

■ Lord Byron's *The Giaour*: More than a Mere Orientalist Curio

Jon Nichols
Shih Chien University

Abstract

This paper argues that Lord Byron's poem *The Giaour* which has been inaccurately classified as a work of Romantic Orientalism, should be regarded as both an example of political metaphor and a rebuke of British imperialism. Within the poem, the major characters represent Greece, the Ottoman Empire, and Western Europe. It is my contention that the poem does not fulfill many of the criterions that Edward Said states are necessary in order to be considered strictly as a work of Orientalism. These discrepancies include Byron's treatment of character names and their connection to the concept of "otherness," the decidedly Eastern viewpoint of the poem, the passivity and silence of the "Western" characters, and the lack of meaningful comparisons between Oriental and Occidental values, culture, and—most importantly—religion. The poem is also significant because it is arguably the first to feature a fully realized version of the "Byronic hero." In addition, the poem should be viewed as an important source of insight into the inner workings of Lord Byron as an author, a political thinker, and as an individual. *The Giaour* neatly merges Byron's experiences of traveling through "The Orient" as a young man and the life-changing moral choices he would make toward the end of his life.

Keywords: Lord Byron, Poetry, *The Giaour*, Orientalism, Edward Said, Political Metaphor, European Imperialism

Jon Nichols is an Assistant Professor in the College of Liberal Arts at the Kaohsiung campus of Shih Chien University. He received his Ph.D. in English Literature at The National Kaohsiung Normal University. His research interests include British Romanticism and language learning. His publications include: "Do High-Stakes English Proficiency Tests Motivate Taiwanese University Students to Learn English?" *American Journal of Educational Research* 4.13 (2016): 927-930; "Moral Reasoning among Taiwanese Liberal Arts Students: Conventional Morality is Not Enough," *Education Journal* 4.5 (2015) 207-213; "An Educator's Reflection on Negative Stereotypes of East Asians Within Western Literature, Film and Social Media," *NPUST Journal of Social Sciences Research* 6.1 (2012): 90-119; and "Burke's Sublime and Lord Byron's Darkness" *NKFUST Journal of Applied Foreign Languages* 17 (2012): 35-63. E-mail: tomballtxs66@yahoo.com.

(Received 28 January 2016; accepted 11 November 2016)

Introduction

Lord George Gordon Byron's *The Giaour* is usually categorized as one of his initial forays into "Orientalism." This is indubitably due to its superficial resemblance—in terms of setting, plot and character—to other pieces of literature in that genre. Byron himself may also have had a hand in this misleading classification of *The Giaour* by ironically later referencing *The Giaour* in his satirical masterpiece *Beppo* in which he writes the following:

How quickly would I print (the world delighting)
A Grecian, Syrian or Assyrian tale
And sell you, mixed with Western sentimentalism,
Some samples of the finest Orientalism. (5-8)

Although Byron offers his readers a tongue-in-cheek acknowledgment of his supposedly Orientalist leanings, a strong argument can be made against this classification. This is because the poem seemingly does not meet most of the criteria for Orientalist literature in the strictest sense. This is especially true in Byron's use of the moniker "the giaour" for his titular character, the Eastern perspective of the poem, the passivity of the main protagonist, the giaour's lack of personal power, and the poem's overall lack of a meaningful comparison between the East and the West. The value of the poem is twofold: First, within this poem, Byron offers his readers his earliest, fully realized Byronic hero; and second, the poem is rich in political metaphors, and foreshadows the moral and political choices that Byron would make toward the end of his life in the cause for Greek political independence.

Background

The Giaour was written after Byron's 1809-11 Grand Tour of Europe and "the Orient." These travels may have shaped Byron's artistic and political destiny as much as any other single event in his life. This time in "The Orient" was a life-changing event for the young poet—one which influenced much of his later writing, including his greatest works like *Childe Harold* and *Don Juan*. According to Marchand, Byron became deeply enamored with "the Orient" in general and Greece in particular (328-38). The idea for *The Gaiour* comes from an incident that Byron witnessed in the summer of 1811. Depending on how much credence one places in Byron's preferred account of the events, that he may have been the instigator of the events must also be considered, though it is equally likely that the story is merely a tale that was relayed to him. According to Byron, he had just finished swimming at the port of Piraeus and was returning to his temporary

residence in Athens when he encountered a group of men carrying a large bag. The bag contained a struggling Turkish girl who had been bound and sewn up inside. Apparently, the girl had been caught in an act of illicit sex. The group of men, acting on orders from the Turkish ruler (Waiwode) of Athens, were about to carry out her death sentence by throwing her into the sea, when Byron intervened. Using threats and bribes, the young poet ultimately convinced the men to release her. Byron apparently knew the girl, however; he was always very careful to conceal the extent to which he was acquainted with the girl, as well as the exact nature of their relationship. It is difficult to know exactly what happened, because the clearest account of Byron's involvement in this affair comes from his friend Lord Sligo, who was not present at the time of the actual incident. He wrote his account based on rumors which were still circulating around the cafés and marketplaces of Athens two years later. Byron, who was already shrewdly aware of how rumors and innuendo could be used to build his own brand name, agreed that Lord Sligo's account of the events was essentially true. Byron further obscured the actual events by heavily redacting certain parts of Sligo's written account, which according to the poet, were either unimportant or indecorous (see Marchand, *Letters* 2:311).

The poem uses Byron's actual encounter with the Turkish girl and her would-be executioners as a point of departure and then proceeds to tell the fictional story of "the giaour" (which is the Turkish term for infidel or outsider), Hassan and Leila. Leila is a concubine within Hassan's harem who escapes on the night of an Islamic holy festival in order to conduct an illicit assignation with the giaour. She is in turn recaptured by Hassan, placed into a bag and drowned in the ocean. The giaour avenges her death by killing Hassan. Wracked with guilt over his failure as a lover and protector, the giaour retreats to a monastery where he spends the rest of his life in solitude. On his deathbed, Leila visits him in a dream. This Gothic mixture of love and death, beauty and longing along with a touch of the supernatural would inform many of Byron's later poems as well as his closet drama *Manfred*.

Edward Said and Orientalism

Following Edward Said's ground-breaking texts *Orientalism* and *Culture and Imperialism*, the term "Orientalism" has become a derogatory label within literary criticism circles. Moreover, for a work of literature to be classified as "Orientalist" is a fate which is tantamount to being labeled "racist," dismissed, and relegated to obscurity. Cochran writes in *Byron and Orientalism* that "the Orient" represents an object that the Eurocentric male subject can penetrate and possess (2). The Ori-

ent and the Occident are binary opposites. “The Orient” is feminine, whereas “the Occident” is masculine; the West is logical and dynamic, whereas the East is irrational and static. The West is knowable; the East is mysterious. The West is modern and scientific; the East is ancient and magical. In essence, “the Orient” is an “other” against which “the West” can define itself by delineating what it is not (3). Said suggests that these binary opposites are concepts which derived from a long history of western imperialism, and that neither “the Orient” nor “the Occident” exists in reality (5). They exist only as theoretical constructs that are used to further western political oppression, cultural hegemony, social misapprehension, and religious intolerance (see *Orientalism*). It is difficult to read Said and not conclude that “Western” literary works that employ “the Orient” as a setting for encounters between Eastern and Western characters should be viewed with a sense of shame, suspicion, and liberal guilt.

Said indubitably developed his criticism of “Orientalism” partially due to the literature that had emerged in Europe during the Romantic period. His critique is difficult to ignore and has numerous merits, particularly when applied to works such as Robert Southy’s *Thalaba the Destroyer* (1801), and *The Curse of Kehama* (1810), both of which are filled with historical and geographical errors, and seem to be more intent upon extolling the virtues of western morality, than offering any coherent artistic statement. Said’s arguments could also be applied to Coleridge’s *Kubla Khan*, which starts with the famous lines, “In Xanadu did Kubla Khan/A stately pleasure dome decree:” (1-2), and depicts “the Orient” at its stereotypical best.

One reason for the development of “Orientalism” was the British Empire’s involvement in an inordinately large number of military conflicts during the nineteenth century. Moreover, since many of these conflicts occurred in “the Orient,” a great deal of public and political energy was expended on attempting to comprehend or, more accurately,—manage the popular perception of—“the Orient” in order to maintain public support for imperialist policy. Consequently, a substantial portion of European art, music, and literature from the Romantic period also reflects an interest in all things “Oriental.”

It is also likely that the “Orientalist” trend within romantic poetry was a response to the stifling religious and social environment of Great Britain and Europe at the dawn of the nineteenth century. These restrictions necessitated mysterious new settings and characters against which authors could weave stories of sensuality and intrigue—free from the moral constraints of European society; or, conversely, to demonstrate how European values and ideals could triumph within the immoral realms of the Godless Near East. The psychological escapism provided by such narratives struck a chord within Europe and Great Britain, and consequently, all

things “Oriental” became a ubiquitous part of the British cultural parlance.

This obsession with “the Orient” not only permeated all facets of European society, it also seeped into most genres of European art including ballet, drama, painting, and poetry. European “Orientalism” probably reached its zenith within the artistic and musical spheres in the mid-to later parts of the nineteenth century with painters such as Eugène Delacroix,—who used Byron’s poems as subjects for his work,—and composers such as “The New Russian School.” Dramas, novels, and poems featured these themes in much earlier times. Cochran indicates in his book *Byron and Orientalism* that by the time the romantics were writing their eastern epics, there already existed a rich European tradition of European “Orientalist” literary works dating back to the Middle Ages. Most of these early works were set against the backdrop of the crusades and the Moorish incursions onto the Iberian Peninsula between the 8th and 10th centuries, and featured clashes between Christianity and Islam as central plot devices, inevitably displaying the superiority of Christianity—and, by extension, the West,—over Islam and the Orient (2).

Marlowe’s drama *Tamburlaine* and Shakespeare’s *Othello* are good examples of literature showing writers in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries addressing a heightened misapprehension of Islam and “the Orient” by introducing characters and themes involving Turkish conquest within Western Europe.

According to Cochran, when Byron wrote the first of his oriental tales in 1812, Europeans knew considerably more about of the specifics of Islam than they did during the Middle Ages or the Renaissance. This is largely due to the scholarship of people such as Antoine Galland, who translated *The Arabian Nights* into French in 1704-1717, and George Sale, who translated The Koran into English in 1734. However, despite increased knowledge regarding the specific Islamic beliefs and practices, there was little corresponding expansion in empathy for the religion’s adherents. The increased scholarship did have the effect of demystifying the religion to a degree, which in turn forced the British Romantics to abandon their poorly realized depictions of Islam, and instead to focus on the magical and mythological elements of “Oriental” folklore as sources for the settings and plots in their stories (6).

The Byronic Hero

Because of its obvious associations with Orientalism, Byron’s *The Giaour* has been panned by critics and largely ignored by scholars. In fact, McConnell states the following regarding *The Giaour* in his introduction to the poem in the *Norton’s Critical Edition of Byron’s Poetry*:

Until recently it was a critical truism that none of Byron's romances (except *The Prisoner of Chillon*) were worth reading except as historical curios. This is an odd judgement, since the romances—especially the “Oriental” tales of sin and swashbuckling, *The Giaour* and *The Bride of Abydos* (1812) and *The Corsair* and *Laura* (1813)—were the poems which more than any others consolidated Byron's greatest and happiest period of celebrity, 1812-15, and which gave the image of the “Byronic” hero its most striking articulation. Modern critics of Byron, indeed, have discovered in these tales a richness and a complexity which redeems them from their long obscurity, especially in the case of *The Giaour*. (84)

In addition to McConnell's observation, it should be asserted that by reducing the Turkish Tales—and *The Giaour* in particular—to mere “Oriental curios,” one risks failing to understand Byron at all. Without *The Giaour*, a gap emerges in the literary development of the Byronic hero, which is perhaps Byron's most important and lasting literary contribution. *The Giaour* is where Byron first shows his readers how the Byronic hero moves through his world and interacts with his environment. In his article “Byron's Turkish Tales: An Introduction,” Peter Cochran states that “*The Giaour* offers us an image of the Byronic hero in action for the first time” (1). Although *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* introduces the reader to the Byronic hero, he is largely inactive, concentrating his energy on being, rather than doing. Within *The Giaour*, the Byronic hero is shown to be a man of action. He is a lover, a warrior, and in that strange Byronic manner, a philosopher—albeit a failure at each of these endeavors.

Furthermore, by ignoring *The Giaour*—or worse, by categorizing it as simply an exercise in Romantic Orientalism—one also runs the risk of failing to understand Byron's then-nascent political philosophy. It is Byron's engagement in the political sphere that influenced so much of his writing throughout his lifetime. Byron's poem *The Giaour* is not a typical piece of Orientalism; it is not focused on promoting the cultural norms of the day, nor does it extol the virtues of Western culture and morals by denigrating those of the Orient. Instead, the poem challenges the status quo, and questions the morality of imperialism as an institution.

There are many ways in which *The Giaour* does not fit into the traditional mold of Romantic Orientalism at all, and should best be analyzed using a different set of critical concepts. The following is a discussion of several of the ways in which *The Giaour* does not fit into the Orientalist mold.

Names and Otherness

The notion of names and their importance in determining who should be considered the “other” is a critical concept within Byron's *The Giaour*, and will be addressed here in some detail. The poem's title provides readers with a strong in-

dication regarding who should be considered the “other” within the poem. That the titular character is without a name indicates that the protagonist, and—not the supporting Oriental cast,—should be viewed as the “other.” The *giaour* is the object, not the subject. The action of the poem happens to him, and although he is not exactly passive, he is not the instigator.

In literature, as in life, names are always significant. Regarding naming, the scholar E. D. Radmacher states: “In the thinking of the peoples of the ancient Near East, naming something was a mark of power or lordship. For them, names were not merely labels, but descriptions with some force to them” (1). In other words, the practice of naming held considerable importance within Middle Eastern culture. Names were not given arbitrarily; they were indicative of position, power, and personal attributes. Wood and Marshall further clarify “Oriental” naming practices as follows:

Isaac was named because of the attendant laughter of his parents (Gn.17:17;18:12; 21:3-7); Samuel, because of the prayer of his mother (1 Sa. 1:20); Moses, because his princess-mother drew him from the water (Ex. 2:10); Ichabod, because of the loss of the Ark of the Covenant, seen as significant of the withdrawal of divine favour (1 Sa. 4:21); Jacob, because of the position of the twins at birth (Gn. 25:26). In many such cases the Bible provides the evidence to show that such ‘accidents’ were truly symbolic: the victory at the Red Sea makes Moses pre-eminently the man who came up out of the water; the story of Samuel is precisely the story of the man who knew that prayer is answered, and so on. (3)

Although these Middle Eastern concepts regarding the connection between names and identity originated from within Judaism and Christianity and predate Islam, the Islamic world has naming practices that are closely related to those of its rival religions. According to Islamic writer Huda Dodge, these traditions remain in force today, and were also used during Byron’s time. For instance, it is recommended that Muslims give their male children names which indicate service to God, by using the phoneme “Abd” in front of one of God’s names. Thus, Abdullah means, “in service to Allah,” Abdul-Rahman is “in service to The Compassionate One,” and Abdul-Aziz is “in service to The Mighty One.” Other possibilities include the names of prophets and those of the companions of the prophet Muhammad (1).

When a parent names a child, the parent is planting the seed of identity, and if a person is renamed, that act can either represent a positive personal transition or the removal of personal power. The fact that Byron’s protagonist has no name is a significant omission that readers should focus on.

In lieu of a proper name, the protagonist in *The Giaour* has been renamed by members of a foreign culture. Renaming is both one of the greatest tools of imperialistic hegemony as well as a primary indicator of personal triumph. For instance, when

an imperial power colonizes a territory, it often also changes the name of the territory, which consequently alters the character of the colonized country in many ways. To see how this notion is practiced in reality, one need look no further than all of the countries that promptly shed their colonial names and renamed themselves using words from their indigenous languages upon securing independence. When a place loses its name, that place often ceases to be. Countries like Sardinia and Saxony are sound examples of this phenomenon; their names have been altered, their borders redefined, and their national character diffused and absorbed into other states. In essence, these countries have ceased to exist. In Byron's poem, the protagonist has been stripped of his name. He has become the object that receives the action of his "Oriental" environment and the "Oriental" cast of characters who inhabit the poem.

Name alterations are never without meaning and they are never neutral. Name changes are always associated with changes in character. This can be perceived by the object of the name change as either a positive or negative experience. The positive permutation of name-changing is commonplace within the religious context. This type of name change occurs when a person's character has become recognizably different or elevated. Regarding this process, Wood and Marshall state the following:

[These] names were bestowed in order to show that something new had entered the life of the person concerned, one chapter was complete and a new chapter was opening. Though this giving of a new name is usually hopeful and promissory, the category opens with the sad re-naming of 'iššā (Gn. 2:23) as Eve (Gn. 3:20), the name expressive of co-equality of status and complementariness of relationship becoming the name of function; the former name expressed what her husband saw in her (and was glad), the latter expressed what he would use her for, giving her domination in return for her longing (Gn. 3:16). But to the same category belongs the re-naming of Abram as Abraham, signifying the beginning of the new man with new powers: the childless Abram (whose name 'high father' was only a sour joke) becoming Abraham, which, though it does not grammatically mean 'father of many nations', has sufficient assonance with the words which would (at greater length) express that thought. Many significant names operate on just such a basis of assonance. Thus also on one and the same day Benoni became Benjamin (Gn. 35:18), the circumstance-name of pain and loss becoming the status-name of 'righthandman'. The dominical bestowal of the name Peter (Jn. 1:42) has the same significance, cf. Mt. 16:18; as indeed does the (presumably) self-chosen change from Saul to Paul. (Acts 13:9) (4)

As Wood and Marshall indicated, in each instance the person who has undergone a name change has also experienced significant personal changes. Their name alterations represent a change in character. In keeping this ancient custom, Catholic priests and nuns have traditionally adopted new names upon joining their orders, and even popes shed their old names upon accepting their

appointment. In each case, the name change reflects a correspondingly positive change in identity. Along these same lines, many former slaves in the United States jettisoned their "slave names" in favor of names that represented their new status as free men and women once they obtained emancipation.

Conversely, when an individual's name is debased or, as in the case of Byron's titular character, when a person is deprived of a name altogether, it is in many ways tantamount to minimizing or even depriving that individual of an identity. From that point forth, the recipient of the name change starts to become what Edward Said referred to as "the other." It is akin to the dehumanizing effect that being referred to by number, rather than by name, has on the psyche when dealing with a bureaucracy, or the humiliation of remembering someone's name and discovering that they have forgotten yours. Perhaps the most "othering" experience of all is to be deprived of a name, in favor of being addressed by a racially-based pejorative moniker such as the Mandarin term "外國人," or the more insulting Cantonese term "怪佬," or even worse, the American slang words "gook" or "chink." The titular character of Byron's poem finds himself in precisely these circumstances. He is never mentioned by name; he is simply referred to as "the giaour." The Turkish term "gâvur" (giaour) is even more derogatory than the aforementioned terms in the sense that the word is used to describe someone who not only comes from another place, but one who is religiously an "other" as well. In essence, the term refers to someone who is so despised that it is assumed, or even hoped, that he will suffer the torments of Hell after his demise. Moreover, Islam differs from some other religions in the sense that Islam dictates cultural, dietary, educational, and hygienic practices, as well as spiritual ones. When one is referred to as a "giaour," he is being called filthy, ignorant, an eater of disgusting food, and one who will burn in hell. Within the ideology of Islam, there can be no one more "other" than the giaour. Within "Orientalist" literary works, Western characters are never the "other"; this role is reserved for the "Oriental" characters. Western characters are never the infidels; this distinction is also reserved for the objectified "Orientals."

Viewpoint

Another manner in which *The Giaour* is an atypical piece of Orientalism is the fact that its fragmented narrative does not originate from the viewpoint of the Western characters. The giaour's story is told from the perspective of the other characters. His own viewpoint is not expressed until the poem's conclusion. This is contrary to what one would expect from a typical piece of Orientalist litera-

ture, where the Western characters are the subjects, and the “Oriental” characters are the objects. It is also striking that throughout the poem, the titular character is mostly—although not entirely—inert. He is swept along in the drama of the other characters’ actions. Although Byron’s *giaour* is typically perceived as a man of action, a closer look reveals him to be reflexive, rather than truly active, in most instances. The European/male *giaour* waits impatiently on the shore, while Leila, the “Orientalized”/female, escapes from the confines of her harem, and rushes off into the night to meet him:

Doth Leila there no longer dwell?
That tale can only Hassan tell:
Strange rumours in our city say
Upon that eve she fled away;
When Rhamazan’s last sun was set,
And flashing from each minaret
Millions of lamps proclaim’d the feast
Of Bairam through the boundless East.
Twas then she went as to the bath,
Which Hassan vainly searched in wrath,
But she was flown Her master’s rage
In likeness of a Georgian page;
And far beyond the Moslem’s power
Had wrong’d him with the faithless *Giaour*. (445-58)

In what is a complete male/female and Occident/Orient role reversal, this passage shows Leila as the initiator and the *giaour* as the receptor. Not only is Leila the character who actively escapes (while the *giaour* passively waits for her), the wording of the poem also indicates that it is she who is the initiator of the romantic relationship. In essence, she is the subject, and the *giaour* is the object; Leila uses the *giaour* in order to wrong Hassan. The “Orient” is not being penetrated and possessed by the “Occidental” man; rather, it is the “Orient” that permeates and possesses the western protagonist. Accordingly, in another passage, the *giaour* waits passively in ambush, while Hassan and his men charge into the night to seek revenge. This is also an east-west role reversal; one that is unexpected in “Orientalist” literature. Hassan’s men are decimated by musket fire before brave Hassan faces the *giaour*. The following lines describe their encounter in battle:

With sabre shivered to the hilt,
Yet dripping with the blood he spilt;
Yet strained within the severed hand
Which quivers round that faithless brand;
His turban far behind him rolled,
And cleft in twain its firmest fold;
His flowing robe by falchion torn,

And crimson as those clouds of morn
 That, streaked with dusky red, portend
 The day shall have a stormy end;
 A stain on every bush that bore
 A fragment of his palampore
 His breast with wounds unnumbered riven,
 His back to earth, his face to heaven. (655-69)

The giaour cuts Hassan's hand off before delivering a death blow to the heart. The hand is often symbolic of action, in the same manner that the heart is symbolic of love, again indicating that it is Hassan's actions as well as his crimes of the heart that so offend the giaour—actions that the giaour is unable to emulate due to his passivity and lack of conviction. The human voice is another source of power and thus it is noteworthy that not only is the story told from an Oriental perspective, but that the Western characters are almost entirely silent throughout the poem as well. Leila, the giaour's lover, speaks no lines throughout the entire poem, and the giaour himself has no lines until its end, when he is a broken and powerless shell of his former self. This silencing of two of the central characters indicates that Byron was not attempting to write merely another Orientalist poem. By silencing Leila and limiting the lines spoken by the giaour, Byron effectively robs them of their power, forcing the reader to view these Western characters through the cultural lens of the Oriental characters who also inhabit the poem. The readers are left to form their own conclusions regarding the inner world of the protagonist, and must wait until the the poem's conclusion in order to discover the giaour's motivations. Leila, however, remains an enigma.

Superior West versus Inferior East

Unlike most "Orientalist" works, this is not the story of a superior Western man who demonstrates his mastery over an inferior Eastern adversary. The giaour does not ostensibly represent European society at all, for he has rejected it. Akin to other Byronic heroes, the giaour lives outside of society. He is aloof and cultureless. The giaour presumably left Vienna in order to escape from the limiting hierarchies of social class and rules. Unfortunately, instead of freedom, the giaour merely trades the tyranny of the West for the tyranny of the East. The giaour, who has chosen to be considered an "other" by members of his own society, has been transformed into an "other" in a different culture as well. This is the story of a man who becomes completely baffled when attempting to negotiate life and love within an alien set of cultural norms. In what is a total departure from previous Orientalist works of "Orientalism," which merely employ the Middle East as a backdrop for tales of religious and cultural conversion, the giaour's Western values

are no match for the cultural complexities he encounters. Even his own set of individualistic values that he has developed in lieu of his previously rejected European values is not adequate to guide him through the quagmire of love and loss in this alien culture. Nor does *The Giaour* exemplify typical Orientalist binary oppositions where the West is depicted as being normal and understandable, in contrast to “the Orient,” which is portrayed as being chaotic and unknowable. Throughout the poem, the Muslim characters are rendered with respect and portrayed as being honorable, intelligent, successful, and brave, and Islamic culture is depicted as being orderly and predictable—albeit harsh. Byron’s rendering of the Muslim characters in *The Giaour* should be contrasted with Southy’s portrayal in *Thalaba the Destroyer* (1801), and *The Curse of Kehama* (1810). In *Thalaba the Destroyer* the supposedly Muslim protagonist defeats a band of evil sorcerers using a magic ring and guidance from the prophet Mohammad. However, even though there is a strong sense of morality throughout the poem, the fact that the action takes place within the Babylonian Empire—thousands of years before the advent of Islam along with its heavy reliance on Western stereotypes about the Middle-East detracts from the idea that Southy ever had any intention of portraying the Orient in a fair and representative manner. *The Curse of Kehama* focuses on India and features Hinduism; however, according to Bernhardt and Kabisch the poet found much of the religion to be too irrational and superstitious and changed his portrayal of the religion to fit his own Western sensibilities (97-8).

Christianity versus Islam

As previously mentioned, one of the prerequisites of “Orientalist” literature is that it must assert the West’s cultural superiority over the East, and by extension, that of Christianity over Islam. However, Byron’s *The Giaour* apparently does not have this intent. Throughout the poem, the Muslim characters clearly fare considerably better than the non-Muslim characters. For example, Hassan is known throughout the poem by his name, and the fact that he dies in battle with an infidel guarantees that he will spend eternity in paradise. He is a hero who is respected as a fallen warrior. By contrast, the giaour’s fate differs; he states the following in his interaction with a priest:

Despair is stronger than my will.
 Waste not thine orison, despair
 Is mightier than thy pious prayer:
 I would not if I might, be blest;
 I want no paradise, but rest. (1266-70)

The giaour does not obtain peace from his religion; in fact, he rejects all that

his religion has to offer. It is nothing but an empty ritual for him. He doubts the power of God, instead nurturing his own despair and allowing his bitterness and loss to fester. In contrast to Hassan, the giaour dies alone, a cursed, broken, and remorseful man bereft of religious solace and eternal peace. He is a man who has rejected his own culture and his own religion in a failed attempt to procure romantic love. Thus, contrary to a reader's expectations of "Orientalist" writings, one cannot interpret the poem as a battle of ideals between Christianity and Islam. Colin Jager characterizes this best when he says: "The poem, then, does not derive its energy from a clash of civilizations; indeed, Christian orthodoxy never meets Islamic orthodoxy, and in any case both are so emptied of content as to become literal invitations for readers to fill in the blanks for themselves" (188). Byron's readers are made aware of both Hassan's and the giaour's respective religious affiliations, but a direct comparison is never offered, and Western Christianity is not shown as being the superior system of belief. If anything, Hassan, who is depicted as being devout, has a more satisfying and meaningful religious experience than does the giaour. The giaour describes meeting Hassan on the battlefield as follows: "One cry to Mahomet for aid,/One prayer to Allah all he made" (1083-4). The giaour does not pray before battle. Throughout the poem, Hassan's adherence to his religious beliefs augments his nobility. Conversely, it is the giaour's rejection of religion which partially defines him. During his final confession to the priest, the giaour says the following regarding Hassan and Islam:

Thou wilt absolve me from the deed,
For he was hostile to thy creed!
The very name of Nazarene
Was wormwood to his Paynim spleen.
Ungrateful fool! since but for brands
Well wielded in some hardy hands,
And wounds by Galileans given-
The surest pass to Turkish heaven. (1038-45)

These lines assure the readers that Hassan is to receive his heavenly reward for falling in battle against an infidel. Even in death Hassan retains his dignity and nobility, and his Islamic faith is never ridiculed, nor seriously challenged by Western religious ideals. In effect, a strong case could be made for the notion that the term "infidel" could be applied to the protagonist by members of either religion, as the protagonist spends his final days within the confines of a monastery, rejecting the tenets of the Christian faith and refusing to participate in any religious rituals. His attitude toward his own religion is described in the following manner:

Tis twice three years at summer tide
 Since first among our friers he came;
 And here it soothes him to abide
 For some dark deed he will not name.
 But never at our vesper prayer,
 Nor e'er before confession chair
 Kneels he, nor recks lie when arise
 Incense or anthem to the skies,
 But broods within his cell alone,
 His faith and race alike unknown. (798-807)

In contrast to Hassan, whose Islamic beliefs were an essential aspect of his character, the *giaour* spends the final six years of his life living among monks, and masochistically refusing to participate in any of their ceremonies. In this manner, the *giaour* deprives himself of any hope of solace or peace that the religion could provide, and instead reinforces the fierce humanism that would become synonymous with the Byronic hero. By choosing to simultaneously live within and without the confines of the monastery, the *giaour* effectively isolates himself from the cultural and spiritual representations of his own culture. This rejection of Western religion lends further support to the argument that it had never been Byron's intention to offer a direct comparison between Western and "Oriental" religious ideologies.

The *Giaour* as *Political Metaphor*

Because classifying *The Giaour* as a work of Romantic "Orientalism" seems inappropriate, it appears an alternative set of critical concepts to analyze the poem is necessary. Another method to approach *The Giaour* is from the standpoint of political metaphor, wherein Byron uses his narrative to shed light on the destructive consequences of imperialism. In his review of the book, *Byromania and the Birth of Celebrity Culture*, the critic Tom Mole states: "McDayter follows . . . others in reading Byron's tales as political allegories, taking Leila in *The Giaour* as a figure for Greece, and the eponymous hero as a political liberator" (1). This notion becomes useful when analyzing the opening lines of the poem, where Byron describes Greece as the corpse of a beautiful woman who has recently died yet still retains her beauty:

Such is the aspect of this shore'
 Tis Greece but living Greece no more!
 So coldly sweet, so deadly fair,
 We start for soul is wanting there.
 Hers is the loveliness in death,

That parts not quite with parting breath;
But beauty with that fearful bloom,
That hue which haunts it to the tomb
Expression's last receding ray,
A gilded halo hovering round decay,
The farewell beam of Feeling past away! (90-101)

These lines not only provide the setting for the action of the poem, they but also provide its theme. In essence, the poem describes the loss of life and the withering of the soul that accompany the practice of imperialism. Byron continues to tell the story of Greece and her experience as a vassal state by personifying the country within the character of the female protagonist Leila, who like Greece, retains her beauty even after her own demise. In fact, she becomes even more beautiful in the idealized memory of the giaour. Greece is also similar in the fact that the sordid realities of Byron's modern Greece pale in comparison to the splendor and greatness that it had achieved in the Classical Era. In the same manner that Byron portrays Greece as an essentially Western country that has been enslaved by the Ottoman Empire, Byron portrays Leila as a Western woman who has been enslaved by a despotic Eastern ruler. Thus, she has become "Orientalized." The parallels between Leila and Greece are evident from the poem's opening lines, which both describe Greece and serve as a foreshadowing of Leila's fate:

No breath of air to break the wave
That rolls below the Athenian's grave,
That tomb which, o'er the cliff,
First greets the homeward-veering skiff. (1-4)

Leila is ultimately forced into a bag and thrown into the sea. Her breath is unable to "break the wave," and hence, she dies. This depiction of Greece most likely reflects Byron's perception of the political conditions experienced in Greece during the beginning of the nineteenth century. In Byron's mind, Greece, like Leila, rightfully belonged to the West, and both were drowned because of their enslavement to the Ottoman Empire. Her break for freedom and subsequent murder act as the catalyst for the action in the poem. Matthew Green points out that "the Giaour stands as a literary representation of the sort of revolutionary subject whose acts are endorsed by Žižek and Badiou" (1). Green also suggests that Leila's murder is the legal transgression which predicates the possibility of freedom. Her death causes the wound, which in turn forces the giaour to engage in the necessary transcendence of the law through which freedom may ultimately be bought. Furthermore it is his love for Leila/Greece and her subsequent loss that galvanizes the intervention of the giaour/the West. Without her death the giaour

would have remained trapped in his native state of inaction.

The poem's lines, "High o'er the land he saved in vain/when shall such a hero live again?" (5-6) indicate that both Greece and Leila required a hero—someone who would break the shackles of enslavement and provide freedom from oppression. In what turned out to be an interesting twist of fate, it was Byron himself who became the hero that Greece needed to finally break from the bonds of Ottoman rule. In fact Byron became the prototypical hero that future revolutionaries would seek when embarking upon their own political adventures. The Polish poet Adam Mickiewicz, who was a key figure in the Polish independence movement of the 1830s, was impressed with Byron's activities in Greece to the extent that he consciously styled himself after his predecessor. Biographer Roman Koropeckyj writes:

He became, indeed, 'the Byron of his country, but a moral and Christian Byron'—if that is not too glaring a contradiction in terms. When Mickiewicz translated *The Giaour*, it became accepted as a virtual Polish poem in its own right because he changed the giaour's death bed sneers at Christian consolation into a pious acceptance of the same. (549)

This assessment indicates that both Byron and his poem were considered to be politically relevant. That the Polish translation has a more Christian ending indicates that Mickiewicz felt he needed to modify Byron's titular character in order to make the entire poem appear more sympathetic to the political goals of the Polish people—namely that their cause was ordained by God. His revisions of Byron's original serve the dual purpose of simultaneously making the poem more nationalistic and more "Orientalist" in tone. A giaour who is a repentant Christian strengthens the poem's value as an instigator of political rebellion, by removing the subtle ambiguity that Byron weaves into his narrative and having the relationship between the oppressor and the oppressed appear to be in binary opposition. A repentant giaour also makes the poem more "Orientalist" by inviting comparisons of religion and culture that Byron never intended.

Indeed, if one can resist the temptation to view the lines 487-90 as an indictment of Islam, this passage begins to assume a different aspect:

Oh! who young Leila's glance could read
And keep that portion of his creed
Which saith, that woman is but dust,
A soulless toy for tyrant's lust? (487-90)

Thus, the question no longer concerns whether or not Leila and women in general possess souls within the Islamic religion. Instead, the question becomes, "Does Greece have a soul?" It seems that Byron's response to this question about

the soul of Greece is similar to the one he provides regarding Leila within his poem. He suggests that Greece may appear to be “soulless,” but narrowly avoids this categorization by virtue of the fact that Greece, like Leila, still possesses extraordinary beauty. Although he expresses his understanding that within Islam women are not considered to have souls, the Muslim narrator—and Byron, by extension—discounts this idea as impossible due to Leila’s (Greece’s) beauty. This is because in the mind of the Romantics, the concepts of beauty and truth were synonymous in the same way that the concept of God represented truth to the poets of the Enlightenment Era. It is also possible that the Romanticist concept of beauty may have been more expansive than our current concept. Although there is no reason to believe that Leila was anything other than a stunning physical beauty, it should also be noted that Romantic poetry is full of poems wherein the poet exalts the status of the ordinary into the realm of the beautiful by extolling the virtues of the object’s form, function, or other intrinsic qualities. This type of approach to beauty is probably best exemplified by Keats’ *Ode to a Grecian Urn*, wherein he describes a common vessel that has been made beautiful by its history and form. The final two lines of this poem read, “Beauty is truth, truth beauty—that is all/Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know” (48-50). Keats summarizes a basic tenet of Romanticism—that beauty is indicative of the presence of the soul, and common things can often be beautiful. In Byron’s mind, the idea that Greece was soulless was unthinkable because of the fact that the country still possessed beauty.

Byron and Imperialism

The question of soullessness may also be an indicator of how Byron felt regarding the degradation of Greece’s heritage at the hands of foreign interlopers from the Ottoman Empire and Great Britain. This question may have been all the more salient to Byron in light of his negative reaction to the newly unveiled “Elgin Marbles.” Despite being unable to resist the temptation to carve his name into several of its columns, Byron was so upset by the removal of these Greek artifacts that he took it upon himself to humiliate and ridicule Lord Elgin on several occasions. These attacks from Byron are evident in several of his early works, including lines 1027-32 of *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*, where he accuses Elgin of mutilating art; the second canto of *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage* (XV), where he criticizes Elgin for exploiting Greece; and *The Curse of Minerva*, where he refers to Elgin as a hated plunderer (100-8). In each case, it becomes clear that the exploitation of Greece at the hands of foreigners is clearly an occurrence which Byron finds to be soul-crushing and abhorrent.

In Byron's world, both Leila and Greece attempt to strive for greater freedom and discourse. Greece attempts to break free through constant rebellion and upheavals, and Leila does so by running into the arms of her Western lover. However, both are ultimately isolated and silenced. Leila's death is witnessed by the fisherman who does nothing, and in fact seems to be oblivious of the dramatic scene which is unfolding before him. This is analogous to the European policy of non-intervention that allowed the destruction of Greece at the hands of the Ottoman Empire.

If Leila represents Greece, Hassan clearly represents the Ottoman Empire. He is portrayed as dignified, harsh, and traditional. And much like the actual state of political and social affairs within the Ottoman Empire at the beginning of the nineteenth century, the poem describes Hassan's once-beautiful domicile in a state of decline and inevitable ruin. Lines 27-33 read:

The steed is vanished from the stall.
 No serf is seen in Hassan's hall
 The lonely spider's thin grey pall
 waves slowly o'er the wall;
 The Bat builds in his Haram bower;
 And in the fortress of his power
 The owl usurps the beacon-tower. (27-33)

Here, Byron provides his readers with a clear sense of how Hassan's incompetence as a lover and his willingness to literally possess another human being has caused his own downfall. Yet, had Hassan been a better partner for Leila, she would never have initially asserted her own independence. This can be viewed as being tightly allegorical to how the Ottoman Empire instigated its own demise through its political ineptitude, as well as corruption and oppression. If Greece had been fairly and competently administered, it is less likely that revolutionary sentiment would have fermented.

Concerning allegory, Byron's titular character is relatively more complex compared to Hassan and Leila. In most regards, the *giaour* is a metaphor for an idealized West—one which is free from the constraints of religion, and freer from the constraints of social class. In what may be one of Byron's most perceptive plot devices, Leila (Greece) flees from the clutches of the tyrannical Hassan (Ottoman Empire), and professes her love for, and affiliation with, the *giaour* (The West and Byron). However, the price for this dalliance is high—it results in the death of the slave, the enslaved, and ultimately, even the would-be liberator. These concepts should be read in part as Byron's warning against the tragedy of cultural dissipation resulting from the half-hearted British intervention into Greek politics—specifically, the removal of important historical Greek cultural artifacts by the British. Byron

is also alluding, not only to the physical loss of the colonized arising from cultural imperialism, but also to moral death—as experienced by the giaour—resulting from the act of colonization. Byron was highly aware that when Leila (Greece) ran away from Hassan (the Ottoman Empire) and into the arms of the giaour (the West), she was very much running from one imperial power to another. If the poem is analyzed from an allegorical perspective, rather than from an “Orientalist” perspective, then lines 1062-67, in which the giaour expresses sympathy for Hassan’s actions, also assume a new meaning:

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. (1062-67)

Here Byron is expressing a commonly held tenet of British imperialism; namely that imperialism was bad, immoral, and wrong—unless it was *British* imperialism. Great Britain’s view of her own colonial conquests was similar to the giaour’s view regarding his relationship with Leila, which in turn, was nearly identical to Hassan’s relationship with Leila. In a book review in *The Byron Journal*, Tom Mole writes the following:

. . . the poems [are] a critique of the ‘moderate republican position’ of many of Byron’s associates, which offered to replace a tyrannical regime with a more ‘benevolent’, but no more democratic, one. This position failed to take account of the violence of political revolution, which McDayter sees as inevitable because it necessarily repeats the primary violence of establishing political power in the state of nature. (1)

In other words, the giaour could not fathom that Leila would ever cuckold him—even though she has already demonstrated that she is inconstant. This is because the giaour views their relationship as one based on love and not one based on ownership. It seems natural to the giaour that a woman who is *owned* would seek a lover, but it is inconceivable to think that a woman who is *loved* would ever want to be free. Great Britain demonstrated an attitude toward her colonies that was similar to Hassan’s (and the giaour’s), and whenever one of its colonies sought independence, it was also punished. In the eyes of the colonizer, the behavior and motivations of other colonial powers—even hated ones—were perhaps more comprehensible than those of the colonized.

This attitude brings to mind Rudyard Kipling’s poem *The White Man’s Burden*, which was written later in the nineteenth century as the British Empire was teetering at its zenith and about to begin its long decline. The imperialist language used by Kipling depicts the colonized as much loved and somewhat simple children.

In it he says:

Take up the White Man's burden, Send forth the best ye breed
 Go bind your sons to exile, to serve your captives' need;
 To wait in heavy harness, On fluttered folk and wild—
 Your new-caught, sullen peoples, Half-devil and half-child. (1-4)

Although this poem was written nearly a century later, it graphically outlines the belief system that buoyed British imperialism. And Byron—who dabbled in liberal politics and aligned himself against the ruling Tories—was at heart a bona fide member of the British aristocracy and was extremely partial to his decadent lifestyle. Despite frequently railing against the social injustices he witnessed being perpetrated upon the underclass, he would have been the last person to relinquish the rights and privileges that his own hereditary title afforded him. However, even though Byron was a lord, he ultimately stood up for his beliefs and sacrificed his life for the cause of Greek independence. The result he sought remains unclear, as is whether or not he would have been satisfied with replacing the possessive enslavement of Hassan with the loving captivity of the *giaour*, where a new class of “enlightened” aristocrats could rule Greece with love, instead of cruelty. Perhaps he envisioned a free and democratic Greece—it is difficult to say. In this manner, and many others, Byron was similar to the proverbial dwarf who is able to increase his range of vision by standing on the shoulders of giants. Byron was a product of his time, who was hampered by the artistic and moral constraints of his era, and yet he had the courage to inch forward the discourse of morality and artistic representation by questioning the morality of imperialism.

In summary, although *The Giaour* has long languished under the category of Romantic Orientalism, there are many ways in which this classification seems to be inaccurate. By applying Edward Said's criterion for determining what constitutes Orientalism it becomes apparent that Byron's poem is best analyzed using other critical approaches. The fact that the nameless protagonist occupies the place of “the other” in the poem along with its “Eastern” viewpoint and lack of a meaningful Orient versus Occident comparison are some of the main reasons why this poem does not fit Said's criterion for being considered Orientalist. Byron's respectful portrayal of Islam is another indication that this poem should not be viewed through an Orientalist lens. *The Giaour* is a poem which is rife with political metaphor and clearly articulates Byron's growing disdain for imperialism in all of its forms.

Works Cited

- Bernhardt-Kabisch, Ernest. *Robert Southey*. Boston: Twayne, 1977. Print.
- Blakemore, Evan G. *The Riverside Shakespeare*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin 1973, Print.
- Byron, G. G. *Beppo a Venetian Story* (1818). Whitefish, MT: Kessinger Publishing, LLC, 2009. Print.
- Byron, G.G. *Byron's Poetry*. Ed. F. D. McConnell. New York: Norton, 1978. Print.
- Cochran, Peter. *Byron and Orientalism*. Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2006. Print.
- _____. "turkish_tales_introduction.pdf." petercochran.files. WordPress.com, n.d. Web. 5 Apr 2014. <http://petercochran.files.wordpress.com/2009/03/turkish_tales_introduction.pdf>.
- Coleridge, Samuel Taylor. *Coleridge's Ancient Mariner, Kubla Khan and Christabel*. Charleston SC: Forgotten Books, 2012. Print.
- Dawood, N. J. *The Koran*. London: Penguin Classics, 2004. Print.
- Green, Matthew J. A., and Piya Pal-Lapinski, eds. *Byron and the Politics of Freedom and Terror*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011. Print.
- Huda Dodge, Christine. *The Everything Understanding Islam Book: A Complete Guide to Muslim Beliefs, Practices, and Culture*. 2nd ed. Avon, MA.: Adams Media, 2009. Print.
- Keats, John. *The Complete Poems*. 3rd ed. London: Penguin Classics, 1977. Print.
- Kipling, R. *The White Man's Burden and Other Poems by Rudyard Kipling*. Auckland: Halcyon 2012. Print.
- Koropecykj, R. *Adam Mickiewicz: The Life of a Romantic*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 2008. Print.
- Marchand, Leslie. *Byron: A Portrait*. New York: Knopf, 1970. Print.
- _____. *Byron's Letters and Journals*. 13 volumes. Cambridge: Belknap of Harvard UP, 1980-93. Print.
- Marlowe, Christopher. *Marlowe: Four Plays: Tamburlaine, Parts One and Two, The Jew of Malta, Edward II and Dr. Faustus*. Ed. Brian Gibbons ed. London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2011. Print.
- McDayter, G. *Byromania and the Birth of Celebrity Culture*. Albany: State U. of New York P, 2009. Print.
- Mole, T. "Byron and the Politics of Freedom and Terror." *The Byron Journal* Vol. 37, No.2. Print.
- Radmacher, E. D., Allen, R. B., & House, H. W.. *The Nelson Study Bible: New King James Version*. Nashville: T. Nelson Publishers, 1997. Print.
- Said, E. W. *Culture and Imperialism*. New York: Vintage, 1993. Print.
- _____. *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage, 1978. Print.

拜倫的詩篇《異教徒》： 不僅僅是個東方古玩

摘 要

本篇論文主張拜倫的詩作《異教徒》被歸類為浪漫東方主義是不正確的，這首詩應被視為帶有政治隱喻（political metaphor）以及對英國帝國主義的斥責，其主要角色代表希臘，奧圖曼帝國以及西歐。本文的論點是這首詩並不符合薩伊德（Edward Said）所定義的東方主義的特點，包括拜倫對角色命名以及這些名字與「他者」概念的關聯，明確的東方觀點，西方角色的被動與沉默，以及缺乏對東西方價值、文化、特別是宗教的對比。這首詩另一大重要性在於這是拜倫第一首完整呈現「拜倫式英雄」的作品。此外，這首詩提供讀者了解拜倫這位作家、政治思想家以及個人的重要資源。《異教徒》結合拜倫年輕時遊歷「東方」（The Orient）的經驗，以及他過世前所做改變生命的道德抉擇。

關鍵字：拜倫、詩、《異教徒》、東方主義、愛德華薩伊德、政治隱喻、歐洲帝國主義