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Lord Byron's Allusions to Persia

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Abstract

This article examines Lord Byron's allusions to Persian literature, history, culture and its ancient religion. The influence of Persia on Byron is considerable. Byron was greatly influenced by orientalists such as Sir William Jones and their translations of Eastern literatures. After examining Byron's allusions to Persia, one realizes that Byron's attitude with regard to Persia appears to be ambivalent. Byron dismisses the Persian king, Nader, as the "costive sophy", but reveres the Persian poet, Hafiz and mentions other Persian poets such as Ferdowsi with great respect. Sometimes he refers to Zoroaster's religion as "devilish" and sometimes Zoroaster figures as a good person in his work. Byron makes use of the Zoroastrian Janus-like philosophy in explaining some of the predicaments that his characters face in life. Zoroastrianism provides Byron with a metaphor for the two confused sides of his characters' nature, the one which struggles towards the light, and the one which, at the same time, involves characters in darkness and destroys them.

Keywords: 1. Lord Byron 2. Persia 3. Zoroastrianism 4. Orientalism
5. Romantic Poetry

1. Introduction

George Gordon Byron (1788-1824), known as Lord Byron, like many other English romantic poets, was curious about the Orient. Byron had an ambitious plan to explore the far-away lands. When Byron's early poems were bitterly criticized in England, he decided to leave England. His two years of travel through Portugal, Spain, Malta, Albania, Greece and the Aegean resulted in the first part of his long poem "Childe Harold's Pilgrimage" (1812). He composed a series of exotic, narrative poems when he came back from his prolonged travels, including "The Bride of Abydos"

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(1813), “The Giaour” (1813) and “The Corsair” (1814). Ostracized by society because of his debauched and riotous life, Byron left England for ever. He travelled to Constantinople from mid-May to mid-July 1810 and was very disappointed when his plan for travelling to Persia and India was thwarted by financial difficulties for he always wanted to visit some of the oriental cities that had fascinated him since childhood and about which he had long ago conducted a very extensive reading .

According to Edward Said, during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, “popular orientalism” in the works of “William Beckford, Byron, Thomas Moore, and Goethe” acquired “a vogue of considerable intensity”. This was related to “the interest taken in Gothic tales, pseudomedieval idylls, visions of barbaric splendour and cruelty” (118). Artists and writers no longer made references to Judo-Christian culture but to oriental cultures of “India, China, Japan, and Sumer, Buddhism, Sanskrit, Zoroastrianism, and Manu. People thought that “to understand Europe properly” they had to understand “the objective relations between Europe and its own previously unreachable temporal and cultural frontiers” (Said 120). Voyages of spiritual discoveries usually “involved adventures in eastern countries” (Cochran 2). The Orient was seen as violent and oppressive, a strange paradise and a lost innocence “where the disparity between ideal and real is ... a source of laughter” (Cochran 2).

2. Discussion

Byron’s preoccupation with the Orient stems from his travel experiences, his readings (Cochran 3) and his appreciation of Greek civilization and his struggle for liberty, which is often couched in his allusions to the Hellenic heroism, and Edenic past when dreams were true and life was sacred. In 1823 Byron went to Greece to join the revolution against the Turkish occupation and died of fever at Missolonghi on 19 April 1824 before seeing battle. The Turkish threat to the Christian world was felt throughout Europe in those days (Cochran 3). Turkey was regarded as an “occupying power” that had to be removed from the face of the earth (Bone 73). Byron depicts the Turks as barbarians who oppress their wives and are eliminated by European heroes (See “The Giour” in Oriental Tales). Byron often appears to contrast the barbarism of the Other with the lost innocence of Greece, echoing the rhetoric of nineteenth-century orientalists who divided the races into “advanced and backward” and wrote about the Orient’s “sensuality, its tendency to despotism, its aberrant mentality, its habits of inaccuracy, [and] its backwardness” (Said 205-6).

In “Childe Harold's Pilgrimage” Byron contrasts the barbaric Albania with the civilized Greece. Here Byron describes the adventures of a self-

styled melancholy and defiant pilgrim whose wanderings, to some extent, resemble those of Byron's. He describes how this pilgrim, tired of his sinful life, finds distraction by travel. He travels through Portugal, Spain, Albania, Belgium, the Rhine, the Alps and Jura. He describes Albania and its wild and exotically clad people and laments the lost liberty of his beloved Greece.

In canto II, Byron writes about Albania and Ali Pasha, whose court he visited either in 1802 or 1809. The Albanian leader, Ali Pasha, sought independence from Greece and the Ottoman Empire, and is depicted as a rebel and a bandit. In this canto, after describing Pasha having been surrounded by "Muslim luxury", lush scenery, gentle winds, green trees and peaceful rusticity and the Muslim manner of prayer and fasting, Byron writes about the so-called "caged" Muslim women whose voices are never heard and their faces never seen, women who are trapped in their prison-houses and are tied up to their family. Byron then alludes to the Persian poet, Hafiz, and his faith in the power of love and the belief that age cannot deter one from loving or being loved:

It is not that yon hoary lengthening beard
 Ill suits the passions which belong to youth;
 Love conquers age - so Hafiz hath averr'd
 So sings the Teian, and he sings in sooth –
 But crimes that scorn the tender voice of Ruth,
 Beseeming all men ill, but most the man
 In years, have mark'd him with a tiger's tooth;
 Blood follows blood, and through their mortal span,
 In bloodier acts conclude those who with blood began (Stanza 63).¹

There are many references to Hafiz in Byron's writing. Byron mentions the names of Persian poets, particularly Hafiz, in his satirical poem "English Bards and Scotch Reviewers" (1809). Byron probably came to know these Persian writers through Scott-Waring's famous *A Tour to Sheeras*, in which the names of the Persian poets are "spelled as Byron spells them" (Yohannan 156). Thomas Moore, who was well-versed in oriental literature, reports that once Byron called Hafiz "the immortal Hafiz, the oriental Anacreon ... who ... is revered beyond any bard of ancient or modern times by the Persians, who resort to his tomb in Shiraz, to celebrate his memory" (qtd. in Yohannan 156).

The influence of Persia on Byron is considerable. Cochran believes that Byron was greatly influenced by Sir William Jones (1746-94) and his translations of Eastern literatures. Jones was of the opinion that a knowledge

of the Orient “would be a useful counterweight to Graeco-Roman traditions, a narrow adherence to which he found provincial and chauvinistic-as, of course, Byron did ...” (Cochran 6). Cochran claims that it was through Jones’s translations that Byron came to know Sa’di, Ferdowsi and Hafiz (6). Byron once suggested to Thomas Moore that he write a “Shah-Namah” by which he meant “a poem of poems, and not merely ‘gazelles’” (Yohannan 157). In “The Giaour” Byron writes about the famous “rose” and “nightingale” of Persian poetry and in a note explains that the “attachment of the nightingale to the rose is a well-known Persian fable. “If I mistake not”, writes Byron, “the ‘Bulbul of a thousand tales’ is one of his appellations” (Yohannan 158). In “The Bride of Abydos”, the two lovers are called by their Persian names of Gul and Bulbul and there is a mention of the Persian “Majnoun’s tale”, “Joseph and Zuleika”, and “Sadi’s Song”. The footnote to these allusions “properly identified Majnun and Laila as the Romeo and Juliet of the East, and Sadi as ‘the moral poet of Persia’” (Yohannan 158). In his epic satire *Don Juan* (1819-24) Byron writes about “Soft Persian sentences, in lilac letters” (V.xiii). Several times in his letters Byron refers to Persia and Zoroastrianism. In a letter to Henry Drury (1809) he writes about his “servant Friese the native of Prussia Proper” who “has been all among the worshippers of Fire in Persia and has seen Persepolis and all that” (Marchand, 1982: 22). In another letter written to Douglas Kinnaird (1819) he informs his friend that he is “reading about Greece and Persia” (189). There are some references to Zoroastrianism in Byron’s letters to Hobhouse and Hodgson in 1810 and 1811 (Marchand, 1973-94: II. 26,89) such as this one which he wrote from Athens on November 12th 1810 with regard to the selling of his estate: “... I call Christ, Mahomet, Confucius and Zoroaster to witness my sincerity and Cam Hobhouse to make it manifest to the ears and eyes of men ... (Marchand 1973-94, II.26). On September 3rd 1811 he writes to Francis Hodgson: “I am no Platonist, I am nothing at all; but I would sooner be a Paulician, Manichean, Spinozist, Gentile, Pyrrhonian, Zoroastrian, than one of the seventy-two villainous sects who are tearing each other to pieces for the love of the Lord and hatred of each other” (Marchand 1973-94 II.89). We must note that, in later years, Byron became even more interested in this Persian religion. He referred to Zoroastrianism in his poetic drama *Cain: A Mystery* (II. ii. 403-405) and, as we shall see later, will appear to reject it in *Don Juan* XIII, 41, 325-6. A more detailed interest in Zoroastrianism may date from Byron’s reading of Sir John Malcolm’s *History of Persia*, which a friend sent him in manuscript in July 1814 (Marchand, 1973-94: 147-8 and nn) and which was in that part of his library auctioned off in 1816 (Nicholson: 243). In this book Malcolm gives a “short abstract” of this religion, which, he claims, “has been very

fully treated by several European authors". He writes:

... I shall pass over the dreams of Daghdha which foretold the greatness of Zoroaster, while yet in the womb; as well as the journey of the prophet to heaven, where he received, from Hormuzd, the holy volume of the Zend-a-vesta, and the sacred fire; and his visit to hell, where he beheld Ahriman, or the evil spirit, release a man in whom he perceived some good, and threaten Satan, in his own regions, with shame and ignominy: nor shall I dwell upon his retirement to the mountain of Elburz, and his solitary devotion in a deep cave, adorned by mystical figures of the elements, the seasons, and the celestial bodies: nor upon the various miracles which he performed to establish the truth of his religion ...

God, he taught, existed from all eternity, and was like infinity of time and space. There were, he averred, two principles in the universe, – good and evil: the one was termed Hormuzd, which denoted the presiding agent of all that was good; and the other, Ahriman, the lord of evil. Each of these had power of creation; but that power was exercised with opposite designs; and it was from their coaction that an admixture of good and evil was found in every created thing. The angels of Hormuzd, or the good principle, sought to preserve the elements, the seasons, and the human race, which the infernal agents of Ahriman desired to destroy; but the source of good alone, the great Hormuzd, was eternal; and must, therefore, ultimately prevail. Light was the type of the good, darkness of the evil spirit; and God had said unto Zoroaster, "My light is concealed under all that shines." Hence, the disciple of that prophet, when he performs his devotions in a temple, turns towards the sacred fire that burns upon its altar; and when in the open air, towards the sun, as the noblest of all lights, and that by which God sheds his divine influence over the whole earth, and perpetuates the works of his creation.

[...] in directing his disciples to turn to the sun, when they offered up their prayers, he accorded with the national belief, and that was also flattered by the great veneration in which he held the elements. (I. 193 ... 198).

In "The Prophecy of Dante" (1821), canto II, Byron alludes to Persia when he writes about Cambyses' plan to attack Egypt and the ordeal he and his army faced while crossing the deserts of Africa during his march to Egypt (Cambyses, the king of Persia who reigned from B.C. 529-522, sent an army to fight the Ammonians, which perished in the sands).

Byron's failure to complete "The Prophecy of Dante" might signal his loss of hope for Italian freedom. In this work Byron expresses his

deepest feelings for the liberation of Italy from the hands of the Bourbons and Austrians or what he referred to as "barbarians" of all nations. Here Byron apostrophizes Rome calling on her to crush her enemies and defeat them just as the Persians were defeated in the desert:

Oh! Rome, the Spoiler or the spoil of France,
 From Brennus to the Bourbon, never, never
 Shall foreign standard to thy walls advance,
 But Tiber shall become a mournful river.
 Oh! when the strangers pass the Alps and Po,
 Crush them, ye rocks! Floods overwhelm them, and for ever!
 Why sleep the idle Avalanches so,
 To topple on the lonely pilgrim's head?
 Why doth Eridanus but overflow
 The peasant's harvest from his turbid bed?
 Were not each barbarous horde a nobler prey?
 Over Cambyses' host the desert spread
 Her sandy ocean, and the Sea-waves' sway
 Rolled over Pharaoh and his thousands, - why,
 Mountains and waters, do ye not as they?
 And you, ye Men! Romans, who dare not die,
 Sons of the conquerors who overthrew
 Those who overthrew proud Xerxes, where yet lie
 The dead whose tomb Oblivion never knew,
 Are the Alps weaker than Thermopylae? (lines 97-116)

Byron's *Don Juan* describes the adventures of a young man who is shipwrecked and rescued by the daughter of a pirate, sold as a slave in Constantinople to a sultana who falls in love with him and who eventually escapes to the Russian army which is besieging the Turkish city of Ismail and is sent on a political mission to England.

Byron starts canto XVI of his famous *Don Juan* with an allusion to the old Persian manner of bringing up their children. He refers to the Persians who teach their children how to draw a bow, ride on horseback and, in accordance with the principles of Zoroastrianism, to be truthful (Byron probably borrowed this piece of information from Herodotus's *Histories*):

The antique Persians taught three useful things,
 To draw the bow, to ride, and speak the truth.
 This was the mode of Cyrus, best of kings-
 A mode adopted since by modern youth.
 Bows have they, generally with two strings;
 Horses they ride without remorse or ruth;

At speaking truth perhaps they are less clever,
But draw the long bow better now than ever (Stanza 1).

In Canto XIII diplomatic relations bring Don Juan ("the envoy of a secret Russian mission") and Lord Henry together. Lord Henry befriends Juan and makes him a frequent guest at their London mansion. When Lord Henry and Lady Adeline Amundeville (the "queen bee, the glass of all that's fair, / Whose charms made all men speak and women dumb") invite Juan to their country seat, Byron writes about Lord Henry's strong and determined character and judgement and compares them to the laws of the Persians:

In judging men - when once his judgment was
Determined, right or wrong, on friend or foe,
Had all the pertinacity pride has,
Which knows no ebb to its imperious flow,
And loves or hates, disdain to be guided,
Because its own good pleasure hath decided.
His friendships, therefore, and no less aversions,
Though oft well founded, which confirm'd but more
His prepossessions, like the laws of Persians
And Medes, would ne'er revoke what went before.
His feelings had not those strange fits, like tertians,
Of common likings, which make some deplore
What they should laugh at - the mere ague still
Of men's regard, the fever or the chill (Stanza 17).

Once more in *Don Juan* (IX) Byron alludes to Persia when he writes about the invasion of India by Nadir Shah. Byron may have received some of his information about the eighteenth-century Persian king, Nadir, from Malcom's *History of Persia*. Sir William Jones also wrote a life of Nadir Shah (Byron recommends Jones and his expertise in a letter to Murray in 1813 (Marchand, 1973-94: III 164)).

To Byron all the wars that result in misery and chaos are the result of the selfishness of the rulers who care only for their own personal aggrandizement. According to the poem, all the abuses in human society exist due to human flaws, such as self-love and inconsideration for the life of other people.

In canto IX, Don Juan, who has come to St. Petersburg, dressed as a war hero in military uniform, revels at his success in saving the life of a "sweet child", the young orphaned Muslim girl, Leila, from two murderous Cossacks intent on killing her. Then he alludes to Nadir Shah's conquest of India, drawing a parallel between the conquest of India by the Persians and

the Russians' attack on Ismail (a Turkish fort at the mouth of the Danube on the Black Sea, historically attacked in 1790) in which 40000 Turks, among them women and children were slaughtered.

Nadir Shah attacked India in 1738 and conquered that country after the King of India, Muhammad Shah, surrendered himself to Nadir's army. During his invasion of India, the Indians rebelled and killed a number of Persian soldiers. It was here that Nadir ordered the massacre of the Indian people and was later assassinated in a conspiracy after his temper had been exasperated by his extreme costivity to a degree of insanity to which Byron refers in the following lines:

But Juan turn'd his eyes on the sweet child
Whom he had saved from slaughter -- what a trophy!
Oh! ye who build up monuments, defiled
With gore, like Nadir Shah, that costive sophy,²
Who, after leaving Hindostan a wild,
And scarce to the Mogul a cup of coffee
To soothe his woes withal, was slain, the sinner!
Because he could no more digest his dinner (Stanza 33).

In another instance in Canto XIII in *Don Juan*, Byron alludes to the "devilish doctrine of the Persian", referring to Zoroaster's philosophy of the two forces of good and evil ("Ormazd", as the force of light, life and creativity and "Ahriman", as the force of darkness, death and evil) while writing about the cold Lady Adeline who is described as "beyond all price, / When once you have broken their confounded ice."

Here Byron rejects Zoroaster's dual doctrine of good and evil ("the two principles") and tries to philosophize about the cold nature of Lady Adeline and reasons with himself whether this can be part of the whole scheme of the world that is based on kindness:

But heaven must be diverted; its diversion
Is sometimes truculent -- but never mind:
The world upon the whole is worth the assertion
(If but for comfort) that all things are kind:
And that same devilish doctrine of the Persian,
Of the two principles, but leaves behind
As many doubts as any other doctrine
Has ever puzzled Faith withal, or yoked her in (Stanza 41).

Zoroastrianism is a very important concept in Byron's poetic drama, Manfred (1817), which is the story of an outcast sinner tortured by guilt for

committing some horrible sin. The Zoroastrian “Arimanes” or Ahriman appears in this play “on his throne, a globe of fire, surrounded by spirits” (II.iv). The guilt-ridden, Faustian Manfred who lives alone in a castle in the Alps descends to the Hall of Arimanes in the underworld and Arimanes promises him death.

In one of the passages in the play (in the speech of the Seventh Spirit, at I.i 110-31) one finds underlying ideas from Zoroastrian cosmology:

The Star which rules thy destiny,
 Was ruled, ere earth began, by me:
 It was a world as fresh and fair
 As e'er revolved round Sun in air;
 Its course was free and regular,
 Space bosomed not a lovelier Star.
 The hour arrived – and it became
 A wandering mass of shapeless flame,
 A pathless comet, and a curse,
 The menace of the universe;
 Still rolling on with innate force,
 Without a sphere, without a course,
 A bright deformity on high,
 The monster of the upper Sky!
 And thou, beneath its influence born –
 Thou worm, whom I obey and scorn,
 Forced by a power (which is not thine,
 And lent thee, but to make thee mine)
 For this brief moment to descend,
 Where these weak Spirits round thee bend
 And parly with a thing like thee –
 What would'st thou, Child of Clay, with me? –

Zoroastrians saw all the known planets as malign (“a curse / The menace of the universe”): however, contact with the Babylonian astronomers caused them to think again, and to see only Saturn and Mars as inauspicious (Zaehner 238). Comets and shooting stars were, in the sacred Zoroastrian books of the *Zend-Avesta*, among the female demons, or Pairikas – evil types of Peri, who used their seductive beauty to turn men away from true religious observance: they, like the planets, constituted one of the minor imperfections which Ahriman introduced into the otherwise perfect universe, created by Ahura Mazda (Wadia 210).

However, it is not clear how Byron formed his understanding of Zoroastrian cosmology in order to be able to make such a point. There is no

evidence that he read the translations of the *Zend-Avesta* made by the eighteenth-century French scholar Anquetil DuPerron.

Despite the fact that he knew none of the original texts, Byron clearly remembered some Zoroastrian ideas while writing *Manfred*, and either elaborated on them or used them in a more straightforward way. There are references to light and dark in Manfred's words at I.i. 29-30 ("Ye spirits of the immortal universe! / Whom I have sought in darkness and in light") and in the speech of the Sixth Spirit at I.i.108-9 ("My dwelling is the Shadow of the Night – / Why doth thy magic torture me with light?").

Manfred is himself seen partly in Zoroastrian terms: he, like the prophet, visits hell (II.iv) and sees Ahriman, who, in turn, regards him with favour; he is familiar with caves (II.ii 80) and mountains (II.ii. 62-5). References to the fact that he was born under "a Star condemned" (I.i.44) or "A wandering mass of shapeless flame, / A pathless comet" (I.i.117) depict him as one deriving his existence from Ahriman, who was the creator of such heavenly bodies.

However, his self-comparison with the Magi at II.ii.92 would put Manfred as a worshipper of Hormuzd, for "Magi" was commonly used by classical writers as a synonym for Zoroastrian priests (Herodotus, Xenophon, Cicero, and Pliny the Elder, for example, all use the word in this way). At II.iv.31, the Second Spirit refers to Manfred as a "Magian", as does the Spirit who comes to claim him, at III.iv.105. The Hymn of the Spirits at the start of II.iv chant the power of Arimanes over the created world; but the speech to the Sun of Manfred himself at III.i.3-29 ("Thou material God! / And representative of the Unknown / Who chose thee for his shadow") hymn the power of his rival and complement, Hormuzd, God of Light, and turns Manfred into a Zoroastrian priest. Manfred may attend the rites of Ahriman and has, in effect, served Ahriman for much of his life but in his true soul he respects Hormuzd. When the Sun sets at the end of his speech, he knows, like a true Zoroastrian, that his own death will follow soon.

By November 1816, in Venice, Byron started his Armenian studies at the monastery of San Lazzarò. After an early visit, on December 5th, he writes to Moore: "There are some very curious MSS. in the monastery, as well as books; translations also from Greek originals, now lost, and from Persian and Syriac, &c.; beside works of their own people." (Marchand, 1973-94, V. 130).

By the first days of January 1817 Byron is totally involved with Father Pascal Aucher, his tutor on San Lazzarò, and helps him with two books: a grammar from which Armenians can learn English, and "... an M.S. grammar for the English acquisition of Armenian" (letter to Murray,

January 2nd 1817: (Marchand, 1973-94: 156). The latter was not published until 1819. When printed, it contained the following:

(The authors of the Persian religion) say, that before the creation of heaven and earth and their creatures Zervanus existed, which being interpreted signifies fortune, or glory. He sacrificed a thousand years that a son might be born to him (named Hormistus) who should create heaven and earth and whatever in them is. And after this sacrifice of a thousand years, he began thus to meditate: Will this sacrifice profit me and produce my son Hormistus, or do I labour in vain? And, during this meditation, Hormistus and Harminus were conceived in the womb of their mother; Hormistus by sacrifice, but Harminus by doubt. Zervanus being assured of the fact, said: There are twins in the womb, to the elder shall the sovereignty be given.

But Hormistus having divined his father's determination, betrayed it to Harminus, saying: Our father Zeruanus [sic] is disposed to give the sovereignty to the elder of us two. But Harminus hearing these words, came forth immediately, and presented himself to his father. Having seen him Zeruanus knew not who he was, and said: Who art thou? he replied: I am thy son. But Zeruanus said: My son is bright and of a grateful odour, but thou dark and offensive. But while they thus discoursed, Hormistus was born at this time, shining and sweet, and presented himself to Zeruanus. And Zeruanus knew him to be Hormistus his son for whom he had sacrificed. And he gave the instruments with which he had sacrificed into the hands of Hormistus saying: With these I sacrificed for thee, henceforward do thou the same for me. And Zeruanus held forth the instruments to Hormistus; and blessed him. But Harminus standing before Zeruanus, said: Hast thou not vowed the kingdom to the elder born? Zeruanus who could not promise in vain, said to Harminus: Hence thou deceitful and malicious! the kingdom is thine for nine thousand years. But Hormistus I appoint over thee, and after nine thousand years he shall reign alone, and do what he wisheth. Then began Hormistus and Harminus the creation. All things made from Hormistus, were good and right, but which Harminus made, was bad and wrong. (Aucher 199-203).

Such dualistic implications and the birth of complementary twins, one dark, the other, light, echo one section of the play in which Manfred compares himself to the neo-Platonist philosopher Iamblichus, who conjured up the twin gods Eros and Anteros:

... I made
Mine eyes familiar with Eternity –
Such as before me did the Magi, and
He who from out their fountain-dwellings raised
Eros and Anteros at Gadara,
As I do thee ... (II.ii.90-95).³

3. Conclusion

When one examines Byron's references to Persia very closely one realizes that he displays an ambivalent and sometimes contradictory attitude towards Persia and everything Persian. Byron dismisses the Persian king, Nader, as the "costive sophy", but reveres the Persian poet, Hafiz. Sometimes he refers to Zoroaster's religion as "devilish" and sometimes Zoroaster figures as a good person in his work. Byron makes use of the Zoroastrian dual or Janus-like philosophy in explaining some of the predicaments that his characters face in life. Zoroastrianism provides Byron with a metaphor for the two confused sides of his characters' nature, the one which struggles towards the light, and the one which, at the same time, involves characters in darkness and destroys them. In later years Byron looked more closely at Zoroastrianism. It seems he looked at it because he was fascinated by what he saw as the extreme duality of man's nature, for which he found that the Christian explanation, whereby the work of one creator is spoiled by the efforts of a lesser, malign spirit, was unsatisfactory. Byron seems to have tried to "know" Persia and its religion. Persia and Zoroastrianism inform some of his well-known poems. Some of his characters are described in terms of the Zoroastrian dual system. It is as if Persia appears, to use Cochran's words, as an object which Byron most probably admired and wished to possess and penetrate (1). Byron tried to assimilate some of his writings into Persian culture and religion and seems to have used and enjoyed Persia's cultural heritage for its exotic nature.

Notes

1. All quotations from Byron's poetry which appear in this article are from *Lord Byron: Complete Poetical Works*, edited by J. J. McGann (Oxford: Clarendon, 1980).

2. "Costive" here means "constipated". "Costive sophy" is a phrase brought in desperately because Byron needs a rhyme. Nadir suffered from melancholia caused by dropsy or ulcer. In his *The Indian Empire* (1857) R. Montgomery Martin writes that Nadir became so mad that he ordered the Afghan chiefs move suddenly upon his Persian guard and seize the chief nobles. He wanted to force them to convert. His plot was discovered,

however, and the intended victims retaliated and some of them including Nadir's guard and the chief of his tribe Afshar, entered his tent at midnight and killed him by repeated blows of sabres.

3. In this section I have benefited greatly from the comments my friend Peter Cochran made as he kindly agreed to read the first draft of this article and emailed me his comments and suggestions. My special thanks to him for his time and invaluable comments.

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