attendance, and Byron, the Spectral Presence

Like all other English schoolchildren of his time (and in theory of ours) Byron was compelled to attend a daily act of religious observance at all his schools – in Aberdeen, Dulwich, and Harrow. The same applied to his days at Cambridge, intermittent as they were. Once he left Cambridge he ceased to go to church, and even in Ravenna, where he cultivated the friendship of the local priesthood, he is not recorded as attending.

The lady who saw the boy Byron, at Aberdeen, sticking needles into his mother's arm during a church service, was witnessing something prophetic. For an eerie fact about him, rarely noted, is that Byron and neither secular nor religious celebrations, sacramental or otherwise, mixed well. He did not go to his own mother's funeral. He grinned at the Best Man during his own wedding (at the line "… and with all my worldly goods I thee endow"). He wanted to be buried with his dog. The only marriage where he stood himself as Best Man – that between the Earl of Portsmouth and John Hanson's daughter – was a macabre disaster. At least three of the four children to whom he was godfather met unhappy ends. Byron Hobhouse, John Cam's nephew, to whom both Byron and Hobhouse were godfathers at Rome in 1817, was killed on the retreat from Kabul in the winter of 1841-2. Byron stood godfather to Tom Moore's daughter, Olivia Byron. Born August 18th 1814, she died on March 24th of the following year. And when the son of James and Frances

16: Looper pp.297-301. No-one has yet done a similar analysis for the Letters and Journals.
17: William Parry, *The Last Days of Lord Byron* (1825), p.207.

Wedderburn Webster, to whom he was also godfather, died young, the father reports that Byron "almost chuckled with Joy—or Irony—& said 'Well—I cautioned you—& told you that my name would almost damn any thing or creature'!!"[18] Of the life of John William Rizzo Hoppner, son of the English Consul in Venice, to whom he stood godfather in January 1818, nothing is known.

This his proposal of marriage (the italics are mine):

> When I believed you attached, I had nothing to urge—indeed I have little now, except that having heard from yourself that your affections are not engaged, my importunities may appear not quite so selfish, however unsuccessful. *It is not without a struggle that I address you once more on this subject*; yet I am not very consistent—for it was to avoid troubling you upon it that I finally determined to remain an absent friend rather than become a tiresome guest. If I offend it is better at a distance.[19]

It took Annabella some ingenuity to decode that. The feeblest of approaches ("It is not without a struggle that I address you once more on this subject") is hedged about with a morass of disheartening qualification: Byron wants Annabella to make the decision, so that when things go wrong she can't blame him.

He was lacking conviction even in some of his theatrical gestures: actually to *pay* for his Napoleonic coach, after all, would imply that he *really saw* himself as Bonaparte's heir, a judgement to which his commonsense could never wholeheartedly assent; so he didn't: and Douglas Kinnaird paid the bill in 1824, just before Byron died, by which time the interest had caused it to double to £1,000. In Genoa, he bought "Greek" helmets for himself and Pietro Gamba: but they never wore them. His satirical sense of reality was constantly at war with his romantic, "metahistorical" self-image, leading to impasse and wastage.

To turn to his writings: the protagonists of his poems are rarely buried properly. Leila in *The Giaour* has no "earthly grave" (l.1124). Hugo and Parisina have "Nor a stone on their turf, nor a bone in their graves" (l.772). Astarte is "One without a tomb" (II iv 83). The monument of Marino Faliero is veiled for shame. And of Haidee and Lambro we're told that

18: BLJ III 106n.
19: B. to Annabella Milbanke, September 9th 1814; BLJ IV 169-0.

None but her own and father's grave is there,
And nothing outward tells of human clay;
Ye could not know where lies a thing so fair;
No Stone is there to show, no tongue to say
What was; No dirge, except the hollow Sea's,
Mourns o'er the Beauty of the Cyclades. (DJ IV 72 3-8)

When we examine Byron's own funeral, the case gets grimmer still. The pattern continues, even though by now he can't be held responsible – or can he? Only parts of him attended.[20] Not all of him is buried in Hucknall Torkard. The Greeks retained his lungs – which are *said* to be beneath his statue in the Missolonghi Garden of Heroes, though I have heard uncharitable people assert that they are unlikely to have survived the destruction of the community by the Turks in 1826.[21]

In the secular plane, Byron failed to attend his own twenty-first birthday party at Newstead Abbey. He very rarely gave dinner-parties, even when he was in a quasi-permanent residence. None are recorded at 13, Piccadilly Terrace (which was probably a good thing), or at any of his Italian residences except the Palazzo Lanfranchi in Pisa. Two dinner-parties were given in his honour just before his quitting England in April 1816: Hobhouse attended both, Byron neither. In Ravenna he ordered his carpets to be hung out over the balconies, to give colourful backdrops to the religious processions: but his ordering his Ravenna household into mourning upon the death of his detested mother-in-law can only be interpreted as a joke (which few in Ravenna would have understood). He always insisted on remaining unknown to the many recipients of his charity.

Byron's pose is that of The Man Who's Passing Through on his Way To Somewhere Else – The Man Who Isn't, or Wasn't, Really There. He

20: Compare "Lord G[uilford] died of an inflammation of the bowels: so they took them out, and sent them (on account of their discrepancies), separately from the carcass, to England. Conceive a man going one way, and his intestines another, and his immortal soul a third!—was there ever such a distribution?" – B. to Moore, April 11th 1817: BLJ V 210-11.

21: Though see "The affection Byron had for Greece is certainly returned by its people, both past and present ... Undoubtedly the most evocative [*story*] is how Byron's lungs, once preserved in a chamber under a church in Mesolongi, were rescued during Exodus night on 10 April 1826 by a monk, who risked his own life to save the remains of a national hero. They were then brought back into Mesolongi following the end of the bloodshed and are now buried under a cenotaph in the grand Garden of Heroes" – Zoe Wilkinson, *Byron's Greek self***,** *Athens News*, 13th June 2008.

never autographed the books in his library (thereby decreasing their sale value considerably). His letters (prior to the death of his mother-in-law) are often signed by a mark which only be transcribed ["*scrawl*"]. Each time he became a father, he left the country. When *The Corsair* and *Lara* were published, he made sure he was out of town. And I sometimes think that the reason why he didn't punctuate his poetry properly in manuscript was because he didn't want to be responsible for their finished state in print.

This desire to be neither seen nor remembered is a singular Byronic quality. What it suggests about the state of his soul, we could discuss. It may imply a semi-conscious desire not to be morally responsible for his own life.

Scepticism

The deepest scepticism was inevitable in such a committed Voltairean as Byron:

> I have read a good deal of Voltaire {lately} – I wish you were with me – for every now & then there is something to kill me with laughing – what I dislike is his extreme inaccuracy – if his citations were correct he might have upset a hundred – – s – upon that point I do not know what to believe – or what to disbelieve – which is the devil – to have no religion at all – all sense & <appearance> {senses} <is> {are} against it – but <all> all belief & much evidence is for it – it is walking in the dark over a rabbit warren – or a garden with steel traps and spring guns. – for my part I have such a detestation of some of the articles of faith – that I would not subscribe to them – if I were as sure as St. Peter after the Cock crew. – – – –
> The most consistent infidel was the Prussian Frederic – because during all the disasters of the 7 years' war – he was as full of his materialism as when in quiet at Potsdam – & like his friend La Metrie who died "denying G – d & the physicians." – – – – – – –[22]

Byron lived a generation before the work of Strauss, Renan and others subjected the Bible to historical scrutiny. But he needed neither their like, nor Voltaire, to keep well abreast of anti-fundamentalist thinking. James Kennedy reports him as saying, on Cephalonia:

> "Christianity is not the best source of inspiration for a poet. No poet should be tied down to a direct profession of faith. Metaphysics open a vast field;

22: B. to Hobhouse, April 14th 1817: text from B.L.Add.Mss.42093 ff.36-8; BLJ V 215-16.

> Nature, and anti-Mosaical speculations on the origin of the world, a wide range, and sources of poetry that are shut out by Christianity."

By "Nature, and anti-Mosaical speculations on the origin of the world", he refers to the advancing understanding of how the fossil record was bringing the account of creation in Genesis into serious question. He shows no sign of possessing or reading the most important book on this subject, Cuvier's *Le Règne Animal* (1817; published in English as *The Animal Kingdom*): but he knew of it, and put some of its Catastrophic ideas into *Cain* (see Mirka Horova's essay below). Of *Cain* he wrote to Moore on September 19th 1812:

> I have gone upon the notion of Cuvier, that the world has been destroyed three or four times, and was inhabited by mammoths, behemoths, and what not; but not by man till the Mosaic period, as, indeed, is proved by the strata of bones found; – those of all unknown animals, and known, being dug out, but none of mankind. I have, therefore, supposed Cain to be shown in the rational Preadamites, beings endowed with a higher intelligence than man, but totally unlike him in form, and with much greater strength of mind and person. You may suppose the small talk which takes place between him and Lucifer upon these matters is not quite canonical.[23]

However, he had no need of such historical or paleontological props, for he found scant logic in the Divine Dispensation. On September 3rd 1811 he wrote to Francis Hodgson:

> As to revealed religion, Christ came to save men; but a good Pagan will go to heaven, and a bad Nazarene to hell; "Argal" (I argue like the gravedigger) why are not all men Christians? Or why are any? If mankind may be saved who never heard or dreamt, at Timbuctoo, Otaheite, Terra Incognita, &c, of Galilee and its Prophet, Christianity is of no avail, if they cannot be saved without, why are not all orthodox? It is a little hard to send a man preaching to Judæa, and leave the rest of the world—Negers and what not—*dark* as their complexions, without a ray of light for so many years to lead them on high; and who will believe the God will damn men for not knowing what they were never taught? I hope I am sincere ...[24]

23: BLJ VIII 215-6.
24: BLJ II 89.