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PATRIOTISM AND ITS DISCONTENTS

The Poetry of Sir John Malcolm

Brijraj Singh

*S*oldier, administrator, ruler, diplomat, historian, biographer, amateur cultural anthropologist, linguist, and practical man of the world who enjoyed good humor and good company, Major-General Sir John Malcolm (1769–1833) is an eminent figure of nineteenth-century British India and, together with two other M's, Thomas Munro and Mountstuart Elphinstone, forms a trio of Scotland's most successful rulers of India. Sent to India as a cadet at the age of thirteen (for which reason he was often referred to in later years as "Boy" Malcolm), he saw service against Tipu Sultan in Srirangapatnam, served as Resident of Mysore, led two embassies to the Persian court, negotiated treaties with Scindhia, and conquered the Malwa region of Central India, for which he was awarded the Grand Cross of Bath, the highest military honor then available.¹ He was the undisputed ruler of Malwa for over

¹ In revising this paper I have received valuable help from Mr. John Malcolm of Edinburgh, Australia and Mahabaleshwar, India, a descendant of a kinsman of Sir John Malcolm, for which I am immensely grateful. All his suggestions and corrections that I have incorporated

three years during which he established peace, wrote its history, founded a cantonment or garrison town, hunted, rode and traveled everywhere, getting to know people of all castes, classes, races and religions who inhabited the region, and won their trust and admiration. Subsequently he served as Governor of the Bombay Presidency, and on returning to Britain for the last time in 1830 became an MP and spoke against the impending reforms, though he lost two elections in 1832 and died before he could occupy the country seat he was building.

Because of his many books, which include accounts of his Persian experiences, a history of the Sikhs, his memoirs of Central India, a history of the British occupation of India, and an unfinished biography of Clive, as well as his voluminous correspondence, some of which was reproduced in William Kaye's biography of Malcolm, he is well known to students of nineteenth-century British India.²

Therefore it is surprising that so little has been written on him in recent years.³ What is even more surprising is that few of those who study Malcolm are aware that he wrote verse for much of his life and published a collection in 1830.⁴ Even when the awareness is present, as in Kaye, the discussion of his verse is negligible. The present paper aims at rectifying this omission. After first providing a general background to his verse, I shall consider Malcolm's poetic output, examine his major themes and concerns, and try to relate some of these concerns to those reflected in his prose. My argument will be that what may be called an imperial patriotism, and its obverse, a loneliness and yearning for home, are two of the motivating impulses of his verse. Though Scots, he identified entirely with England's desire for conquest in India and was proud to play an important part in this endeavor. His patriotism is therefore that of the soldier as empire builder, a cheering and inspira-

here were sent in an email message of 14 July 2010, and are identified with his initials JM.

² John William Kaye, *The Life and Correspondence of Sir John Malcolm*, 2 vols. (London: Smith, Elder, 1856).

³ To my knowledge, the only two recent works that treat Malcolm's work in India in depth are Michael Fry, *The Scottish Empire* (East Lothian and Edinburgh: Tuckwell Press and Birlinn, 2001), and Martha McLaren, *British India and British Scotland, 1780–1830 Career Building, Empire Building, and a Scottish School of Thought on Indian Governance* (Akron: University of Akron Press, 2001). See also Brijraj Singh, "From a Colonial Diary," *I[ndia] I[nternational] C[entre] Quarterly* 36.1 (Summer 2009): 78–88.

⁴ *Miscellaneous Poems by Sir J—M—* (Bombay: Printed at the American Mission Press, not published, 1829). "The collection was in fact published in 1830, despite...the date 1829" (JM).

tional kind of patriotism that takes pride in the overseas territorial possessions of the home country even as it applauds the band of men who have made these conquests and this rule possible. It is one that revels in and draws strength from social bonding; and doubtless Malcolm and countless other British functionaries in India must have felt its value in providing a daily motivation for their actions and in keeping officialdom cemented together. But this patriotism did not come without a price. The interests of empire demanded that its votaries and servants spend most of their lives in foreign lands and among foreign cultures while their families, whom they rarely got to see, were sent back home to Britain. If the pleasure from seeing the British flag flying over new territories is one theme of Malcolm's poetry, feelings of loneliness and weakness, which he expresses in a number of poems and in a number of ways, though to which he admits more openly only when addressing his wife, are another. Part of my argument in this paper will be that what may be called, if not doubt in the imperial enterprise, then a sense that the price it exacts is perhaps too high, is least perceptible in poems where only men are addressed. However, it becomes more noticeable in those of Malcolm's poems where he is conscious of his separation from his family or where women are addressed or tender or romantic images evoked, while in poems that deal with the East or introduce a religious or mystical strain, imperial patriotism is subjected to other kinds of strains. This does not in any way undercut his sense of the value of empire. But it does bring to the fore the hardships involved and therefore the special fortitude of those who opt for this service. His poetry is imperialistic. But it humanizes the imperialist.

We do not know when Malcolm wrote his first poem,⁵ but the earliest in his *Miscellaneous Poems*, "On John Leyden's Scenes of Infancy," was written in 1805 and the last in July 1830.⁶ In a diary entry made on

⁵ It seems that he had started writing verse before 1796, for on 25 February of that year he sent a letter to his friend and mentor Sir John Kennaway enclosing "two productions of many that were brought forth in the passage [from India]. They will show you that I still continue at the old trade..." (Devon Records Office, 961M/Add 5/F73. Qtd. by JM). Again, on 16 October of the following year, he wrote to Kennaway: "Have left off with my other idle habits my poetical flights. However, I do attempt an ode now and then, as you will see by the enclosed, which I translated two days ago" (Devon Records Office 961M/Add 5/F97. Qtd. by JM).

⁶ John Leyden, the Scottish poet, physician and linguist, was the son of a shepherd in Teviotdale district in the Scottish borders. He spent seven years at Edinburgh University studying philosophy, theology and medicine, learned Scandinavian languages, Hebrew, Arabic and Persian, collaborated with Sir Walter Scott in the production of the *Border Minstrelsy*, and in 1803 went to India, having

board ship on his way to England on 14 December 1821 Malcolm says that though not a poet, he loves rhyming and has "always cherished a disposition to versify" (Kaye II, 398-99). He goes on to praise the virtues of writing verse: such writing improves a man's prose and his ear, makes him more conscious of inelegant expression, and exercises the imagination. Smooth verse, combined with "a happy expression of feeling" gives pleasure to the intended audience. Being able to versify carries both the versifier as well as the reader into a region of sentiment, if not of romance, that may be called "the pleasure-ground of life"; and though one should not remain there always, it would be equal folly not to go there when possible, for visiting that realm enables one to return to the concerns of the world refreshed, "with new spring" (399). For these reasons Malcolm says that he gives himself to an hour or two of rhyming when time permits.

If Malcolm's understanding of poetry seems rather amateurish here, it must be remembered that he had little formal schooling but was an autodidact whose learning took place largely through conversations with other men of action who had as little time for academic discourse as he. His knowledge of poetry also came from a reading of his favorite Scottish poets Sir Walter Scott and especially Robert Burns, and from books and magazines that would have brought him popular, not to say commonplace notions of poetry such as that it was *dulce et utile*, meant both to please and instruct. But for all the lack of theoretical sophistication that his diary notes betray, the pleasure he derived from the act of writing was as genuine as the value he set on the effort, and the fact that he did not take his own pretensions as a poet too seriously is clear from his remark, made on 25 December 1821, on a nonsensical poem he

qualified as a physician. The following year, while at Mysore he fell seriously ill. As he recounted later in a letter to his father, "When I was ill Colonel Malcolm arrived from Bengal. As soon as he heard that I was a Border man, he instantly came to see me without any ceremony, and as soon as I was able to move, carried me out to his palace at Mysore, where I stayed with him until he was called to Bengal again." While they were staying together in early 1805 Malcolm asked to see Leyden's book of poems *Scenes of Infancy*, and when he returned it, Leyden found that Malcolm had penciled in some verses which he subsequently included in *Miscellaneous Poems* under the title "John Leyden's Scenes of Infancy." (Information supplied by JM).

On receiving the news of Leyden's death in Batavia in 1811 Malcolm wrote "Lines Written on the Death of John Leyden," first published in an obituary in the *Bombay Courier* of November 1811 and later included in *Miscellaneous Poems*. JM adds that Malcolm sent Sir Walter Scott a copy of the obituary, impressing the novelist; the following year the two met and became friends.

composed while lying uncomfortably on deck in a hammock strung out of flags: the smiles on his children's faces when they read this example of his "chicken flight" would gratify him more than "all the approbation given to the higher soarings of the Muse" (Kaye II, 401).

The diary entries also show why his poetic output is so limited. Pressure of work has allowed him to write but one poem in the last four years, he says (Kaye II, 399). The fact is that as a man constantly engaged in action and surrounded by hordes of people, Malcolm seldom enjoyed either leisure or solitude. It was mostly in the course of his voyages to and from England while on board ships that he could find the time to compose, which is why some of his poems take the form of prologues and epilogues spoken on the occasion of theatrical performances that passengers enacted as a way of passing time, while several others of a more private nature are also written during these trips. Indeed, *Miscellaneous Poems*, an eighty-page octavo volume, has a total of only 28 poems; the longest, *Persia*, consisting of 380 lines plus extensive notes, being followed by the other 27 which are grouped under the subtitle "Short Poems, written on Different Occasions." Though the volume may not include his total output,⁷ it is still meager given that it was produced over twenty-three years.

The book was not published, the reason probably being that as Governor of Bombay Malcolm recognized that it would be unseemly to publish a book which would go on sale in the Presidency's main city, make its prominent citizens feel that they were under an obligation to buy it, and thus earn him money. Not publishing it was also perhaps a way of avoiding bad reviews. However, he was interested in gifting it to friends, and therefore had it printed. I have not been able to find out how many copies were printed, but those that I have seen or about which details are available are inscribed to different people. Thus the copy in the New York Public Library is inscribed "To Lady Beckwith from her sincere friend the Author—Bombay Novr. 5th. 1830."⁸ That

⁷ Thus *Miscellaneous Poems* does not contain "The Lawyer's Complaint" which seems to have been written in 1829 or 1830. The poem can be found in the British Library, Add mss 41964, f.36. This information comes from JM, who also kindly provided me with a copy of the poem.

⁸ She was the wife of General Sir Sidney Beckwith, the commander-in-chief who at his death was acting as the interim governor of Bombay after Malcolm's departure from that post. He is buried in Mahabaleshwar, where his tomb is sometimes mistaken for that of Malcolm and worshiped as a shrine by villagers who believe that it will bring them prosperity. (Information and a photograph of worshippers at the tomb supplied by JM).

in the National Library of Scotland has an inscription to "the Ettrick Shepherd" (James Hogg, 1770-1835, the Borders poet), and we know that a copy was presented to the famous Scottish engineer and bridge builder Thomas Telford, for in 1831 the latter published a poem entitled "To Sir John Malcolm on Receiving his *Miscellaneous Poems*. A Poem."⁹ It is because only a few of these gifted copies have made it into libraries that Malcolm's poems are very hard to come by, which may be a reason why his poetry is so little known.¹⁰ For this paper I have used the copy in the New York Public Library.

Several of Malcolm's poems take the form of prologues and epilogues to dramatic performances. During his voyage to India in 1827 to take up the Governorship of Bombay he was asked to contribute both a prologue and epilogue to Sheridan's *The Rivals* which was performed by the male passengers on board, and he obliged with light and witty verse inspired by nothing save the desire to have a good time. The prologue, spoken by an actor in the character of a sweeper, describes the directions afforded to him:

To every word you must your action suit,
Now shut your fist, now stamp with shoe or boot;
Then plant your broom with dignity and grace,
And smiling look the audience in the face.

But he should not concern himself with whether what he says makes sense or not; he should merely keep it short. The epilogue tries to squeeze humor out of the fact that women's roles were played by men.

At the end of the voyage, on 23 October 1827, the actors held a party at which a Mr. J. Williamson spoke a "Farewell Address" written by Malcolm for the occasion. This is a more significant production than either the Prologue or the Epilogue, for together with some good-humored digs it also expresses the hope that memories of having

⁹ According to OCLC, the poem is owned by six libraries worldwide: the British Library and those of the universities of Oxford, Cambridge, Stanford, Delaware, and South Carolina.

¹⁰ The *National Union Catalogue Pre-1956 Imprints* does not list *Miscellaneous Poems* at all. OCLC mentions five copies, in the New York Public Library, University of Delaware, Florida State University, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and the American Antiquarian Society. In addition, there is a copy in the National Library of Scotland, and the British Library possesses three. This gives a total of nine copies available for study worldwide.

participated in the play will "wake the warmest feelings in each heart," and ends:

Oft may you mingle, mirthful as to-night,
 Britons with Britons, ever should unite;
 When love of country every bosom warms,
 England shall triumph both in arts and arms.

Here art and patriotism are combined, and it is hoped that the camaraderie that characterized the dramatic performance will continue to inspire actors in their roles as India's soldiers and administrators and cement expatriate Britons into a body of empire builders.

Patriotism is more pronounced in an earlier prologue, written in 1810, "to a Play Acted by the Seamen on Board HMS Culloden, Admiral Sir E. Pellew, Spoken by a Man in the Character of a Boatswain." British sailors, we are told, used to put up great naval shows of force against France, but now that war with France has ended the sailors have turned their decks and flags into props for comedy. Dramatic performances are here identified with naval engagements. Both share the same *dramatis personae*, the sailors; and just as Admiral Pellew was surrounded by his officers as he led his crew into battle against France, so now he sits front and center surrounded by officers to watch the play performed by actor-warriors. In the meantime the "maintop boys" perch in the shrouds, and their frank, unchecked and spontaneous reactions to the play, while being favorably compared to those of more affected audiences, are also seen as being of a piece with their honesty and courage.

In these poems, where the only actors present are men and no women are involved, art, war, patriotism and the spread of empire are allied. The actors are soldiers and sailors first, and their primary commitment is to the expansion and defense of the British empire. Dramatic entertainment is a diversion from that task, and yet contributes to it by joining the men together in good humor and fellowship so that they can learn to trust, lean on and support one another in a common cause. Patriotism bonds men with other men in the cause of empire.

"A Prologue to *The Heir at Law*, Spoken by Capt. Gregory at the Bombay Theatre, A.D. 1811" is patriotic too, but here patriotism is combined not just with art but also with a hint of *sufi* mysticism to

which Malcolm would have been introduced both in Iran and India. This introduction of Eastern motifs in his verse, or any attempt to combine the East with the West, is usually a sign in Malcolm that the subject he is dealing with is going to be problematized. This poem is no exception. It sums up the tribulations undergone by an amateur group of actors who are all soldiers and younger brothers toiling in foreign lands to help expand the empire while the eldest brothers enjoy, thanks to the laws of primogeniture, the good fortune of being able to stay at home. All through their lives the eyes of these younger brothers turned empire builders remain focused on "the Sacred Island of the West" and they yearn to return there just as the *sufi*'s eyes remain focused on God with whom he hopes to unite. Patriotism here is not just a matter of cheerful fellow feeling that results in certain victory in battle but also tinged with a sense that in yielding to its demands men are also missing out on something. For the patriotic love of the imperial soldier is never towards the land that he has conquered or towards the foreign country he makes his home, but always towards the home from which he came and to which he hopes eventually to return, however long he may have lived abroad and therefore however much out of tune with the country of his origin he may have grown. Malcolm, like so many of his fellow imperialists, never thought of himself as Indian but always as British, sent his wife and young daughter to live in Britain shortly after the latter was born, always hankered to visit them, and like all Britons fortunate enough not to die in India, returned to Britain at the end of his career.

The sense that patriotism, however noble its impulses or great its rewards may be, also imposes a burden, is heard too, though faintly and therefore only if we listen to it, in Malcolm's versification from the Bible. One may expect that because of the patriotic content of his dramatic prologues and epilogues Malcolm, though relaxed and at his social best, will never be too distanced from his role as a leading British official, but that in his religious poems it will be different. And it is certainly the case that as a poet for the theater he may not wear his general's uniform, but the *topee* and the sword are never out of reach. But though we see him as a much more as a private human being in his religious poems, he never abandons a sense of himself as an imperialist and a public figure; indeed, I would argue that these poems are motivated by a sense of inadequacy in performing this role.

This is especially true of the three poems, written on board ship on his way to India in 1828, in which he versifies biblical chapters or parts

thereof. One versifies twenty verses of Job 39, a second Isaiah 35, and the third Isaiah 53. In each case Malcolm attempts to stick as close to the original as possible. Thus Job's "Who hath sent out the wild ass free? Or who hath loosed the bands of the wild ass? Whose house have I made the wilderness, and the barren land his dwellings?" (v. 5-6) becomes

Who gave the wild ass liberty
Midst barren lands to wander free?
From bands unloos'd I bade him roam,
And made the wilderness his home (1-4)

Or again, "Hast thou given the horse strength? Hast thou clothed his neck with thunder?" (Job 39, 19) is versified:

Has the horse strength at thy bequest,
Hast thou with thunder cloth'd his crest? (17-18)

Sometimes Malcolm is more prolix than his biblical texts and renders the occasional terse, even hard, clogged rhythms of the Bible more flowing, indeed mellifluous. Compare, for instance, Isaiah 35, 1: "The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them; and the desert shall rejoice and bloom as the rose" with

The Wilderness and lonely gloom
In gladness shall uplift their voice:
The desert like the rose shall bloom,
And in its fragrance shall rejoice.

At other times he tames the poetical, sometimes hyperbolic imagery of the Bible. Isaiah 35, 5-6: "Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing: for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert" is rendered:

The blind shall see, the deaf shall hear
The dumb shall sing a joyful song,
And like unto the speedy deer
He that was lame shall bound along.

Then shall the desert wild give birth
To streams that in clear currents flow. (17-22)

Why did Malcolm choose to versify from the Bible? Kaye ascribes this to Malcolm's deeply held and devout Christianity, and says that when returning to Bombay to take up the Governorship Malcolm wanted so observe the sanctity of the Sabbath and therefore on Sundays turned "Scriptures into verse" (II. 497). Recently Malcolm's Christianity has been questioned. The Web carries an anonymous Victorian essay on him in which he is called a devout Christian, but in a commentary supplied by John Malcolm, a descendant of one of Malcolm's kinsmen, the commentator denies that his ancestor was more than nominally Christian, maintains that though interested in all religions, he is best described as a deist, and adds that he was strongly opposed to allowing Christian missionaries in India any government support.¹¹ McLaren, too, thinks that Malcolm had a preference for Deism over conventional Christianity (148, 149). Though John Malcolm and McLaren may well be right, purely on the basis of the three poems we would have to conclude that the Victorians were closer to the truth of Malcolm's religion than more recent commentators. He may not have had a strong sense of Christ as a personal savior, but he was obviously deeply moved by the power and mystery of the Christian God and the Christian message.

However, more important to us is the fact that of the three biblical chapters he chose to versify, one (Job 39) speaks in striking images of God's unparalleled power over Nature, another (Isaiah 53) foretells the coming of Christ and his intercessory power, and the third (Isaiah 35) holds out a promise of hope, life and renewal. Could Malcolm have turned to these themes in moments of hesitation or despair in order to seek hope and strength? Did he, for all his outward success, have moments of weakness when he sought comfort in the promise of Isaiah? Did the burdens of rule sometimes weigh too heavy, did the certainty of the rightness of his conduct as an empire builder seem doubtful? Having recently bid farewell to his family, and not knowing when he would see it again, did he wish that he were back in England with his family instead of on the high seas, outward bound for India yet again? One wonders whether a sense of yet again having to separate

¹¹ http://www.electricscotland.com/history/other/malcolm_john.htm.

himself from his family and gird himself for the tasks of the empire and the demands of ruling India did not create in Malcolm a need to turn to religion for strength.

These are speculations, but they are given some credibility by his poem entitled "Human Life, A Sketch" which, though not biblical, is a religious meditation. Having first considered life's ups and downs and wondered what the purpose of life is, he asserts that there is a divine plan and God offers help "to those who seek a path to Heaven," for He "never would delude with mortal doom / Him he has taught to look beyond the tomb." This belief in an afterlife, says Malcolm, will sustain him through life's gloom. There is an unmistakable sense here that the poem was written when Malcolm was in a state of spiritual despair. India and the burdens of the Raj are never mentioned, but a sense of providence is invoked and a sense is present that there is a larger meaning to the struggle for existence. In this respect the poem may be compared to his fragment on "Vasco de Gama," another founder of empire, in which Vasco refuses to turn back in a storm and expresses his determination to plant on Indian soil a flag consecrated and given to him by King John of Portugal and bearing on it the cross of the military order of Christ. Are we to see Vasco's resolve as reflecting Malcolm's own sense that he is going on with his imperial duties impelled by religious faith? The religious poems would suggest that he possessed a deeply held faith to which he turned when the burden of rule got to be too much with him.

The theme of loneliness and separation from the homeland and family that imperial duties demand is more clearly and insistently heard in the poems he addressed to various women of his acquaintance, though some of them express sentiments of friendship and regard as well. "To Mrs. H. written at sea, 1817" thanks the subject for lending him a sympathetic and patient ear as he laments this separation.¹² The poem is suffused with images of tropical breezes and moonbeams kissing the sea, which contribute to the sense of calm, beauty and blessing that friendship provides. Mrs. Hall is addressed again in "Lines Written on Mrs. H remarking that a sketch of my family was dim, and required cleaning." He responds that the grime that encrusts his deceased parents' picture comes from his often kissing it and breathing

¹² "Mrs. H" was Mrs. Hall, the middle aged wife of General Hall, commander of British troops at the Cape where she disembarked. (JM).

prayers on it. Therefore the grime is not dirt that requires cleaning but rather, as it were, the morning dew that covers a rose or "the prints of pilgrim's feet" which carry him to a holy shrine.¹³

Indeed, several of Malcolm's *Miscellaneous Poems* deal with his family. Malcolm married Charlotte, the younger daughter of Col. (later Gen. Sir) Alexander Campbell who eventually served as Commander in Chief of the Madras Army, on 4 July 1807 (Kaye I, 386, 388). Their first child, Margaret, was born the following year. In "Written at Persepolis, or Istakhr" on Margaret's birthday in 1810, while Malcolm was in Iran, he says that though he is in the midst of imposing and historic ruins, it is not to them that his thoughts turn that day but to his daughter and her mother. He paints a pretty little vignette of the mother "bending low" to dress Margaret and tend to her infant son, and concludes that to him "The Husband and the Father's name" and "the circle of domestic love" are dearer than all the thoughts of fame and ambition that the sights of Persepolis may inspire. He is clearly conscious here of himself as a builder of empire, but just as clearly he also subsumes that role to that of family man. The life of the private individual is preferred to that of the great man lived in glory and in public. He may be dwelling in this poem in that region of sentiment which he called the "pleasure-ground of life" in his diary entry, and fully aware that his habitation there is but temporary; but during the time it lasts his preference for it is unambiguous.

Malcolm returned to India from Iran in 1810, and two years later, in 1812, proceeded to take his family to Britain, where his wife was to remain for the rest of her life though in 1827 his eldest daughter, by now married to a first cousin, her aunt's son, accompanied him to India when he returned as Governor of Bombay. Since, as we have seen, many of Malcolm's poems were written on board ships between India and Britain, it is not surprising that several address the subject of family partings and separation from loved ones. Experiencing turbulent weather on his voyage back from Britain where he has just left his family, he says in "Written in the Bay of Biscay, 1816," that the gloom and rain recall his wife's agony at parting from him; though her anguish grieved him, it also pleased him to see this expression of her love.

¹³ JM thinks that the sketch of his family that Malcolm is referring to may be that of his wife Charlotte and four of their five children done in 1814 or early 1815, before the fifth was born, still in possession of a descendant in Somerset.

"Lines Written at Sea, 1822" again combines his solitude at sea with thoughts of the family. He is sailing back to England after having served so well in Malwa for over three years. The sea is calm and lovely and the ship is making good progress, but he is keen to make even greater speed so that he can be reunited sooner with his family when, with one smile, his wife will "banish years of care and toil." He says that thoughts of her have sustained him during periods of war. Her "approving and benign" countenance seemed to take on an even more benevolent look when he was engaged in restoring peace, curbing the bold and raising the poor. He imagines her smiling through her tears as she narrates deeds of his glory to their children. Malcolm is here fully conscious of the greatness that he has achieved and the honors he has won, and trusts that having heard of these honors his children will love and respect him more though they have not seen him for many years. But in the poem it is not on his achievements that his thoughts linger but rather on being reunited with the family. What we see here is not Malcolm the returning hero, adulated by his children as he is by the public, but Malcolm the loved and loving father and family man coming home after a life of weariness, loneliness and toil abroad.

The sentiments that Malcolm expresses in these poems about himself as a father are at variance from those expressed in a number of his prose writings. There he sometimes gives the impression that a man's worth to his family depends not so much on what he is like as a human being but on what he has achieved in life. Reputation and success are what determine children's regard for their father rather than simply the bonds of love, and the public role that a person plays in life therefore becomes an important determinant of the condition of his domestic life. On 10 January 1810, the day Malcolm left on his second embassy to Iran, and when his eldest daughter was not quite three years old and his wife was expecting a second child,¹⁴ he noted in his diary that "the purest and noblest motive that can fill the breast of a man is to leave a good and great name to his children as a rich and proud inheritance" (Kaye II, 2). That is, it is as an eminent public official rather than as a private individual that he wants to be regarded by his

¹⁴ A son was born on 21 January, eleven days after Malcolm sailed. It was not till several months afterwards that Malcolm got the news. JM remarks that the incident reveals Malcolm's sense of duty and his refusal to put off setting out on an important journey by a single day simply because his wife was about to have a baby.

children. Eleven years later, writing to his wife from Ratlam in Central India on 8 April 1821, he says: "It is a sweet reflection to me, that long after I am gone our children's bosoms may glow at hearing blessings implored on their father's name" (Kaye II, 335). He shows acute consciousness here of the fame he has earned in India, and the thought that his children would recognize the greatness of his public image is a source of deep satisfaction to him. He wishes, as it were, to appear to his children in the full uniform of a Major General, the red ribbon of the Grand Commander of Bath shining on his breast. But in the poetry the uniform has been taken off and he appears simply as a loving human being.

Not that we do not see Malcolm the private individual, loving and full of fears, in his letters. On 28 May 1818, when camped thirty miles from the fort of Asirgarh awaiting the surrender of the Peshwa, Baji Rao II, he wrote to his wife about news that had reached him of the illness of one of his children:

I trust in God this darling child is better. How completely do such communications awaken me from every dream of ambition; to tell me whom all my happiness is treasured up in—you and my little ones. The thought of one of you ailing makes me unhappy. I cannot bear to contemplate any reverse in this fortunate part of my condition. I have been spoilt by everything hitherto going to my wish. I am become unreasonable, and expect more than God gives us; but this I cannot help. I pass days of toil and anxiety—I am almost weary of my existence. But I retire at night, and when alone build castles, every room of which is inhabited by you and my children, and I am happy. (Kaye II, 242-43)

A number of themes that we hear in his poetry are echoed here: his belief in God, his sense of weariness and loneliness, his love for the family, his sense of himself as a private and vulnerable individual. And yet the public figure is not too far away. Lurking subterraneously under the text of this letter is a sense that the illness of his children is a check on his success and on the fulfillment of his ambitions. Everything has succeeded for him in Central India beyond his dreams thus far. He is universally obeyed, respected and loved. His word is law; Indians, high and low, look to him for justice. He has established peace, and the land

is turning prosperous once again. The Peshwa's surrender is imminent. At a time when his reputation as a public figure is at its zenith, for one of his children to fall sick is a fly in the ointment, almost a setback to his hurtling career.

There is, then, a sense of ambiguity in the letter, a tug between Malcolm the successful ruler of a vast land and Malcolm the loving husband and concerned father. In the poems to his family this ambiguity, while not totally absent, is considerably subdued, and Malcolm appears as a private human being, a person out of uniform. He may enjoy the excitement and danger of battle, the pomp of imperial rule, the sense that he is doing good to people; but his job is also for him a daily toil sweetened only by thoughts of a loved though distant home and the family that shelters there.

Persia, with which *Miscellaneous Poems* opens, is Malcolm's longest and most ambitious poem. It was composed during his second embassy to Iran in 1810 and first published anonymously in 1814 in London as *Persia, A Poem*. In a preface Malcolm says that it was not written with an eye to publication but for the amusement of a friend, presumably his wife Charlotte, and that it is now being given to the public because though it lacks the skill that marks a finished product, it may possess the novelty and interest that attaches to a sketch taken on the spot. Written in heroic couplets, it is in the nature of a travelogue. The author, as he leaves Iran for Britain (actually Malcolm returned from Iran to Bombay, not Britain) casts a parting glance at the land where he has been traveling and tries to give descriptions of "[t]he various regions he so late survey'd." The controlling trope is patriotism. The more Malcolm sees of Iran, the more his experiences "[f]an the pure flame of the Patriot's breast that warms," and the more he becomes conscious of Britain's superior charms. Thus while in Britain liberty "triumphant smiles," in Iran millions are "by a Despot kept in awe." Unlike British noblemen the chiefs and nobility of Iran like to live in cities but draw their power from barbarous and rude followers and fellow tribesmen in the countryside over whom they rule tyrannically. At the same time they live in fear of their monarch while occasionally trying to dislodge him. So there is no sense of loyalty and patriotism, but everyone is ruled by selfishness and fear, with the result that "Those who should their country's wall have stood, / Show sabres redden'd with their brothers' blood."

However, in mitigation, Malcolm makes it clear that it was not always so. Iran had a glorious civilization; and though present conditions are very

different—he does not try to account for this degeneration—the country once produced great art and artists. Firdausi's versification of the story of Sohrab and Rustom is recalled (this passage was later to serve as a source for Matthew Arnold's *Sohrab and Rustom*), and the poetry of Hafiz and Saadi praised. The glories of ancient Persepolis, Shiraz and Isfahan are remembered, and Iranian history recalled.

In thus contrasting the present realities of Iran and, by extension, of Asia with its former glory and in trying to recover the latter, Malcolm shows himself to be standing almost at the fountain head of a long tradition among late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Orientalist scholars who argued that Eastern civilizations were once superior to Western, and that the task of the Western scholar is therefore to recover lost greatness which the Oriental, because of his present debased condition, cannot undertake to do. It was in this spirit that Nathaniel Halhed, Sir William Jones, and William Ward undertook their monumental studies.¹⁵ Malcolm was familiar with Ward's work on Hinduism, for he refers to the second volume in a letter to John Marshman (Kaye II, 263). That he himself belonged to this tradition of Oriental scholars is clear from the way in which, in his *Memoirs of Central India*, he contrasts the greatness of Holkar State under Ahilya Bai with the degenerate condition of her successor Tulsa Bai's reign. And he says enough to suggest that he considers his rule over Holkar territories as aimed at recovering the golden age of Ahilya Bai which her blood descendants would be incapable of doing. Scholarship is here put to imperial ends: the rulers justify their rule by convincing the ruled that the latter can discover their former glory only through the agency of the rulers and therefore for their own good they should acquiesce in being ruled.

The best parts of *Persia* are those where Malcolm's natural gifts as a raconteur find full play. Apart from the story of Sohrab and Rustom he also narrates those of Seliman, who revenged her husband's death by slaying his murderer, and of Ferhad and Shireen, who are still remembered by Iranians as the most tragic of star-crossed lovers. In the process he offers free renditions of passages from poets like Hafiz who

¹⁵ See especially Nathaniel Halhed, *A Grammar of the Bengal Language* (Hoogly, Bengal, 1778), and *A Code of Gentoo Laws, or, Ordination of the Pundits* (London, 1776); Sir William Jones, trans., *Sacotala, or, The Fated Ring: An Indian Drama by Calidas* (Edinburgh, 1796), and trans., *Institutes of Hindu Law: or, The Ordinances of Menu* (Calcutta, 1796); and William Ward, *History, Literature and Religion of the Hindus*, 3 vols. (London, 1817).

have sung these stories, thus not only imbuing parts of his own poem with narrative and human interest but also providing examples, in translation, of the kind of poetry classical Persian poets have written.

As the poem progresses, Malcolm's journey also continues, taking him from present-day Iran into Carduchia or what is now Kurdistan, where he finds people living as they have always done, more inclined to plunder than to toil but fiercely attached to their land, and then to Baghdad from where he is to return to Britain. He compares thoughts of returning home to the desire of the soul to return to rest in God's bosom: in one of his favorite metaphors, several times repeated, Britain becomes the heaven towards which his wishes have ever turned and to which he is now vouchsafed an imminent return. The notion of the soul returning to God is a religious trope often found in the works of *sufi* mystics; and Malcolm underlines this point in an endnote where he says that the sages of the East, the *sufis*, the *fakirs* and the *yogis*, by abstracting the soul from all earthly attachments till it is absorbed in the divine in a spiritual act called *tapasya* in India, try "to subdue nature by rigid austerities." The introduction of a mystical, indeed religious, element in a poem which is essentially patriotic serves to combine the two experiences: the patriotic becomes the religious. But it can also be seen as a signal that patriotism is going to be problematized. For even as Malcolm uses a *sufi* image, his skepticism obtrudes, and he continues in his endnote that while sometimes the spiritual experience is genuine, at other times it is the result of the wanderings of the imagination diseased by fasting and a mortification of the body. *Fakirs* and *yogis* pretend to go into trances only in order to impress their disciples. Malcolm's attitude towards spiritual trances is, then, ambiguous; and this renders his glorification of a Britain towards which his soul is longing ambiguous as well. He says of his visions of returning to British shores:

Hail, visions bright! Ye come alone to those

Within whose breast the patriot's passion glows. (369–70)

But if the *fakir's* vision is a fake, so surely is the patriot's, for the patriot's vision is allied to the *fakir's* in the poem. A poem that has consistently upheld British superiority and patriotism suddenly deconstructs at the end. Malcolm wants to end on a mystical note, but in embodying in his note British skepticism of Eastern mystical experiences he ends up hijacking his own patriotic feelings.

It is surprising that, given that Malcolm spent most of his career in India, only one poem in his entire poetic oeuvre deals with India: "Song Sung at an Anniversary Dinner in Celebration of the Battle of Assye. Mhow, A.D. 1818." But this is also probably his best work; Kaye included it as an appendix to his two-volume biography as an example of Malcolm's poetic skill. Like *Persia* it, too, celebrates as well as problematizes patriotism and British imperialism, but it does so in a totally different way.

Malcolm's "Assye" is better known today as Assaye, a small town in Maharashtra in Western India where, on 23 September 1803, Arthur Wellesley, the future Duke of Wellington, led a small body of troops against a larger Maratha army and crushed it, thus beginning the decline of Maratha power and the establishment of Britain's total control over India. Malcolm admired Wellesley, who was his senior in rank though they were both the same age, and served for some time on his staff, though he was not with Wellesley at Assaye. The two became good friends, corresponded,¹⁶ and in later years Wellington served as Malcolm's confidant and sometimes unreliable and unhelpful patron.

In 1818, on the anniversary of Assaye, Malcolm, who was then building a cantonment in Mhow, held a celebration. He described the festivities in a letter to Wellington written two days later. First there was a dinner hosted by Malcolm to which all British officers were invited. Later that evening a junior Indian officer who had served under Wellesley and been promoted for bravery at Assaye threw a party for all Indian soldiers and a *nautch* or dance attended by four hundred spectators, including all British officers. A large transparency of Wellington's head, which hung in Malcolm's bungalow, was attached to a tent wall with the words *Wellesley Sahib Bahadur* written underneath in Persian. When it was pointed out to the Indian host that Wellesley was now to be called Wellington, he replied that Wellington was his European name but in India he would always be Wellesley *sahib*. Late that night Malcolm was awakened by loud noises, and going to investigate he found that the "pariahs" of Mhow ("untouchables," or people who performed scavenging tasks for the troops) had got drunk on thirty bottles of local liquor (what he called "pariah liquor") and were toasting Wellesley's health (Kaye II, 278 and note). Clearly the celebration was a major event.

¹⁶ "Five hundred letters between them survive" (JM).

Malcolm's "Song" was written to be sung on the occasion. He enclosed the poem with his letter to Wellington, adding that the measure is the same as used by Thomas Moore in his poem in which the Genius of Erin asks the Duke to relieve Ireland's sufferings, and that it can be sung to the tune of "Paddy Wack."¹⁷ And he concluded: "If Moore is very Irish...I am very Asiatic."

The truth of this statement becomes apparent on a first reading of the poem. It begins with the figure of Britannia remembering her sons' bold deeds. As she lingers fondly over thoughts of Wellington's victories, a splendid maiden (personifying India) bursts into view and tells her that it is to her that Wellington owes his fame, for his earliest battles were won on Indian soil. India goes on to tell Britain that it is not the British alone who have conquered India: the conquest would not have been possible without Indian troops. India has helped Britain to conquer India. The reason is that India realized that she had become prey to "anarchy's horrors" and hopes that Britain will bring "freedom and knowledge" to her so that the Star of the East, which once shed its luster far and wide, will be enabled to do so again. Then "in one wreath" will "the laurel and lotus entwine," and Indian soldiers will crowd round Britannia's triumphant car and become famous for their bravery, "by such heroes as Wellington led."

In this poem Malcolm upholds a kind of supremacy for Britain: it is her heroes who have led Indian troops to victory, just as it is her sons who will bring enlightenment to India. But Britannia is also a passive figure who simply sits on her throne and reminisces silently, while it is the figure of India that is active, radiant, and given words to speak. India has been conquered, but that is because India *chose* to allow herself to be conquered; without her acquiescence, indeed active agency, this situation would not have come to pass. She accepts a role inferior to that of Britain: without Britain's help she will remain barbarous, and without British leaders her own soldiers will win neither victory but renown. At the same time, she is proud of herself, conscious of her future destiny of greatness, and her hope that the lotus will entwine with the laurel suggests an inextricable relationship of equals, for each will be as important as the other in the completion of the wreath. India may need Britain to be empowered; but once she has been enabled to

¹⁷ The reference is to Moore's poem which begins "While History's Muse the memorial was keeping."

discover her past greatness, hers will be the radiant countenance that shines upon the world. If Malcolm's "Song" is an imperialist poem—and it is unquestionably that—it also reflects a very generous imperialism, one where the conquered is raised not just to dignity but in some ways if not all to the level of an equal. Later works on the Indian empire by British imperialists mark a regression on this position, not a building on it. As is well known, even in Malcolm's time his views on India were superseded by the racist, supercilious, condescending, even obnoxious ones, of James Mill and later on Macaulay and the Evangelists, and the tragic events of 1857, when troops mutinied, disaffection stalked the land, and the Raj was shaken to its core, were the result. Is it too far-fetched to speculate that had Malcolm's views of dealing with India and the Indians prevailed, 1857 might not have occurred? He was, as we know from his prose works, impartial, fair and scrupulous as a judge, not a racist, respected religious sensitivities, and was keen to see Indians occupying positions in government under the British and exercising responsibility in ruling the country. He was against sudden or drastic change that might make people fearful that their cultural traditions were under attack. Had his system of governance and his values prevailed, could what is variously called the Sepoy Mutiny and India's first war of Independence have been averted?

Malcolm was a British patriot because he was born in and thought of Britain as home, because his family lived there, and because he hoped to return there at the end of his career. He was committed to its overseas empire not only because he saw this empire as being just and as having been won honorably, but also because it provided countless younger sons like him unequaled opportunities for a career, wealth, and glory. He saw British rule as beneficent for its overseas subjects; he also knew that it would not last forever. He recognized, too, the terrible toll that running the empire imposed on its servants and the havoc it played on family life, and in his poetry gave expression in various ways to this burden. This did not lessen his patriotism, but it did mean that he saw the issue with unclouded eyes.

In giving expression to these sentiments in his verse, Malcolm was not saying anything new. He was merely bringing into relief the feelings of many people like himself. In this respect *Miscellaneous Poems* link his poetics, his attitudes and his biography to the larger narrative of empire.