Don Juan Study Guide

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Summary

Don Juan is a unique approach to the already popular legend of the philandering womanizer immortalized in literary and operatic works. Byron's Don Juan, the name comically anglicized to rhyme with "new one" and "true one," is a passive character, in many ways a victim of predatory women, and more of a picaresque hero in his unwitting roguishness. Not only is he not the seductive, ruthless Don Juan of legend, he is also not a Byronic hero. That role falls more to the narrator of the comic epic, the two characters being more clearly distinguished than in Byron's *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage.*

In *Beppo: A Venetian Story*, Byron discovered the appropriateness of *ottava rima* to his own particular style and literary needs. This Italian stanzaic form had been exploited in the burlesque tales of Luigi Pulci, Francesco Berni, and Giovanni Battista Casti, but it was John Hookham Frere's (1817-1818) that revealed to Byron the seriocomic potential for this flexible form in the satirical piece he was planning. The colloquial, conversational style of *ottava rima* worked well with both the narrative line of Byron's mock epic and the serious digressions in which Byron rails against tyranny, hypocrisy, cant, sexual repression, and literary mercenaries.

Byron opens *Don Juan* with a dedication to his old nemesis, Robert Southey, who was at the time poet laureate. Byron hated Southey for his turncoat politics, for his spreading of rumors about Byron, and for his weak verse. The publication of the first two cantos in 1818 created scandal and outrage for the author. Although the names of publisher and author did not appear on the title page, Byron's identity was unmistakable. Even Byron's friends—Hobhouse and others—though admiring the genius of the work, were shocked and concerned about its language and content. The invectives against contemporaneous writers and against Lady Byron smacked of slander; his comments on political and theological issues bordered on sedition and blasphemy. Byron, arguing that this was in fact "the most moral of poems," remained steadfast against editing and censoring. The work, however, also received significant critical praise from such noteworthy giants as Percy Bysshe Shelley, German poet Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, and John Gibson Lockhart (Sir Walter Scott's son-in-law, writing under the pen name of "John Bull"). Byron found much strength and determination in these encouragements.

Byron's avowed purpose in *Don Juan* was to be "quietly facetious on everything." The narrative opens with sixteen-year-old naïf Don Juan, who innocently falls in love with Dona Julia, the young wife of Don Alfonso, a gentleman of fifty who has been linked romantically with Juan's mother, Dona Inez. Although Byron's poem is "epic" and he promises to observe the epic conventions of Aristotle and the classical authors, his hero is modern, of ordinary proportions and weaknesses. The plot follows a line of at times almost stock farce, the lovers being discovered by Alfonso's spotting Juan's shoes under Julia's bed. At the end of the canto, Juan must flee Spain, the divorced Julia enters a convent, and the picaresque adventures of the young hero begin. Byron's narrator takes the opportunity during the story to comment on love, education, and marriage.

Juan is shipwrecked in canto 2 and, after a shocking encounter with cannibalism, is washed ashore in the Greek Cyclades and is rescued by the beautiful maiden, Haidee, with whom he shares an idyllic love in canto 3 until her pirate father, Lambro, returns in canto 4 and Juan is sold into Turkish slavery. Haidee dies of a broken heart. The Haidee passage is one of Byron's most poignant, his depiction of innocent love thwarted by external, evil forces one of his most touching. Canto 5 finds Juan accompanied and befriended by Johnson, an English soldier of fortune, and the two are bought by a black eunuch who dresses Juan in women's clothes and takes him to the harem queen, Gulbayez, whose advances Juan rejects in deference to Haidee's memory. In canto 6, however, Juan spends a sensuous and loving night in the harem with Lolah, Katinka, Dudu, and the other odalisques but is unfortunately sentenced to death in the morning.

The epic takes on a more serious tone with cantos 7 and 8, in large part as a result of the significant changes in Byron's own life since the publication of the previous cantos. Juan and Johnson, who have managed to escape, join the Russian army, and Byron vehemently condemns war and military aggression. In cantos 9 and 10, Juan, now a war hero, meets Catherine the Great, who sends him to England. In the remaining cantos, 11 to 16, Byron satirizes English society. As a guest at the country estate of Lord Henry Amundeville, Norman Abbey (based on Byron's own Newstead Abbey), Juan is pursued by three women: Lord Henry's wife, the sophisticated and intellectual but self-centered Lady Adeline; the mysterious, gracious, graceful Countess Fitz-Fulke; and the silent but emotionally deep Aurora Raby. Much of the final canto concerns a social gathering and the identity of the mysterious ghost of the Black Friar, whom Juan sees at night.

At the time of his death in 1824, Byron was still working on *Don Juan* but had completed only a fragment of canto 17, which does not continue the story line.

Characters: Characters Discussed

Don Juan

Don Juan (JEW-awn), the young son of Donna Inez and Don Jose, a hidalgo of Seville. He is a handsome, mischief-making boy whose education, after his father's death, is carefully supervised by his mother, who insists that he read only classics expurgated in the text but with all the obscenities collected in an appendix. He is allowed to associate only with old or ugly women. At the age of sixteen, he learns the art of love from Donna Julia, a young matron. The ensuing scandal causes Donna Inez to send her son to Cadiz, and from there to take ship for a trip abroad. The vessel on which he is a passenger sinks after a storm. He experiences a romantic interlude with the daughter of a Greek pirate and slave trader. He is sold to the Turks and takes part in the siege of Ismail, a Turkish fort on the Danube River. He becomes the favorite of Empress Catherine of Russia, and he is sent on a diplomatic mission to England, where he becomes a critical observer of English society.

Donna Inez

Donna Inez (I-nehz), Don Juan's mother, a domineering and short-sighted woman who first tries to protect her son from the facts of life but later rejoices in his good fortune and advancement when he becomes the favorite of Empress Catherine of Russia.

Don Jose

Don Jose (hoh-SEH), Don Juan's father, a gallant man often unfaithful to his wife, with whom he quarrels constantly. He dies while his son is still a small boy.

Donna Julia

Donna Julia, Don Juan’s first love, a woman of twenty-three married to the fifty-year-old Don Alfonso. She is forced to enter a convent after her irate husband discovers his wife and her young lover in her bedchamber. In a long letter, written on the eve of Don Juan’s departure from Spain, she professes her undying love for him.

Don Alfonso

Don Alfonso, the cuckold husband who discovers Don Juan hiding in a closet in his wife’s bedroom.

Haidée

Haidée (HI-dee), the second love of Don Juan. A tall, lovely child of nature and passion, she finds him unconscious on the seashore following the sinking of the ship on which he had sailed from Spain. Filled with love and sympathy, she hides and protects him. This idyllic island romance ends when Lambro, her pirate father, returns from one of his expeditions and finds the two sleeping together after a great feast that Lambro has watched from a distance. Don Juan, wounded in a scuffle with Lambro’s men, is bound and put aboard one of the pirate’s ships. Shortly afterward, Haidée dies, lamenting her vanished lover, and his child dies with her.

Lambro

Lambro (LAM-broh), Haidée’s father, “the mildest-manner’d man that ever scuttled ship or cut a throat.” Returning from one of his piratical expeditions, he surprises the young lovers and sends Don Juan, wounded in a fight with Lambro’s men, away on a slave ship. Later, he regrets his hasty action when he watches his only child die of illness and grief.

Gulbeyaz

Gulbeyaz (GEWL-beh-yaz), the sultana of Turkey. Having seen Don Juan in the slave market where he is offered for sale, along with an Italian opera troupe sold into captivity by their disgusted impresario, she orders one of the palace eunuchs to buy the young man. She has him taken to the palace and dressed in women’s clothes. Even though she brings her strongest weapon, her tears, to bear, she is unable to make Don Juan her lover.

The sultan of Turkey

The sultan of Turkey, the father of fifty daughters and four dozen sons. Seeing the disguised Don Juan in his wife’s apartments, he orders the supposed female slave to be taken to the palace harem.

Baba

Baba, the African eunuch who buys Don Juan at the sultana’s command. He later flees with Don Juan and John Johnson from Constantinople.

Lolah

Lolah,

Katinka

Katinka, and

Dudu

Dudu, three girls in the sultan's harem. Dudu, lovely and languishing, has the disguised Don Juan for her bed fellow. Late in the night, she awakes screaming after a dream in which she reached for a golden apple and was stung by a bee. The next morning, jealous Gulbeyaz orders Dudu and Don Juan executed, but they escape in the company of Johnson and Baba.

John Johnson

John Johnson, a worldly Englishman fighting with the Russians in the war against the Turks. Captured, he is bought in the slave market along with Don Juan. The two escape and make their way to the Turkish lines before Ismail. Johnson is recognized by General Suwarrow, who welcomes him and Don Juan as allies in the attack on Ismail.

Leila

Leila, a ten-year-old Muslim girl whose life Don Juan saves during the capture of Ismail. He becomes her protector.

General Suwarrow

General Suwarrow, the leader of the Russian forces at the siege and taking of Ismail.

Catherine

Catherine, the empress of Russia, to whose court Don Juan is sent with news of the Turkish victory at Ismail. Voluptuous and rapacious in love, she receives the young man with great favor and he becomes her favorite. After he becomes ill, she reluctantly decides to send him on a diplomatic mission to England.

Lord Henry Amundeville

Lord Henry Amundeville, an English politician and the owner of Norman Abbey. Don Juan meets the nobleman in London, and the two become friends.

Lady Adeline Amundeville

Lady Adeline Amundeville, his wife, who also becomes Don Juan's friend and mentor. She advises him to marry because she is afraid that he will become seriously involved with the notorious duchess of Fitz-Fulke. During a house party at Norman Abbey, she sings a song telling of the Black Friar, a ghost often seen wandering the halls of the abbey.

The duchess of Fitz-Fulke

The duchess of Fitz-Fulke, a woman of fashion notorious for her amorous intrigues. She pursues Don Juan after his arrival in England and finally, disguised as the ghostly Black Friar of Norman Abbey, succeeds in making him her lover.

Miss Aurora Raby

Miss Aurora Raby, a young Englishwoman with whom Don Juan contemplates matrimony. She seems completely unimpressed by his attentions, and he is piqued by her lack of interest.

Pedrillo

Pedrillo (peh-DRIHL-oh), Don Juan's tutor. When the ship on which he and his master sail from Cadiz sinks after a storm, they are among those set adrift in a longboat. When the food runs out, the unlucky pedagogue is eaten by his famished companions. Although Don Juan considers the man an ass, he is unable to eat the hapless fellow.

Zoe

Zoe (ZOH-ee), Haidée's maid.

Lady Pinchbeck

Lady Pinchbeck, a woman of fashion who, after Don Juan's arrival in London, takes Leila under her protection.

Critical Essays: Critical Evaluation

Although Lord Byron said that *Don Juan* was to be an epic, his story does not follow epic tradition. It is a vehicle for digression on any and every subject and person that entered Byron's mind as he wrote. The plot itself is almost a minor part of the poem, for much more interesting are Byron's bitter tirades on England, wealth, power, society, chastity, poets, and diplomats. The poem holds a high place among literary satires, even though it was unfinished at Byron's death.

George Gordon Byron, who became the sixth Lord Byron by inheriting the title from his uncle, William, was born on January 22, 1788. His father, the notorious "Mad Jack" Byron, deserted the family, and young Byron was brought up in his mother's native Scotland, where he was exposed to Presbyterian concepts of predestination, which distorted his religious views throughout his life. In 1801, he entered Harrow, a public school near London; in 1808, he received the master of arts degree from Cambridge; in 1809, he took his seat in the House of Lords. From June, 1809, to July, 1811, Byron traveled in Europe. In 1812, he met Lady Caroline Lamb, who later became his mistress; in 1813, he spent several months with his half-sister, Augusta Leigh, who later bore a daughter who may have been Byron's. Byron married Annabella Milbanke in 1815; she bore him a daughter, Ada, a year later and left him shortly thereafter. In 1816, Byron left England, never to return. That year found him in Switzerland with the Shelleys, where, in 1817, Clare Clairmont bore his illegitimate daughter Allegra. After 1819, Countess Teresa Guicciola, who sacrificed her marriage and social position for Byron, became his lover and comforter. Byron died on April 19, 1824, in Missolonghi, where he had hoped to help Greece gain independence from Turkey. His most famous works are *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* (1812-1818, 1819), *Manfred* (1817), *Cain: A Mystery* (1821), *The Vision of Judgment* (1822), and *Don Juan*, his masterpiece.

Don Juan, a mock-epic poem written in ottava rima, is permeated with Byronic philosophy. Its episodic plot, narrated in first person by its author, tells the story of young Juan, who, victimized by a narrow-minded and hypocritical mother, an illogical educational system, and his own fallible humanity, loses his innocence and faith and becomes disillusioned. The poem's rambling style allows for Byron's numerous digressions, in which he satirizes many aspects of English life: English government and its officials, religion and its confusions and hypocrisies, society and its foibles, war and its irrationality, woman and her treachery, man and his inhumanity. Even English poets feel the fire of Byron's wrath. Thus Byron has been accused of a completely negative view in *Don Juan*—anti-everything and pro-nothing. The philosophy of *Don Juan* is not wholly pessimistic, however, and its tone is consistently, especially in the digressions, sardonic and tongue-in-cheek. Furthermore, Byron's flippant refusal to take Juan's story (or life) too seriously and his

extensive use of exaggerated rhyme (such as "intellectual" and "hen-peck'd you all") are essentially comic. Thus the zest and the laughter in *Don Juan* belie the statements of despair and lend an affirmation of life despite its ironies; the lapses into lyricism reveal a heart that sings despite the poet's attempts to stifle emotion with sophistication.

In *Don Juan*, Byron's philosophical confusion seems to be caused by his natural affinity for a Platonic, idealistic view, which has been crushed under the weight of a realism he is too honest and too perceptive to ignore. He denies that he discusses metaphysics, but he comments that nothing is stable or permanent; all is mutable and subject to violent destruction. Nevertheless, Byron, in calling the world a "glorious blunder," is not totally blind to its temporary beauties. During the Juan-Haidée romance, the lovers live in an Edenic world of beautiful sunsets and warm, protective caves. Still, Juan's foreboding and Haidée's dream are reminders that nature's dangers always lurk behind its façade of beauty. Even Haidée, "Nature's bride," pursues pleasure and passion only to be reminded that "the wages of sin is death."

Byron's view of the nature of humanity is closely akin to his complex view of natural objects. People have their moments of glory, integrity, and unselfishness. For example, Juan, the novice, does not flee from the horror of battle; he shuns cannibalism even though he is starving; he refuses to be forced to love the sultana; he risks his life to save young Leila. Often Byron emphasizes humanity's freedom of mind and spirit. However, Byron believes that human self-deceit is the chief factor in decadence; false ideas of glory lead to bloodshed. Ironically, Surrow lectures his soldiers on "the noble art of killing"; humanity kills because "it brings self-approbation." In fact, Byron suggests that men are more destructive than nature or God. Still, Byron does not condemn humanity. This is in spite of Byron's opinion that humanity is basically flawed. Lord Henry, the elder sophisticate, is perhaps the best example of the human inability to retain innocence; caught in the trap of his own greed and hypocrisy and of society's political game, Lord Henry finds that he cannot turn back, even though "the fatigue was greater than the profit." Byron also strikes out against political corruption. He had strong hopes for England's budding liberalism: a "king in constitutional procession" had offered great promise in leading the world to political freedom and morality. Byron, however, boldly declares England's failure to fulfill this promise.

Byron does, however, offer positive values in *Don Juan*. He believes that momentary happiness and glory and love are worth living for. Although "A day of gold from out an age of iron/ Is all that life allows the luckiest sinner," it is better than nothing. Humanity must fight, though it knows that it can never redeem the world and that defeat and death are certain. Since hypocrisy is one of the worst sins, people should be sincere. To Byron, the creative act is especially important, for it is humanity's only chance to transcend mortality.

Throughout *Don Juan*, then, one follows humanity through its hapless struggle with life. Born in a fallen state, educated to hypocrisy and impracticality, cast out into a world of false values and boredom, a person follows the downward path to total disillusionment. One learns, however, to protect oneself from pain by insulating oneself with the charred shell of burned-out passion and crushed ideals. Blindly, one stumbles toward that unknown and unknowable end—death. Nevertheless, one goes not humbly but defiantly, not grimly but with gusto.

Therefore, Byron's philosophy, despite its harshness, is one that embraces life, seeking to intensify and electrify each fleeting, irrevocable moment. It is a philosophy of tangibles, though they are inadequate; of action, although it will not cure humanity's ills; of honesty, although it must recognize humanity's fallen state. Although death is inevitable and no afterlife is promised, Byron maintains his comic perspective: "Carpe diem, Juan . . . play out the play."

Critical Essays: Don Juan

Although the Don Juan of literary and operatic tradition is a coldly amoral seducer, Byron's version of the character begins as a sheltered youth but is progressively tarnished by his worldly experiences. A wellborn Spaniard, Juan is sent abroad when his mother and her lover, Don Alphonso, discover him to be having an affair with Alphonso's 23-year-old wife, Julia.

Don Juan's grand tour of Europe, from Greece, Turkey, and Russia to England, contains all the material of epic convention: storm and shipwreck, slavery, warfare, and political diplomacy. Most prominent among his experiences, however, is love. Juan's seduction by Julia is soon followed by an island idyll with a pirate's daughter, Haidee. Enslaved by the pirate, he is purchased for the pleasure of a sultana, makes a conquest of a pretty harem girl, and, after aiding in the Russian victory at Ismail, becomes the latest in Catherine the Great's parade of paramours. The poem ends at an English country house where three aristocratic beauties vie for his attentions.

The tale of *Don Juan* is a lively one, but much of the time only a pretext, a thread on which Byron strings the pearls of opinion. Byron's digressions--some serious, some lighthearted, some savage, but all eloquent--treat a wide range of subjects. Byron shares his religious doubts, political convictions, and poetic values. He describes what he has read, eaten, seen, and felt. He shares his preferences and fiercely attacks his enemies, especially William Wordsworth, the poet laureate Robert Southey, the British Foreign Secretary Lord Castlereagh, and Lady Byron, from whom he had separated. *Don Juan*'s candor scandalized some 19th century readers but tends to delight its modern audience.

Bibliography:

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Crane, David. *The Kindness of Sisters*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003. A study of Byron's reputation after death, exploring bitter and conflicting accounts by the wife he divorced and the sister he seduced.

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Ridenour, G. M. *The Style of Don Juan*. New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1960. Examines the classical theory of styles and its impact on Byron's paradoxical vision and his involvement in the narrative as speaker. Particular attention is paid to the Fall as a metaphor for the creation of art, nature, sexual identity, and a persona.

Wolfson, Susan. "'Their She Condition': Cross-Dressing and the Politics of Gender in *Don Juan*." *English Literary History* 54 (Fall, 1987): 585-617. Argues that categories that historically define "masculine" and "feminine" are often inverted in *Don Juan*. Dressing young Juan as a slave girl and the Duchess of Fitz-Fulke as the Black Friar are two examples of playful attempts at exposing and challenging the inadequacies of socially constructed gender roles.

Don Juan, Lord Byron: Introduction

Don Juan **Lord Byron**

English long poem, 1819-1824, written by George Gorden Noel, Lord Byron.

The following entry presents criticism on Byron's *Don Juan* from 1945 to 2000. See also, *Manfred* Criticism.

Don Juan (1819-24) is considered Byron's foremost achievement and one of English literature's great long poems. Variously described as a satire, epic, and novel in verse, the unfinished work defies critical categorization despite the consensus that it contains some of the sharpest social criticism in the English language. Writing in an animated style, Byron utilized a variety of narrative perspectives to comment on a wide range of concerns, including liberty, tyranny, war, love, sexuality, hypocrisy, and the mores of high society. The poet's ironic observations and brutally candid portrayal of human weaknesses garnered widespread condemnation from his contemporaries, who subjected *Don Juan* and its author to an unforgiving and almost relentless campaign of personal slander and critical abuse. Today, however, critics regard Byron's complex, profoundly skeptical yet often humorous work as a remarkable anticipation of both the mood and thematic occupations of modern literature.

Biographical Information

The unique relationship between Byron and his audience that later played an important role in the reception of *Don Juan* began with the publication of the first two cantos of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage: A Romaunt* (1812). When *Childe Harold* appeared in the spring of 1812, Byron became England's most celebrated author virtually overnight, gaining access to the country's highest social and literary circles. The close association in the public mind between Byron and his protagonists, first established in *Childe Harold,* continued throughout the poet's career and profoundly affected the critical reception of later works, especially *Don Juan.*

Byron continued to enjoy unyielding public adoration for several years following the publication of *Childe Harold,* attending exclusive social events and carrying on a series of affairs with married women, notably Lady Caroline Lamb and Lady Jane Oxford. In 1815 he married Annabella Milbanke, who left him just over a year later. The couple's separation has been the subject of extensive research, and some biographers have suggested that an affair between Byron and his half-sister Augusta Leigh prior to the marriage caused the estrangement. The breakup of the marriage and rumors about Byron's conduct drew scorn in his social circle, and Byron found himself snubbed by his peers and chastised in the press. Byron and Milbanke officially separated on April 21, 1816. Four days later, Byron left England forever.

Byron's meteoric rise to fame and equally abrupt exile hardened him against a society whose rigid notions of decorum had always aroused his suspicion. The poet was able to channel his acute awareness of social mores into his writing, and he produced his first satirical work in October 1817, while living in northern Italy. *Beppo: A Venetian Story* (1818) offers light, humorous criticism of Venetian morality and customs, and is largely regarded as a precursor to the stanzaic form and narrative style of *Don Juan.* The positive reception of the work pleased Byron, prompting him to investigate the rich tradition of Italian burlesque poetry written in ottava rima, including the works of Pulci, Francesco Berni, and Giambattista Casti. Under the influence of

these models, he began drafting *Don Juan* in July 1818.

Don Juan, which is composed of sixteen cantos written between 1819 and 1823, is regarded as largely autobiographical in nature and can be traced to a wide range of literary and theatrical influences. In addition to the Italian poets, Byron borrowed from the epics of Virgil and Homer; the satire of François Marie Voltaire, Miguel de Cervantes, Alexander Pope, and Jonathan Swift; and the picaresque novels of Tobias Smollett, Henry Fielding, and Laurence Sterne. Byron also incorporated a broad selection of nonfiction, including passages from historical works, directly into his text. The result is a work satiric in tone, epic in scope, and harshly realistic in its portrayal of human behavior and events. Despite its wide-ranging commentary, the work remains incomplete. Byron moved to Greece in 1823 to aid the fight for that country's independence from the Turks. He died there on April 19, 1824, from an illness contracted after becoming drenched in a rainstorm, less than one month after the publication of *Don Juan*'s last completed cantos.

Plot and Major Characters

Don Juan follows the travels and relationships of a youthful protagonist who, though he shares the same name, bears little resemblance to the heartless libertine of popular European legend. Juan's story, however, represents only a part of *Don Juan.* Through the series of adventures as overprotected teenager, castaway, lover, slave, soldier, kept man, and ornament in English society, Byron deliberates on a vast array of social, political, poetic, and metaphysical topics. Byron's use of a narrator with a distinct personality, as well as the presence of the poet's own voice in the work, allows him simultaneously to tell Juan's story and to comment on it from various perspectives, a technique that contributes to the ironic qualification of nearly every level of meaning in the poem.

The poem begins with Juan's birth to Don Jose and Donna Inez, his education, and his early love affair with Julia, wife of Don Alfonso of Seville. Subsequently, the poem moves from one geographic area—and transformative episode—to another: a shipwreck on the voyage from Seville; a romantic encounter with Haidée on a Greek island; enslavement by Haidée's pirate father, Lambro; sale to Gulbeyaz, a Turkish sultana; escape and subsequent participation in the Siege of Ismail; service in Russia for Catherine the Great; and finally entrance into English aristocratic society and a possible affair with the Duchess of Fitz-Fulke. While his experiences and geographic range are vast, Juan's journeys are beset with disillusion. His romantic encounter with Julia dissolves into farce when Alfonso bursts into Julia's bedroom. Haidée offers a chance at true love, but the tryst is thwarted by the reappearance of Lambro. Juan next encounters the evils of war and conquest, imperialistic tyranny, and the hypocrisies of English society. Aurora Raby appears to offer another opportunity for romance, but is displaced by the flirtatious Duchess. Nothing in *Don Juan* is as idyllic as on its surface it seems. Grand passions and lofty ideals are consistently undermined by vicious schemes.

Major Themes

Although many of Byron's contemporaries focused on the poet's indictment of English high society in *Don Juan,* the poem actually contains myriad subjects and offers sardonic commentary on a vast range of societal ills. Upright Regency-era views of love and sexuality are among Byron's central targets, but *Don Juan* also offers biting commentary on war, religion, restraints on personal liberty and freedom of speech, and injustices rendered upon society's weakest inhabitants. A passive character, Byron's Juan reacts to, rather than manipulates, the world around him. Brave, resourceful, but essentially without motivation or direction, he is a victim of a harsh, hypocritical world. By casting outside forces as corrupting influences on a character traditionally depicted as extravagant and callous, Byron reversed popular legend to suggest that society, not the individual, bears responsibility for evil in the world.

While Juan is largely regarded as an innocent victim of the harsh world in which he lives, the poem's narrator provides a more hardy voice. A continually shifting character who at times represents Byron, the narrator

sympathizes with the weaknesses displayed by the various characters in *Don Juan,* although his overall tone is one of cynical amusement. His eventual argument that pity, humor and compassion must counteract a chaotic, unfair world becomes the poem's overarching message.

Critical Reception

Byron had an early taste of the imminent critical backlash against *Don Juan* when his publisher, John Murray, vehemently contested the poet's plans to publish the first two cantos of the work in 1819. Byron's attack on the Poet Laureate Robert Southey in the Dedication, his thinly veiled, unflattering depiction of Lady Byron in the character of Donna Inez, and the irreverent attitudes toward sex and religion made publication of the poem impossible, Murray and his advisors contended. Eventually, Byron and Murray reached a compromise, with Byron agreeing to retract the Dedication and several slanderous stanzas. The first two cantos were published with neither Byron's nor Murray's names on the title page in July 1819, and a critical uproar followed. The influential Scottish journal *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* launched the first salvo, praising the artistic merit of the work but thoroughly condemning its moral implications and subject matter. Other influential critics followed suit, many noting the autobiographical elements in the poem and using their reviews to deride the author as well as his work. One highly regarded critic, Leigh Hunt, came to Byron's defense in the liberal *Examiner.* Hunt defended both the morality and realism of *Don Juan* and offered his own attack on conservative values. Hunt's praise notwithstanding, critics continued to rebuke Byron and *Don Juan* with the release of subsequent cantos between 1821 and 1824. The general public's opinion countered the critics', however; while the first two cantos sold poorly, the remainder of the series proved immensely popular. Despite the brisk sales, Murray refused to publish *Don Juan* after the fifth canto, and the rest of the poem was published by Leigh Hunt's brother, John.

Don Juan remained largely contested or ignored for over a century following Byron's death, but the publication in 1945 of book-length studies of the poem by Elizabeth French Boyd and Paul Graham Trueblood (see Further Reading) began to turn the tide. Both the serious approach to and the quantity of essays on the poem during this period helped to establish it as Byron's most important work. Since 1945, scholars have focused on the structure, style, literary background, and philosophy of *Don Juan.* The appearance in 1957 of both Leslie Marchand's biography of Byron (see Further Reading) and a variorum edition of the poem edited by Truman Guy Steffan and Willis W. Pratt (see Further Reading) provided critics with a wealth of primary source material and information about the work's composition, textual history, and place in Byron's oeuvre. A surge in *Don Juan* criticism followed. Modern-day critics have countered their nineteenth-century predecessors with regard to Byron's portrayals of women, love, and sexuality, casting Byron's female characters as powerful and his views on sexual mores as liberated. Critics have maintained that the women characters in *Don Juan* are as diverse and complex as those created by William Shakespeare, have traced the literary traditions from which *Don Juan* stems, including the tradition of popular spectacular theater. Scholars have also offered psychoanalytic approaches to the poem, applying the noted theories of Sigmund Freud, Carl Jung, and Otto Rank to Byron's use of myth, his portrayals of women and relationships, and noting an overarching theme of guilt in the poem. Critics have also commented on the religious and geo-cultural themes in *Don Juan.*

Don Juan, Lord Byron: Principal Works

Hours of Idleness (poetry) 1807

English Bards and Scotch Reviewers (satire) 1809

Childe Harold's Pilgrimage: A Romaunt (poetry) 1812

The Bride of Abydos: A Turkish Tale (poetry) 1813

The Giaour: A Fragment of a Turkish Tale (poetry) 1813

Waltz: An Apostrophic Hymn (poetry) 1813

The Corsair (poetry) 1814

Lara (poetry) 1814

Ode to Napoleon Bonaparte (poetry) 1814

Hebrew Melodies (poetry) 1815

Childe Harold's Pilgrimage: Canto the Third (poetry) 1816

Parisina (poetry) 1816

The Prisoner of Chillon, and Other Poems (poetry) 1816

The Siege of Corinth (poetry) 1816

The Lament of Tasso (poetry) 1817

Manfred, A Dramatic Poeming (play) 1817

Beppo: A Venetian Story (poetry) 1818

Childe Harold's Pilgrimage: Canto the Fourth (poetry) 1818

Don Juan, Cantos I-XVI. 6 vols. (poetry) 1819-24

Mazeppa (poetry) 1819

Cain (play) 1821

Marino Faliero, Doge of Venice (play) 1821

Sardanapalus (play) 1821

The Two Foscari (play) 1821

The Vision of Judgment (poetry) 1822

Heaven and Earth (poetry) 1823

The Island; or, Christian and His Comrades (poetry) 1823

Werner (play) 1823

The Deformed Transformed (play) 1824

The Works of Lord Byron: Poetry. 7 vols. (poetry) 1898-1904

Letters and Journals. 11 vols. (letters and journals) 1975-81

Criticism: Elizabeth French Boyd (essay date 1945)

SOURCE: Boyd, Elizabeth French. "The Literary Background of *Don Juan*: Incidents." In *Byron's* Don Juan: *A Critical Study,* pp. 112-38. New York: The Humanities Press, 1958.

[*In the following essay, originally published in 1945, Boyd examines several figures and events that may have inspired various characters and scenes in* Don Juan.]

Don Juan is a compound of self-expression and literary reminiscence. We have seen that Byron wrote fundamentally from his own feelings and ideas, and that when he read, he was likewise habitually conscious of himself and his world at the center of the book. He identified himself with characters, and visualized scenes, making them his own. He associated scenes and ideas from one book to another, and from books to his own life. The details that appealed to him were those that corroborated his own experience and tastes. In all Byron's poetry, therefore, purely autobiographical elements are blended with echoes of the literature he had absorbed so deeply as to make it part of himself. Thus his poetry has both personal and cultural qualities to appeal to his readers. In the following analysis of each section of *Don Juan,* I shall endeavor to show how the personal elements are fused with the literary, and thus to restore the full literary flavor of the poem for modern readers.

1

The motto of the first and second cantos of *Don Juan* may perhaps be blamed for part of the public conviction that Byron was writing literal autobiography. He selected it from Horace's *Ars Poetica*: "Difficile est proprie communia dicere," "It is hard to treat in your own way what is common." Byron's friends took this to be a confession that he was writing about his domestic affairs, which were certainly common property. In Horace's context, *communia* means literary subjects which have been often handled by the poets and are well-known to the public, for he continues, "you are doing better in spinning into acts a song of Troy than if, for the first time, you were giving the world a theme unknown and unsung."[1] The motto was highly appropriate for a new version of the Don Juan legend. Byron was noted, however, not only for public confessions in his poetry, but for puns, and Hobhouse in his letter of January 8, 1819, advising Byron not to publish *Don Juan,* must have accused Byron of substituting in his mind for *communia* the words *domestica facta.*[2] Replying on January 25, Byron said:

> "The motto 'domestica facta' merely meant *common life* which, I presume, was Horace's meaning—the *Julian* adventure detailed was none of mine; but one of an acquaintance of mine (Parolini by name), which happened some years ago at Bassano, with the Prefect's wife when he was a boy; and was the subject of a long case, ending in a divorce or separation of the parties during the Italian Viceroyalty. …"[3]

Byron's understanding of *communia* as common life, and his further interpretation of that phrase as what had actually occurred within his knowledge, throw light on his conception of the term Nature, an eighteenth century concept based in part on this very passage in Horace. As with *Beppo,* Byron was founding his story on an anecdote from real life, resolved to incorporate nothing in Juan's adventures except actual fact.

Although Parolini's story may have been uppermost in his mind, there is undeniable autobiography in his account of it, for example, the characterization of Donna Inez, who combines the features of both Byron's

wife and his mother, and the resemblance of the whole plot to an affair of Byron's Southwell days, when he is supposed to have been allowed undue freedom with the daughter of a neighboring family who hoped thereby to entrap him for her husband. Perhaps there is autobiographical recollection in the closing scene of the Julia episode, when Juan becomes seasick while reading Julia's letter. The letter with its insistence on the singleness of Julia's love, now irrevocably lost, reminds us of Byron's sets of farewell verses to Mary Chaworth upon his leaving England in 1809. Yet the *Lines to Mr. Hodgson Written on Board the Lisbon Packet,* at the same time, though not then published, show Byron, the sufferer from love, in high spirits and surrounded by the seasick:

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"Hobhouse muttering fearful curses,
          As the hatchway down he rolls,
Now his breakfast, now his verses,
          Vomits forth—and damns our souls.
                    'Here's a stanza
                    On Braganza—
          Help!'—'A couplet?'—'No, a cup
                    Of warm water—'
                    'What's the matter?'
          'Zounds! my liver's coming up! …

"But, since Life at most a jest is,
          As philosophers allow,
Still to laugh by far the best is,
          Then laugh on—as I do now.
                    Laugh at all things,
                    Great and small things,
          Sick or well, at sea or shore. …"
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If Parolini's anecdote and Byron's reminiscences are at the bottom of the Julia episode, it is a case of real life imitating art, for the plot is a commonplace of fabliau and comedy. Analogues abound, wherein a young gallant, innocent like Juan, or a scheming gay blade, seduces the young and pious wife of a stupid old husband. Byron would have learned from Dunlop's *History of Fiction* the "genealogy" of this fabliau at least from the *novelle* of Franco Sacchetti, *ca.* 1400 (who imitated the *Decameron*), to Casti's *Novelle Amorose* (1804). Dunlop selects as a typical example to relate the French version entitled *La Culotte des Cordeliers*:[4]

> "It is there told, that a merchant's wife in Orleans had a clerk for a gallant. The husband came home one night unexpectedly. The clerk had time to escape, but left an essential article of dress behind him, which, on the following morning the husband put on by mistake. Before evening he remarked the change in his clothes, and on his return home reproached his wife with infidelity."

The wife gets out of her dilemma by providing that the clothing shall appear to have been a present from the Franciscans for the greater fertility of her husband. Dunlop says, "Of all these tales the origin may, perhaps, be a story in Apuleius, where a gallant is detected by the husband from having left his sandals."[5]

The *novella* of Casti mentioned by Dunlop in this series is *La Brache di San Griffone,* but Casti gives another version also in *I Calzoni Ricamati.* In this story, Giuditta, the wife of Master Piero of Amsterdam, yields to the love-making of Lord Boxton, who is touring Europe to discover whether there is any difference among the women of various countries. Her husband returns one night unexpectedly from a business trip and surprises them; Giuditta just has time to hide the milord under the sofa in the totally darkened room. She pretends to have the colic and sends Piero after some *acqua cattolica* at the chemist's. Piero dresses in the dark and hurries off full of concern for his wife's illness, but when he comes to pay for the medicine, he finds to his amazement that his money has turned into an English guinea, and that he has on a strange pair of richly embroidered breeches, with a watch and jeweled chain in the pocket. Advised by the chemist, he suppresses

the obvious but dishonorable conclusion, and shames his wife into good behavior by his forbearance. “I have gained these rich spoils,” he tells her, “and I shall take them from the closet every eight days in your honor.”

Incidentally, still another of Casti's *novelle,* the fourth, entitled *La Diavolessa,* has been cited by many critics, E. H. Coleridge, Helene Richter, and R. D. Waller among them, as an analogue of *Don Juan,* Cantos I and II. Don Ignazio, a Spanish hidalgo, friend of Don Juan Tenorio and brought up with him in the same kind of education, pursues a brilliant career of scandalous amours in Seville, and at last runs away with his mistress Ermengilda. They are captured by pirates, their ship is wrecked, and Don Ignazio alone survives, cast up naked on the sandy beach. He gathers wreckage—“casks” and “biscuits”—to support himself; he finds a cave to live in, and then a hut; he becomes a penitent anchorite and is tempted by the Devil in many guises. Finally the Devil appears to him disguised as Ermengilda miraculously raised from the dead. Don Ignazio, forgetting his religious vows, marries with a common-law ceremony this Diavolessa. After a week, she whisks him off to Hell, where he rejoins his friend Don Juan.

The compressed simplicity and bareness of Casti's stories, however, convey none of the illusion of real life to be found in Byron's. Byron has borrowed, too, from richer versions of the Apuleian fabliau. He may have known it in romantic guise in C. P. Duclos's *Histoire de Madame de Luz,* in which he would also have read the history of his reputed French ancestor the Marechal de Biron. He undoubtedly knew it with all its trimmings of hypocrisy in Machiavelli's *Mandragola.* The heroine of that comedy, Lucrezia, is like Donna Julia in character—pious, easily led, capable of self-deception, femininely whimsical. Her mother, Sostrata, though a simpler character than Donna Inez, shares her complete hypocrisy and her function as half-conscious go-between. Regnard's play, *The Divorce,* is similar, especially in the tirades of the young wife feigning injured innocence to her irritating lord and master. The whole tradition of the fabliau from Boccaccio to Casti was in Byron's mind as he wrote, and the scene of climax that November night in Donna Julia's bedroom is improved by all that Byron had learned from English, French, and Italian comedy.

2

It seems unlikely that Casti's *La Diavolessa* played any important part in Byron's account of Don Juan's voyage and shipwreck. Aside from the fact that disaster at sea and the rescue of the hero by a simple maiden whom he proceeds to seduce were conventional features of the Don Juan legend, Byron's other models would have suggested their inclusion. Tempest and shipwreck have been conventional subjects of the epic since the *Odyssey.* Greek romance made the most of this convention, and picaresque romance in its turn did not neglect its advantages. The supreme example of shipwreck in *Robinson Crusoe* only gave a new impetus of realism and actuality to this favorite episode. The *Monthly Magazine,* as E. H. Coleridge notes in his edition of *Don Juan,* very soon brought out a complete analysis of Byron's indebtedness to Sir G. Dalzell's *Shipwrecks and Disasters at Sea,* 1812, a very remarkable collection of firsthand accounts of wrecks. Coleridge adds to the documentation of Canto II the hints that Byron used from “his grand-dad's narrative,” from Bligh's *Mutiny on the Bounty,* from Hartford's *Remarkable Shipwrecks,* 1813, and from the *Memoirs of Cardinal de Retz.*

Byron told Trelawney, when they were fitting out the *Bolivar,* that Trelawney would “find him nothing but a land-lubber. I hardly know the stem from the stern, and don't know the name or use of a single rope or sail. … All the sea-terms I use are from authority, and they cost me toil and trouble to look them out.”[6] The realism resulting from this painful research was too strong for the British stomach. Byron's public objected to the juxtaposition of the terrible and the ridiculous in such unveiled terms. Even Shelley, in the midst of his enthusiastic comments on the first two cantos, felt a little repelled:

> “What a strange and terrible storm is that at sea,” he wrote to Byron, “and the two fathers, how true, yet how strong a contrast! Dante hardly exceeds it. … The love letter, and the account of its being written, is altogether a masterpiece of portraiture. … I cannot say I equally approve of the service to which this letter was appropriated; or that I altogether think

> the bitter mockery of our common nature, of which this is one of the expressions, quite worthy of your genius."[7]

To us, who have been dulled by all too frequent repetitions in our daily newspapers of this story of wreck and disaster at sea, the objections of the public seem incomprehensible. They were prompted by that sentimentality which demanded prettiness and sublimity in poetry and refused ugliness and the grotesque, no matter how true to life. Such things belonged in prose, in the picaresque novel for instance, like *Roderick Random,* where we find in brief a wreck, decorated with rum and religion, somewhat similar to that of the "Trinidada."

The prose documentation of Byron's shipwreck, like the Parolini episode, was merely an extension and corroboration of Byron's own experience, for one of the events in his first visit to Greece which made a deep impression on him was the near-disaster at sea that he and Hobhouse underwent in trying to sail from Prevesa to Patras in a Turkish ship of war. Hobhouse gives his account of this experience in his *Journey Through Albania,*[8] and Byron wrote a characteristically amusing description of it to his mother:

> "Two days ago I was nearly lost in a Turkish ship of war, owing to the ignorance of the captain and crew, though the storm was not violent. Fletcher yelled after his wife, the Greeks called on all the saints, the Mussulmans on Alla; the captain burst into tears and ran below decks telling us to call on God; the sails were split, the main-yard shivered, the wind blowing fresh, the night setting in, and all our chance was to make Corfu … or (as Fletcher pathetically termed it) 'a watery grave.' I did what I could to console Fletcher, but finding him incorrigible, wrapped myself up in my Albanian capote (an immense cloak), and lay down on deck to wait the worst. I have learnt to philosophise in my travels; and if I had not, complaint was useless. Luckily the wind abated, and only drove us on the coast of Suli. …"[9]

As Moore put it, Byron remembered the emotions he had felt on this occasion, though the circumstances and details of his poetic narrative might be imaginary or borrowed from other sources than his own experience.

But he had good poetic authority, as well as prose documentation, for his shipwreck. Probably William Falconer's *The Shipwreck,* 1762, predominated in Byron's mind as he wrote. This poem, one of the first publications of the Murray press, had been long a favorite with Byron. An 1804 edition of it by Clarke appears in the 1816 Sale Catalogue, and Byron mentions it in his notes to *Childe Harold,* Canto II, as one of the reasons why Cape Colonna is especially interesting to the English traveler, for it is the site of that famous wreck.[10] Two years after he wrote *Don Juan,* Canto II, he referred to it again at some length in his argument with Bowles over the "invariable principles of poetry."[11]

Superficially, Falconer's story of the storm and the shipwreck bears little resemblance to the *Don Juan* story. There is an exiled lover, Palemon, who gains the shore only to die after committing his sad tale of an unrelenting parent and an orphaned sweetheart to the charge of the Byronic hero, Arion. The scene is the Grecian archipelago, and there is much congenial talk of the ancient glories of Greece and its modern enslavement to the Turks. But the reasons for this poem's hold on Byron's imagination are shown in his comments on it in the Bowles controversy, revealing how it satisfied his predilections for human nature and action, for realism and authenticity:

> "Is the sea itself [he wrote] a more attractive, a more moral, a more poetical subject, with or without a vessel, breaking its vast but fatiguing monotony? Is a storm more poetical without a ship? or, in the poem of *The Shipwreck,* is it the storm or the ship which most interests? both *much* undoubtedly; but without the vessel, what should we care for the tempest? It would sink into mere descriptive poetry. …

> "In what does the infinite superiority of Falconer's *Shipwreck* over all other shipwrecks consist? In his admirable application of the terms of his art; in a poet-sailor's description of the sailor's fate. These *very terms,* by his application, make the strength and reality of his poem."

An authentic narrative of a great and losing struggle between man and inanimate nature, delivered in a high-pitched emotional key, was exactly the sort of thing to appeal to Byron's mind. Biased as he was in supposing that a piling up of facts was the same thing as the truth, he fell into the same error of taste—though not to such an abysmal extent—as Falconer, by using painstaking realism in the technical details. Falconer's *Shipwreck* was applauded, in spite of its boring factualness, but Byron's was not, and the reason for its failure with the public was its hard-boiled manner. A sustained high emotional tone was not the pitch for *Don Juan,* but a humorous middle tone, varied by abrupt changes to the sublime.

Ariosto's shipwreck, a famous passage in the *Orlando Furioso,* described entirely in his high heroic strain, must also have been in Byron's mind, for his shipwreck matches Ariosto's in many details and fully equals it when he chooses to raise the tone. Byron had some thoughts at this time of translating Ariosto, but left the task to his friend W. S. Rose, who was already engaged upon it. Perhaps Rose's translation was to some extent influenced by Byron's poem—I am not expert enough in Ariosto or Italian to decide; but it is interesting to compare their markedly similar descriptions of the wreck.

Rogero and his seven kings set sail from Marseilles for North Africa, but

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"Upon the darkening of the day, the wind
Displays its fickle and perfidious kind."
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Through the stormy night, the pilot, the sailors, and all on board struggle at various nautical tasks to steady the ungovernable vessel. Nothing avails; fallen on her beam ends, split and leaking at every seam, the ship is about to founder. "Meanwhile, his soul to Heaven each recommends."

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"A fierce assault and cruel coil doth keep
          Upon all sides that wintry tempest fell.
Now to their sight so high the billows leap,
          It seems that these to heaven above would swell;
Now, plunging with the wave, they sink so deep,
          That they appear to spy the gulf of hell.
Small hope there is or none: with faltering breath
They gaze upon inevitable death.

"On a dispiteous sea, that livelong night,
                    They drifted, as the wind in fury blew.
The furious wind that with the dawning light
Should have abated, gathered force anew."
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The ship breaks up piecemeal, rudder, sails, and mast are carried away, and they drive on helplessly toward a bare rock:

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"All to their private aims alone attend,
          And only to preserve their life have care.
Who quickest can, into the skiff descend,
          But in a thought so overcrowded are,
Through those so many who invade the boat,
That, gunwale-deep, she scarce remains afloat.

"Rogero, on beholding master, mate,
                    And men abandoning the ship with speed,
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In doublet, as he is, sans mail and plate,
Hopes in the skiff, a refuge in that need:
But finds her overcharged with such a weight,
And afterwards so many more succeed,
That the o'erwhelming waves the pinnace drown,
And she with all her wretched freight goes down;

"Goes down, and, foundering, drags with her whoe'er
Leaving the larger bark, on her relies.
Then doleful shrieks are heard, 'mid sob and tear,
Calling for succour on unpitying skies:
But for short space that shrilling cry they rear;
For, swoln with rage and scorn, the waters rise,
And in a moment wholly stop the vent
Whence issues that sad clamour and lament."(12)

Byron's story of shipwreck, also located in the Gulf of Lyons, carries on for many stanzas in conversational humorous style, full of circumstantial details, but as the climax of the actual wreck approaches, the tone rises and grows solemn:

"'T was twilight, and the sunless day went down
Over the waste of waters; like a veil,
Which, if withdrawn, would but disclose the frown
Of one whose hate is masked but to assail.
Thus to their hopeless eyes the night was shown,
And grimly darkled o'er the faces pale,
And the dim desolate deep: twelve days had Fear
Been their familiar, and now Death was here. …

"Then rose from sea to sky the wild farewell—
Then shrieked the timid, and stood still the brave,—
Then some leaped overboard with dreadful yell,
As eager to anticipate their grave;
And the sea yawned around her like a hell,
And down she sucked with her the whirling wave,
Like one who grapples with his enemy,
And strives to strangle him before he die.

"And first one universal shriek there rushed,
Louder than the loud Ocean, like a crash
Of echoing thunder; and then all was hushed,
Save the wild wind, and the remorseless dash
Of billows; but at intervals there gushed,
Accompanied by a convulsive splash,
A solitary shriek, the bubbling cry
Of some strong swimmer in his agony."

But even in the midst of these often quoted stanzas, Byron has inserted two in his customary voice, describing the last half-hysterical efforts of the ship's company to save themselves. The ship, having been lightened of every object that would float, at last

"gave a heel, and then a lurch to port,
And, going down head foremost—sunk, in short."

These lines epitomize the prosaic, tough realism with which he elected to relate a scene hallowed by romance.

Rogero, with the superhuman strength of a chivalric hero, swims with growing vigor and unwearied mind, buoyed up by noble resolves to reform his whole way of living, and so arrives on the rocky island shore not in the least exhausted and far from drowned. But Juan endures days and nights of torment, watching his comrades die lingering and cruel deaths, and reaches shore

"With just enough of life to feel its pain,
And deem that it was saved, perhaps, in vain."

There is symbolism in both these pictures of survival. Ariosto's is that of a good Catholic Christian, for Rogero finds on the rock the hermit who converts and baptizes him, in token of his salvation from death. Byron's symbolism, however, I venture to suggest derives from Lucretius, who strongly affected his views on man and the universe. One of the most famous images in the *De Rerum Natura,* which he read in the summer of 1813 with Lady Oxford, struck his imagination so forcefully that, as we have seen earlier, he used it as the basis of three separate scenes. The lines occur in a passage where Lucretius has gathered proofs of the imperfection of the universe and the undeniable existence of evil:

> "Then further the child, like a sailor cast forth by the cruel waves, lies naked upon the ground, speechless, in need of every kind of vital support, as soon as nature has spilt him forth with throes from his mother's womb into the regions of light, and he fills all around with doleful wailings; as is but just, seeing that so much trouble awaits him in life to pass through."[13]

Faced with inexplicable and fated evil in his own life, Byron felt the pathos, the doubt, and the despair of Lucretius. The cosmic view of the hapless individual stranded in a vast, threatening, and even malignant universe is the backdrop for the Byronic melancholy, rebellion, and pessimism. Man, Byron wrote, "has always been, and always will be, an unlucky rascal." He encountered the Lucretian passage again in Burton's chapter on Discontents, Cares, and Miseries, where Burton calls to mind Lucretius' naked mariner "cast on shore by shipwreck, cold and comfortless in an unknown land. No estate, age, sex, can secure himself from this common misery."[14]

3

Peter Quennell has observed that Greece and youth were equated in Byron's mind. Byron thought in 1816 that he had said all he had to say on Greece; its scenes were fading and confusing in his memory, and he dreaded committing the error deplored by Voltaire of over writing his material. But nothing in his former pictures of Greece surpasses *Don Juan,* Cantos II-IV, in beauty and reality. It would be useless to conjecture about the autobiographical reminiscences contained in them; they are manifest and abundant. But the literary associations of the Haidée episode, as of the seraglio one to follow, are less obvious and should be noted. Here we enter the maze of connections linking oriental romance and European literature, which I do not propose to thread but only to sketch. For I am convinced that the nexus of oriental fiction, ancient and modern, was present in Byron's mind as a source of inspiration.

The formula of shipwreck, innocent, passionate love, and piracy in the Mediterranean is as old as the Greek romances, with which Byron's Venetian library was amply stocked. Dunlop's *History of Fiction* told him in its first chapter all about the Greek romances; in the second, about Apuleius and Petronius; copies of all these he bought in Venice. He would also have learned Dunlop's conjectures on the perpetuation of these romantic fictions, together with all classical mythology and superstitions, in the medieval romances, such as *Amadis de Gaul*[15] and *Huon of Bordeaux.* At the other end of time, in his own experience, he knew these aspects of oriental adventure at first hand, and had heard, collected, and translated some of the Greek ballads (dating, many of them, from the late middle ages) representing popular traditions on similar materials. His response to the whole body of oriental fiction resembles that of Scott and the other romanticists and Gothic novelists to the traditions of western medieval romance and balladry. Byron took the time-worn stuff of Greek and

medieval oriental romance and breathed life and truth and passion into it. Dressed in the actual style and setting of the Orient, the Haidée episode is as fresh and real as an eye-witness account.

Byron says at the conclusion of Haidée's story:

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"But many a Greek maid in a loving song
                    Sighs o'er her name; and many an islander
With her Sire's story makes the night less long. …"
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In a note to the *Bride of Abydos,* Byron mentions his acquaintance with the recent exploits of the contemporary historical Lambro; but his acquaintance with the Haidée story, and possible ballads recording it, is more shadowy. The name Haidée, we know from Byron's own translation of the ballad "Belovèd and Fair Haidée," occurred within his knowledge in popular Greek songs. Its meaning, "a caress," or "the caressed one," is appropriate to *Don Juan,* Cantos II-IV. Samuel Baud-Bovy, in his *La Chanson Populaire Grecque du Dodécanèse,* records many variants of ballads on "La fille injustement tuée" by cruel brothers or parents for her love to a stranger.[16] Any one of these may have been Byron's original. The testimony of historical reality furnished by the appearance of the story in ballad form would perhaps satisfy his fact loving nature, even if he had no more substantial proof of its occurrence in real life. As for the famous interpolated song, "The isles of Greece," its affinity to the Greek patriotic ballads, like "Arise, sons of the Hellenes," is obvious.

Daphnis and Chloe, however, and Theagenes and Characlea, are the literary ancestors of Juan and Haidée. Byron also knew their modern counterparts in Paul and Virginie; indeed, the eighteenth century tradition of the island romance is the "source" of Haidée's character and of her love for Juan. As in the Greek romances, the love-idyll of Juan and Haidée is interrupted by the pirate, blood and thunder, wounds and separation. The recognition scene between Lambro, apparently raised from the dead, and Haidée torn between filial devotion and fear for her endangered lover, is rendered in the best style of melodramatic romance. But unlike the Greek romances, or their medieval equivalents, no room is left for a happy reunion. Haidée dies a lingering death, her mind eclipsed by sorrow, and her unborn child dies with her. In three elegiac stanzas Byron records her tomb and her father's, the desolate isle, and the ballads of the Greeks upon her love and her father's exploits.

M. Anton Blanck, in an article entitled "*Floires et Blanceflor*" *et l'épisode de Haidée dans le* "*Don Juan*" *de Byron,*[17] has called attention to some interesting parallels between that twelfth century romance and Byron's story. Both stories begin in Spain and proceed to the Orient. In both, a pair of seventeen-year-old lovers, one Christian and the other Muslim (for Haidée, though said to be acquainted by name with Hell and Purgatory, is half-Moorish in blood and wholly pagan in ideas), experience a perfect love idyll, interrupted by the cruel guardian of the girl. In *Floires and Blanceflor,* the religious differences are reversed, for Floires is the Muslim, and Blanceflor the Christian. She is sold to the emir of Babylon, whither Floires patiently pursues her. He finds his way into the fantastic, highly decorated tower where she is kept, and there they enjoy their love in scenes of oriental luxury. At last the emir becomes suspicious and upon coming to the tower himself to find Blanceflor, discovers her fast asleep in Floires' arms. They wake to see his naked sword suspended over them, which he withholds until he can learn the young man's name. This romance has a happy ending, for the emir's heart is melted by Floires' constancy, and the young lovers are united in marriage. But the conception of innocent natural love, and the contrast between tender hellenic grace and oriental cruelty are the same in both *Floires and Blanceflor* and *Don Juan.*

It seems very improbable, however, that Byron knew either *Floires and Blanceflor* or its near relation *Aucassin and Nicolette.* M. Blanck grants the unlikelihood, but points out that Byron could have been acquainted with the story in Boccaccio's *Il Filocolo,* which Hunt had just drawn to the attention of Keats. Why should not Hunt have mentioned it to Byron also? This may have happened, but I feel sure that Byron would not have found the intensely prosaic *Filocolo* congenial, in spite of its "Questions of Love." He never mentions it, and whenever he speaks of Boccaccio, "the bard of prose," it is to speak of the *Decameron,* which

he was reading in Venice as early as 1817.

Aside from the fact that *Floires and Blanceflor* is a medieval descendant of the Greek romances, the resemblance of the Haidée episode to it is more probably due to Wieland's *Oberon.* For *Oberon* is founded on the romance of *Huon of Bordeaux,* which in turn is closely allied to *Floires et Blanceflor,*[18] and Byron knew Wieland's modern version of *Huon* through Sotheby's translation. In Dunlop's *History of Fiction,* Byron would have found the entire story of *Huon of Bordeaux* with its analogues,[19] both from the Arabian Nights and from German prose fiction, all preceded by a short paragraph ascribing praise to Wieland's use of the material in *Oberon,* and to Sotheby's "beautiful translation" which has rendered the story "universally known." Dunlop concludes his discussion:

> "Huon is a more interesting character than most of the knights of Charlemagne. Even his weakness and disobedience of Oberon arise from excess of love or the ardour of military enterprise; and our prepossession in his favour is much enhanced by a mildness of nature and tenderness of heart, superior to that of other heroes of chivalry."[20]

Alaric Watts, in the already mentioned articles on Byron's plagiarisms, was quick to pounce upon the similarity of *Don Juan* to *Oberon.* He had already been accusing Byron of borrowing without acknowledgment from Sotheby in the *Corsair.* The scene between Gulnare and the Corsair in prison, he found to resemble too closely the prison scene between Almansaris and Huon in *Oberon,* Canto XII. Now he points out the similarities between the island love affair of Juan and Haidée and that of Huon and Amanda. Unfortunately for the immediate effect of his arguments, Watts confused Amanda and Almansaris in his comparisons. Byron was able to toss this off: "Much is coincidence." But if he had not been borrowing from Sotheby's translation of *Oberon* in *Don Juan,* Cantos II-IV, he certainly had been in Canto V, written five months before he read Watts's articles, but not published until some months after. Watts reproaches Byron, and indeed he seems to deserve it, for his unkind criticisms of the good Botherby in *Beppo* and for his lines in *Don Juan,* Canto I:

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"Thou shalt not covet Mr. Sotheby's Muse,
                    His Pegasus, nor anything that's his. …"
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These remarks, Watts says, are particularly ungrateful from Byron, since "besides innumerable imitations of his style and diction, he has resorted to his pages … for ideas, language to clothe them in, and sometimes for principal portions of the machinery he employs in his poems." It is too bad for Watts that he could not have written this after *Don Juan,* Canto V, was published.

Byron wrote in his Journal at Ravenna, a few weeks after he had completed this canto, that he had read "much less of Goethe, and Schiller, and Wieland, than I could wish. I only know them through the medium of English, French, and Italian translations."[21] It is not possible to trace from published records when he first became acquainted with Sotheby's translation of *Oberon,* but by 1814 he must have known something of the original at least, not only from Dunlop, but from Mme. de Staël's enthusiastic account in *De L'Allemagne*:

> "Wieland," she wrote, "a imité Voltaire dans ses romans; souvent Lucien, qui, sous le rapport philosophique, est le Voltaire de l'antiquité; quelquefois l'Arioste, et, malheureusement aussi, Crébillon."[22]

This was exactly calculated to arouse Byron's curiosity, mentioning as it does so many of his favorite authors as Wieland's models; it is not surprising to find him reading *Agathon,* to see a copy of *Aristippus* in the 1827 Sale Catalogue, and to suspect his acquaintance with *Don Sylvio de Rosalva.* Mme. de Staël went on to recite part of the story of *Oberon,* up to the island episode, but she left it unfinished. Byron must have resorted to Sotheby's translation, if he did not know it already, for it is the last three cantos of the poem on which he has

relied for “materials” in the scene between Gulbeyaz and Juan in Canto V.

Juan has just been forcibly torn from his Haidée by her pirate father, and has been sent away to Constantinople to be sold as a slave. Huon likewise was separated from Amanda on the island, when she was brutally abducted by pirates to be sold into slavery in Tunis. After much suffering, Huon is wafted by enchantment straight to Tunis to the cottage of Ibrahim, the head gardener of the royal palace. Huon assumes the disguise of a slave and works in the seraglio gardens, in the fond expectation of reunion with Amanda; she, he hears, was miraculously preserved when the pirate ship was struck by lightning upon entering Tunis harbor, and is now the honored guest of the Sultan. Meanwhile Almansaris, the Sultana, neglected like Gulbeyaz, encounters Huon in the gardens and falls in love with him. As Gulbeyaz contrives with Juan, so Almansaris smuggles Huon into the seraglio for a private interview. Huon expects and hopes to see his Amanda again at any minute, and is firmly true to her through all temptations. But Juan has no hope of ever seeing Haidée again, and his mourning for her and faithfulness to her are more within the bounds of probability.

Gulbeyaz and Almansaris exactly resemble each other in circumstances, character, and even outward appearance. “Never,” wrote Sotheby of Almansaris,

                              “will Nature in her loveliest mould
So fine a model for a Venus frame,”(23)

and so on, for three stanzas of statuesque description. Byron described Gulbeyaz as

                              “rising up with such an air
As Venus rose with from the wave. …
                    Her presence was as lofty as her state;
Her beauty of that overpowering kind …”

and much more, to suggest, without describing, immortal perfection of beauty.

In *Oberon,* Huon is led through “a suit of endless chambers,” beginning in dim shadows and leading out into a “blaze” of “highest lustre.” A rich brocaded curtain parts and discloses the queen sitting on her golden throne, surrounded by twelve nymphs,

          “love's sisters, young and full of charms, …
Each scarcely shaded by a roseate veil.”

They are in the midst of a gorgeously decorated apartment—

“There gold and lazuli the walls o'er laid;
          There Siam and Golconda's rifled mines
Seem'd to have center'd their exhausted store,
By wanton luxury lavished o'er and o'er.”(24)

Huon “starts back like one bewilder'd and appal'd,” for he had expected to see Amanda, not this “voluptuous visionary sight”:

“Ah what to him?—a dream without delight—
          'T is not Amanda—.”

In *Don Juan,* the dwarfs open the great gilded bronze doors, and Baba and Juan, who have traveled “room by room, through glittering galleries, and o'er marble floors,” enter a room “still nobler than the last,” “a dazzling mass of gems, and gold, and glitter.” Here follows a brief digression on tastelessness in décor, very good from

Byron who was said to have had no taste in such matters. Gulbeyaz reclines under a canopy. Her attendants were

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                              "a choir of girls, ten or a dozen,
And were all clad alike; like Juan, too,
                    Who wore their uniform, …
A very nymph-like looking crew,
                    Which might have called Diana's chorus
                              'cousin.'"
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Juan stands "admiring, at some distance." It is noteworthy that, though Byron cannot help some innuendoes on "Diana's chorus," he completely omits the ridiculous possibilities of Juan's feminine disguise in the dramatic scene that follows, reserving them for later when the dramatic tension has slackened.

Both ladies send away their attendants after some preliminaries, but the action between Almansaris and Huon, while similar on the whole, differs in details from that between Gulbeyaz and Juan. Both queens are imperious and straightforward in their love-making, expecting an instant response. Both Huon and Juan have their minds fixed on their absent mistresses. But Huon looks pale and sulks, and Juan bursts into tears. Both men are tempted by the voluptuous beauty of the Sultana, but each resists, Huon more staunchly, and Juan less so, who feels his virtue ebb

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"As through his palms Bob Acres' valor oozed."
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Huon endures by consciously recalling Amanda, and at last openly confessing that he loves her only. Juan untangles himself from Gulbeyaz' embrace (Almansaris wants to embrace Huon but does not dare), and says he *has* loved, but that love is only for the free. Almansaris and Gulbeyaz respond equally to this check with passionate though silent rage, and with tears and humiliation. Throughout this scene, Byron is much more full and minute than Wieland in his psychological dissection of the feelings, assisted perhaps by Wieland's further promptings in the story of Danae and Agathon.

There are differences also in the sequels. In *Oberon,* Almansaris' ideas of vengeance hatch the scheme of compromising Huon in the garden myrtle-bower; there she tempts him, he resists again, and they are interrupted by the Sultan. Almansaris thereupon accuses Huon of trying to ravish her, and he is condemned to death by fire. Later she tries to rescue him from this fate, but he refuses to be rescued at the price of being untrue to Amanda, and Almansaris abandons him to his sentence, outraged at his scorn and consumed with jealousy of Amanda.

Gulbeyaz and Juan are interrupted by the arrival of the Sultan, and on the next day, when Gulbeyaz' suspicions and jealousy have been aroused by the thought of what may have passed in the harem with Dudù, she gives the order to Baba to have Juan liquidated. The double temptation of the hero, and the proof of chastity, were not in Byron's scheme.[25] His plot is looser, less dramatic, and more lifelike. Wieland goes on to a Tasso-like close in an incident paralleling the constancy of Olindo and Sophronia. Byron had no use for Oberon and all the fairy lore.

Once again Byron has taken a famous literary plot and retold it in terms of real life.[26] For the story of the Muslim lady and the Christian slave appears repeatedly in Italian, Spanish, and French literature, and probably in all the countries bordering the Mediterranean. Doubtless the adventure occurred repeatedly in real life, even up to Byron's day, in that pirate-infested sea and the neighboring Muslim and Christian civilizations. Piracy, capture, and holding for ransom persisted in the Mediterranean until 1830.

Byron knew several of the literary versions of this story. Dunlop gave him a clue to it, as follows:

> "The first tale of Firenzuola, is one that has become very common in modern novels and romance. A young man being shipwrecked on the coast of Barbary, is picked up by some fishermen, and sold to the Bashaw of Tunis. He there becomes a great favourite of his master, and still more of his mistress, whom he persuades not only to assist in his escape, but to accompany him in his flight."[27]

Byron acquired the works of Firenzuola in Italy. The first *novella*[28] has some points in common with the first cantos of *Don Juan,* and is a fairly typical representative, as Dunlop says, of this plot.

Two devoted friends, wealthy nobles of Tuscany named Niccolo and Coppo, are separated by the necessity of Niccolo's going to Valencia to receive an inheritance. Setting sail from Genoa, Niccolo suffers shipwreck in a great storm, which with its effects on the ship's crew and passengers is described at length in the manner of *Don Juan,* Canto II, though without all the nautical accuracy. The ship breaks in two when it loses its mainmast, and Niccolo saves himself by clinging to a table, on which he floats to the coast of Barbary. The fishermen who rescue him sell him as a Christian slave to Amet of Tunis, a rich old Mussulman, who makes a pet of him and finally presents him to his young and beautiful wife. The wife falls in love with him, and after persuading herself in a long soliloquy that it is right for her to love Niccolo, who as a slave would naturally be more concerned about freedom than about love, makes a declaration to him "almost inarticulate between tears and blushes." When he realizes the truth of her offer, he is overcome by her beauty, superior sense, and refinement. He converts her to Christianity, marries her secretly, and they live together meditating escape.

Meanwhile Coppo has traced Niccolo to Tunis and arrives to rescue him. The two friends arrange to sail away with the lady, ostensibly on a pleasure cruise for the day, and so they escape to Messina. There, through the interposition of the ambassador of Tunis, the King of Sicily returns Niccolo and the lady, in spite of their protests, to the Dey of Tunis and the revenge of Amet. Good fortune, however, blows up another storm which carries their vessel toward Leghorn, where they fall a prey to some Pisan corsairs. Ransoming themselves from these pirates, they finally reach Pisa with some of their remaining treasure. When the lady has recovered from a dangerous fever, resulting from her trials and hardships, they proceed to Florence where their friends welcome them and feast them, and they are remarried with all due ceremony. Coppo marries Niccolo's sister, and the two couples live together in exemplary harmony and nobility of life.

It will be recalled that Byron's first plan for Juan and Gulbeyaz, as he outlined the story to Medwin, was that they should escape together, and then, if Juan tired of the lady, she could easily be made to die of the plague.

As this story progressed from Italy to Spain and then to France, it took on many additional features and new emphases. The questions of religious and political conflicts were made crucial in the plot. A new character, a renegado, or a servant of the Muslim lady (like Baba), who helps the lovers to escape, was added. Finally, its principal theme became the conflict between love and honor, or love and loyalty, as the friends developed into rivals for the lady's affections.

Cervantes has two versions; the simple one, in "The Captive's Story" in *Don Quixote,* and the complex version in *The Liberal Lover,* one of his *Exemplary Novels.* The latter, like Wieland's *Oberon,* makes the triangle into a quartette, by introducing a second lady, another Christian captive. The incident of a permitted conference between the Christian lovers in the harem was thereby added to the plot. Scudéri's *Ibrahim* presents still another version.[29] The novelette in Le Sage's *Le Diable Boiteux* called "The Force of Friendship" is a complete and a highly successful example of the tale. Canto I of Casti's *Tartar Poem* is another analogue, with the additional feature of threatened emasculation of the hero.

Byron probably knew all these versions, but if he was relating in *Don Juan,* Canto V, merely his own account of a famous fictional plot, what becomes of his claim that every adventure of Don Juan is drawn from real life? He may, indeed, have heard of some such incident from an acquaintance, or he may have felt that

Cervantes' autobiographical “Captive's Tale” was sufficient proof of its occurrence. But luckily he knew the version of the story set down by Jean-François Regnard as autobiography in his novelette *La Provençale.* Byron knew about Regnard's works from Grimm's *Correspondence,* and apparently before composing Canto V, he had just acquired a set of Regnard in the Paris edition of 1810, republished in 1820.[30]*La Provençale,* “a true story,” appears in Volume I; it combines the features of Firenzuola's story and Cervantes' *Liberal Lover,* and is closely parallel to Wieland's *Oberon,* Cantos X-XII. Though it lacks the finesse and dramatic quality of Wieland's version, which are reflected in Byron's, it must have encouraged Byron to use Wieland, by furnishing evidence of Wieland's truth to reality in the purported actual adventures of Regnard.

Regnard's story, however, was more congenial to Byron in tone than Wieland's. Such passages as the following, would have struck sympathetic chords in Byron's mind:

> “Love, among the Turks, is not armed with spikes but covered with flowers. … The ladies make all the advances: the law of nature is supreme, which they follow preferably to that of Mohammed, because they are women before they are Turks.
>
> “[The hero's] restlessness did not permit him long to remain in the same place; and, like those people who have suffered from prolonged insomnia, he sought his repose in agitation. … It mattered little to him where he went, provided that he put himself at a distance. He flattered himself, even with pleasure, that the cold of the north might a little assuage his ardor. … Drawn along always by his restlessness, he traveled in Turkey, in Hungary, in Germany. But what good did it do him to flee afar, if he could not flee from himself, and if he was inseparable from his own grief? He found many other places, but he encountered nowhere indifference.”[31]

Juan also, though not voluntarily, journeys away from love, Haidée, and the seraglio toward the north, and in the snows of Russia is overcome by melancholy and restless ennui.

4

Before leaving the seraglio scenes, we should consider the *Blackwood's Magazine* accusation that Byron had merely adapted Louvet's *Chevalier de Faublas* in *Don Juan,* Canto VI.[32] This little volume pretends to be the authentic memoirs of the sixteen-year-old De Faublas, covering his love adventures in Paris in 1783-84. It contains practically all the hackneyed plots of secret amours; the central plot is a triangle situation among De Faublas, the Marquis and the Marquise de B., similar to the plot of *Der Rosenkavalier.* De Faublas's mistress, the Marquise de B., first receives him when, by a series of misunderstandings, his masquerade as a young lady is not penetrated, at least ostensibly, until he is safely abed with her. The description of his unrobing from his masquerade costume is like *Don Juan,* VI, 61-62:

> “I found myself in great embarrassment when it became necessary for me to disengage myself from these garments whose usage was so little familiar to me. I broke strings, I tore out pins, I pricked myself on this side and tore myself on the other; the more I hurried, the less speed I made.”[33]

The story is conducted with a high degree of verisimilitude and wit, some scenes being actually dramatized like a comedy. I think it highly possible that Byron had read this novel and many another like it, but as for Canto VI being based upon it, that is nonsense. The gentle, almost meditative beauty of that Canto has nothing in common with the lush, brutal sentimentality of De Faublas's amours. On the contrary, I think that Byron had in mind a satiric repudiation of that kind of “amatory writing,” and for that reason he fails to give any satisfaction to a lasciviously imaginative reader. He skates on thin ice, with the utmost grace, but he never breaks through. The chaste and touching description of Dudù is probably a portrait from life, perhaps of one

of the Macri girls at Athens, or the “Dudù” whom he knew there in 1810-11.[34] Cervantes may also have assisted his comprehension of the innocence and boredom of the harem life in his Exemplary Novel called *The Jealous Husband*; Byron may have picked up his title for the duenna, “The Mother of the Maids,” from James Mabbe's translation of this novel.

5

The next tender episode of *Don Juan,* the rescue and adoption of Leila in the midst of the sack of Ismail, was suggested by a footnote in Byron's acknowledged source, Castelnau's *Essai sur l'Histoire ancienne et moderne de la Nouvelle Russie.*[35] The footnote is derived from the young Due de Richelieu's “mémoires,” one of Castelnau's sources, in which Richelieu describes his rescue of a young girl ten years old, innocent and lovely in striking contrast to the rage in her surroundings. She was trying to hide from a pair of menacing Kossacks among the slain bodies of four women, one of them her mother. Richelieu chased the Kossacks off with blows, and was glad to find that the little girl had no injury other than “a slight cut on the face from the same sword which had pierced her mother.”

Byron versified this incident, using almost the same words and faithfully detailing the facts. But his imagination, dwelling upon the future relations of Leila and Juan, seems to have reverted to one of Marmontel's *Moral Tales,* “Friendship Put to the Test,” in which a similar incident is described. This love story, again with orientalism and “noble savage” traits to recommend it, is enhanced by the themes of conflict between love and honor, of humanitarianism in war, and of universal religion as opposed to sectarianism. These qualities would all have made it appeal to Byron.

Blanford, the hero, is seeking his fortune in India and happens to be present when Coralie's native village is being sacked by the British soldiers. Her father is dealt a mortal blow on the threshold of his dwelling:

> “At that instant Blanford arrives. He comes to repress the fury of the soldiery. … ‘Barbarians,’ said he to the soldiers, ‘be gone! Is it feebleness and innocence, old age and childhood, that you ought to attack?’”

Coralie, who is not yet fifteen years old, “witness to the piety, the sensibility of this stranger, thought she saw a god descended from Heaven to succour and comfort her father.” The old Brahmin, though he perceives his end approaching, devotes his dying moments to a prolonged discussion of virtue, war, and religion with Blanford. He confides Coralie to Blanford's charge, and Blanford swears “that her chastity, innocence, and liberty, shall be a deposit guarded by honour, and for ever inviolable,” and that she shall be brought up in “that modesty and virtue which are every where the glory of a woman”:

> “Blanford, whom his duty recalled from Asia to Europe, carried thither with him his pupil; and though she was beautiful and easy to seduce; though he was young and strongly taken, he respected her innocence. During the voyage, he employed himself in teaching her a little English; in giving her an idea of the manners of Europe, and in disengaging her docile mind from the prejudices of her country. … The sentiments which he had conceived for his pupil seemed to have given him rather the disposition of a father than of a lover.”

The details of Marmontel's plot run far beyond the conceptions of Byron, insofar as they appear in his incompleted poem. But he has taken Marmontel's situation, authenticated by Richelieu's incident, and has reinterpreted it, with more delicacy and truth to life than Marmontel could muster. He rejects the improbable love at first sight of the young man for the child found in such frightful circumstances, and he refines on the strange mixed feelings each must feel for the other after the dramatic commencement of their affection. Moreover, he transfers to Leila some of the natural freshness of viewpoint to make satiric use of the observations of these travelers on European civilization.

A curious fact from Byron's life should be appended to this incident in *Don Juan.* Almost two years after the completion of Cantos VIII-XII, in which Leila figures, Byron secured the release of a group of Turkish civilian captives from the Greeks and sent them to their homes at his own expenses, all but one little girl, Hato, or Hatagee. Hato, Byron wrote to Augusta,[36]

> "has expressed a strong wish to remain with me, or under my care, and I have nearly determined to adopt her. If I thought that Lady B. would let her come to England as a Companion to Ada—(they are about the same age), and we could easily provide for her; if not, I can send her to Italy for education. She is very lively and quick, and with great black oriental eyes, and Asiatic features. All her brothers were killed in the Revolution. … Her extreme youth and sex have hitherto saved her life, but there is no saying what might occur in the course of the *war* (and of *such* a war), and I shall probably commit her to the charge of some English lady in the islands for the present. The Child herself has the same wish, and seems to have a decided character for her age. …"

Not content to leave the historical accuracy of this bit of *Don Juan* to the adventures of the Duc de Richelieu, Byron appears to be living out in his own life one of the adventures of his fictional hero. This is the exact reverse, in point of time-sequence, of the relation between the adventures of author and hero usually ascribed to Byron's storytelling. It is a measure of how deeply he could identify himself with his fictional creations.

6

The companionship of Leila on Juan's travels to seek his fortune in Russia and England may remind the reader of a similar situation toward the close of Thomas Hope's *Anastasius.* This novel, published anonymously by Murray in 1819, has been cited by Anton Pfeiffer[37] as the source of many incidents in *Don Juan,* Cantos III-X, and indeed deserves attention for its Byronism, which was immediately detected by the critics. Croker wrote to Murray:

> "I have read just twenty pages of 'Anastasius,' and thank you for the information you gave me as to the author. Of course you know best, and what you volunteered to tell must be the truth, but then also I must believe in the 'Metempsychosis,' and that Tom Hope's late body is now the tabernacle of Lord Byron's soul."[38]

The *Edinburgh Review,* after the secret of the authorship of *Anastasius* was out, wrote enthusiastically:

> "Mr. Hope will excuse us,—but we could not help exclaiming, in reading it, is this Mr. Thomas Hope?—Is this the man of chairs and tables—the gentleman of sphinxes—the Oedipus of coal-boxes—he who meditated upon muffineers and planned pokers?—Where has he hidden all this eloquence and poetry up to this hour?—How is it that he has, all of a sudden, burst out into descriptions which would not disgrace the pen of Tacitus—and displayed a depth of feeling, and a vigour of imagination, which Lord Byron could not excel?"[39]

The novel is a most extraordinary work and is less well known today than it deserves to be, having been overshadowed perhaps by Morier's *Hadji Baba.*

Murray must have sent a copy of *Anastasius* to Byron in the spring of 1820, after he had settled down at Ravenna, but Byron does not mention it until July 22, 1820. Murray was curious to know what Byron thought of this new rival in orientalism, and Byron finally wrote that it was "good, but no more written by a Greek than by a Hebrew." Murray was not satisfied with this lack of enthusiasm, and probably teased Byron further by letting him in on the secret of the authorship. In a later letter, Byron votes the book, rather petulantly,

“excellent.” It is hard to avoid the impression that he was genuinely envious of Hope's production. Here was the man whom Byron had ridiculed in *English Bards* as a dilettante, turning out exactly the type of novel Byron could have wanted to do himself, and receiving praise for it in the *Edinburgh* with invidious comparison to his own powers. By 1823, Byron had sublimated these envious feelings in a joke. He told Countess Blessington, after expressing high commendation of Hope's *Anastasius,* that

> “he wept bitterly over many pages of it, and for two reasons:—first, that *he* had not written it, and, secondly, that *Hope* had; for that it was necessary to like a man excessively to pardon his writing such a book—a book, as he said, excelling all recent productions, as much in wit and talent, as in true pathos. He added, that he would have given his two most approved poems, to have been the author of ‘Anastasius.’”[40]

It seems unlikely that Byron had read this novel before he composed Cantos III-IV in Venice, September-October 1819. Consequently, it is hard to accept part of Pfeiffer's observations on Byron's alleged indebtedness to Hope. But there are some hints that Byron's may have followed for the later development of his poem. Anastasius, for example, dallies, for a page or so, with a project for a good adventure—to light out from Constantinople for St. Petersburg and become the next favorite of the Empress Catherine. Circumstances, however, direct him to the Arnaut-Turkish wars in the Balkans, then to Smyrna, the Arabian Desert, Egypt once more, and finally to Italy. In his second sojourn in Egypt, Anastasius falls in with Cirico, the wandering poet-revolutionist, whom he had already met after his disastrous love affair with Euphrosyne in Smyrna. Cirico always serves as a spur to his worthier ambitions, and urges him to try his fortunes in France in the French Revolution, where he might represent the cause of freedom for the Greeks. This hint may have reminded Byron of Anacharsis Cloots, for it was not until February 1821, some months after Byron had read *Anastasius,* that he first mentioned the plan of a French Revolutionary ending for *Don Juan.*

Anastasius is full of irony like *Don Juan,* but a dramatic irony expressed through the self-knowledge and self-characterization of the hero, who writes in the first person. He was born worldly-wise, with his impulses to mischief and wickedness infinitely stronger than his impulses to good feelings and good deeds. He says at one point that he feels impelled by destiny to “perform the things set down for him—be they good, or be they evil.” But in the context this confession of fatalism is ironic, and reminds us of that sudden frankness of Byron's:

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"But Destiny and Passion spread the net
          (Fate is a good excuse for our own will). …"
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Anastasius is master of his own soul, no matter how the wheel of fortune tosses him up and down. Periods of conversion and reformation occur from time to time, but not until his will, as well as his intellect, has been subdued by suffering does it finally turn toward good. This is the reverse of Don Juan's character, at least as far as we can see how it is to be projected. Both heroes, however, after living an extraordinarily active and congested life, were to die young in the odor of sanctity.

Many a thought of Anastasius in his roving career around the eastern Mediterranean parallels Byron's reflections in *Don Juan*: on the problems of free will, predestination, good and evil; on mutability in fortune; on avarice, the vice of the middle-aged; on female friendship and coquetry; on modern Greek patriotism and pride; on ennui—that it is a greater evil than loss or sorrow. Anastasius' reflections on his mother and her bad upbringing of him, when he came home to find her dead and only the dog to welcome him, must have struck Byron forcibly, and the conclusion, leaving Anastasius dying friendless and a solitary exile at the age of thirty-five, must have made an indelible impression on Byron's foreboding mind.

Coincidences also may be noted between the careers of Anastasius and Don Juan. Like Juan, Anastasius enters a new country, Arabia Deserta, famed for its liberty, and in the midst of uttering a rhapsody on freedom

is held up by a fierce Bedouee, as the footpads hold up Juan with the words of praise to freedom-loving England scarcely out of his mouth. Like Juan, Anastasius leaves unwillingly the warm and familiar East for the chill and strangeness of the West, accompanied only by his child Alexis, the one being in the world whom he loves unselfishly:

> “The people of Europe seemed heartless, the virtues of the Franks frigid, the very crimes of the West dull and prosaic; and I was like a plant which, reared in all the warmth of a hothouse, is going to be launched into … chilling blasts and nipping frosts. … Perhaps on the further borders of the chilly Neva, it may be my fate to cherish the last remembrance of Ionia and of Chios!”[41]

Anastasius' introduction into the society of Naples offers many parallels to Juan's experiences in England: intrigue in the *haut monde,* wits at the dinner table, the frenzies of romantic poets and blues, even a ghost which turns out to be substantial. M. de Silva, in a long diatribe against the corruptions of Rome, utters many of the thoughts Byron expresses in his castigation of England. Hope, like Byron, was using the observations of the traveler from another civilization to satirize his own.

While we are considering comparatively obscure works which have been nominated as sources of Byron's *Don Juan,* we should take a look at the Abate Casti's *Tartar Poem,*[42] credited with having suggested the St. Petersburg episode. There is no direct evidence that Byron knew this *ottava rima* epic in twelve cantos; but it seems probable, in view of his enthusiasm for Casti's other poems and the general similarity between the adventures of Casti's hero and *Don Juan,* that Byron had read it. Ugo Foscolo's much admired article in the *Quarterly Review,* April 1819,[43] on the *Narrative and Romantic Poems of the Italians,* would have told him something about it. Foscolo wrote of Casti:

> “After amusing himself with kings in comedy and heroes in tragedy, he renewed his satires upon royalty in the person of Catherine the Second; with whom he made free in a very long poem entitled *Tartaro.* Casti succeeded the Abbate Metastasio as *Poeta Cesareo,* and lived at Vienna in high favour with Joseph the Second, who used to set him on against the monks and friars. When the ‘Poema Tartaro’ appeared the Emperor Joseph was on very ill terms with the Empress Catherine; but when each had got a slice of the kingdom of Poland, they made up their differences. The Czarina insisted that the Poeta Cesareo should be turned away; and Casti was banished from Vienna: but the emperor directed that the poet's pension should continue payable during the remainder of his life. Casti, with a spirit which would have honoured a better man, refused the gift, and when Joseph remitted the money to him, he would not touch it. The pecuniary losses consequent upon the publication of the Tartaro were not made up in fame. Foreigners did not relish it, and the Italians did not understand it; for they knew nothing of the court of St. Petersburgh beyond what they read in the newspapers. Neither did it add much to Italian literature. The style is unimpassioned, and the diction without grace or purity. But the poem abounds with point, and it succeeded amongst certain readers, in the same way that *small wits* take in society. They amuse for a moment because they flatter the bad passions of the human heart, and they end by becoming tedious.”[44]

The *Poema Tartaro* is supposed to be another chivalric epic of the middle ages. The imaginary hero, Tommaso Scardassale, a handsome blond young Irishman, sells all his goods and sets out on a Crusade with other cavaliers from all over Europe. They go to Constantinople to support Baldwin II, and thence to Palestine, where Tommaso is captured in a battle against the Sultan of Egypt. The Sultan sends him, among a dozen of the handsomest and youngest of the Christian captives, as a present to the Caliph of Bagdad. At Bagdad, he works as a gardener slave in the pleasure grounds of the seraglio, and thus sees and falls in love with Zelmira, a lady of the harem. The Caliph, however, finds Tommaso so agreeable, or so dangerous, that he decides to promote him to the office of chief eunuch in the seraglio; Tommaso is saved from the dreadful

fate only by escaping with Zelmira and his faithful valet. They journey to Circassia, and there fall in with Battù Khan, a marshal of Tartary.

Thus far the first canto has been sprightly comic-epic, but from this point the tone of the poem changes. Tartary stands for Russia, where Casti spent some years as an ambassador at Catherine II's court, and all the great and near-great of St. Petersburg and the warlike events of the first years of her reign are described and satirized in the remaining cantos. The love interest of Zelmira is shelved, for she is given by Battù to his little companion Prince Mengo, and she does not turn up again until the end of Canto XII, when chance makes her and Mengo the new rulers of Russia. The intervening cantos are all concerned with the actual eighteenth century Russia, a combination of travelogue and political and religious satire.

Tommaso goes with Battù to Caracora (St. Petersburg); there he is introduced at court and shown the sights of the city by a young Greek, Siveno, a well-instructed blasé cynic, who enters the poem merely to be Tommaso's guide, and then leaves it for good. As Siveno has predicted, Tommaso is preferred by Battù to Potemkin, who looks him over (in the bath) as a candidate for the next "Gentleman of the week" for Catherine. Potemkin is delighted with him, and writes a note to Catherine, sending Tommaso off to deliver it to her. Catherine reads the note, which causes her to smile and laugh to herself, approaches Tommaso to inspect him better, and promptly turns him over to Turfana, her lady in charge of all such candidates, or "L'Eprouveuse," as Byron calls her. The interview between Turfana and Tommaso is reported in full, and Tommaso is installed forthwith in Catherine's favor. Not until after all these preliminaries and the first weeks of Tommaso's servitude have passed, does the poet come to the great birthday ball, at which the public and the court first get a glimpse of the new favorite and whisper and speculate about him. Byron has telescoped all this dry, naked storytelling of Casti's to make one graceful, brilliant scene.

Tommaso is made of tougher material than Don Juan. Their predecessor Lanskoi, it is true, as Casti notes:

"Divenuto era smunto, e quasi tisico,
E i dover della carica annuale
Posto quasi l'avean di vita in risico,
Onde per lo consiglio universale,
D'ogni esperto Dottor, Medico fisico,
Andò a viaggiar negli stranieri stati,
E il numero aumentò de riformati."

The same fate awaited Juan, but Tommaso, having no more sensibility, though a much more delicate looking frame, than any of Catherine's other aides-de-camp, flourished and outlived the wars and rebellions, and was finally disgraced only by the slander of Potemkin. From that point, Casti's poem leaves history and reverts to epic fancy.

Casti may have taught Byron, if he needed any instruction, to despise Catherine and all her works. He may have suggested to him the possibilities of double meanings and puns, even international ones, which are the only forms of humor in Casti's work, once it settles down to serious satire and description. Certain phrases and stanzas in Casti are echoed in Byron; for example:

"Candida verità, figlia del Cielo,
Oh! se vederti occhio mortal potesse
Senza ornamento alcun, senza alcun velo!
Oh! se scriver la storia ognun volesse
Al par di quei che scrissero il Vangelo,
Nè tanto il ben col mal si confondesse,
Oh! quanti, che di grandi il titol ebbero,
Piccoli agli occhi nostri apparirebbero!"

The reflections of Tommaso on his curious adventures, after he has become the Empress's favorite, would be congenial to Byron and his hero:

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                                        "… guari non fu,
Che di Soria nel sanguinoso piano
          Caddi de' Saraceni in schiavitù;
E venni poi per vari casi in mano
          Di Melech, del Califfo, e di Battù;
Anzi, che Dio ne scampi insino un bruco,
Poco mancò che divenissi eunuco.

"E giunto poscia in sì lontan paesi
          Tosto la sorte mia cangiò di scena,
Ed a cotanta altezza a un tratto ascesi
          Che agli occhi miei creder lo posso appena;
Per quai sentier non preveduti, o intesi
          Il lor chieco destin gli uomini mena!
Commedia è il mondo, e l'uom dal caso pende
Chi sa qual fine la mia sorte attende!"
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But the general intention and scope of Casti's poem are quite outside those of Byron's and fail to be realized with the success that attended Byron's efforts.

Notes

1. Horace, *Satires, Epistles, and Ars Poetica,* with an English translation by H. Rushton Fairclough, Loeb Classical Library, London and New York, 1929.
2. [Hobhouse, John Cam. *Recollections of a Long Life,* 1909], II, 107.
3. Murray, *Correspondence,* II, 101.
4. Dunlop translates from Le Grand, I, 299.
5. Dunlop, *History of Fiction,* II, 75.
6. Trelawney, *Recollections,* 70.
7. Murray, *Correspondence,* II, 149-150.
8. I, 162-163.
9. *L. & J.,* I, 253-254.
10. *Works,* II, 169.
11. *L. & J.,* V, 544-545, & 551. Byron's arguments are negligible, for he constantly confuses his usage of the words "nature" and "art," the opposing terms in the argument, as indeed they are the opposing forces in *The Shipwreck*—the power of the storm at sea pitted against the art of the ship and the mariners.
12. Ariosto, *Orlando Furioso,* transl. by W. S. Rose, Canto XLI.
13. Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura,* Bk. V, ll. 222 ff., Loeb Classical Library translation. Other phrases, images, and ideas in Lucretius, too numerous to mention, which Byron made his own, include: *"Alma Venus … genetrix"* ("thou alone dost govern the nature of things, since without thee, nothing comes forth into the shining borders of light, nothing joyous and lovely is made. …"); Lucretius' description of the mind-soul, which Byron called "that very fiery particle"; and Byron's favorite tag: *"medio de fonte leporum surgit amari aliquid. …"* Burton also loved to quote this aphorism, *e.g.* I, 144, of the *Anatomy of Melancholy.* Byron believed with Lucretius in the changing universe, but he rejected Lucretius' explanation of the process of death in the dissolution of soul and body. Cf. *Don Juan,* V, 33-39.
14. *Anatomy of Melancholy,* I, 272.
15. The *Amadis of Greece,* a continuation of *Amadis de Gaul,* is especially oriental; it contains a Christian-Moorish love affair, conducted by aid of female disguise, in the harem, similar to *Florice*

and Blanchefleur and to *Don Juan,* Cantos V and VI. See Dunlop, I, 312-313.

16. Geneva, 1936, 220-224.
17. In *Mélanges d'Histoire Littéraire … offerts à Fernand Baldensperger,* I, Paris, 1930.
18. See *Florice and Blanchefleur,* ed. A. B. Taylor, Oxford, 1927, 16.
19. Dunlop, I, 253-267.
20. *Ibid.,* 265.
21. *L. & J.,* V, 171.
22. [Germaine] De Staël, *De L'Allemagne,* [3 vols., 1810] 269.
23. *Oberon,* Canto XI, 8, and following stanzas.
24. *Ibid.,* XI, 47.
25. Besides, there was an interval of eighteen months between the composition of Canto V and Canto VI.
26. Leigh Hunt, reviewing *Don Juan,* III-V, in the *Examiner,* August 26, 1821, remarks that the love scene between Gulbeyaz and Juan is “an Oriental version of the scene between *Lady Booby* and her servant in *Joseph Andrews.”* Others have noticed its resemblance to the story of Potiphar's wife and Joseph.
27. Dunlop, II, 99.
28. As translated by Thomas Roscoe in *The Italian Novelists,* London, Simpkin and Marshall, 1836, II.
29. Reported in Dunlop, II, 292-293.
30. *Don Juan,* Canto V, was composed October 16 to November 20, 1820.
31. My translation.
32. July 1823, XIV, 88-92.
33. 30-31. My translation.
34. Cf. Murray, *Correspondence,* I, 16.
35. Paris, 1827, II, 216.
36. From Missolonghi, February 23, 1824, *L. & J.,* VI, 331.
37. *Thomas Hope's “Anastasius” und Lord Byrons “Don Juan,”* Munich, 1913.
38. Smiles, II, 76.
39. No. LXIX, 92-102.
40. Blessington, *Conversations,* 36.
41. *Anastasius,* II, 356.
42. Composed in 1778, and published at Paris, 1797.
43. *Quarterly Review,* XXI.
44. P. 491.

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Blessington, Marguerite Power, Countess of, *Conversations of Lord Byron with the Countess of Blessington,* Philadelphia, Carey and Hart, 1836.

Byron, George Noel Gordon, Lord, *The Works of Lord Byron, Poetry,* edited by E. H. Coleridge, and *Letters and Journals,* edited by R. E. Prothero, London, John Murray, 1898-1905. 13 vols.

———, *The Complete Poetical Works of Lord Byron,* with an introductory memoir by Sir Leslie Stephen, New York, Macmillan, 1907.

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Murray, John, editor, *Lord Byron's Correspondence,* London, John Murray, 1922. 2 vols.

Trelawney, Edward, *Recollections of the Last Days of Shelley and Byron,* with an introduction by Edward Dowden, London, Humphrey Milford, 1923.

Criticism: Elizabeth French Boyd (essay date 1945)

SOURCE: Boyd, Elizabeth French. "The Literary Background of *Don Juan*: Ideas." In *Byron's* Don Juan*: A Critical Study,* pp. 139-62. New York: The Humanities Press, 1958.

[*In the following essay, originally published in 1945, Boyd illustrates how* Don Juan*'s literary precursors likely influenced Byron's treatment of war, marriage, women, high society, the supernatural, and other themes that appear throughout the poem.*]

1

Byron was indebted to literature not only for suggestions which enriched the situations, the sentiments, and the characterizations of *Don Juan,* but for the cultivation of many of his ideas. Ideas came to him, he freely acknowledged, as much from his reading as from his own observation of life, and these developed into convictions when he had tested them by experience and introspection.

The literary filiation of his ideas about war in *Don Juan* clearly demonstrates this alliance between literature and life. Omitting Shakespeare, though it should be noted that *Henry IV* and *Hamlet* were among Byron's favorite sources of quotation, we can begin with Burton, whose introduction to the *Anatomy of Melancholy* gives faithful expression in almost all its pages to Byron's inmost beliefs.

The stuff of the English Democritus' ideas is, however, as old as Lucian's *Menippus* and Juvenal's *Tenth Satire,* which were also direct sources of inspiration to Byron. Menippus descends to Hades to ask blind Teiresias what is the best way of life. He learns, like Hamlet, that the dead are indistinguishable from one another:

> "So, with many skeletons lying together, all alike staring horridly and vacuously and baring their teeth, I questioned myself how I could distinguish Thersites from handsome Niraus, or the mendicant Irus from the king of the Phaeacians, or the cook Pyrrhias from Agamemnon."

Teiresias answers Menippus' question:

> "The life of the common sort is best, and you will act more wisely if you stop speculating about heavenly bodies and discussing final causes and first causes, spit your scorn at those clever syllogisms, and counting all that sort of thing nonsense, make it always your sole object to put the present to good use and to hasten on your way, laughing a great deal and taking nothing seriously."[1]

Byron concludes the stanzas on Death at the beginning of *Don Juan,* Canto IX, bridging the transition from Camp to Court:

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"And thus Death laughs,—it is sad merriment,
          But still it is so; and with such example
Why should not Life be equally content
          With his Superior, in a smile to trample
Upon the nothings which are daily spent
                    Like bubbles on an Ocean much less ample
Than the Eternal Deluge, which devours
Suns as rays—worlds like atoms—years like hours?"
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His thoughts wander on through the natural associations of this Lucianic (and Lucretian) passage, to Shakespeare's Hamlet, Alexander's fame, Burton's object in life (good health and a sound digestion), the problem of being, Montaigne's skepticism, and Newton's intellectual modesty.

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"It is a pleasant voyage perhaps to float,
                    Like Pyrrho, on a sea of speculation;
But …

                                        … a calm and shallow station
Well night the shore, where one stoops down and
          gathers
Some pretty shell, is best for moderate bathers."
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But skepticism for Byron, as for Burton, was only the cause for all the greater moral indignation at the crimes and follies of human beings. "*Lykanthropy,*" Byron goes on, he comprehends, but he cannot for the life of him imagine why men accuse him of misanthropy, when all he writes is to show men the truth about mankind.[2]

Burton's thought on this Lucianic basis includes in the wonderful proliferations of "Democritus to his reader" a long diatribe against wars of conquest, chief among the vain follies of humanity:

> "What would [Democritus] have said to see, hear, and read so many bloody battles, so many thousands slain at once, such streams of blood able to turn mills, *unius ob noxam furiasque* (through the mad guilt of one person), or to make sport for princes, without any just cause, 'for vain titles' (saith Austin), 'precedency, some wench, or such-like toy, or out of desire of domineering, vainglory, malice, revenge, folly, madness,' goodly causes all, *ob quas universus orbis bellis et caedibus misceatur* (for plunging the whole world into an orgy of war and slaughter), whilst statesmen themselves in the meantime are secure at home, pampered with all delights and pleasures, take their ease, and follow their lusts, not considering what intolerable misery poor soldiers endure, their often wounds, hunger, thirst, etc., the lamentable cares, torments, calamities, and oppressions that accompany such proceedings, they feel not, take no notice of it. 'So wars are begun, by the persuasion of a few deboshed, hair-brain, poor, dissolute, hungry captains, parasitical fawners, unquiet Hotspurs, restless innovators, green heads, to satisfy one man's private spleen, lust, ambition, avarice, etc.'; *tales rapiunt scelerata in proelia causae* (such causes bring on war with all its crimes). *Flos hominum* (the flower of mankind), proper men, well proportioned, carefully brought up, able both in body and mind, sound, led like so many beasts to the slaughter in the flower of their years, pride, and full strength, without all remorse and pity, sacrificed to Pluto, killed up as so many sheep, for devils' food, 40,000 at once."[3]

Burton continues, enumerating famous sieges and slaughters, the "engines, fireworks, and whatsoever the devil could invent to do mischief with 2,500,000 iron bullets shot of 40 pound weight, three or four millions of gold consumed." How may Nature, God, and all good men expostulate at this perversion of "an harmless, quiet, a divine creature! … yet … these are the brave spirits, the gallants of the world, these admired alone, triumph alone, have statues, crowns, pyramids, obelisks to their eternal fame. …" Burton dilates in a crescendo of rage on the slaughters, treachery, waste, rapine, maiming, murder, and rape of war: "So abominable a thing is war … the scourge of God, cause, effect, fruit, and punishment of sin, and not … the mere pruning of the human race, as Tertullian calls it, but *ruina.* …" Civil wars are particularly "feral"—"ten thousand families rooted out. … 'Why do the Gentiles so furiously rage?' saith the Prophet David. … But we may ask, why do the Christians so furiously rage? … Would this, think you, have enforced our Democritus to laughter, or rather made him turn his tune … and weep with Heraclitus. …"

But this is not all, nor even the worst, says Burton. For though “valor is much to be commended in a wise man,” the world mistakes for the most part:

> “They term theft, murder, and rapine, virtue. … ‘They commonly call the most hair-brain bloodsuckers, strongest thieves, the most desperate villains, treacherous rogues, inhuman murderers … valiant and renowned soldiers, possessed with a brute persuasion of false honour,’ as Pontus Heuter in his Burgundian History complains. By means of which it comes to pass that daily so many voluntaries offer themselves, leaving their sweet wives, children, friends, for sixpence (if they can get it) a day … to get a name of valour, honour and applause, which lasts not neither, for it is but a mere flash this fame, and like a rose … 't is gone in an instant. Of fifteen thousand proletaries slain in a battle, scarce fifteen are recorded in history, or one alone, the general perhaps, and after a while his and their names are likewise blotted out, the whole battle itself is forgotten. … Which is yet more to be lamented, [the orators] persuade them this hellish course of life is holy, they promise heaven to such as venture their lives … in a sacred war.”

“Such brutish stories” that “put a note of divinity upon the most cruel and pernicious plague of humankind,” should be suppressed. Meanwhile,

> “… a poor sheep-stealer is hanged for stealing of victuals, … but a great man in office may securely rob whole provinces, undo thousands, pill and poll, … enrich himself by spoils of the commons, be uncontrollable in his actions, and after all, be recompensed with turgent titles, honoured for his good service, and no man dare find fault, or mutter at it.”

The reader will recognize in this outburst the source of many and many a passage in English poetry and prose which borrowed freely not only the ideas but even the words of Burton's most eloquent oration, as Burton had freely gathered and brought up to date the Juvenalian eloquence of centuries on this subject. A set piece on the madness of conquerors and the outrage of war became a classic necessity in eighteenth century verse. Combined with reflections on the careers of Louis XIV, Charles XII, and Frederick the Great, these set pieces in sermons, periodicals, and poems began to be associated with the problem of Greatness and Goodness, as well as with the mockery of fame.[4] Byron's *Don Juan,* Cantos VII-VIII, was heir to all of these, but let us single out those passages that we know Byron had most in mind in 1821, as he was meditating the future of his suspended poem.

Pope, always fresh in his recollection, was particularly so in the early weeks of 1821, while he was writing his pamphlets in the Bowles controversy. He had been rereading Pope in Campbell's *Specimens,* and no doubt continuing his reflections on the worth of “the little Queen Anne's man” as opposed to contemporary poets. In March 1821 he wrote Murray a letter in which he comments in detail on Pope's superior imagery and imagination in satire. It is not surprising to find how deeply Pope's lines in *The Essay on Man,* Epistle IV, had been absorbed by Byron:

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“Look next on Greatness: say where Greatness lies.
‘Where but among the heroes and the wise?’
Heroes are much the same, the point's agreed,
From Macedonia's madman to the Swede;
The whole strange purpose of their lives to find,
Or make, an enemy of all mankind!
Not one looks backward, onward still he goes,
Yet ne'er looks further forward than his nose. …
What's fame? a fancied life in others' breath;
A thing beyond us, ev'n before our death. …
All that we feel of it begins and ends
In the small circle of our foes or friends;
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To all beside as much an empty shade,
An Eugene living as a Caesar dead; …
One self-approving hour whole years out-weighs
Of stupid starers and of loud huzzas."(5)
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At the same time, Byron was studying carefully Johnson's *Vanity of Human Wishes,* as he records in his Journal, January 9, 1821:

> "Read Johnson's *Vanity of Human Wishes,*—all the examples and mode of giving them sublime, as well as the latter part, with the exception of an occasional couplet. … 'Tis a grand poem—and *so true!*—true as the 10th of Juvenal himself. The lapse of ages *changes* all things—time—language—the earth—the bounds of the sea—the stars of the sky, and every thing 'about, around, and underneath' man, *except man himself,* who has always been, and always will be, an unlucky rascal. The infinite variety of lives conduct but to death, and the infinity of wishes lead but to disappointment. All the discoveries which have yet been made have multiplied little but existence. An extirpated disease is succeeded by some new pestilence; and a discovered world has brought little to the old one. …"[6]

Byron is reading with application of Johnson's lines to modern life.

The introduction of the *Vanity of Human Wishes* leads at once to war, the prime example of folly in human ambitions. We are told to observe

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"How nations sink, by darling schemes oppress'd,
When vengeance listens to the fool's request. …
Impeachment stops the speaker's pow'rful breath,
And restless fire precipitates on death.
          But scarce observ'd, the knowing and the bold
Fall in the gen'ral massacre of gold;
Wide-wasting pest! that rages unconfin'd,
And crouds with crimes the records of mankind. …
Once more, Democritus, arise on earth,
With cheerful wisdom and instructive mirth,
See motley life in modern trappings dress'd,
And feed with various fools th' eternal jest. …"
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Byron had recently commented to Murray, when he heard of the death of his dentist Waite, on his abomination of Wellington and all such "'bloody, blustering boobies' who gain a name by breaking heads and knocking out grinders." Johnson's pictures of Charles XII, Xerxes, and "the bold Bavarian, in a luckless hour" furnished his thoughts with ammunition for the Siege of Ismail.

With the invocation to Democritus to rise once more, Johnson's poem would further have reminded Byron of Burton, for though it is a free imitation of Juvenal's Tenth Satire, it draws upon the *Anatomy of Melancholy* even for subject matter, notably in the passage on the woes of scholars.[7] Byron sent off to Murray for a copy of that well-remembered book, and had the luck to get back several months later his own former copy, rescued from the sale.

Meanwhile Byron had been writing *Sardanapalus,* "which he had for some time meditated," basing it on Diodorus Siculus and Mitford's *Greece,* though he had known the story since his school-days. While he worked in that tragedy on the problems of luxury and courage, tyranny and revolution, he had to deal in real life with the plans for an Italian revolution against the Austrians. On the day he commenced *Sardanapalus,* he notes in his Journal that news has come:

> "the *Powers* mean to war with the peoples. The intelligence seems positive—let it be so—they will be beaten in the end. The king-times are fast finishing. There will be blood shed like water, and tears like mist; but the peoples will conquer in the end. I shall not live to see it, but I foresee it."[8]

From the luxury-loving warrior-prince, and the causes of freedom and justice, he turned to *Cain*; in that, he enlarged the perspective on the problems of good and evil, murder and revolution, from the historical to the cosmic, under the influence of his interest in metaphysics, popular geology, and astronomy. Compare the passages in *Don Juan,* especially Canto IX, 37-40, where war is viewed in a geological and archaeological vista. Meanwhile, also, he had been reading Shelley's *Revolt of Islam,* an effort, unsuccessful Byron felt, inspired by the French Revolution, to condemn tyrants and war and to praise freedom and brotherhood.

In the autumn of 1821, Byron was rereading Fielding. Judging from the references in his letters on the way to Pisa, he ran through not only *Joseph Andrews,* but the *Miscellanies,* and he noted his reflections in his *Detached Thoughts,* early in November:

> "They talk of Radicalism, Jacobinism, etc., in England (I am told), but they should turn over the pages of 'Jonathan Wild the Great.' The inequality of conditions, and the littleness of the great, were never set forth in stronger terms; and his contempt for Conquerors and the like is such, that, had he lived *now,* he would have been denounced in 'the Courier' as the grand Mouthpiece and Factionary of the revolutionists. And yet I never recollect to have heard this turn of Fielding's mind noticed, though it is obvious in every page."[9]

The influence of Lucian, Juvenal, Burton, and Pope on Fielding's mind is also obvious in the various pieces comprised in the *Miscellanies.* The thread of meditation on war and conquest, greatness and fame runs through many of them. The *Essay of True Greatness* contains a typical set piece on war. It is almost a miniature, a text, of Byron's Siege of Ismail. Men, Fielding says, refuse honor to the lean wolf for his conquests over the flocks, though famine is his motive,

"While Man, not drove by Hunger from his Den,
To Honour climbs o'er Heaps of murder'd Men.
Shall ravag'd Fields, and burning Towns proclaim
The Hero's Glory, not the Robber's Shame?
Shall Thousands fall, and Millions be undone
To glut the hungry Cruelty of one?
"Behold the Plain with human Gore grow red,
The swelling River heave along the Dead.
See, through the Breach the hostile Deluge flow,
Along it bears the unresisting Foe:
Hear, in each Street the wretched Virgin's Cries,
Her Lover sees her ravish'd as he dies.
The Infant wonders at its Mother's Tears,
And smiling feels its Fate before its Fears.
Age, while in vain for the first Blow it calls,
Views all its Branches lopp'd before it falls.
Beauty betrays the Mistress it should guard,
And, faithless, proves the Ravisher's Reward:
Death, their sole Friend, relieves them from their Ills,
The kindest Victor he, who soonest kills.
"Could such Exploits as these thy Pride create?
Could these, O Philip's Son, proclaim thee great? …
Not on such Wings, to Fame did Churchill soar,
For Europe while defensive Arms he bore.
Whose Conquests, cheap at all the Blood they cost,
Sav'd Millions by each noble Life they lost. …
Thee, from the lowest Depth of Time, on high

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Blazing, shall late Posterity descry;
And own the Purchase of thy glorious Pains,
While Liberty, or while her Name remains."
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Fielding's imitations of Lucian's *Dialogues* contains a noteworthy one between Alexander and Diogenes. Alexander has been preening himself on his conquests and slaughters, and Diogenes retorts that Alexander is no better than any deadly pestilence, whom men fear equally as a source of death:

> "Alexander: Thou seemest, to my Apprehension, to be ignorant, that in professing this Disregard for the Glory I have so painfully achieved, thou art undermining the Foundation of all that Honour, which is the Encouragement to, and Reward of, every thing truly great and noble: For in what doth all Honour, Glory, and Fame consist, but in the Breath of that Multitude, whose Estimation with such ill-grounded Scorn thou dost affect to despise. … What other Reward than this have all those Heroes proposed to themselves, who rejecting the Enjoyments which Ease, Riches, Pleasure, and Power, have held forth to them in their native Country, have deserted their Homes, and all those Things which to vulgar Mortals appear lovely or desirable, and in Defiance of Difficulty and Danger, invaded and spoiled the Cities and Territories of others; when their Anger hath been provoked by no Injury, nor their Hope inspired by the Prospect of any other Good than of this very Glory and Honour, this Adoration of Slaves. …"

Diogenes retorts that Alexander does not know the meaning of true Honour if indeed he finds it in the applause of Wretches, the Mob, who are truly contemptible; Honour is actually self-approval for one's own Wisdom and Virtue. Alexander asks him what his Wisdom and Virtue consist in:

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DIOGENES:

Not in ravaging Countries, burning Cities, plundering and massacring Mankind.

ALEXANDER:

No, rather in biting and snarling at them.
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Byron doubtless noted the Lucianic irony and surprise ending.

The classic passages in *Jonathan Wild* are so well-known as hardly to require quotation. They occur *passim* in Jonathan's reflections on Greatness and his career. He early decides that the Great Man is he who hires the most hands to perform his will, whether Conquerors, absolute Princes, Prime Ministers, or Prigs. Goodness, on the other hand, is only the expression of pusillanimity and soft-wittedness. As for murder, Jonathan soliloquizes:

> "What is the Life of a single Man? Have not whole Armies and Nations been sacrificed to the Humour of *One Great Man*? Nay, to omit that first Class of Greatness, the Conquerors of Mankind, how often have Numbers fallen by a fictitious Plot, only to satisfy the Spleen, or perhaps exercise the Ingenuity of a Member of that second order of Greatness the Ministerial!"

In the grand climax, Fielding declares that Wild's career exceeds in Greatness even those of some few Heroes, such as traitors, or Conquerors, "who have impoverished, pillaged, sacked, burnt, and destroyed the Countries and Cities of their fellow Creatures, from no other Provocation than that of Glory."

The same motifs are repeated in *A Journey from this World to the Next,* and in the *jeu d'esprit, An Essay on Nothing,* where to the nothingness of the ambition of conquerors and emperors is joined the nothingness of the ambition of the Miser, unless “he can shew us some substantial Good which this Fortune is to produce,”—a sequence followed likewise by Juvenal, Burton, and Byron.

Pope, Johnson, Fielding, and Burton occupied a prominent place in Byron's thoughts during 1821, but they would draw in their train a host of reminiscences of other writers. I could repeat many instances, as Burton would say—Smollett, for example, Swift, and Steele. But turning to Voltaire, who shared with Pope the most important place in Byron's models, we find the same condemnation of wars of conquest. Although Voltaire cannot help admiring the fortitude and daring of Charles “the Great,” in his biography of the Swedish conqueror, he condemns severely Charles's wars of conquest, which laid waste the overrun territories and reduced the conqueror's own country in men and money to the point of perishing. He concludes that Charles XII was not at all a great man, especially in comparison with his lifelong enemy, Peter the Great; for though Peter was equally cruel and aggressive, he is exempt from the charge of *wanton* highway robbery by the fact that his wars always enriched his country in material wealth and culture. Byron's interest in this biography is marked by his drawing upon it for the setting and story of *Mazeppa,* the famous Polish-Cossack ally of Charles XII.

In his tales, Voltaire elevates his moralizing on war to a philosophical level, in his search for the answer to the problem of the existence of evil and misery. In *Babouc's Vision, the World as it is,* the first spectacle that Babouc sees upon entering Persia is a senseless war between the Persians and the Indians over a trifling cause—a war in which brutality and treachery abound, while the individual soldiers on both sides fight heroically with no notion of their cause. Babouc interviewed the commanders in either army, and

> “learned of actions of generosity, greatness of soul, humanity, which astounded and delighted him.
>
> “‘Inexplicable human beings!’ cried he. ‘How can you unite so much baseness and grandeur, so many virtues and crimes?’
>
> “Meanwhile peace was declared. The leaders of the two armies, neither of whom had gained the victory but on the contrary had shed the blood of so many men for their own interests, went off to seek rewards in their own Courts. The peace was praised in the public prints which announced nothing less than the return of virtue and felicity to the earth.”

Babouc observes the same duality, the same mixture of good and evil, in all the institutions and customs of Persepolis, and concludes that “if all is not well, all is tolerable.”

In *Candide,* however, the first overwhelming misfortune of the hero is caused by the carnage and rapine of war, which is recounted in a spirit of utter revolt against its brutality. The fantasy, grotesque emphasis, and exaggeration of this counterblast against false optimism would not appeal to Byron's sense of proportion and of fact, but he thoroughly agreed with the conclusion: “that man was born to live in the convulsions of distress or in the lethargy of boredom,” and that the only solution to render life even tolerable is to work without argument or curiosity about problems beyond man's solving—to “cultivate his garden.”

All these views of the problem of war have been largely from the moral and philosophical standpoint, but on the economic side of the question, Byron certainly knew the calm commercialism of the Whig viewpoint on the extravagance of conquest.[10] He probably also sympathized with Italian antimilitaristic propaganda, such as that expressed in Goldoni's comedy *La Guerra.* He must certainly have been acquainted with the most famous antimilitaristic statement of his own day, Benjamin Constant's pamphlet entitled *de l'Esprit de Conquête et de l'Usurpation.*[11] Even if he had never read Constant's political works, he would have known the general tenor

of his ideas from Madame de Staël and her friends in London, and again at Coppet in 1816, where Constant was a frequent topic of conversation.

The phrasing of *de l'Esprit de Conquête* makes it seem uncannily appropriate for our contemporary world, and underlines the resemblance of our times to the Napoleonic. It does not dwell on the horrors of war, but reasons on the impossibility of accomplishing any good by a war of conquest in the modern commercial world. It looks forward to the united nations and to the outlawing of war. But, most important for Byron, it dwells upon the hypocrisy incidental to war. When a nation sets out on a war of conquest, Constant says, it throws itself backward to a state of barbarous tyranny complicated by a disgusting hypocrisy:

> "Authority has then to accomplish, in the intellectual faculties of the mass of its subjects, the same effect as in the moral qualities of the military. It must exert itself to banish all logic from the mind of the one, while it tries to stifle all humanity in the heart of the other: all words lose their sense; that of moderation must presage violence; that of justice must announce inequity. The right of nations must become a code of expropriation and of barbarism: every civilized notion which the light of centuries has introduced into the relations of societies, as into those of individuals, must be suppressed anew. The human race must revert to those times of devastation which seem to us the opprobrium of history. Hypocrisy alone must accomplish this difference; and that hypocrisy must be more corrupting than anyone can imagine; for the lies of authority are evil not only when they lead astray and deceive the people: they are all the more so when they do not deceive them."[12]

With all these thoughts in mind, Byron set out deliberately to write an anti-*Iliad,* and cast about for an historical source, which he found in the Marquis Gabriel de Castelnau's *Essai sur l'Histoire Ancienne et Moderne de la Nouvelle Russie,* Paris, 3 vols., 1820. Castelnau gives a rapid, detailed story of the Siege of Ismail, with all the facts as Byron uses them and in almost the same words. E. H. Coleridge, in his edition of *Don Juan,* has collated the parallel passages, but Coleridge's quotations do not show the general drift of Castelnau's narrative, which reveals its ideal appropriateness as a vehicle for Byron's satire. In the first place, it is an eyewitness account, compounded from a report of the siege made by a Russian officer who fought at it, from the journal of the young Duc de Richelieu, and from letters of the generals and Potemkin, which Castelnau claims to have in his hands. These ensure its authenticity, and set it in opposition to all the poetic accounts of sieges, dear to epic, from Homer and Tasso to Voltaire's *Henriade.* In the second place, Castelnau pretends to be writing a new sort of history—a kind that Byron approved—that not only exhibits the manners of a nation but includes those details of which historians are often so blamably negligent. Commenting on the foolhardy courage of the Russians under Suvaroff in attempting the assault of Ismail when their numbers were inferior to the Turks, Castelnau writes:

> "Without that disposition [to obtain glory and honor at any cost], without the success which surmounted dangers easy to conceive, we would certainly not have entered into details at such length; but this assault of Ismail is an event to be noted among the most gallant of its kind; it gives an exact idea of the nation which undertook it, of the general who commanded it, and it honors all the military who took part in it. That the historian should slide over facts with little notice, that he should content himself with indicating and not bearing down upon them, is so many lines the less which he often spares the ennui of those who read; but that he should render an exact account of an action allied to heroism is a duty which he ought to force himself to fulfill well."[13]

Castelnau relishes the heroism and the action, for to him war is glorious. He mentions the generals and the men of rank personally and recounts laconically the suffering of the soldiers as part of the tactics of the battle. But the memoirs which he quotes are not so indifferent to the horrors of carnage and pillage, and Castelnau does not attempt to reconcile the marked difference between their eyewitness viewpoint and his own academic

attitude. Two paragraphs forming a brief word picture of the sack of Ismail end thus:

> "Let us turn our regard from the frightful spectacle of which we have only given an idea; let us pass over in silence acts of ferocity worse than death; let us draw the curtain on the disgusting excesses and the crimes impossible to prevent when the fury of the soldiers could not be restrained."

He goes on, in apology for the carnage, to say that it had nothing to do with the kindly nature of the Russians; it was the inevitable expression of their rage at the losses and resistance sustained in taking the city. On the whole, says Castelnau, the Siege of Ismail is unique in showing the exploit of 23,000 men (of whom over 8,000 were killed) against 36,000 in a fortified place (over 38,000 Turks were killed, counting civilians), and offers "to Europe the most handsome military deed which its annals could celebrate." This was an invitation to irony which Byron could not resist.

The main purpose of *Don Juan,* Cantos VII-VIII, is therefore a satiric attack upon wars of conquest, the major crime of civilization. On the other hand, the Siege of Ismail is only an episode in the experiences of Don Juan. Byron shows in these cantos what he had learned from the novels of Scott in the conduct of historical fiction. Without losing sight of the fortunes and characterization of his fictional hero, he manages to blend them into the historical narrative—the epic sweep of the siege and the sack, the portrait of Suvaroff, and the sketches of the other historical characters. Like Scott, he heightens, expands, and realizes in detail all the data in the source narrative.

In these efforts of imagination, he was inspired not only by the novel but by the epic. We have already mentioned the episode of Leila's rescue with its echo of Marmontel's novel. Even more strikingly, the episode of the Tartar Khan and his five sons, who sold their lives so dearly, reflects epic inspiration. Castelnau relates the story briefly with no elaboration, but Byron's expanded version of it recalls, not only his own earlier attempt at the same scene in Minotti's fight, as he "so gallantly bore the brunt of the fray,"[14] but the episode of Latinus and his five sons in Tasso's Siege of Jerusalem.[15] Ginguené in his account of the episodes and characters chosen by Tasso to illustrate the two camps, Moslem and Christian, singles out this one of Latinus and his sons to narrate in full.[16] Thus Byron had recently been reminded of that heroic story. Like Latinus, Byron's old Khan sees his sons perish one after the other and feels himself at last childless and alone; with a final desperate spring upon his enemies, he catches his death blow and

> "In one wide wound poured forth his soul at once."

Tasso's passage ends in a simile likening the fall of Latinus to that of a sturdy tree, and Byron echoes this figure in Canto VIII, 116. The coincidence of such passages in Castelnau and Tasso (compare also Byron's chief Pasha, who surrendered at last with oriental phlegm, and Tasso's wily Soldan of Jerusalem) would draw a cloud of epic reminiscences and enhance the value of Byron's Siege of Ismail to his readers. For the mingling of the heroic deeds of individuals with the barbaric ferocity of the whole siege is part of the epic satire on unnatural civilization.

2

The last six cantos of *Don Juan,* the English section, were less directly influenced by literature than the first ten. Although the circumstances of plot and characters are thoroughly fictionalized, the thoughts, the feelings, and the situations were largely Byron's at firsthand. Nevertheless, there are some interesting correspondences to be traced in his reading, which help to locate *Don Juan* XI-XVI in its proper literary setting.

In the first place, memoirs contributed to the pattern and the spirit of these cantos. The fine lines that separate the novel from biography and biography from memoirs are perhaps hard to define. All three were favorite

types of reading with Byron. But the principal virtue of memoirs is that they describe beneath an infinity of ephemeral details, not individuals, but a real society and the spirit and ideals that actuate it. De Grammont's memoirs, for instance, convey the gaiety, essential health, and rude vivacity of the English court of Charles II. Grimm's expose the intellectuality, the sentimentality, and the decay and new life fermenting together in pre-Revolutionary France. The anecdotes, the portraits, the events recorded combine to impart to the reader the essential atmosphere in a given society at a given time.

Byron was keenly aware of this function of memoir writing. He wrote to the Earl of Blessington:

> "I return the Count D'Orsay's Journal, which is a very extraordinary production, and of a most melancholy truth in all that regards high life in England. … The most singular thing is, *how* he should have penetrated *not* the *fact,* but the *mystery* of the English *ennui* at two-and-twenty. I was about the same age when I made the same discovery, in almost precisely the same circles,—(for there is scarcely a person mentioned whom I did not see nightly or daily, and was acquainted more or less intimately with most of them,)—but I never could have described it so well. *Il faut être Français,* to effect this.
>
> "But he ought also to have been in the country during the hunting season, with 'a select party of distinguished guests,' as the papers term it. He ought to have seen the gentlemen after dinner (on the hunting days), and the soiree ensuing thereupon,—and the women looking as if they had hunted, or rather been hunted; and I could have wished that he had been at a dinner in town, which I recollect at Lord Cowper's—small, but select, and composed of the most amusing people. The dessert was hardly on the table, when, out of twelve, I counted *five asleep.* …
>
> "Altogether, your friend's Journal is a very formidable production. … I have read the whole with great attention and instruction. … I showed it … to a young Italian lady of rank, … and she was delighted with it, and says that she has derived a better notion of English society from it than from all Madame de Staël's metaphysical disputations on the same subject, in her work on the Revolution."[17]

The diversity of subjects and pictures in the latter cantos of *Don Juan,* informed as they are with satiric purpose, has in a broader sense an affinity with memoir writing. It is Byron's attempt to sum up a real society, at the same time that he is satirizing it and writing a novel based on its realities.

A brief little volume of *Essays and Sketches … by a Gentleman who has left his Lodgings,* the anonymous production of Moore's friend, Lord John Russell, may have contributed some specific suggestions. Byron told Lady Blessington that he had been reading and enjoying them; they were excellent in detail, he thought, but on too small a scale. These papers contain sprightly descriptions of the London social season. Two long paragraphs describing a London Ball—the crush, the inability to meet one's friends, the hostess ready to sink with fatigue—closely parallel the stanzas in *Don Juan,* XI, 67-72. There is an essay on fortune-hunting mammas who entrap young heirs into marrying their daughters, "making society a cattle fair," a practice which "produces in the end deceit amongst girls, and suspicion in young men." Compare *Don Juan,* XII, 58-61. Other chapters comment on the corrupt practices of political career men, and the arithmetical legerdemain of the Chancellors of the Exchequer. But these were commonplaces of the contemporary novel and journalism.

The topics for discussion in periodicals, indeed, are a rich source for many of the digressions and allusions in *Beppo* and *Don Juan.* A perusal of the Quarterly List of New Publications in the *Edinburgh Review,* for instance, the issue of January 1820, suggests that here are the points of departure for many of Byron's ramblings on contemporary subjects: medicine, political economy, subjects under debate in Parliament and in

religious synods, Ireland, slavery, post roads, travels to the North Pole in search of a northwest passage, descriptions of country seats, indicating the revival of interest in Gothic architecture, and gay reviews of recent books on French cookery and the science of the gourmet. Journals of the *Edinburgh Review* type are, in fact, a kind of public memoirs. It is a measure of the sureness of Byron's taste, the integrity of his mind, that the journalistic topics of his poem require as little footnoting as they do, and seem fresh and interesting after the lapse of more than a hundred years.

The subject of the marriage market, important in English fiction since the days of Fanny Burney and greatly to be expanded by Victorian novelists, has, like the indictment of war, a Juvenalian background. Fielding touched on its main themes in his epistle *To a Friend on the Choice of a Wife,* reflecting to some extent the ideas of the sixth satire of Juvenal, which he translated later in the same volume of the *Miscellanies*:

```
          "Some sterner Foes to Marriage bold aver,
That in this Choice a Man must surely err:
Nor can I to this Lottery advise,
A thousand Blanks appearing to a Prize.
Women by Nature form'd too prone to Ill,
By Education are made proner still,
To cheat, deceive, conceal each genuine Thought,
By Mothers, and by Mistresses are taught.
The Face and Shape are first the Mother's Care;
The Dancing-Master next improves the Air.
To these Perfections add a Voice most sweet;
The skill'd Musician makes the Nymph compleat.
          "Thus with a Person well equipp'd, her Mind
Left, as when first created, rude and blind,
She's sent to make her Conquests on Mankind.
But first inform'd the studied Glance to aim,
Where Riches shew the profitable Game:
How with unequal Smiles the Jest to take,
When Princes, Lords, or Squires, or Captains speak;
These Lovers careful shun, and those create;
And Merit only see in an Estate."
```

Fanny Burney, representative of a host of women novelists in her time, elaborated these themes, illustrating them from the actualities of daily practice, and clustering around them subordinate themes on all the other malpractices of fashionable life. The fashionable, or “silver fork,” novels were well known to Byron; they must have constituted a large portion of those “four thousand novels” he claims to have read before 1807. In *Don Juan* XI-XVI, he drew heavily upon their types and themes: the knowing duenna, the marriageable bachelor, the “drapery-misses,” the blues, the desperate dandies, the complacent husbands, the matchmaking relatives, the dissatisfied wives.

The Gothic novel, however, comes in for a greater share of burlesquing attention. The description of Norman Abbey, fond though it is, is nevertheless with its details of architecture, grounds, and furnishings, a hit at Gothic novel descriptions, even at the novels of Scott. Byron concludes it:

```
"Oh, reader! if that thou canst read,—and know
                    'T is not enough to spell, or even to read,
To constitute a reader—there must go
                    Virtues of which both you and I have need;—
Firstly, begin with the beginning—(though
                    That clause is hard); and secondly, proceed:
Thirdly, commence not with the end—or sinning
In this sort, end at last with the beginning.

"But, reader, thou hast patient been of late,
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                    While I, without remorse of rhyme, or fear,
Have built and laid out ground at such a rate,
                    Dan Phoebus takes me for an auctioneer.
That Poets were so from their earliest date,
                    By Homer's 'Catalogue of ships' is clear;
But a mere modern must be moderate—
I spare you then the furniture and plate."
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Incidentally, the four stanzas following the description of Newstead with its gently humorous close, form a delightful burlesque of "nature-poetry" like Keats's *Ode to Autumn.*

The principal resemblance between *Don Juan* and the Gothic novel is, of course, the ghost scenes in the sixteenth canto. To celebrate his twenty-first birthday, Byron gave a house party at Newstead for several of his college friends. One of the pranks that contributed to their merriment was a bit of ghostly faking that Hobhouse recalled years later in his journal:

> "On Tuesday, I set off for Nottingham, and passed by Newstead. … When I was admitted I was shown up into the old gallery, then refitted, and scarcely to be recognised. It was there that Lord Byron placed the old stone coffin found in the cloisters; and I well recollected that, passing through the gloomy length of it late one night, I heard a groan proceeding from the spot. I went to the coffin, and a figure rose from it, dressed in a cloak and cowl, and blew out my candle. … It was my friend C. S. Matthews."[18]

From this incident, the local legends, the atmosphere of the dilapidated old Abbey, and Byron's bump of superstition, grew not only Don Juan's vision of the Black Friar, but the earlier ghostly vision in *Lara.* A comparison of these two episodes shows the essential differences between Byron's romantic and his realistic, satiric muses, both under the influence of Gothic novel fashions.

The scene and the circumstances in both poems are identical, but in *Lara,* the details emphasized in evoking a ghostly atmosphere are feverishly heightened and vaguely localized, while in *Don Juan,* they are sharply and matter-of-factly defined. Lara and Juan both turn from a contemplation of the moonlight, the lake, and the stream, to walk in the shadowy gallery, under the portraits of grim Knights and pictured Saints. Juan hears a sound like a mouse rustling in the corner, and is petrified to behold the hooded figure pass him three times, glancing on him a bright eye. Lara sees nothing except his vastly enlarged shadow on the walls, but some nameless horror causes him, or an unworldly visitant, to shriek and rouse the whole house; he falls down in a deathlike trance from which he is recovered with difficulty. Juan recovers his senses unaided, finds that his eyes still work all right, reads an old newspaper to compose his mind, and goes to bed and to sleep without causing any disturbance. A reluctance to speak of their experience, however, and an effort to hide any traces of perturbation mark the behavior of both heroes the morning after.

Thus far the *Don Juan* ghost story is merely the *Lara* one seen through an unclouded, unemotional pair of eyes. *Lara,* which is pure Gothic in the manner of the *Castle of Otranto,* has been translated into the idiom of real life. The specter, or the supernatural appearance, is given equal credit in both poems. It belongs to the vast army of ghosts whom Gothic novelists loved to employ as monitors of dire events to come. In *Lara,* the supernatural experience is dropped—it has served its purpose—and the bloody and catastrophic events ensue. In *Don Juan,* like Mrs. Radcliffe's novels, or more properly like Monk Lewis's, the natural explanation of the supernatural is suggested in her Grace of Fitz-Fulke's impersonation of the ghost. Byron's treatment of this ghost-story is typically Don Juanesque; it is antisentimental and self-mocking, but it shows under a mask of skepticism, humor, and disillusionment, an undeniable will to believe.

3

Claude Fuess has noted the possibility that Byron in his description of the assemblage at Norman Abbey "was influenced to some extent by Thomas Love Peacock."[19] Whether it is influence or coincidence, the affinity between Byron's and Peacock's satires of society is well worth examining.

Byron's acquaintance with Peacock was only at second hand through Shelley, who sent Byron a copy of *Melincourt* as soon as it appeared in 1817. In 1821, out of all the pamphlets and articles occasioned by the first few cantos of *Don Juan,* the one that elicited a favorable response from Byron was "John Bull's" *Letter to the Right Hon. Lord Byron.* He admired the author's clever writing, full of "fun and ferocity," and was no doubt pleased by the comparison of *Don Juan* to Scott's novels and the suggestion that Byron should continue the poem by writing about England in the reign of George IV. Byron wrote to Murray to learn who was the author; he suspected Hobhouse, Peacock, and D'Israeli, possibly Washington Irving. But a few weeks later he had settled on Peacock, who learned from Shelley's letter, when Shelley was visiting Byron at Ravenna: "Lord B. thinks you wrote a pamphlet signed *John Bull*; he says he knew it by the style resembling *Melincourt,* of which he is a great admirer."[20] Byron seems to have accorded Peacock the sincere flattery of imitation in his latter cantos of *Don Juan,* for his satire on England and English society shares many of the techniques and opinions of Peacock's.

Melincourt is perhaps not so successful a sample of the Peacockian recipe for the intellectual novel as his later *Crotchet Castle,* but it contains all the essential ingredients and is almost equally diverting. The most obvious mechanical resemblance between it and *Don Juan* is the use of the house party and the banquet as settings for the meeting of minds and of fools. Both Peacock and Byron use allegorical names, a trick borrowed from Greek and English satiric comedy. Peacock has his Rev. Mr. Grovelgrub, Mr. Hippy, Mr. Fax, Mr. Feathernest, and Mr. Mol(e)y Mystic (*i.e.* Coleridge) in his Cimmerian Lodge. Byron gives us the young bard Rackrhyme, Sir John Pottledeep, the six Miss Rawbolds, and the Reverend Rodomont Precisian. All the types of politicians, intellectuals, social climbers, fools and eccentrics, many of them thin disguises for real people, make up the parties at Norman Abbey, Miss Anthelia Melincourt's castle, and Mr. Forester's country house. Byron complains, however, that

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"The days of Comedy are gone, alas!
                    When Congreve's fool could vie with Molière's
                              bête:
Society is smoothed to that excess,
That manners hardly differ more than dress."
```

He is unwilling to go to such lengths of fantasy as Peacock in his social satire.

The interpolated songs in *Melincourt,* usually sung by Miss Anthelia to the harp, recall Lady Adeline's ballad of the Norman Abbey friar. The electioneering of Sir Oran-haut-ton and Mr. Sarcastic at the borough of Onevote, aided by the citizens of Novote, suggests Lord Henry's electioneering, for it is based on the same principles of maintaining Place and Patronage. The chess-dance, following Mr. Forester's Anti-Saccharine banquet, recalls Byron's metaphor:

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"Good company's a chess-board—there are kings,
                    Queens, bishops, knights, rooks, pawns; the World's a game;
Save that the puppets pull at their own strings,
                    Methinks gay Punch hath something of the
                              same."
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Dr. Killquick and his medicines, from whose fatal ministrations Mr. Hippy is always just being saved by some lucky accident, are echoed in Byron's gibes at the medical profession. Other butts of Peacock's incidental satire are the same that Byron loved to shoot at: Southey (Mr. Feathernest), Wordsworth (Mr. Paperstamp), Coleridge, the Legitimate Review (*i.e.* the *Quarterly*), and Lord Castlereagh, with his strange jargon, especially the phrase "venerable feature."

The “plot” of Peacock's novel, like Byron's, is matchmaking. Anthelia, the heiress, brought up like Aurora Raby in a truly unworldly fashion, is looking around for a husband, and she becomes involved in Mrs. Pinmoney's matchmaking efforts on behalf of her nephew Sir Telegraph and her daughter Miss Danaretta Contantina. *Melincourt,* like *Don Juan,* contains strong satire on the marriage market, marriage *à la mode,* the importance of money in making a good match, and the feeble and pernicious education of fashionable women. Mrs. Pinmoney, incidentally, enumerates among other fads of the day, “a taste for enjoying the country in November, and wintering in London till the end of the dog-days.”

But the story of Anthelia and her suitors is only a narrative line on which to hang the main matters of *Melincourt,* contained in the discussions and diversions. Mr. Fax and Mr. Forester hold informal debates on political and social economy. Mr. Fax represents the theories of Malthus and Bentham, while Mr. Forester, the Rousseauistic philosopher and hero, holds less pedantic and more traditional views, relying on reason and the natural goodness of man. It is obvious where Peacock's sympathies lie. A whole chapter is concerned with the Principle of Population, and the intellectual climax of the book occurs in Chapter XL, “The Hopes of the World,” in which the two gentlemen, just about to conclude successfully their rescue of the kidnapped Anthelia, sit down gravely to discuss with deep philosophy the future of England. Byron avoided this burlesque of reality by merely suspending his story while, as author, he digresses into philosophy, instead of trying to dramatize it in dialogue.

The thesis of Peacock's novel, demonstrated in these discussions and in the story of poor Desmond and his experiences with Mr. Vamp, the editor of the Legitimate Review, is that a politically corrupt society is being duped into hypocritical complacency by prating about morals. In the council of war held by the Legitimate Reviewers at Mainchance Villa, for example, the slogan “The church is in danger” is raised whenever reason threatens to take hold of the proceedings and defeat the sophistries of those defending the *status quo.* At Mr. Forester's banquet, Mr. Sarcastic delivers an oration against the power of Custom to entrench error and wickedness. Later comments in a more elegiac strain bewail the feebleness of natural feelings laid asleep by Custom.

> “Vices of unfrequent occurrence stand sufficiently self-exposed in the insulation of their own deformity. The vices that call for the scourge of satire, are those which pervade the whole frame of society, and which, under some specious pretence of private duty, or the sanction of custom and precedent, are almost permitted to assume the semblance of virtue, or at least to pass unstigmatized in the crowd of congenial transgressions.”[21]

This saying of Mr. Forester's represents the primary thesis of Byron's satire on society, and sums up the difference between the satire in Pope's poetry and that in Peacock's novels and Byron's *Don Juan.* “Manners now make men,” says Byron; “Be not what you seem, but what you see.” Byron will be content to live in exile with beautiful Truth, as long as error and hypocrisy rule in England. The same classicist admiration of reason, common sense, and moderation, tinged by Shaftsburian and Rousseauistic conceptions of the natural goodness of man and the pernicious influence of society, pervades both Peacock's and Byron's thought.

With this scale of value Byron measured mankind and the world with a just proportion. The denials of value or of constancy in the temporary show of things passed in review through *Don Juan* are the repeated answers of the perfectionist forced to comment on an imperfect world. They should be read in the light of Byron's subsequent behavior in the imperfect world of Greek revolution and political skullduggery as much as in his surrender to imperfection of life in Venice and London. For, as Lord Ernle has pointed out, Byron had one solitary conviction on the value of moral action, that bridged the hiatus between his abstract beliefs and his practice: through courageous moral action, the world will achieve the ideal of liberty.

The history of Byron's intellectual skepticism is the drama of the opposing tendencies in his nature toward participation and toward isolation. He is a skeptic who would like to persuade himself that he is perfectly

poised in his skepticism, but who is really so uncomfortable in it that he is constantly launching out on a new, though hopeless, struggle toward belief. He longs to believe and shrinks from believing because he thinks himself incurably solitary and independent at the center of opposing systems. During most of his life he is unwilling to commit himself, either in poetry or in action. Nature and fate have made him solitary and an outsider. He cannot give himself wholly to anything, to an individual, a social group, a party, or a system of belief. He is the Pilgrim of Eternity. Yet he longed to submit and to be absorbed. The glory of Byron's life is that at last he did commit himself in the cause of Greek liberty. It does not do to explain away this last decided commitment by references to his ambition, to his boredom, and to all the other motives for the Greek expedition which were most undoubtedly and compellingly present. The fact of heroic self-sacrifice remains. Byron was right when he said that we should not dig for motives and causes and thereby destroy the value of a good deed and a good effect:

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"'T is sad to hack into the root of things,
                    They are so much intertwisted with the earth;
So that the branch a goodly verdure flings,
                    I reck not if an acorn gave it birth."
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He begged Colonel Stanhope to judge him by his actions and not by his words. This final commitment was what Byron was working out for himself in *Don Juan,* explaining his origin and his history, not in any crassly objective autobiography, but in the deepest sense, in the mirror of poetry. Don Juan was to have died for human freedom. Byron left the word and took up the deed: he completed *Don Juan* in action.

Notes

1. Lucian, Loeb Classical Library transl., IV, 97-99 & 107-109.
2. *Don Juan,* IX, 13-21.
3. *Anatomy of Melancholy,* Everyman edition, I, 55-56.
4. See Irwin, *The Making of Jonathan Wild,* New York, Columbia University Press, 1941.
5. ll. 217-258.
6. *L. & J.,* V, 161-163.
7. I am indebted to Professor Marjorie Nicolson for the reminder that Burton's passage on this subject is founded upon an equally famous and earlier one, that in Bacon's *Advancement of Learning,* which was also known and admired by Johnson.
8. *Ibid.,* 173.
9. *Ibid.,* 465.
10. Cf. Henry Martyn's letter to Steele (*Spectator,* No. 180).
11. Composed at Hamburg in 1813, and republished in Constant's *Cours de politique constitutionelle,* 4 vols., 1817-1820. See its recent republication as *Prophecy from the Past; on the Conquest and Usurpation,* ed. and transl. by Helen Lippmann, N. Y., Reynal and Hitchcock, 1941.
12. My translation.
13. Vol. II, 206-207. My translation.
14. *Siege of Corinth,* ll. 781 ff.
15. *Gerusalemme Liberata,* Canto IX, Fairfax's translation.
16. V, 447.
17. *L. & J.,* VI, 186-188.
18. Hobhouse, *Recollections,* III, 29.
19. Fuess, *Lord Byron as a Satirist,* 172, footnote.
20. *Letters of Shelley,* ed. by Roger Ingpen, London, Pitman, 1909, II, 897. Peacock discounted Byron's praise of *Melincourt,* laying it to Shelley's kindness.
21. *Melincourt,* 178.

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Criticism: Michael G. Cooke (essay date summer 1975)

SOURCE: Cooke, Michael G. "Byron's *Don Juan*: The Obsession and Self-Discipline of Spontaneity." *Studies in Romanticism* 14, no. 3 (summer 1975): 285-302.

[*In the following essay, Cooke critiques the functions of spontaneity, improvisation and surprise in* Don Juan.]

The Giaour, at just over 1300 short lines, and *Don Juan,* at something over 16 long cantos, have one crucial structural feature in common: both are fragments. Once this has been said, it seems necessary to ask whether they are, as fragments, similar in kind (the question of quality need not even arise). Does fragmentariness express the same boisterous self-aggrandizement in *Don Juan* as in *The Giaour,* the same difficulty with aesthetic and philosophical ordering, the same misgivings about the adequacy of what has been written and the same compensatory faith that bigger is truer, as well as better?

It would be plausible to say that Byron left *The Giaour* unfinished, whereas death left *Don Juan* unfinished. Of course Byron amused himself with the contemplation of 100 cantos of *Don Juan,* a number so magnificent as to leave scant time for Byron's daily business of war and love, which after all pursued him ardently as he them. On the face of it the poem may have been not only unfinished in fact, but in Byron's own conception of it unfinishable, inasmuch as he meant to discourse in it "De rebus cunctis et quibusdam aliis": on everything, and more besides. Such a conclusion, though, comes too easy. It is only justice to urge that Byron not be censured for eking out with fond and wilful tongue a potentially tedious tale. He certainly knew how to abandon an unprofitable venture, leaving the pretentious Polidori to complete *The Vampire.* And as for his going on with *Don Juan* to no known end, we have perhaps been remiss in not recognizing the warrant Byron obtained from his time. The unfinishable poem stands as a signal romantic contribution to the form and vital entelechy of poetry itself; it expresses a resistance to predictability in poetry, which grows in new modes, and has many fulfillments. The root problem with the long poem in romanticism lay not in the collapse of sustaining philosophical structures,[1] but in the fact that the long poem could not, in reality or in mortality, be made long enough. Which is to say, it could not be infinite.

A link between the fragmentary and the infinite attests itself in various ways in the romantic period. The sense of incompleteness as an emblem of infinity may be derived from Keats's "On Seeing the Elgin Marbles," which seems to make the combination of art's perfection and time's depredation, a fragment in short, the "shadow of a magnitude." But in fact romantic philosophy is explicit about the symbolic value of fragmentariness. Novalis espouses it as our only means of approaching infinitude, and Friedrich Schlegel, in his uncomprisingly named *Fragments,* comes out against the principle of formal conclusion to thought on the grounds that the vital fermentation of intellectual process can only be rendered inert by artificial checks.

It is wholly in keeping with this principle that we recognize an ambition of the infinite in the way the romantic poets handle the long poem. It is clear in Blake and Shelley that the long poem (taking *Prometheus Unbound* as a poem in dramatic guise) is meant to encompass infinity, and the form of the works images this fact. *Jerusalem* ends at the 99th plate, but it makes no bones about the fact that the ending is a poetic fiction and an authorial convenience. Enitharmon advises Los that the poet, Blake, is about to wind up the project they are living, and so the action, the poem, moves into a landing pattern. Accordingly, we have not so much a conclusion as a resolution of the poem, which might have flown on forever and which conceptually does fly on forever, since the human states or Zoas with which it deals are timeless. Much the same effect is achieved in *Prometheus Unbound,* where the sober, if not somber injunction of Demogorgon to struggle against relapse suggests a perennial tension, if not an everlasting cycle.

The Prelude may also be instanced as a poem boasting a sense of resolution rather than a strict conclusion; the principles of “something evermore about to be” and the contention that “our home is with infinitude” both convey a reaching toward as governing the emergencies of the poem's action, and that action, though so lucid and so comprehensive in the Snowdon episode, still remains open and unpredictable. Assurance is given, reliably so, but how to live up to this assurance will have to be discovered. Just as in “Resolution and Independence,” a given solution is perennially to be tested and challenged by some inevitable, though unnameable emergency. *The Prelude* itself constitutes a resumption and a re-cognition of its own action,[2] with every suggestion of an everlasting cycle, in Wordsworth's mind, analogous to the everlasting cycle set up between William and Dorothy at the end of “Tintern Abbey.” More than this, the poem's beginning in discrete fragments and its gradual, as well as endlessly self-modifying crystallization in Wordsworth's mind make it resemble *Don Juan* stage for stage.

In the case of *Don Juan,* then, it would seem timely to ask: is it in the singular romantic sense an infinite poem, or did it only stand in danger of growing physically interminable?[3] First let me say there is in the abstract no reason why we should not greet an interminable poem with perfect equanimity: it is nothing to us if we choose to ignore it. But benign neglect did not seem a possibility with *Don Juan* in 1824, and is not now a century and a half later; the projected interminability of the poem accordingly threatens us, as an extension of the fact that the poem itself threatens us, at any length. I venture to say *Don Juan* threatens the reader as no comparable poem does—*Paradise Lost* and *Jerusalem* and *The Prelude* are actually consolatory efforts, and Swinburne's *Atalanta in Calydon* and Hardy's *The Dynasts* prove, though forbidding, less than inescapable in vision.

Given that it is too much and too good to ignore, what makes *Don Juan* a threatening poem? Certainly not its theme of liberty, a very shibboleth of British self-opinion. And not the sexuality of the poem, where it falls far short of Fielding or even in some respects Goldsmith and Gay. Nor should it have been the multifariousness of the poem; an episodic structure is characteristic of epic and picaresque forms, as well as traditional in the Don Juan stories, and Fielding and Sterne would both stand as precedents for a multifarious form; Sterne indeed amuses the reader with his projection of the *opus sine fine*:

> I am this month one whole year older than I was this time twelvemonth; and yet have got, as you perceive, almost into the middle of my fourth volume—and no farther than to my first day's life—'tis demonstrative that I have three hundred and sixty-four days more life to write just now, than when I first set out; so that instead of advancing, … on the contrary, I am just thrown so many volumes back. … It must follow, an' please your worships, that the more I write, the more I shall have to write—and consequently, the more your worships read, the more your worships will have to read.

(*Tristram Shandy,* ch. 13)

And yet in a way all three factors—liberty, sexuality, and multifariousness—help to make *Don Juan* threatening because of the peculiar and unconventional use Byron makes of them. For *Don Juan* first of all confronts us with a state of dissolutions. Within a brisk four cantos it dissolves the premier genre of Western Literature, the epic, with a few perversely dextrous, or perhaps I should say sinister strokes: the opening phrase, "I want a hero," is a scandal to the tradition and a far cry from Wordsworth's anxious reverent pondering and Milton's "long choosing and beginning late"; and by the same token the insistence on beginning at the beginning and on proceeding without a Muse, that panacea against poetic disability, helps to destroy any sense of orientation or coherence in a story whose center, the hero, is already "wanting." Here is an epic, that noble and conventional form, in which anything can happen. The extent to which Byron undoes our expectations and threatens our assurance may be inferred from the fact that his greatest epic catalogue occurs in a private letter as a litany of his recent conquests, and his finest descent into the underworld occurs on the morning when he awoke and found himself in a crimson-curtained bed with Annabella Milbanke, and gave voice to the ungallant outcry: "Good God, I am surely in Hell." Meanwhile, in his ongoing epic, he proceeds to dissolve our towering estimate of Plato ("Oh Plato! Plato! you have paved the way, / With your confounded fantasies, to more / Immoral conduct …), and to dissolve the marriage of Donna Julia and Don Alfonso, Juan's ties to his homeland, our faith in the covenant of the rainbow and in man's humanity to man, and one entire Aegean island:

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That isle is now all desolate and bare,
Its dwellings down, its tenants pass'd away;
None but her own [Haidée's] and father's grave is there,
And nothing outward tells of human clay;
Ye could not know where lies a thing so fair,
No stone is there to show, no tongue to say
What was; no dirge, except the hollow sea's,
Mourns o'er the beauty of the Cyclades.
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And having as it were immersed us in the mourning of the sea, while disingenously denying the existence of any elegy, he is off again ad lib: "But let me change this theme which grows too sad. …"

The fact is that, as much as Keats would oppose this, Byron is his consummate Chameleon poet, changing themes and schemes quicker than the mind, let alone the eye, can follow. And this is what poses a threat. Byron strips us of all forms of assurance, from the generic to the linguistic to the religious, offering us in place of this slavery of custom a freedom of the moment that is inseparable from its perils. He, however, having voluntarily cast off form and custom, proceeds effortlessly on his way ("Carelessly I sing"); we struggle up behind. He keeps his footing wherever he goes, even into the pitfalls of skepticism; we do not and cannot. In short, *Don Juan* threatens us because it does not lend itself to plotting and bounding, and as we trail after it we experience not only the exhilaration of its freedom, but also the embarrassment of its unfamiliar power and ways. We might delight in its unplotted ease, indeed we do so, until there comes home to us a sense of its unboundedness. It is hard not to pull back at the intersection of spontaneity and infinity.

It has been observed that every risk entails an opportunity; no doubt every threat also disguises an invitation. It seems to me that *Don Juan* poses an invitation to explore the problem of spontaneity in romanticism; it is only the most vivid instance of a phenomenon we can recognize in poems as diverse as *The Prelude* and *The Fall of Hyperion,* namely, a structure of collision and surprise experienced by writer and reader alike. Such a structure exhibits the kind of development where a ride in a rowboat, an all-night party, reading a book by Cervantes, or climbing the Alps or Mt. Snowdon will lead to effects entirely unforeseen and unforeseeable. Significantly, this structure affects both the speaker and the reader; the poet who, say, enjoys a draught of vintage, is as subject to collision, as taken by surprise as we. Perhaps Byron for his part displaces his surprise, but he does not dissimulate his vulnerability:

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But let me change this theme which grows too sad,
And lay this sheet of sorrows on the shelf;
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I don't much like describing people mad,
For fear of seeming rather touch'd myself. …
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Or again we have his avowal that, strive as he may to become a stoic, sage, “The wind shifts, and [he flies] into a rage.”

On the strength of such indications let me suggest that spontaneity is not all freedom and arbitrary lines. At bottom, indeed, spontaneity and a fatalistic tendency or bent run together, as do spontaneity and sheer local reaction. The things we describe as spontaneous, as opposed to laborious, are the things that coincide with our preferences, which after all constitute limitations as much as strengths; what the Spaniards call a “querencia”[4] nicely suggests the rigid and bovine quality of a preference. Furthermore, we need to recall that the art of improvisation, which Byron so admired, is a highly trained art, and that, within the realm of conventional literary expression, romance flourishes on the art of *divagation,* of taking off in unforeseen directions. Allowing for the charm of a variegated energy, then, we must note that incoherence is anathema to the human mind. Closely looked at, how spontaneous is spontaneity? It seems crucial to stress the peculiarly romantic practise of clinging to random incidents as though for dear life, and of finding in them a cumulative pattern of meaning and value. For this becomes the basis and the purpose of the long unfinished or, as we may say, the infinite poem in the romantic scheme: to go over, and over and over, some material that we cannot let go, and to go into, and even further into the possibilities of that material, which becomes at once obsession and careful choice, fixation and source of revelation.

What I am proposing boils down to this: *Don Juan* builds itself on the pattern of repetition and reflection and variation, of subtle repetition and oblique reflection and intricate variation, of the simple single action of the initial Juan-Julia episode.[5] This multiform episode becomes the poem's central figure, or at least configuration: *Don Juan* revolves around a complex of human behavior rather than an individual character, and the poem's beginning becomes at once perpetual and final—if we knew enough of the exfoliating form of this episode, we would have to go on no further. Of this, more anon. It is well here to recall the positive implications of the avowal: “I want a hero,” which advises us of a need and active desire, as well as a brute deficiency. In other words there is an affirmative thrust toward reconstitution underlying the overt dissolution of the hero in the poem. In this dispensation Juan must choose to be a hero, and of what stripe; he will not find hero status thrust upon him.

The factor of choice in *Don Juan* is easy to overlook, but it is pervasive and can readily be invoked to show the reflexive complexity of the poem's design. Let us first recall its pervasive presence; Juan must choose, that is, he cannot if he is to survive choose but choose how to respond vis-à-vis Alfonso and Lambro; it is fight or die. I would refrain from praising him merely for fighting here, especially since he does not do it well, and that only for the simplest sort of survival. But his fighting seems to anticipate and to be consonant with two other choices Juan does *not* have to make, in the shipwreck and the harem episodes. The latter choices, not impetuous but deliberate, not convenient but contradictory to survival, seem to me to enunciate a standard and principle of human dignity that the hullaballoo with Alfonso and Lambro somewhat beclouds. To choose not to die drunk and not to eat human flesh as a means of staying alive, and to declare to the smitten and nervous Gulbeyaz, “love is for the free”: these are not the marks of a sensual or indifferent nature. Not that Byron goes overboard and sacrifices Juan's human plausibility to the pieties of heroism; the lad does at last, and despite “some remorse,”[6] allow himself a paw of his father's spaniel, and does treat himself to an incipient dalliance with Dudú. In a sense Byron seems to say that his heroism, if it is to come about, must come from a personal and moral act of his nature rather than from an aesthetic definition of character established by genre or authorial fiat. Thus the choices he continues to be faced with convey intuitions or intimations of deeper being; the act of saving Leila momentarily stems the tide of his commitment to the inhuman seige; the choice of becoming the Empress Catherine's plaything—a far cry from defiance of the more sympathetic Gulbeyaz—proves a choice of spiritual and physical dissipation.

The final choice of the poem as we have it involves a recapitulation of the individual moments we have seen Juan in before: the bossy Lady Adeline Amundeville, the sensual Duchess of Fitz-Fulke and the refined and lovely Aurora bring back Gulbeyaz-Catherine, Julia, and Haidée respectively. Juan has a second chance, with the intensities and precipitancies of first experience now tempered by reflection and comparison, to choose what kind of man he will be, in terms of what kind of woman he will identify himself with. Such a choice has been adumbrated in the harem episode, where Lolah, Katinka, and Dudú lend themselves to distinction, *mutatis mutandis,* according to degree of bossiness, sensuality, and serene loveliness (see esp. Canto VI, sts. xl-liv).

I would go so far as to suggest that the strategic placement of the female trios in *Don Juan* symbolizes the three modes of relationship that the protagonist may experience with women and through them with the world. Depending on the choice he makes, women (and his life) may become for him an experience of the graces, of the fates, or of the furies. In more abstract terms, Haidée-Aurora, suggesting the graces, would represent a timeless world formed of compassion, candor and love; Julia-Fitz-Fulke, suggesting the fates,[7] would represent a sensual world marked by brute repetition and monotony; and Gulbeyaz-Catherine-Lady Adeline, suggesting the furies, would represent an unfeeling but insatiable world characterized by exhausting duty and punishment. There is some indication that Juan feels he is put to choosing among the three women at Norman Abbey, and there is every indication that the narrator has a stake in the choice Juan makes; "I want a hero" is a tacit threat, though not a threat of force. Certainly the narrator chides Juan for finally choosing war over compassionate love, and slights him as the Empress Catherine's love-object, and confronts him with an explicit and unprecedented social-moral disapprobation after his sleeping in with the opportunistic Duchess.

This last episode generates a veritable hubbub of resonances. It not only shows Don Juan falling into the casual ways of the flesh, but shows this in the midst of one of his battles against superstition and terror (shades of the shipwreck episode). Where he should be wrestling with spirits, if not angels, he gets entangled in flesh. He is left unfit to meet the new day (Aurora) or even the ordinary world (A-munde-ville), having quite spent himself on the false spirit of darkness and concealed indulgence, and having left himself, as the poem observes with a telling Spenserian resonance, with "eyes that hardly brook'd / The light. …" The "air rebuk'd" in which the Duchess is seen also picks up the vocabulary of "virtue" and "vice" which Byron resorts to in this scene; its evaluative tone emerges markedly where Byron calls it an occasion for "Man to show his strength / Moral or physical." It is striking that where imagery of the Fall abounds in all previous love episodes,[8] it is actually withheld and even opposed at this stage. For Byron carefully associates Aurora with a seraphic state and a possible recovery of Eden: "She look'd as if she sat at Eden's door. / And griev'd for those who could return no more." It need not surprise us that she induces in Juan an unwonted "contemplation." She is, if Byron's pun may be spelled out, a cultivated Aurora who restores Haidée[9] in a viable social mode, and not an idyllic, and perhaps idolatrous isolation. She affords Juan the chance of a full new beginning, bringing to the poem "an ideal of womanhood attainable *within* society, though free from all its vices and illusions."[10]

Two points may be brought into focus here. The first is what I would call the realistic humanism of this singular "non-epic" epic, which cannot consummate itself without a hero but whose hero, given opportunity and choice, seems to balk at a systematic heroism. Occasional heroism he is capable of, but he is betrayed into realism by his very capacity for heroism. To grapple with the Friar is to fall into the clutches of the Duchess of Fitz-Fulke. And we must observe that the narrator, though seeming to hope for more of his protaganist, knows human failing at first hand:

If such doom [to be thought "Bores"] waits each intellectual Giant,
We little people in our lesser way,
In Life's small rubs should surely be more pliant,
And so for one will I—as well I may—
Would that I were less bilious—but, oh, fie on't!
Just as I make my mind up every day
To be a 'totus, teres,' Stoic, Sage,

The wind shifts and I fly into a rage.

Narrator and protaganist are not just separate figures in *Don Juan,* they are set at odds, one aspiring to stoicism and the other wavering between Aurora's purity ("beyond this world's perplexing waste") and the availability of her Frolic Grace, Fitz-Fulke. But both come together in being tripped out of the ideal. The "I want" which begins *Don Juan,* and whose epic resonances may echo in the *cri de coeur* of Saul Bellow's Henderson, finally means both "I fail to discover, anywhere," and "I fail to become, anyhow," a hero. But it also means we are made to encounter, instead of the lyrical epic of Wordsworth's *The Prelude,* another innovation taking the form of an epical elegy tinged with a mythical or translunary vision. As Haidée and the Tartar Khan and even Aurora Raby show, we may not realistically expect a relation of more than nostalgia with that high world, of love and sacrifice and "a depth of feeling to embrace / thoughts, boundless, deep, but silent too as Space." A shy leitmotif of elegy sets one of the amplitudes of *Don Juan.* The poem can make comedy of Gothic terror, as in the Black Friar episode. But Byron is not kidding when he says that he laughs in order not to weep. The realistic humanism the poem displays is in this sense an achievement, not a dubious compromise. The poem constitutes the only place, between the procrustean magnitudes of traditional heroism and the procrustean diminishments of industrialism and imperialism, where mortal individualism has any play. "Between two worlds," Byron anticipates Arnold in saying

man hov

'Twixt night and morn, upon the horizon's verge.
How little do we know that which we are!
How less what we may be! The eternal surge
Of time and tide rolls on, and bears afar
Our bubbles. …

To stay afloat is credit in itself, and in successive moments to defy the demon rum and deny a cannibalistic definition of human survival, and then to meet and mate Haidée constitute a life's achievement not to be sneered at. After this, of course, much is forgotten, even lost, and elegy supervenes on aspiration; but elegy, after all, is the tribute that mortality pays to the immortals of the erstwhile epic. And besides, it remains consolingly possible, with a sly shift of emphasis, "to laugh and make laugh."

The second point to focus on, in connection with the twofold pressure *Don Juan* exerts toward Man's showing his strength, moral or physical, and his showing in the field of idealism and heroism, concerns less the tone of the poem than Byron's apparent freedom from formal or conventional constraints within it. I'd like to suggest that every way he turns Byron manages to go in one direction. The way and the destination become, with each succeeding episode, increasingly difficult to sum up in a nutshell, but variations on the theme of physical and moral strength appear throughout. With this explicit theme, and with the narrator's infiltration into the poem's action, *Don Juan* becomes a generic hybrid of confession and satire, in epic guise. Confession and satire muffle each other, but both are based on a common preoccupation with the shortcomings of heroism. The play and the interplay of war and love, tyranny and individual fulfillment become the root concerns of the poem—its variety is tonal and modal, rather than substantial. Things and people do not stay long enough in the poem to change, it is true; instead they become one another, as war and love do in the person of the Empress Catherine, as Spanish, Turkish, Russian and English worlds become versions of one another, as love becomes the god of evil, as Donna Inez becomes Lambro becomes Gulbeyaz becomes Suwarrow becomes the Empress Catherine becomes Lady Adeline Amundeville, or as the fall becomes a matter of Newtonian physics and humbler physiology and sexual rhythm (see Canto IX, sts. xxii, vl, lv) as well as wry allusion and social fortune and undifferentiated theology. And linking and imaging all this Don Juan becomes a part of all he sees and encounters.

In light of this mutual presence of classifiably separate things in each other, we may see a principle of association or ramification within the surface spontaneity and versatility of *Don Juan.* In fact we may argue a principle of unity based on obsession: Byron keeps coming back to one issue in various guises. The idea of

obsession, startling though it may seem, does help to account for the reflexive repetitiousness of the poem, and may be necessary to account for any form of spontaneity, which after all expresses the unlabored capacity of a finite organism for response and action. One does most freely what one most fundamentally is bent to do. In literary terms we may see this also in Wordsworth's "spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" that are carefully cultivated and also strongly, independently resurgent.

But the psychology of spontaneity and the quality of *Don Juan* require that more than this be said. The recurrency of obsession comes out here without its stagnancy and arrest. We can identify a pattern of enclosures in the poem and see that Don Juan falls deeper and deeper into prison or rather a realization of prison; his position changes though his situation remains roughly similar from his mother's house to Julia's tumbling bedroom to the ship *Trinidada* to Haidée's cave and Haidée's luxurious bedroom and the slave ship and the harem. Even this cursory catalogue makes it clear that Byron does more than repeat a certain setting and situation; he explores its forms and implications, and makes it into an instrument for apprehending and elucidating a human motif.[11] In other words, as he goes back to it obsessively, he goes into it creatively; setting becomes an evolutionary symbol. Thus we can appreciate the irony of Juan's defying Gulbeyaz with his profession that love is for the free, and then literally fighting his way into the moral and physical subjection and exhaustion of the Empress Catherine's boudoir. The text moves from action to reflection to abstraction, though the protaganist may fail to keep pace.

In connection with this pattern of unfolding, enlarging, and altering identity in *Don Juan,* it should be of advantage to recall two cathedrals that figure prominently in the architectural symbolism of the romantic period: Wordsworth's Gothic Cathedral and Byron's St. Peter's Church. The metaphor of his entire work as a Gothic Cathedral conveys, beyond the immediate occasion of The Preface to *The Excursion* (1814), Wordsworth's conception of all things as part of one; this is the conception that makes beginnings so difficult for Wordsworth ("Who knows the individual hour in which / His habits were first sown, even as a seed …," when the mind, in "The words of Reason deeply weighed, / Hath no beginning"?). It also makes ends chancy and imprecise for Wordsworth; the contribution any part makes to the whole stands beyond dispute, but the vagueness or failure of every guide in *The Prelude* leaves every end in doubt and makes the poem nothing better than an exercise in frustrated teleology.

The metaphorization of St. Peter's Church in *Childe Harold* IV also serves to reveal, for the mind as well as for poetry, a process of indefinite epistemological development; like Zeno's traveller, one gets closer to a total comprehension of things met piecemeal, without ever quite getting there.[12] "Thou movest," Byron writes of the reverent visitor whose mind "Has grown colossal":

—but increasing with the advance,
Like climbing some great Alp, which still doth rise,
Deceived by its gigantic elegance;
Vastness which grows, but grows to harmonise—
All musical in its immensities;
Rich marbles, richer painting, shrines where flame
The lamps of gold, and haughty dome which vies
In air with Earth's chief structures, though their frame
Sits on the firm-set ground—and this the clouds must claim.

Thou seest not all; but piecemeal thou must break
To separate contemplation the great whole;
And as the ocean many bays will make,
That ask the eye—so here condense thy soul
To more immediate objects, and control
Thy thoughts until thy mind hath got by heart
Its eloquent proportions, and unroll
In mighty graduations, part by part,
The glory which at once upon thee did not dart,

```
Not by its fault—but thine. Our outward sense
Is but of gradual grasp: and as it is
That what we have of feeling most intense
Outstrips our faint expression; even so this
Outshining and o'erwhelming edifice
Fools our fond gaze, and greatest of the great
Defies at first our Nature's littleness,
Till, growing with its growth, we thus dilate
Our spirits to the size of that they contemplate.
```

It would seem fair to infer, on the strength of these two cathedral metaphors, that the character of infinity does not belong to the poem as physical object, but rather to the pursuit of the object—the world and our experience of it—which the poem embodies. And it is important to acknowledge the obverse of the ever-expanding circuit of Byron's interest, namely, his own awareness of the tremendous intricacy of what seems small. Such intricacy results in a kind of expansion inward; as Byron writes in “The Dream,” “in itself a thought, / A slumbering thought is capable of years, / And curdles a long life into one hour.” This principle of immense miniaturization is illustrated in *Don Juan,* Canto VIII, sts. lvi-lix, where Lascy and Juan reenact the Tower of Babel; Byron summarizes the episode as follows:

```
And therefore all we have related in
Two long octaves, pass'd in a little minute;
But in the same small minute, every sin
Contrived to get itself comprised within it.
The very cannon, deafen'd by the din,
Grew dumb, for you might almost hear a linnet,
As soon as thunder, 'midst the general noise
Of Human Nature's agonizing voice!
```

The passage has a severely cryptic quality, and is full of images yearning to be heard, like Juan or a linnet; but we may note that a cannon and an agonizing voice, though these are at top decibel, also fail to be heard, indicating a moral rather than an acoustical problem. The little minute contains more than every sin; it contains everything by implication, and it would seem that the poem gets larger, as by authorial commentary, not only to encompass a polyglot universe in a single aesthetic space, but also to enunciate the wealth of implication in that universe's single objects. The use of allusion, so prevalent in the poem, thus deserves special notice as a form of bringing various worlds, of time and thought and value, into concert around a given, ostensibly isolated moment.

The mode of development of *Don Juan*—“now and then narrating, / Now pondering”—clearly reinforces the techniques of turning obsession into a disciplined instrument of creative insight. The action themes of war and love consort with the contemplative motifs of skepticism and humanism. In short the poem is thinking its way through its action, through itself, fusing obsession and philosophy, incident and teleology. We should note that, after the adventitiousness of the shipwreck and arrival on Haidée's island, the sequence of incidents right up to the landing in England is very closely linked together, almost becoming a causal chain in the teeth of the casual emergency system that seems to prevail.

It is necessary to go beyond the patterning of moments and characters if we are to realize the full aesthetic discipline and shapeliness underlying the free play of *Don Juan.* There operates in the poem an idiocratic (or self-determining) action and rhythm, whereby it becomes remarkably consistent and lucid and weighty and significant in form. This action and rhythm may well derive from Byron's life, and to that extent may resemble a helpless or mechanically obsessive occurrence, but it is generalized and abstracted to meet extra-biographical, catholic needs, and so must be taken as a matter of artistic choice and deployment.

This is, of course, the action and rhythm that we recognize in all the major episodes of *Don Juan*; it first appears in the Juan-Julia episode, which I have accordingly signalized as prototypal, and it comprises five

main elements:

- 1) an authority figure (Donna Inez, Lambro, Gulbeyaz, the Empress Catherine, Lady Adeline Amundeville) who more or less directly contributes to the development of a profane or wrong action;
- 2) initial passivity or dependency on the protaganist's part, though he exerts a powerful attraction and possesses great potential energy;
- 3) a clandestine affair of love softly, almost inadvertently begun, and with strong hints of exaltation;
- 4) a realistic redefinition of that love, with a burst of violence and a threat to the protaganist's life;
- 5) The protaganist's renewed subjugation, to force rather than authority, and his ensuing exile, a period of reflection and evaluation.[13]

The elaboration of this idiocratic structure in *Don Juan* affords a sense of stability in the poem, but would be harmful if it implied any sort of stagnation. Rather the dynamism of the poem is invested in this structure, which grows increasingly subtle and reverberative and revelatory of the poem's values. Thus, for example, the exile from Haidée's island constitutes more of a spiritual loss than the initial exile from Spain, though Spain is technically home (the homelessness and nostalgia running through the poem are not geographical but spiritual); the superior value of Haidée's world to Julia's is manifest in Juan's naturally and nobly remembering Haidée's, as opposed to the fate of the missive with which Julia pursues him.

In short the contours, the textures, the values of the elements in the idiocratic structure of *Don Juan* significantly alter as we proceed. Perhaps the most elusive and most complicated instance occurs at the Russian court, which will repay a closer scrutiny. There is some justice in beginning at the end of Canto VIII, where Juan makes a vow "which," Byron emphasizes, "he kept," to shield the Moslem orphan, Leila. She, like Aurora to come, is one of the homeless in the text, but we may see more significance in the ways she calls Haidée back to mind; for, like Haideé's, Leila's entire world, her family and her very place of birth, have "perished." But she survives, and Juan, albeit purblindly, may be regarded here as preserving something which the poem at any rate associates with Haidée. It is an authentic act, but it continues to exist in the framework of Byron's earlier question: "What's this in one annihilated city?" The dominant energy resides with war, not compassion, and Juan approaches the Empress Catherine's court as a man capable of occasional good but, as Vergil says, intoxicated with blood.

It is ominous that Donna Inez reenters the poem here for the first and only time, to give her maternal sanction to the "maternal affection" the Empress Catherine bears Don Juan, just as she had earlier fostered Donna Julia's "platonic" affection for him. In fact the confusion of love and bad poetry and humor and war that exists in Catherine's soul (and which stands embodied in Juan artificially accoutred as "Love turned a Lieutenant of Artillery"), this confusion is compounded by the identification of the domestic and political power and by the disguise of raw impervious lust in the cloak of benevolence. A kind of metaphysical chaos is dissimulated by the splendor of the court and the recent victory, but its perversity finally appears in the very form of its disguise—if the Empress Catherine is maternal, she is the mother who consumes her own children, and consumes them incestuously. This, of course, focuses her in opposition to Haidée, the "mother" who saves Juan and whose dreams, however harrowing to herself, imply an infinite capacity for saving, if not giving, life. A further sign of chaos resides in the fact that when all is said and done, the Empress Catherine functions at once as Donna Inez, as Donna Julia, as as Don Alfonso—as instigator, paramour, and punisher in this escapade. The height of Juan's reputation becomes the height of confusion and, indeed, of degradation. It is not surprising that "he grew sick," in body and spirit. Catherine of course tries to save him, and we have the final irony and confusion of the entire episode, namely that the purported cure is designed to prolong the disease and may endanger his life. A gracious but effectual exile ensues.

Juan here reaches the nadir of his career. But there are good, or at least hopeful signs. Leila, with all the benevolence that she attracts, firmly frames the episode at the Russian court, and as she heads for England over land and sea with Juan a significant positive temper springs up in him. I have suggested above that the

exile scenes serve as intervals of reflection and evaluation. In each Juan has one main companion: Pedrillo, the tutor manqué; Johnson, the worldly-wise man whose wisdom is not *à propos* and whose skin is really saved by Juan, and now Leila. With Leila there is no uncertainty as to who is protecting whom. Juan, coming off his worst subjugation and most essential defeat in the poem, begins to recover himself as a magnanimous man. Clear and viable relationships begin to crystallize again, and even as the English scene looms ahead, wheeling like swords about his so-called "virgin face," it seems to me that in Aurora Raby he can find the three crucial relationships Comte says man bears to woman: that of veneration, as for a mother, of attachment, as for a wife, of benevolence, as for a child. Here is the relationship of wholeness that opposes the relationship of chaos we have seen in the case of the Empress Catherine. These relationships have partially existed, or perversely appeared before. Now, having gone through them, however imperfectly, and having reflected on them, however incidentally, he is in a position to commit himself and satisfy the soul of the man who cannot but "want a hero."

It is only by the structure of the poem, with its discovery of the critical value of obsession and of self-discipline in an unconventional spontaneity, that such a position has been reached.[14] And it is in turn what I have called the realistic humanism of the poem—a compound of plangent skepticism and sardonic merriment and undying dreams of human magnificence—that makes this position so hard to resolve. The poem falls somewhere between the picaresque and the *Bildungsroman,* and so, perhaps, Don Juan becomes, more even than Wordsworth, the romantic hero of everyday, whose occasions and whose aspirations lead him to a transcendental Haidée and Aurora, while yet his occasions and his impulses involve him with hoary Empresses who stand for old Glory and indiscriminate primitive modes of love.

Notes

1. See A. C. Bradley, "The Long Poem in the Age of Wordsworth," in *Oxford Lectures on Poetry* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1955), pp. 177-208.
2. Geoffrey H. Hartman deals tellingly with this matter of recognition in relation to poems as diverse as *The Prelude* and "Resolution and Independence," in his study of *Wordsworth's Poetry: 1787-1814* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale U. Press, 1964).
3. It is possible in theory that the poem, for all its activity, could betray a real aesthetic or conceptual impasse for Byron. But that kind of impasse, seen in *Christabel* or *The (First) Book of Urizen* or *Hyperion,* usually results in a suspension or abandonment of the text. *Prima facie* Byron's continuing with his magnum opus is a sign of viable substance.
4. From *'querer,'* to desire or love. The term is used in tauromachy to describe a position in the arena to which the bull repeatedly and as it were instictively returns.
5. Most critics of the poem take up the subject of its form. None to my knowledge has worked it out as I am attempting to do here, but it would be churlish and misleading not to cite the major critics who have contributed significantly to my responses:

    George M. Ridenour, *The Style of Don Juan* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale U. Press, 1960)

    P. G. Trueblood, *The Flowering of Byron's Genius: Studies in Don Juan* (1945; rpt. New York: Russell & Russell, 1962)

    Jerome J. McGann, *Fiery Dust: Byron's Poetical Development* (Chicago: U. of Chicago Press, 1968)

    Alvin B. Kernan, *The Plot of Satire* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale U. Press, 1965)

Leslie A. Marchand, *Byron's Poetry: A Critical Introduction* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1965)

Andrew Rutherford, *Byron: A Critical Study* (Stanford: Stanford U. Press, 1961)

Edward E. Bostetter, *The Romantic Ventriloquists* (Seattle: U. of Washington Press, 1963)

Truman Guy Steffan, *The Making of a Masterpiece,* vol. I of *A Variorum Edition of Byron's Don Juan* (Austin: U. of Texas Press, 1957)

M. K. Joseph, *Byron the Poet* (London, Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1964)

Ernest J. Lovell, Jr., "Irony and Image in *Don Juan,"* in *English Romantic Poets: Modern Essays in Criticism,* ed. M. H. Abrams (New York: Galaxy Books, 1960)

E. D. Hirsch, Jr., "Byron and the Terrestrial Paradise," in *From Sensibility to Romanticism,* ed. Frederick W. Hilles and Harold Bloom (New York: Oxford U. Press, 1965)

6. If there is an etymological pun here on "chewing again" (*re-morsus*), we may the better appreciate Juan's difficulty in stomaching this brute necessity of self-preservation.
7. Byron calls Lady Adeline "fatal," but it is the Duchess of Fitz-Fulke who proves so, insofar as she bodily stands in the way of his return to wholeness and innocence, on a mature footing with Aurora.
8. Even the Haidée episode, but there Byron is careful to shield Haidée from its severer implications, just as he shields her from the luxury of her surroundings and the corruption of her ancestry: she remains "as pure as Psyche ere she grew a wife," and if she is as stubborn as her father, her stubborness is devoted to preserving freedom and love, not curtailing them.
9. Haidée of course contains both heyday and high day. Aurora, the dawn goddess, may be repeated in the surname 'Raby' (ray be). The crucial thing, in any case, is to see that Aurora reminisces and also revises Haidée; she is herself a gem, while Haidée seems alien to the bejewelled state of her apartment. Aurora's power and perfection in the poem come from her escaping single definition and becoming an instance of genuine wholeness: she is not only dawn, and gem, but also budding flower. The gem of course picks up the dawn's light, while the dawn is analogous to the opening of the flower. For a more extended, biographical view of Aurora's name, the reader should consult Thomas Ashton, "Naming Byron's Aurora Raby," *English Language Notes,* 7 (1969), 114-120.
10. Andrew Rutherford, *Byron: A Critical Study* (Stanford: Stanford U. Press, 1961), p. 203.
11. In small compass, the snake image used of Haidée may be cited to illustrate the minuteness of the technique in the poem, and also perhaps to meet a difficulty in construing her character. She is at first a snake possessing venom and implying death, and later not a snake that loves a long and dreary length of life. It seems that the second image controls the application of the first. Byron makes the snake oppose itself, as a brief incandescent intensity and a dragging monotony are opposed. But both "snakes," in relation to Haidée, say the same thing: she is not long for this world. The images together make for a highly controlled effect and must be seen as drastically curtailing, if not eliminating, the negative associations we tend to have upon first encounter with the snake that "casts at once its venom and its strength."
12. But as Jerome J. McGann has privately observed for the benefit of this writer, the likeness between Wordsworth and Byron is not complete, as Wordsworth is "caught" by Gothic, Byron by Baroque architecture.
13. It is possible that the exile should be treated as a separate element; certainly the ship wreck episode and the War cantos, reminders of *The Odyssey* and *The Iliad,* are parallel in *Don Juan,* and the shipping to Turkey and to England may stand as lesser echoes of the exile theme, much as the harem

trio suggests the English trio of ladies.

14. The manipulation of the *ottava rima* stanza offers a concrete summary of the poem's joining of the modes of necessity and surprise. In itself the stanza is precise and invariable, but in effect in Byron's hands it proves disconcerting and treacherous (see, for further elaboration of this point, Michael G. Cooke: *The Blind Man Traces the Circle: On the Patterns and Philosophy of Byron's Poetry* [Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton U. Press, 1969]). It may be worth noting that *Don Juan* formally prepares for the maintenance of the long poem in the English tradition, with writers as various as Tennyson, Pound, Lowell and Ammons drawing on its resources.

Criticism: Bernard Blackstone (essay date 1975)

SOURCE: Blackstone, Bernard. "*Don Juan.*" In *Byron: A Survey,* pp. 287-347. London: Longman Group, 1975.

[*In the following excerpt, Blackstone examines various themes of* Don Juan, *including femininity and masculinity, sexuality, love, and power.*]

'THE SEXUAL GARMENTS SWEET'

Don Juan is outstanding among English longer poems for the great gallery of women characters which it exhibits; here the only possible comparison is with Shakespeare in his total *oeuvre.* Each is minutely and sympathetically displayed and discriminated with all the adroitness of a man who (as Byron said in riposte to a *Blackwood's* accusation of 'treating women harshly' in the poem) could honestly affirm: 'It may be so, but I have been their martyr. My whole life has been sacrificed *to* them and *by* them.' Thus the element of autobiography enters strongly into Byron's presentation: he is remembering his wife as he paints the portrait of Donna Inez, and the Spanish girls of the Pilgrimage form the models for his detailed study of Donna Julia in Canto I, while the Haidée of Cantos II and III draws on his recollections of the Maid of Athens and the mysterious 'Leila' of *The Giaour.* Gulbeyaz and Dudu in Canto VI come straight from his Turkish days, while Aurora and Adeline in the final Canto belong to the years of fame in London.

Yet even here, and from the outset, we are conscious that the poem is proceeding on the two levels of dream and waking. The women characters come from Byron's waking life, but in the poem they are conflated in a somnambulistic phantasmagoria; 'Weaving to Dreams the Sexual strife', in Blake's phrase. Indeed, Blake's 'For the Sexes: The Gates of Paradise' (engraved in 1793, with additions in 1818, the year of the writing of *Don Juan* I and II) forms a remarkably useful 'Key' to Byron's poem on its esoteric level. 'Mutual Forgiveness of each Vice'[1] is what Byron had asked from Annabella; Blake's designs of water, earth, air, all expressing entrapment, and the final design of fire where the liberation of man is achieved only in 'endless Strife', exactly convey Byron's situation at this time. Each of the remaining 'emblems' could be shown to have its relevance: I will here mention only No. 7, 'What are these? Alas! the Female Martyr, Is She also the Divine Image?', No. 8, 'My Son! my Son!', No. 10, 'Help! Help', and No. 16, 'I have said to the Worm: Thou art my mother & my sister.' This last emblem is expanded in the concluding 'The Keys of the Gates':

```
My Eternal Man set in Repose,
The Female from his darkness rose
And She found me beneath a Tree,
A Mandrake, & in her Veil hid me. …

When weary Man enters his Cave
He meets his Saviour in the Grave
Some find a Female Garment there,
And some a Male, woven with care,
Lest the Sexual Garments sweet
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Should grow a devouring Winding sheet,
One dies! Alas! the Living & Dead,
One is slain & One is fled. …

Thou'rt my Mother from the Womb,
Wife, Sister, Daughter, to the Tomb,
Weaving to Dreams the Sexual strife
And weeping over the Web of Life.
```

With almost uncanny relevance, ‘The Gates of Paradise’ epitomises Byron's total life pattern, from the parental conflicts of his birth to the solution ‘in endless Strife’ at Missolonghi; it also focuses the immediate dilemmas of 1816-19, with the mother-wife-sister-daughter agon paramount, as the letters and journals demonstrate.

This same complexity is present, if we look beneath the mocking, ‘realistic’ surface, in the opening stanzas of *Don Juan,* where Juan's mother, Donna Inez, is a compound of Byron's mother and wife, with some features derived from Lady Caroline Lamb and Claire Clairmont. So too, Donna Julia unites aspects of Teresa, of Augusta, of Lady Frances Wedderburn Webster, and of ‘Leila’. Exactly as in a dream, these real-life characters are moulded into strange patterns and flow bewilderingly into one another. These are the ‘Emanations’, as Blake would put it, of the masculine archetype or Zoa who is Juan, himself a split-off piece of the universal man adumbrated in Harold and brought to some kind of completion in Manfred, though the disruptive forces in Byron were from the beginning too powerful to allow a full integration.

In no respect is *Don Juan* more a reversal of *Childe Harold* than in its continuous presentation of the social order as a matriarchy. From the beginning Blake's ‘shadowy Female’ dominates the scene, and man, ‘Woman-born and Woman-nourish'd and Woman-educated & Woman-scorn'd’,[2] is scarcely more than wax in her hands. Seville is forcibly presented as a Garden, a garden ‘of oranges and women’; and it was probably not absent from Byron's mind that theologians have put forward the claim of the orange rather than the apple as the forbidden fruit within the latitude of the Garden of Eden. Be that as it may, we have in the Inez-Julia nexus a curious re-enactment of the Lilith-Eve myth, with Juan-José-Alfonso as the primeval Adam ‘lingering near his garden’ (clxxx) in baffled *cavalier-serventism* on his women. ‘Other echoes / Inhabit the garden’. Donna Inez is ‘a learned lady’ famed / For every branch of every science known … Her favourite science was the mathematical, … An all-in-all-sufficient self-director, … In short she was a walking calculation' (I, x-xvi): traits more masculine than feminine. Don José, on the other hand, is ‘a mortal of the careless kind … a man / Oft in the wrong, and never on his guard’ (xix-xxi), who is reputed to keep a mistress or two, and thus gives his wife the excuse for an inveterate campaign against him:

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… she had a devil of a spirit,
          And sometimes mixed up fancies with realities,
And let few opportunities escape
Of getting her liege lord into a scrape.
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(I, xx)

Like Annabella, Donna Inez calls on lawyers and physicians ‘to prove her loving lord was *mad*’; failing in this, ‘She next decided he was only *bad*’ (xxvii), and is starting proceedings for divorce when Don José obligingly dies (xxxii).

Juan, the only child of this ill-assorted pair, is very like his father in temperament—spirited, careless, generous, handsome:

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At six, I said, he was a charming child,
          At twelve he was a fine, but quiet boy;
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Although in infancy a little wild,
          They tamed him down amongst them: to destroy
His natural spirit not in vain they toiled,
          At least it seemed so …
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(I, l)

'They' are of course the women, who have taken Juan's education in hand after his father's death, and the possé of priests and schoolmasters with which Donna Inez surrounds him. Beside Donna Inez there is also Donna Julia:

```
Amongst her numerous acquaintance, all
          Selected for discretion and devotion,
There was the Donna Julia, whom to call
          Pretty were but to give a feeble notion
Of many charms in her as natural
          As sweetness to the flower, or salt to Ocean.
```

(I, lv)

The last line leads us cunningly from the artifice of 'acquaintance, all / Selected for discretion and devotion' (Donna Julia's public face) into the dangerous tracts of 'nature', the nature of a flower's sweetness and the ocean's salt (very different from the *sal Atticum* ascribed to Donna Inez in an earlier stanza). Byron is here setting up complexities which are to accompany Juan's progress throughout the poem. Julia's 'Oriental eye' bespeaks her Moorish origin:[3] at this point Byron links up his experiences at the two ends of the Mediterranean, and fuses in Julia a feminine archetype he is to reduce to its components through the long succession of the poem's heroines. Even Inez is not so monodic as she seems. There is the suggestion (lxvi) that she had sinned with Don Alfonso, Julia's husband, before her friend's marriage. The idea comes unexpectedly, and on the realistic level of the poem's reading is not only implausible but artistically disadvantageous; it is only on the dream level, where characters and motives flow so ambiguously one into the other, that Byron's unconscious and semi-conscious compulsions become apparent. Among these we may count his sense of outrage—

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Standing alone beside his desolate hearth,
          Where all his household gods lay shivered round
                    him
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(I, xxxvi)

—at what the 'good' women have done to him, with the concomitant thirst for revenge (expressed in many letters of this period); and also, and of deeper import, his 'metaphysical' motif of the relativity of all human affairs and qualities, which is the basic theme of the poem. Whether Donna Inez—or Mrs Byron, or Annabella—was ever actually unchaste is irrelevant to the inbuilt antitheses of human nature—just as whether a love is 'pure' or 'impure', selfish or unselfish, Uranian or Pandemic, is irrelevant to its essential guilt. For guilt, original sin, taints all human action and in no department more clearly than the sexual. This is a point I shall return to in discussing the Haidée episode, but it is well to have it in mind here.[4] 'What might have been and what has been / Point to one end, which is always present.'

Juan and Julia fall inevitably in love and the comic-erotic action of the poem is set vigorously in motion. The rest of Canto I is devoted to this pretty piece of adultery. I have no intention of 'telling the story' of *Don Juan* here; the poem which has been called 'the most readable long poem of the nineteenth century' deserves to be enjoyed in its plenitude, not in synopsis. On the novelistic level the Juan-Julia intrigue follows what we should expect of a plot based on the old legend already exploited in the medieval play *El Atheista Fulminato,*

in *El Burlador de Sevilla y Combidado de Piedra* of Gabriel Tellez in the early seventeenth century, in Molière's *Don Juan; ou, Le Festin de Pierre,* and, of course, in Mozart's opera. But from the very opening of Byron's poem some striking differences become apparent. His Juan is not a gay philanderer or sexual athlete. Far from being the exploiter of feminine weakness, young Juan is the victim of the various women who cross his path.[5] It is Julia who seduces Juan. Juan's sexual awakening at the age of sixteen, and Julia's growing attraction towards him, her struggles with her own conscience, and final capitulation—all this is drawn with great skill and verve, and the final scene, where Don Alfonso bursts into Julia's bedroom and Juan's presence is ultimately discovered, is richly comic. The undertone of existential irony, however, persists: Juan is not only the victim, but the despised victim, despised particularly by the rough common sense of Julia's maid Antonia. For Antonia, Juan is 'this pretty gentleman', 'the urchin', and his 'half-girlish face' is not worth losing a life or a place for (clxx-clxxi). Juan's first place of concealment is the bed itself, where he lies under Julia and Antonia like a piece of smuggled merchandise:

He had been hid—I don't pretend to say
          How, nor can I indeed describe the where—
Young, slender, and packed easily, he lay,
          No doubt, in little compass, round or square;
But pity him I neither must nor may
          His suffocation by that pretty pair.

(I, clxvi)

This double suffocation, by sense and sensibility, is relevant to the dual stresses to which Juan is exposed in the whole course of the poem: whenever he finds himself in a position to cope adequately with one, he is outflanked by the other. *Don Juan* is thus, among so many other things, a dramatic enactment of Pascal's and Pope's scenario of man on 'this isthmus of a middle state' not simply in so far as he is 'darkly wise and rudely great' but also in the sense that the dark wisdom is further obscured by the conflicting claims of passion and judgement.

This initial bedroom scene is a perfect paradigm of Juan's progress from one impasse to another in his futile gestures towards freedom. Juan is bundled from the bed, his first refuge, into the closet, his second.[6] His position is consistently undignified and, indeed, humiliating. 'I want a hero …', so Byron began his poem; if, in reading that first stanza, we have taken 'want' in its sense of 'wish for', we may now, looking back, accept it rather in the sense of 'lack', 'haven't got', and realise that this is a lack which Byron has no intention of supplying. In stanzas ii to iv he has given a mock-Miltonic roster of heroic names, with the rider:

I conde

                    But can't find any in the present age
Fit for my poem (that is, for my new one);(7)
So, as I said, I'll take my friend Don Juan.

(I, v)

The nineteenth century is an unheroic age, Byron is saying; let us accept it as that, and in doing so let us ask ourselves whether there have been, after all, any heroic ages? whether the basic condition of man does not debar him from heroism, as it does from beauty, from love and from ultimate significance. The point is Johnson's, in *The Vanity of Human Wishes,* in *The Rambler,* and in *Rasselas.*

Juan's 'only garment' is torn off in the scuffle with Alfonso and he flees naked through the night to his mother's house, leaving confusion and disaster behind him. The sequel, over which Byron passes with lightning speed which however does not exclude a dig at British scandalmongering—

The pleasant scandal which arose next day,

The nine days' wonder which was brought to light,
And how Alfonso sued for a divorce,
Were in the English newspapers, of course.

(I, clxxxviii)

—ends with Julia entering a convent and Juan packed overseas ‘by the advice of some old ladies’ (cxc). The famous letter which Julia writes from her convent cell (a contemporary critic, Colton, found it ‘quite equal, in its way, to the celebrated epistle of Eloisa’) is rich in ambiguities. Among the most quoted lines in Byron are ‘“Man's love is of man's life a thing apart, / 'Tis woman's whole existence …”’ (cxciv) and the quotation is usually made with a compassionate sigh for poor woman. In the context of *Don Juan* such an obsession reveals itself as a vampire threat[8] to the whole structure of masculine, rational values painstakingly built up through the civilised centuries; it is the amorphous, clinging sexual-familial swamp to which Blake gives the name of ‘storgous’ in the Symbolic Books. ‘“You will proceed in pleasure, and in pride, / Beloved and loving many …”’ Julia goes on, providing exquisite dramatic irony for the reader who is reading *Don Juan* for the second or twentieth time:

‘My heart is feminine, nor can forget—
To all, except one image, madly blind.’

(I, cxcvi)

It is this madness, this blindness, which constitutes the vampirish essence of *storgè.* Eliot's contrasting ‘Love is itself unmoving, / Only the cause and end of movement, / Timeless, and undesiring’ returns us to the ethos of the Turkish Tales.

‘IN TIME'S OCEAN FALLING DROWN'D’

From the cloyingly feminine world of Seville Juan is launched, in Canto II, into the harshly masculine world of the *Trinidada,* the shipwreck, and the horrors of thirst and cannibalism in an open boat at sea. It is noteworthy that *Don Juan* progresses by means of these stark horizontal antitheses. We miss the smooth modulations of *Childe Harold,* which are largely mediated through an architectural imagery of which *Don Juan* has virtually nothing. This is an *unstructured* world, amorphous in the grip of forces beyond rational control. The planned contours of the Pilgrimage are replaced by erratic currents. If we read *Don Juan,* as I think we are bound to do, in what Blake would have called ‘its diabolical sense’, linking up the events of Byron's life, the references of his letters, the threads which stretch backwards and forwards from his other works, to the plot, the characters and the incidental disquisitions of this his latest poem, we cannot but see in it the culmination of that process of fragmentation which I have tried to trace in the Tales and the dramas. The same scurry from the circumference to the centre of the circle of fire is apparent in these two opening cantos of *Don Juan.* From the circumference—the Garden, and mostly the moonlit garden, of Seville—we retreat to the fiery centre of the longboat becalmed under its subtropic sun. The situation is Ancient Marinerish, but with a farcical dimension unknown to Coleridge. With the byplay about who is to eat whom we return to that ‘theatre of the absurd’ already noted in *The Deformed Transformed.* Agony and death, like love, have to be deprived of their dignity if ‘reality’ is to be preserved. In terms of our original love-wisdom-power syndrome, we pass in Canto II from the sphere of predatory love to that of predatory power, both absolute non-values undermining the basis of civilised existence.

Existence for Byron, as for Blake—‘Life feeds on life’—is very much a matter of eating and being eaten. When the traditional sanctions of wisdom are removed—and there is no wisdom in *Don Juan*—we are reduced to the mouth and the vulva.[9] We know how much Byron objected to seeing his wife eating, and while this may have something to do with his own horror of obesity and recollections of his mother's gormandising, there were probably moments at which Byron saw himself as an homunculus between the steady munch,

munch of Annabella's upper and lower jaws.[10] This is Byron eaten: Byron eating is Don Juan in his progress from Seville to Norman Abbey. Seville is ‘famous for oranges and women’, and Juan begins his career there: the rest of the poem is a tuck-shop spree. In reverting to the schoolboy we revert to the Billy Bunter syndrome. It is all cleverly camouflaged (with the usual Byronic loopholes, so that the poet can riposte ‘But I gave you the clue’ if we guess right) but we are not deceived: the promised postal order has failed to arrive, the fatal compensation (financed on borrowed cash from Bob Cherry) is near at hand.[11] Don Juan's attitude throughout the poem is that of the compulsive eater, the eternal enemy of the slim, aesthetic Byron.[12] Where Harold had toiled his way along the hard track of the pilgrimage of self-knowledge, the none-too-intelligent Don eats his way through the segments of his orange to its non-existent centre. This explains the impression *Don Juan* gives us of being a series of segments, in that there is no true progression, no continued development, only a catenation of episodes. We begin with the womb situation, the interior point of the segment, in the Seville Inez-Julia imbroglio. From this we swing violently through the power-eating horrors of the shipwreck with its enforced human contacts to the idyllic solitude of the Aegean island—where we are back again at the centre of our next segment with Haidée and her maid Zoé, back in the love-eating complexities of a private banquet which inevitably latches on to the public complexities of the current Turk-Greek power-eating situation—and off we go again with Juan to the new horrors of the Seraglio and of Ismail!

Juan and Julia, Juan and Haidée, are love-eaters: but Byron is concerned to show us, within the diagrams of the poem, that without wisdom love cannot be separated from the corruptions of power (or powerlessness). Remember that within his own private diagram Byron had sought to attain that wisdom, first through his immersion in the Islamic East, and second in his attachment to the ‘wise woman’ Annabella. He knew that a simple withdrawal to ‘solitude’, the island dream, solves nothing for a man of his kind, or for any man of energy and intelligence: you become a vegetable or break out into violence, Blake's ‘endless strife’. The succumbing to the Venetian love dream was a springboard for the Missolonghian catastrophe. Even physiologically, the damages inflicted by Byron on his constitution in those years, the syphilitic self-eating, the sword outwearing its sheath, determined the fatal outcome of his fever. Without wisdom, the *tertium quid,* all the magnificence of ‘sincerity and strength’ which Swinburne divined in Byron availed him nothing: and of course this he had realised from the beginning. It is the whole point of the ‘pilgrimage’ of *Childe Harold.* The Greek adventure of 1823 was to be Byron's last cast for self-synthesis: ‘the release from action and suffering, release from the inner / And the outer compulsion’.

Meanwhile, the Greek adventure of Don Juan is a further penetration into the sensual whirlpool. A tautened, cadaverous Juan (otherwise strangely unaffected by the horrors he has gone through) is washed up on the shores of an island in the Cyclades. Have we finished with Julia? Apparently: but remember her letter, ‘Its seal a sun-flower: “*Elle vous suit partout*”’ (cxcviii). He may escape from the embraces of the sea, but never from ‘the ocean Woman’. (‘Will the sunflower turn to us, will the clematis / Stray down, bend to us; tendril and spray / Clutch and cling?’) The sea enters *Don Juan* with Canto II and remains an important protagonist up to the end of Canto VI. A major element in *Childe Harold* II and IV and the Turkish Tales, it is largely absent from the dramas and the Italian poems. As the creative-devouring symbol of the eternal feminine, its presence in the first half of *Don Juan* is highly significant in establishing the work's main coordinates. In swinging from the garden of Seville into the ‘murderous innocence of the sea’ we pass from the theme of eating to that of being eaten, from dream into nightmare. The role of the sea as grim mother, with Juan ‘rocked in the cradle of the deep’ to a sleep without waking, is emphasised in the storm's lullaby—

          The high wind made the treble, and as bass
The hoarse harsh waves kept time …

(II, xxxiv)

and the succeeding calm which

```
Lulled them like turtles sleeping on the blue
          Of Ocean …
```

(II, lxviii)

(destined to be eaten, if caught). Juan's tutor, Pedrillo, is quietly bled to death, and the surgeon drinks 'from the fast-flowing veins', a vampire touch which is to be curiously paralleled in Haidée's maternal tending of Juan. When at last they approach land,

```
Famine—despair—cold—thirst and heat, had done
          Their work on them by turns, and thinned them to
Such things a mother had not known her son
          Amidst the skeletons of that gaunt crew.
```

(II, cii)

The shore is rocky, and its dangers unknown, but

```
Lovely seemed any object that should sweep
Away the vast—salt—dread—eternal Deep.
```

(II, ciii)

In their haste to get on shore, the four remaining occupants of the long-boat overset her, and only Juan, a skilled swimmer, survives:

```
          He buoyed his boyish limbs, and strove to ply
With the quick wave
```

(II, cvi)

and with the aid of an oar, that 'piece of wood of small value' which here plays the part of the Ark,[13] succeeds in reaching the shore.

```
There, breathless, with his digging nails he clung
          Fast to the sand, lest the returning wave,
From whose reluctant roar his life he wrung,
          Should suck him back to her insatiate grave:
And there he lay, full length, where he was flung.
          Before the entrance of a cliff-worn cave,
With just enough of life to feel its pain,
And deem that it was saved, perhaps, in vain.
```

(II, cviii)

And there, in front of the cave, he loses consciousness.

'WEAVING TO DREAMS THE SEXUAL STRIFE'

The situation is close to that of *The Tempest.* The Christian atmosphere, modulating guilt, prayer and forgiveness, of Shakespeare's final masterpiece has been often noted: it is here too in *Don Juan,* but with unShakespearean undertones of irony. Juan, who is Everyman, is also the crucified Christ. The transition from Old Testament imagery—the Ark, the dove, the rainbow—to New Testament is subtly made through a pair of Pietà-like images: the first, while Juan is still in the embrace of the grim mother, has been already noted (cii):

‘the skeletons of that gaunt crew’ brings Michelangelo's Christ irresistibly to mind. This design is now reproduced at the entrance of the cave. When Juan recovers consciousness, he sees ‘A lovely female face of seventeen’:

```
'Twas bending close o'er his, and the small mouth
          Seemed almost prying into his for breath.
```

(II, cxiii)

Haidée—‘the maid, or whatsoe'er / She was’—feeds him, watching him ‘like a mother’ (clviii). In his sleep he lies ‘Hushed as the babe upon its mother's breast’ (cxlviii); the next stanza brings in a reference to ‘the sweet portraits of the Virgin Mary’, and a much later stanza culminates the irony with an adaptation from Sappho:

```
Oh, Hesperus! thou bringest all good things—
          Home to the weary, to the hungry cheer,
To the young bird the parent's brooding wings,
          The welcome stall to the o'erlaboured steer;
Whate'er of peace about our hearthstone clings,
          Whate'er our household gods protect of dear,
Are gathered round us by thy look of rest;
Thou bring'st the child, too, to the mother's breast.
```

(III, cvii)

Throughout the Haidée idyll Juan is consistently presented as a child. In swimming to shore, ‘he buoyed his boyish limbs’; in the cave he ‘slept like a top’ (a childhood phrase), ‘like an infant’ (cvi, cxxxiv, cxliii): there is, in short, a return to boyhood for Juan, what I have called a regression to the central point of the fruit's segment. Haidée too is presented as very young but there is in her the mysterious essence of feminine wisdom which is, in one of its aspects, guile, and in the deepest recesses of its being, *storgè,* a force ‘madly blind’.

As I have suggested in an earlier discussion of the Haidée episode, the love of Juan and Haidée is both innocent and guilty. It is innocent in its naturalness, its self-giving; but it is guilty in that it partakes of the primal guilt, the original sin, the Fall. Byron and Blake stand out amongst the Romantics in their profound conviction of this primal flaw in the nature of man: it is a ‘pessimism’ which contributed to Byron's downgrading by the optimistic Victorians, but as decade after decade of our twentieth century passes it becomes increasingly plausible that somehow, somewhere, something went wrong in the existential drama. A false step was taken, a wrong corner turned. This is no place for theological discussion, and it matters little along which lines we care to interpret the great myth of the Fall—it need by no means be along Judaeo-Christian lines—but what does matter for our understanding of Byron is our recognition of the central place of this doctrine in his thinking. His letters and journals are full of it, and so is his verse. Long before Kafka Byron sees life as a trial, a lawsuit in which it is irrelevant whether the defendant knows or does not know what he is accused of: he is guilty by virtue of existing.

Blake's ‘For the Sexes: the Gates of Paradise’ may well continue to be our ‘key’ to the Haidée episode of *Don Juan.* Here indeed we have the sleeping ‘universal man’ in his cave, ‘Weaving to dreams the sexual strife’. Dragging Juan into her cave, Haidée ‘rescues’ him as Julia had ‘protected’ him in the depths of her bed and the straitjacket of her ‘closet’. The Haidée episode abounds in cave scenes, curiously linked to dreams and nightmares. The sea beats and washes around the caves, which are at once natural and nonnatural, a Fall architecture of a ruined world:

```
And thus they wandered forth, and hand in hand,
          Over the shining pebbles and the shells,
Gliding along the smooth and hardened sand,
```

```
          And in the worn and wild receptacles
Worked by the storms, yet worked as it were planned
          In hollow halls, with sparry roofs and cells,
They turned to rest; and, each clasped by an arm,
Yielded to the deep Twilight's purple charm.
```

(II, clxxxiv)

Here, Byron's Aegean experiences of 1809-11 and his pitying sense of human destiny and the fragility of human happiness are combined. It is in the close weaving of such a wealth of apparently disparate material and tones that Byron achieves a density of utterance surpassing that of any of his contemporaries, with the exception of Blake.

The Haidée dream begins when Juan wakes out of the exposure of his shipwreck nightmare into the cosy protection of ‘the lady of the cave’. He is her ‘sea-treasure’, her ‘ocean-wreck’. The phrases carry a number of suggestions which I have discussed in that earlier essay: to those I will here add a new one, that of smuggling and ‘wrecking’. Juan is salvage; is he also perhaps the fated victim of the kind of moth-to-candle attraction, which the Cornish seaboard villagers exercised with lamp and beacon to draw the storm-tost ships on to their murderous coasts?[14] In this reading, the witch or vampire aspect of Haidée—‘the maid, or whatsoe'er she was … the small mouth … her eyes / Were black as death’,

```
Forth from its raven fringe the full glance flies,
          Ne'er with such force the swiftest arrow flew;
'Tis as the snake late coiled, who pours his length,
And hurls at once his venom and his strength(15)
```

(II, cxiii-cxvii)

takes on an added dimension of menace, as though the beacon guilt-innocence in Haidée has called to the corresponding innocence-guilt of Juan across the waste of waters. Certainly Juan is stowed in the cave as contraband.

The coastguard turns up in the shape of Haidée's ‘piratical papa’, Lambro. The name means ‘shining’, and his coming throws a fierce light on the whole dream situation. Ironically he is himself a smuggler and slave-dealer, plying among the islands for merchandise to sell to the Turks. This is a Byronic existential complication: he arrives on the scene just as the family poet, himself ‘a sad trimmer’,[16] sings the famous ‘Isles of Greece’ song. We are in a world not of make-believe but of hedgings, of provisional commitments and rhetorical declarations in which a love so childlike as that of Juan and Haidée has no chance to survive. Their world is a dream world precisely because it is the natural world. In the realm of artifice which has been man's habitat since the Fall, there is no room for simple passion or childlike trust.

```
They should have lived together deep in woods,
          Unseen as sings the nightingale; they were
Unfit to mix in these thick solitudes
          Called social, haunts of Hate, and Vice, and Care;
How lonely every freeborn creature broods!
          The sweetest song-birds nestle in a pair;
The eagle soars alone; the gull and crow
Flock o'er their carrion, just like men below.
```

(IV, xxviii)

The natural is the abnormal. ‘Here is a place of disaffection / Time before and time after / In a dim light. …’ In human society, only the artificial can survive. Lambro is a curious blend of the natural and the artificial.

Byron describes him as ‘an old man, who lived upon the water’—an Old Man of the Sea, then—at a very early point in the episode (II, cxxiv). With subtle touches here and there Byron prepares us for his coming over three Cantos—he is ‘a fisher … of men, / Like Peter the Apostle’ (II, cxxvi), Haidée's ‘piratical papa, … a sea-attorney … the best of fathers … the good old gentleman’ (III, xiii-xv), and finally ‘a dark eye … fixed upon the pair’ as Haidée and Juan wake from their last sleep together (IV, xxxv). A remarkable conflation of archetypes is achieved here: the fisher-king, Ulysses, God the Father: an adult, male intrusion into the female-orientated, childhood world of the lovers.

Juan and Haidée wake up to that remorseless eye from a sleep in which Haidée has a nightmare. The irony of the ‘Oh, Hesperus!’ stanza lies in its immediately preceding this nightmare and the living nightmare of the homecoming of Lambro. Haidée's dream reaches out into the past, into Juan's shipwreck, his near-death, and the cave scene which followed it, and into the future, into the homecoming of her piratical papa. A good deal of Byron's own 1813 nightmares seemed mixed up in it too. ‘I awoke from a dream!—well! and have not others dreamed?’, he had written in his Journal on 23 November, ‘—Such a dream!—but she did not overtake me. I wish the dead would rest, however. Ugh! how my blood chilled,—and I could not wake. … I do not like this dream.’ Haidée's nightmare runs:

```
She dreamed of being alone on the sea-shore,
          Chained to a rock; she knew not how, but stir
She could not from the spot, and the loud roar
          Grew, and each wave rose roughly, threatening her;
And o'er her upper lip they seemed to pour,
          Until she sobbed for breath, and soon they were
Foaming o'er her lone head, so fierce and high—
Each broke to drown her, yet she could not die.
```

(IV, xxxi)

This is dream identification: Haidée enacts her lover's ordeal as he struggled for life before she reached him.

```
Anon—she was released, and then she strayed
          O'er the sharp shingles with her bleeding feet,
And stumbled almost every step she made;
          And something rolled before her in a sheet,
Which she must still pursue howe'er afraid:
          'Twas white and indistinct, nor stopped to meet
Her glance nor grasp, for still she gazed and grasped,
And ran, but it escaped her as she clasped.
```

(IV, xxxii)

Here we have a mixture of Byron's 1813 dream with an inversion of the blissful ‘wandering forth … Over the shining pebbles and the shells’ quoted on p. 305 above. One suspects that Byron has been deeply involved in some real life situation which provides the imagery here. The ‘something rolled before her in a sheet’ seems to present the 1813 ‘she did not overtake me’ in nightmare reverse: the shudder is worthy of M. R. James, as the final lines of the episode, ‘the sea dirges low / Rang in her sad ears like a mermaid's song’ bring to mind T. S. Eliot's waking to reality by human voices from the chambers of the sea.

‘ONE DIES! ALAS! THE LIVING AND DEAD!’

The harsh masculine world which Lambro brings into the epicene fantasy of the first six cantos of *Don Juan* gradually gains the ascendancy as we move away from the sea to the warlike foci of Central Europe and the frozen banks of the Volga. In terms of this present study, it is a matter of the final, or *almost* final, triumph of power over both wisdom and love. This would not be so disastrous for Byron as a writer if he could have

gathered the theme of power to himself, if he were celebrating some exercise of his own power, or of some force with which he could identify himself. But it is, alas! nothing but naked, irrational power. Naked, irrational love, in the first four cantos, had been a difficult theme enough, though Byron manages it with aplomb; but it has its deep creative as well as its deep destructive sides. Naked power is nothing but destructive, and the time has long gone by when Byron could idealise Napoleon or Caesar. His letters and journals show his disillusion growing towards the end of 1819—about love, politics, Europe itself ('an outworn portion of the globe') and he even contemplates emigrating to South America. As usual, he is fighting on a number of fronts: with Murray and his 'committee' for the non-gelding of *Don Juan* ('Don Juan shall be an entire horse, or none', letter of 19 January to Hobhouse and Kinnaird), with Count Guiccioli for the possession of Teresa (letter of 26 July to Augusta), with Teresa for the possession of his spiritual independence (letter of 23 August to Hobhouse, quoted above, p. 290), with Augusta for her continued affection, in one of the most passionate of his letters (17 May):

> They say absence destroys weak passions—and confirms strong ones—Alas! *mine* for you is the union of all passions and of all affections—Has strengthened itself but will destroy me—I do not speak of *physical* destruction—for I have endured and can endure much—but of the annihilation of all thoughts, feelings or hopes.

Yet in the midst of this despondency he can defend the antitheses of *Don Juan* with all his old verve and wicked wit:

> … I will answer your friend C[ohen], who objects to the quick succession of fun and gravity, as if in that case the gravity did not (in intention, at least) heighten the fun. His metaphor is, that 'we are never scorched and drenched at the same time'. Blessings on his experience! Ask him these questions about 'scorching and drenching'. Did he never play at Cricket, or walk a mile in hot weather? Did he never spill a dish of tea over his testicles in handling the cup to his charmer, to the great shame of his nankeen breeches? Did he never swim in the sea at Noonday with the Sun in his eyes and on his head, which all the foam of Ocean could not cool? Did he never draw his foot out of a tub of too hot water, damning his eyes and his valet's? Did he never inject for a Gonorrhea? or make water through an ulcerated Urethra? Was he ever in a Turkish bath, that marble paradise of sherbet and Sodomy? Was he ever in a cauldron of boiling oil, like St John, or in the sulphureous waves of hell … ?

(Letter of 12 August to Murray.)

There is, finally, the fight for Italian freedom with which he is trying to identify himself by supporting the Carbonari (a power struggle, then, with which he *can* feel himself in sympathy, though he has no personal ambitions) but here again he is badly let down by the conspirators' apathy or timidity.

The transition from the sensuous-sentimental reaches of Haidée's island to the horrific power struggle of the siege of Ismail is brilliantly managed. The idyll begins and ends with a feast—the fried eggs, fruit and honey of the initial cave scene, and the 'pilaus and meats of all sorts … and flasks of Samian and of Chian wine' of the quasinuptial banquet in Lambro's mansion. The theme is Homeric, and this final scene of joy is suffused with an Homeric gusto. But food implies killing, life is consequent on death, Haidée has dared to bring Juan out of his cave into her home because of a report that her father is dead. But Lambro is very much alive, and in the house, though his presence is unmarked. Death, that 'gaunt Gourmand' (XV, ix), is about to resume his sport with Juan. But first he and Haidée are allowed to sleep, in unsuspecting happiness, when the banquet is over and the guests have departed. It is in this sleep that Haidée has her nightmare, and from it that she and Juan wake up to the confrontation with her father.

The scene of somnolent, luxurious delight immediately explodes into violence. Juan resists, and is wounded and overcome by twenty of Lambro's men. Haidée suffers a cerebral haemorrhage, and dies within a fortnight. That she is with child (IV, lxx) is not merely an added touch of pathos, but a corollary of the Fall syndrome; the child 'might / Have dawned a fair and sinless child of sin' (or, as the MS reading runs, 'a child of beauty, though of sin', which I think is nearer to Byron's thought) but Destiny forbids. Meanwhile Juan resumes his career as human merchandise. Lambro's sailors rush him down to shore immediately after the fight, 'and under hatches, / They stowed him, with strict order to the watches' (IV, 1). Note how his progress is relentlessly from trap to trap: Bed, closet, boat, cave, mansion, ship, slave-market, Seraglio, bed again. The journey to Constantinople is richly comic. Juan, now a slave, gazes out from the ship on 'the shores of Ilion' where the mounds still marking 'many a hero's grave' meet his eye. (The irony requires no emphasis.) His fellow-slaves are a troupe of Italian opera singers, sold to Lambro by their own impresario while *en route* to an engagement in Sicily. Byron here draws on his Italian experiences as in his description of the Troad he draws upon his old Levantine pilgrimage. With jokes about *castrati,* prima donnas, pretty lads bursting with conceit, and the buffo Raucocanti's boundless egotism, even in chains, the point of impotence is pressed home. As they approach the Sublime Porte, Raucocanti is chained to his most hated rival, the tenor, and Juan is fettered to 'a Bacchante blooming visage', a foretaste of the enforced amours of his next avatar.

The stanzas on fame which are intercalated into the narrative at this point (IV, xcvii-cxii) bring the theme of power home to Byron in a personal sense. The discussion is goodhumoured, ranging through Byron's ample gamut of tones, first mocking:

the publisher declares, in
Through needles' eyes it easier for the camel is
To pass, than these two cantos into families

(IV, xcvii)

—then knuckle-rapping:

[I] recollect the time when all this cant
Would have provoked remarks—which now it shan't

(IV, xcviii)

—then pathetic:

Whether my verse's fame be doomed to cease,
While the right hand which wrote it still is able,
Or of some centuries to take a lease;
The grass upon my grave will grow as long,
And sigh to midnight winds, but not to song

(IV, xcix)

—then judicial:

And so great names are nothing more than nominal,
And love of Glory's but an airy lust,
Too often in its fury overcoming all
Who would as 't were identify their dust
From out the wide destruction, which, entombing all,
Leaves nothing till 'the coming of the just'—
Save change: I've stood upon Achilles' tomb,
And heard Troy doubted; Time will doubt of Rome

(IV, ci)

—then scabrously realistic, in its picture of the monument to De Foix:

```
A broken pillar, not uncouthly hewn,
          But which Neglect is hastening to destroy,
Records Ravenna's carnage on its face,
While weeds and ordure rankle round the base
```

(IV, ciii)

—with a return to the personal in what is the most powerful apologia Byron ever made for his life and art:

```
If in the course of such a life as was
                    At once adventurous and contemplative,
Men who partake all passions as they pass,
          Acquire the deep and bitter power to give
Their images again as in a glass,
          And in such colours that they seem to live;
You may do right forbidding them to show 'em,
But spoil (I think) a very pretty poem.
```

(IV, cvii)

The theme of the first Act of *Don Juan* is eating and being eaten; that of the second is buying and selling.[17] Exposed for sale in the Istanbul slave-market, Juan finds himself at the side of an Englishman, a soldier of fortune named Johnson,

```
          A man of thirty, rather stout and hale,
With resolution in his dark grey eye,
```

(V, x)

who treats Juan, as they wait to be bought, to an instructive discourse. He commiserates Juan's sorrow at the loss of Haidée and freedom, but reminds him subtly that his love for Haidée was itself a species of slavery, among the many which life brings.

```
'Love's the first net which spreads its deadly mesh;
          Ambition, Avarice, Vengeance, Glory, glue
The glittering lime-twigs of our latter days,
Where still we flutter on for pence or praise.'
```

(V, xxii)

'For pence or praise' effects a modulation from the trap motif to that of purchase; but Byron is not content to leave the transition there, he brings in the theme of eating as well. The merchant, who has sold Juan and Johnson to the black eunuch, goes home to dine. 'I wonder if his appetite was good?', Byron muses: does conscience ever ask him the 'curious sort of question … how far we should / Sell flesh and blood' (V, xxx).

```
I think with Alexander, that the act
          Of eating, with another act or two,
Makes us feel our mortality in fact
          Redoubled …
```

(V, xxxii)

What John Johnson, a ‘rough moralist’ like his great namesake (whom Byron so much admired), is in fact suggesting, is a connection of Juan's pleasant life of love and feasting on Haidée's island with its origins in Lambro's slave dealing: and, beyond this, with the mercantile laws which govern all human intercourse:

```
          'Tis pleasant purchasing our fellow-creatures;
And all are to be sold, if you consider
          Their passions, and are dext'rous; some by features
Are bought up, others by a warlike leader,
          Some by a place—as tend their years or natures:
The most by ready cash—but all have prices,
From crowns to kicks, according to their vices.
```

(V, xxvii)

The stanza sums up the buying-selling episodes of the succeeding action: the Sultana, herself a buyer, is nevertheless bought by Juan's ‘features’, while Juan is later bought by the leaders Lascy and Souvaroff, and by the ‘place’ offered him in exchange for his sexual services by the Empress Catherine.

Thus the Seraglio episode, coming as it does at the exact centre of the poem as we have it, forms a species of knot or vortex into which all the themes of the poem, past and future, are tightly woven. Byron likes this recapitulation technique: he employs it again in the Norman Abbey sequences at the end of the poem.[18] The palace is a labyrinthine combination of all the earlier and later traps, a concatenation of caverns, corridors, closets, beds, fortresses, prisons; it can even be seen as a slave-ship, riding high over the Golden Horn; hemmed in by its cypresses, it is also a tomb. The first thing Juan senses is its inhumanity, its deathlike solitude. We remember that the claustrophobic Venetian plays are being written *pari passu* with Cantos IV, V and VI. The ‘strange firefly’ caught in the ‘enormous spider's net’ in *The Two Foscari* might stand for Juan entangled in the Seraglio love-power complexities. He is here, emphatically, the love-victim; his very masculinity is threatened when the eunuch Baba dresses him in female garments and menaces him with castration (V, lxxv). The Seraglio is a Lesbian world, in which Juan's hermaphroditism offers a mild titillation to Gulbeyaz' sexual palate. The ‘gigantic portal’ guarding her chamber is the sexual organ itself, drawing him in as spilt spermatozoon, a dribble from the rent island intercourse: individuality is lost in the ‘devouring winding sheet’ of ‘the Sexual Garments’.

```
Some find a Female Garment there,
And some a Male, woven with care.
```

The sexual strife reaches its climax in the ‘address to the throne’ stanzas of Canto IX, the apotheosis of the vulva: a comic extrapolation which I leave for later scrutiny in a survey of the total ‘love’ theme in *Don Juan.*

.....

‘A DEVOURING WINDING SHEET’

Love narrows drastically to sex in the later reaches of *Don Juan.*[19] And it is cold, calculated sex, orientated towards petty motifs of power and status, disguising itself under the various masks of sensibility, prudence, idealism and benevolence. The unbridled sexual voracity of Catherine holds a certain savage grandeur; but the English cantos introduce us to a shadow world of shifts and subterfuges. The Duchess of Fitz-Fulke is the nearest we come in Cantos XIII-XVII to Catherine's exuberance and amorality: but even she is driven to disguise in her approach to the seduction of Juan; and that the disguise should be a religious one has its relevance. Lady Adeline's interest in Juan is disguised even from herself. Aurora Raby's role is dubious: the poem breaks off just as we are getting interested. She is presented as a point of crystalline purity and integrity within the swirling currents of intrigue and compromise which knit the texture of these concluding Cantos:

but she may be more complex than she appears at first sight. She belongs to 'that High World' of selfless devotion which Byron had evoked in *Hebrew Melodies*:

```
The worlds beyond this World's perplexing waste
          Had more of her existence, for in her
There was a depth of feeling to embrace
Thoughts, boundless, deep, but silent too as Space.
```

(XVI, xlviii)

But is there not a touch in that 'silent too as Space' of the icy solitudes of 'When Coldness wraps this suffering clay'? Byron, and, perhaps we are meant to assume, subconsciously Juan also, compares Aurora with Haidée:

```
… each was radiant in her proper sphere:
          The island girl, bred up by the lone sea,
More warm, as lovely, and not less sincere,
          Was Nature's all: Aurora could not be,
Nor would be thus:—the difference in them
Was such as lies between a flower and gem
```

(XV, lviii)

—a comparison which tells us all we need to know.

The sea which washed Haidée's island is absent from the inland wastes of the last four Cantos. Yet not entirely so. By a subtle stroke of his incorrigibly analogising imagination, Byron restores the sea in its feminine aspect through an identification of this world of women, this 'gynocracy' (XII, lxvi; XVI, lii), with the prolific/voracious, superficially entrancing/potentially destructive powers of the ocean. It is worth following the development of this image through the later Cantos. The theme, dropped since the Seraglio episode, reappears in the Catherine imbroglio:

```
What a strange thing is Man! and what a stranger
          Is Woman! What a whirlwind is her head,
And what a whirlpool full of depth and danger
          Is all the rest about her!
```

(IX, lxiv)

and is boldly amplified in the London cantos. English women may be rather cold, 'But after all they are a North-West Passage / Unto the glowing India of the soul', and (Byron adds ironically) 'young beginners may as well commence / With quiet cruising o'er the ocean woman' (XIII, xxxix-xl).

'Perched on a promontory' (XV, xix) overlooking 'the ocean, Woman', Byron, now a mere spectator (XIII, vii), takes stock of its gulfs and shallows. 'There was Miss Millpond, smooth as summer's sea' (the latest projection of Annabella), who seems harmless enough, but *caveat nauta*! (XV, xli). Aurora Raby has more in common with the depths of space than those of the sea; nevertheless, her complexion is described as 'always clear, / As deep seas in a sunny atmosphere' (XVI, xciv). Adeline is concerned with her 'lord's, son's, or similar connection's / Safe conduct through the rocks of re-elections' (xcv).

About all these women there is a certain ambiguity: 'they are like virtuous mermaids, whose / Beginnings are fair faces, ends mere fishes' (XII, lxxiii). Women *are* the ocean, *express* thalassic powers as mermaids and fishes, and *carry* the ocean about with them in their wombs. This is a striking anticipation of the thesis of

Ferenzci's book *Thalassa,* which sees man's sexual urge as the desire to regress, individually, to the womb and, racially, the sea: to abandon the agonising evolutionary struggle and return to the preconscious and prehuman.

A plausible exegesis of Byron's work could be made along these lines: it would conclude with a 'thalassic' interpretation of *The Island,* Byron's final and major womb poem.[20] Already, in the later *Don Juan,* we are afforded fascinating glimpses of the way his mind is moving. Beneath the factitious rationality of English 'high life', its social and political decorum (to which I shall turn shortly), the deep sexual tides are determining the distribution of the visible shoals and sandbanks. Lord Henry holds forth, boringly, by day; Fitz-Fulke glides from darkened chamber to chamber, excitingly, by night. In search of her mystery Juan, prompted by 'the rippling sound of the lake's billow' beneath his 'Gothic chamber' (XVI, xv), traverses Lara's long gallery where 'voices from the urn / Appear to wake' (xviii) and his memory reverts to a former idyll:

```
And the pale smile of Beauties in the grave,
          The charms of other days, in starlight gleams,
Glimmer on high; their buried locks still wave
          Along the canvas; their eyes glance like dreams
On ours, or spars within some dusky cave,
          But Death is imaged in their shadowy beams.
```

(XVI, xix)

'The dance along the artery / The circulation of the lymph / Are figured in the drift of stars / Ascend to summer in the tree.' Death: sea: cave—the syndrome persists. But what is Fitz-Fulke, the ambulant mystery? Precisely that complex of life and death, of amniotic sea and emergent individuality which is the womb. 'Voices from the urn' sound in Juan's ears, another pregnant ambiguity. They proclaim, but they also invite, entice back to the cave—death, the womb-life. Fitz-Fulke blatantly, but also Adeline and Haidée and Aurora in different gradations of subtlety, are moving wombs, living organisms built around the voracious matrix. The theme is first sounded in its starkness in the amusing address to the vulva in Canto IX which Byron composes as a fantasia above the ground-bass of Horace's 'O tu teterrima causa':[21]

```
O thou 'teterrima causa' of all 'belli'—
          Thou gate of Life and Death—thou nondescript!
Whence is our exit and our entrance,—well I
          May pause in pondering how all souls are dipped
In thy perennial fountain:—how man fell, I
          Know not, since Knowledge saw her branches
                    stripped
Of her first fruit; but how he falls and rises
Since,—thou hast settled beyond all surmises.

Some call thee 'the worst cause of War,' but I
          Maintain thou art the best: for after all
From thee we come, to thee we go, and why
          To get at thee not batter down a wall,
Or waste a World? since no one can deny
          Thou dost replenish worlds both great and small:
With—or without thee—all things at a stand
Are, or would be, thou sea of Life's dry land!
```

(IX, lv-lvi)

The naughtiness of the play on 'stand' and 'fall' should not divert us from the serious Fall theme which, running as it does through the whole of *Don Juan,* is here narrowed to a specifically sexual context which will persist through the remaining Cantos with little relief from Nature's benisons or even from man's inhumanity

to man. 'Elle vous suit partout.' Julia's ominous 'elle' has now caught up with Juan, and her plaintive

```
'Man's love is of man's life a thing apart,
          'Tis Woman's whole existence; Man may range …'
```

(I, cxciv)

is seen for what it is, a piece of devastating irony. Man may range; but not very far. For wherever he ranges, it is within 'the gynocracy'. Whether he 'stands' or 'falls', it is within the ambience of the 'perennial fountain' which is also the universal grave. The ambiguities here remind me forcibly of the 'Lines Inscribed upon a Cup formed from a Skull'[22] and the analogous stanzas of *Childe Harold* II. Compare the use of 'wall' and 'waste' there with the conceits here: wall as the ramparts of Troy and hymen, 'waste a world' as the destruction of Troy and the death of millions of spermatozoa. 'Life' is a dry land, a Waste Land: we plunge into 'the ocean woman' as a refuge from life, from its dry and dusty duties, its exhausting claims upon us.[23] 'Die' is a seventeenth-century euphemism for the sexual act: and this is one of the great 'metaphysical' moments of *Don Juan.* It is the 'low dream' and the low world of sexual fulfilment asserted against the 'high dream' and the 'High World' of total realisation; beneath the brilliantly funny phrasing we detect the bitterness of defeat.

In addressing the organ Byron severs it from the woman and thus from its total human context. At this point the poem's swing over from 'love' to 'sex' is effected. The apostrophe ushers in the Empress Catherine episode (IX, lvii-X, xlviii) where Juan first knows commercial sex: commercial in the sense that beside being bought he is himself a buyer. Catherine is 'the grand epitome / Of that great cause of war'. She swallows lovers as she swallows kingdoms. Juan 'loves' her through 'self-love' (IX, lxviii); Catherine 'loves' him with 'temporary passion' (lxx). The sea image re-enters the narrative in the ignoble guise of refrigerator: Juan is 'of that delighted age' when all women are equally attractive, that is, reduce themselves to pure vulva:

```
We don't much care with whom we may engage,
          As bold as Daniel in the lions' den,
So that we can our native sun assuage
          In the next ocean, which may flow just then—
To make a twilight in, just as Sol's heat is
Quenched in the lap of the salt sea, or Thetis.
```

(IX, lxix)

At least four of Byron's major sanctities are desecrated here: sun, sea, Scripture, twilight.[24] We proceed (in stanzas lxxiii-lxxvi) to an excursus on love which for the first time in the poem stresses the absurdity of the act, that 'trivial and vulgar way of coition' whose folly had impressed, among others, Sir Thomas Browne. The love-illusion itself is charming; but how uncharming the sequel.

```
How beautiful that moment! and how odd is
          That fever which precedes the languid rout
Of our sensations! What a curious way
The whole thing is of clothing souls in clay!
```

(IX, lxxv)

Byron had gone into 'the whole thing' in more detail in *Cain* (II, i, 48-60):

```
CAIN.

I should be proud of thought

Which knew such things [as the secrets of the universe].
```

LUCIFER.

But if that high

Link'd to a servile mass of matter, and,

Knowing such things, aspiring to such things,

And science still beyond them, were chain'd down

To the most gross and petty paltry wants,

All foul and fulsome, and the very best

Of thine enjoyments a sweet degradation,

A most enervating and filthy cheat

To lure thee on to the renewal of

Fresh souls and bodies, all foredoom'd to be

As frail, and few so happy …

The spirit/clay paradox lies behind a good deal of Byron's thinking, and in its sexual application can be traced as far back as the 1813 journal:

> It seems strange; a true voluptuary will never abandon his mind to the grossness of reality. It is by exalting the earthly, the material, the *physique* of our pleasures, by veiling these ideas, by forgetting them altogether, or, at least, never naming them hardly to one's self, that we alone can prevent them from disgusting.

(13 December 1813)

Part of the moral purpose of *Don Juan* was to name these ideas, to strip the veil from the face of horrid reality. And this, Byron told Murray, was what Teresa objected to when she begged him not to go on with *Don Juan.* ‘The truth is that *it is* TOO TRUE, and the women hate every thing which strips off the tinsel of *Sentiment*; and they are right, as it would rob them of their weapons’ (Letter of 12 October 1820).

Despite Teresa's protests, and a promise to discontinue *Don Juan* which he was not able to keep,[25] Byron proceeded to strip off more of the tinsel of sentiment. Juan's situation in Catherine's court reproduces Juan's in Haidée's cave, but in a cynical key. The successive exhaustions (X, xl) of shipwreck and love-affair are now repeated in the guise of warfare and ‘royalty's vast arms’ (xxxvii). ‘The trilling wire in the blood / Sings below inveterate scars / Appeasing long forgotten wars.’ There is an echo from even further back in the story: Julia's sentimental letter is paralleled by a letter Juan now receives from his mother, replete with hypocrisy (a deity which Juan apostrophises in stanza xxxiv) and the recommendation of dissimulation (xxxii). Donna Inez has remarried (sex has had its way with her too) and there is a new little boy to be brought up along the educational lines which have proved so effective with Juan. By a masterly stroke, Inez praises ‘the empress's *maternal* love’, which is not very different in voracity, Byron implies by his underlining, from his mother's ‘storgous appetite’.

A survey of the sustained apostrophes which punctuate the course of *Don Juan* is a revealing exercise.[26] They are all addressed to love, and strike the keynotes of the successive episodes. Irony runs through them, and is

steadily amplified up to the final ‘O thou “teterrima causa” … !’ The series begins with a quotation from Campbell:

```
‘Oh Love! in such a wilderness as this,
          Where Transport and Security entwine,
Here is the Empire of thy perfect bliss,
          And here thou art a God indeed divine.’
The bard I quote from does not sing amiss …
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(I, lxxxviii)

The fact that he *is* quoting, and that he proceeds to comment on the value of the quotation, constitutes the initial irony. This is love *in excelsis,* as it were, on which Byron feels himself unworthy to expatiate. Next comes love Platonic, in stanza I, cxvi: ‘Oh Plato! Plato! you have paved the way, / With your confounded fantasies. …’ The tone is rueful, slightly exasperated. In ‘No more—no more, Oh! never more, my heart, / Canst thou be my sole world, my universe!’ (I, ccxv) the two previous invocations are given a personal turn. This broadens to the historical in ‘Oh, Love! of whom great Caesar was the suitor …’ (II, ccv) and contemplates love *as* power and even wisdom: ‘Thou mak'st philosophers …’ (II, ccvii). The idyllic Haidée episode evokes a tragic apostrophe; Eliot's ‘Chill / Fingers of yew … curled / Down on us’ are anticipated in

```
Oh, Love! what is it in this world of ours
          Which makes it fatal to be loved? Ah why
With cypress branches hast thou wreathed thy bowers,
          And made thy best interpreter a sigh?
```

(III, ii)

and the irony of ‘Oh, Hesperus! thou bringest all good things …’ (III, cvii) with its emphasis on human relationship and parental love is infused with deep pathos. The quotation from or paraphrase of Sappho here balances and corrects the Campbell complacency (note the echo of Campbell's ‘wreathed’ in Byron's ‘entwine’, ‘this world of ours’ in ‘such a wilderness as this’, and ‘a sigh’ in ‘perfect bliss’). ‘In my end is my beginning’: the two apostrophes perfectly contain the first great movement of the poem, where Juan can still be seen as ‘innocent’.

The second movement opens at the poem's mid-point (on a rough stanza count) with a significant collocation of Love and Glory. Love existing in its own right is no longer the theme.

```
O Love! O Glory! what are ye who fly
          Around us ever, rarely to alight?
```

(VII, i)

We are about to pass into the brutal power world of the siege of Ismail and its sequel, where love is corrupted to lust. In ‘Oh, thou eternal Homer!’ (VII, lxxix) the apostrophe implicitly recognises the right of violence to exist ‘wreathed’ with love, and the two siege cantos lead directly into the power-lust world in which the devouring vulva is the sardonic centre. On the ‘teterrima causa’ I have already sufficiently commented. This is the last of Byron's addresses to the *mater hominum et deorum,* though the poem is scarce half finished. It is followed by an apostrophe to Catherine:

```
Oh Catherine! (for of all interjections,
          To thee both oh! and ah! belong, of right,
In Love and War). …
```

(IX, lxv)[27]

—where the identification of the empress with the vulva is undisguised, and the reflective passage (lxxiii-lxxvi) which follows sums up the themes of all the preceding apostrophes. First Campbell is confuted:

```
And that's enough, for Love is vanity,
          Selfish in its beginning as its end …
```

Next, his own 'Oh never more, my heart …' in

```
Except where 'tis a mere insanity,
          A maddening spirit which would strive to blend
Itself with Beauty's frail inanity …
```

Then, the philosophers:

```
And hence some heathenish philosophers
Make Love the main-spring of the Universe.
```

Platonic love, divine love, marital love, even cicisbean love (poor Teresa!) are next deflated, together with the exigences of the sexual impulse:

```
Besides Platonic love, besides the love
          Of God, the love of sentiment, the loving
Of faithful pairs … besides all these pretences
To Love, there are those things which words name senses;

Those movements, those improvements in our bodies
          Which make all bodies anxious to get out
Of their own sand-pits, to mix with a goddess,
          For such all women are at first no doubt. …

The third sort to be noted in our chronicle
          As flourishing in every Christian land,
Is, when chaste matrons to their other ties
Add what may be called marriage in disguise.
```

(IX, lxxiii-lxxvi)

And at this point the invocations to love terminate. In fact all apostrophes terminate, with the exception of the passing invocation to gold in Canto XII, iii, and the longer address to death in Canto XV, viii-ix, which is itself implicated in the commercial-political-social complex which encroaches like a cancer on the hitherto vigorous natural growth of Juan's life-pattern.

The real/unreal love antithesis is vigorously and brilliantly pursued through the six final cantos, which examine the Regency scene in England in the light of all that Byron/Juan has experienced in his earlier avatars. The initial excursus on Berkeley in Canto XI poses the real/unreal theme philosophically. Doubt is the 'sole prism / Of the Truth's rays' (ii)[28] but Byron begs pathetically to be allowed to drink his dram of 'Heaven's brandy', illusion, undisturbed. Of course it won't do: reality keeps breaking in.

Notes

1. The opening line of the Prologue to 'The Gates of Paradise'. 'The Keys of the Gates' is the subtitle given to the 24 consecutive couplets from which my section headings in this chapter are taken.

2. Blake, *Jerusalem,* III, 64 (*Complete Writings,* ed. G. Keynes, London 1957, p. 698).
3. Derived from 'her great great grand-mamma' (lvi); Haidée, in Juan's next love adventure, has a Moorish mother (IV, liv). Byron's insistence on these Eastern, Islamic ingredients is important for his whole doctrine of love.
4. I have already made it in 'Guilt and retribution in Byron's sea poems' (*loc. cit.*).
5. Also, as Karl Kroeber has well noted, of his milieu: 'Juan is victimised as much by a complicated network of social relationships [much like those Byron met in Venice] … as by the upsurge of his sensual appetite. He is brought into contact with Julia through his mother's offices' (*Romantic Narrative Art,* University of Wisconsin Press, 1960, p. 150). In like manner, Donna Inez approves of Juan's 'friendship' with Catherine the Great (see below, p. 324).
6. An odd thing, belonging clearly to the dream level of the episode rather than to any realistic plot structure, is that Juan's shoes are not discovered during the very thorough search at Alfonso's first entry.
7. The direct reference to *Childe Harold* here is interesting.
8. See below, p. 304. And the even earlier cannibalistic episode in the long-boat, where Julia's precious letter is torn up to make lots to decide who shall first be eaten by his famishing companions (II, lxxiv).
9. The extent of Byron's acquaintance with Zoroastrianism has yet to be assessed, but a passage like this (quoted in R. C. Zaehner, *The Teachings of the Magi,* Allen & Unwin, 1956, p. 43) seems relevant 'I created thee … with a mouth close to thy buttocks, and coition seems to thee even as the taste of the sweetest food to the mouth.' See also below, p. 322. I cannot at this point *prove* a connection, but the quotation may perhaps be permitted to stand as, in Coleridge's *Kubla Khan* phrase, 'a psychological curiosity'.
10. 'But why will she grow fat? and you too?' he writes to Miss Mercer Elphinstone on 3 August 1812. 'That additional wing (with a bit of the breast superadded I dare say) is worse than waltzing.—But as I actually dined yesterday myself, I must bear these trespasses' (*MLJ* ii, 187). Cf. also *MLJ* ii, 219: 'I am sadly out of practice lately, except for a few sighs to a gentlewoman at supper who was too much occupied with ye *fourth* wing of her *second* chicken to mind anything that was not material.'
11. Readers unfamiliar with the Greyfriars saga will find their best introduction to it in George Orwell's essay, 'Boys' Weeklies', in *Critical Essays,* 1951.
12. 'Very sulky … and ate in consequence a copious dinner … (I have added, lately, eating to my "family of vices")' (Diary, 4-5 January 1821). Byron's eating habits form a reliable index to his spiritual ups and downs. Contrast this, to his mother en route from the Levant, 25 June 1811: 'I must only inform you that for a long time I have been restricted to an entirely vegetable diet, neither fish nor flesh coming within my regimen. … I drink no wine.'
13. *The Wisdom of Solomon*: see my *The Lost Travellers,* p. 174, for a link with *The Ancient Mariner.*
14. References to the Cornish wreckers occur in Byron's letters of this period, e.g. *LJ,* v, 272.
15. The serpent image here conflates with that of Eve.
16. The MS reads 'a sad Southey', a further complication leading into Byron's personal resentments.
17. 'A man actually becomes a piece of female property', Byron writes in a letter to R. B. Hoppner (31 January 1820) describing his life in Italy. The fifth Canto was finished in November 1820.
18. [*Charles Reade: a study in Victorian authorship,* New York, 1900], pp. 340-41.
19. For purposes of exposition I pass over the Russian episode (Cantos IX-X) at this point, to take it up on p. 322.
20. This is something I half-undertook in 'Guilt and retribution in Byron's sea poems' (*REL,* ii, no. 1, January 1961), before reading Ferenzci's book.
21. If most of *Don Juan* consists of 'addresses from the throne' (III, xcvi) this is an 'address to the throne', Byron's homage as dutiful subject and vassal.
22. See above, pp. 62-5.
23. Cf. 'Detached Thoughts, 102' (1821): 'What a strange thing is the propagation of life! a bubble of Seed which might be spilt in a whore's lap—or in the orgasm of a voluptuous dream—might (for

ought we know) have formed a Caesar or a Buonaparte: there is nothing remarkable recorded of their sires, that I know of.' With engaging frankness, Prof. M. K. Joseph selects the last couplet of the stanza (lvi) to sum up his indebtedness to his wife and children in the writing of his *Byron the Poet* (Acknowledgements, p. 10). Byron would certainly have approved.

24. A distinction has to be drawn between counterpointing and deflating. Byron's common technique of juxtaposing sanctities with profanities is one thing; the deliberate use of sanctities for profane ends is another. So is the offence against Latin and Greek quantity!
25. Teresa in fact released him, 'provided it [the continuation of *Don Juan*] were immaculate; so I have been as decent as need be' (Letter of 27 August 1822 to Moore).
26. These may be compared with the dramatic *invocations* which I refer to on pp. 244-50 above. *Ginevra,* published in the same year as *Cain* (1821), has 'Life's great cheat; a thing / Bitter to taste, sweet in imagining' (36-7).
27. The gasps of 'death' in its obvious sense (dying soldiers) and its metaphorical ('dying' lovers). 'Oh' may represent the indrawn breath at the onset of the orgasm, 'ah' the expiration at its finale; or more broadly the optimistic expectation at the beginning of coitus and the *omne animal triste* sigh at its ending.
28. It is worth while connecting this with the *Childe Harold* prism moments (see above, pp. 196-7) to see the shift in stance from idealism to realism.

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Criticism: Rolf P. Lessenich (essay date 1978)

SOURCE: Lessenich, Rolf P. "The Danger and Vanity of Human Passions." In *Lord Byron and the Nature of Man,* pp. 57-98. Köln: Böhlau Verlag, 1978.

[*In the following essay, Lessenich explores Byron's characterization of love and war as vain and perilous pursuits, designed to tempt death.*]

A) THE DANGER AND VANITY OF LOVE

Though, in Byron's work, love and military glory appear as contrary passions with contrary moral values, they have this in common: their pursuit is both vain and dangerous.

The sufferings of Mazeppa, tied up and turned away on a wild horse, are too obviously reminiscent of the sufferings of the Ancient Mariner to escape notice[1]. But, unlike Coleridge's bird-slaughterer, Byron's hero suffers for loving, not for killing[2]. To the old scarred and battle-steeled soldier Mazeppa passing his life in review, his love-affair with Theresa has proved the most dangerous adventure of all his long career.

Byron's morbid concept of the dangerousness of any involvement in love went back to a literary nlivened by his traumatic experience with an inconstant mother always threatening to replace extreme love by extreme hatred. And his later acquaintances with women, especially with Annabella Milbanke and Caroline Lamb, were hardly of a nature to destroy this early inoculated prejudice:

> I am thus far on my way to … the *Yungfrau* (that is the "Wild woman" being interpreted—as it is so perverse a mountain that no other sex would suit it), …[3]

The danger of love manifests itself in the adventures as well as in the name of Don Juan. His love-affair with Donna Julia leads to his banishment and a hair-breadth escape from death by shipwreck. His love-affair with Haidée leads to his imprisonment and a hair-breadth escape from death by the sword. His love-affair with Dudù leads to his condemnation and a hair-breadth escape from being drowned in a sack. And the literary tradition of his name suggests that one of his subsequent love-affairs would prove fatal for him[4], as love had proved fatal for the heroes of Byron's earlier poetical tales, the Giaour, Selim, Conrad, Alp, Hugo, and Mazeppa, for the heroes of Byron's dramas, Manfred and Sardanapalus, and, last but not least, for Tasso, the hero of Byron's dramatic monologue[5]. It is not mere coincidence that Selim, bravely defending himself against the soldiers of the tyrant Giaffir and on the verge of his rescue, falls by Giaffir's shot in an unguarded moment when looking back to see his beloved Zuleika:

```
Ah! wherefore did he turn to look
          For her his eye but sought in vain?
That pause, that fatal gaze he took,
          Hath doom'd his death, or fix'd his chain.
Sad proof, in peril and in pain,
How late will Lover's hope remain!(6)
```

Nor is it an accidental invention of Byron's that Alp the Renegade is felled by a bullet in an unguarded moment when paralysed with the unexpected news of his beloved Francesca's death, sneeringly imparted to him at the height of the battle by his deadly enemy Minotti, the Venetian governor of Corinth and Francesca's despotic father[7]. Analogously, Conrad the Corsair loses the battle against the tyrant Seyd which he is on the point of winning because, in the critical moment, instead of pursuing his routed enemies, his love of woman makes him hesitate and save Seyd's harem-slaves[8]. The beautiful Gulnare, rescued on that occasion and firmly resolved to stab Seyd for her love of Conrad, is a symptomatic instance of Byron's fear of the danger which may proceed from the love of woman. Conrad's rescue of Gulnare leads to the loss of his war, the loss of his adored Medora, and the loss of the sense of his life, and Seyd's failure to recognize any such danger leads to his immediate death:

```
Ah! little reck'd that chief of womanhood—
Which frowns ne'er quell'd, nor menaces subdued;
And little deem'd he what thy heart, Gulnare!
When soft could feel, and when incensed could dare.(9)
```

In regular descent from these piteous lovers and soldiers, Byron's Don Juan is the helpless victim of a dangerous fate, caused by dangerous women, which drives him from one perilous love-affair to another and to his destined end[10]. It has been explained why Byron tends to see the danger as emanating from woman, but the fatality of love resides in the *caractère maudit* of love itself. To Byron, the *homme fatal* and *femme fatale* present but partial symptoms of one of this deterministic world's diseases as provided by a tyrannical God. With all due respect for the intellectual brilliancy of Mario Praz's study of the romantic joy in sensual experience and lapse into erotic deviations[11], we must firmly oppose the absurd view of the infernal vampire Byron who glutted over the agonies of his tortured women, both in life and literature, and who shows akin to the Marquis de Sade[12]. Biographically, Byron was no Satanic Lord[13] and his wife no Patient Griselda[14]. And in point of literary creation, it cannot escape the notice of an unprejudiced critic that Byron's most active lovers, the Giaour or Childe Harold or Manfred, do not destroy the partners of their love willingly but through the providential constitution of things whose victims they become themselves. Manfred's topical reference to the ill-fated Pausanias, who “slew That which he loved, unknowing what he slew”[15], and his begging Astarte's forgiveness[16], are hardly compatible with a vampire's perverse delectation in arbitrary butchering. Even King Herod, the real murderer of the *Hebrew Melodies* who has wilfully ordered the execution of his beloved wife Mariamne in frenzy's raving jealousy, torments himself in wild remorse and vain prayer for pardon rather than fiendishly glutting over his crime[17]. The case of Don Juan supplies an even stronger argument against Praz. Different from Childe Harold's, Juan's role is that of the passive and seduced lover, a significant inversion of the conventional *homme fatal,* the actively seducing and wilfully destroying irresistible lover in seventeenth-

and eighteenth-century versions of the Don Juan legend[18]. Hardly escaped from death by shipwreck, Juan opens his eyes and sees the next fatal claimant of his love, Haidée. Hardly escaped from death by the sword, he becomes the slave of the imperious Gulbeyaz. Hardly escaped from death by being drowned in a sack, he becomes a soldier at Ismail. Hardly escaped from death in battle, he is sent on a diplomatic mission to England and becomes the object of the amorous pursuits of Aurora Raby, the Duchess of Fitz-Fulke, and Lady Adeline Amundeville, the "fair most fatal Juan ever met"[19]. The inescapable danger into which this latter adventure would have brought the lovers, had the story not been left unfinished by Byron's death, is here foreshadowed:

```
I'm 'at my old lunes'—digression—and forget
          The Lady Adeline Amundeville,
The fair most fatal Juan ever met,
          Although she was not evil nor meant ill,
But destiny and passion spread the net
(Fate is a good excuse for our own will)
And caught them.(20)
```

Julia, Haidée, Gulbeyaz, and Dudù are described with the same halo of fatality and danger hovering about them. Julia, Juan's first seductress, is a proud beauty of Moorish origin, with large dark eyes betraying the erotic fire and boiling blood which she struggles to conceal[21]. The very blackness of her eyes reveals her passion, increased by repression in the "burning core"[22] of her heart, and portends imminent danger "as the blackest sky Foretells the heaviest tempest"[23]. Her magic charm threatens to destroy the epic hero as the magic charm of Circe, Dido, and Armida threatened to destroy Ulysses, Aeneas, and Rinaldo[24]:

```
                                                  … but ne'er magician's wand
Wrought change with all Armida's fairy art
Like what this light touch left on Juan's heart.(25)
```

Similarly, the black eyes of Haidée are associated with death[26]. And an image of unexpected deadly danger characterizes the glance of those black, raven fringed eyes:

```
'Tis as the snake late coiled, who pours his length
And hurls at once his venom and his strength.(27)
```

While Juan is recovering his health in sound sleep, Haidée bends over him "as death"[28], drinking his scarce-drawn breath[29], a vampire-like image suggestive of Herodias dancing off the head of John the Baptist[30], in blatant contrast to the subsequent comparison of Haidée with "an angel o'er the dying Who die in righteousness"[31]. And again, later, when Juan falls asleep in Haidée's arms, the thought of death overshadows the tender joy of the most natural and least sinful of loves:

```
There lies the thing we love with all its errors
And all its charms, like death without its terrors.(32)
```

The happiness of the two unlawful lovers will soon be cruelly shattered, and Byron's complaint about this injustice of Providence is quite serious, though, a stanza later, he again turns it into ridicule and resumes his habitual attitude of resignation to the unalterable state of things as they are:

```
Oh love, what is it in this world of ours
          Which makes it fatal to be loved? Ah why
With cypress branches hast thou wreathed thy bowers
          And made thy best interpreter a sigh?
As those who dote on odours pluck the flowers
          And place them on their breast—but place to die;
Thus the frail beings we would fondly cherish
Are laid within our bosoms but to perish.(33)
```

The next perilous adventure in Juan's career is his sale as a slave and secret lover to the beautiful and imperious Gulbeyaz, the fourth spouse of the Turkish Sultan. Her fatality appears in her first encounter with Juan, who is absolutely at her mercy. Byron compares her eyes to those of an antelope which ancient literature represented as a wild and dangerous beast like the panther, the tiger, the boar, and the wolf[34], and the allusions to Venus and Paphos as well as Gulbeyaz's sensual ecstasy towards the initially cold Juan suggest the tragic love of Venus for the ill-fated Adonis:

```
The lady, rising up with such an air
          As Venus rose with from the wave, on them
Bent like an antelope a Paphian pair
          Of eyes, which put out each surrounding gem,
And raising up an arm …(35)
```

Dudù, Gulbeyaz's rival for Juan's love, also partakes of the nature of the fatal Venus, albeit her character at first appears to stand in sharp contrast to Gulbeyaz:

```
A kind of sleepy Venus seemed Dudù
          Yet very fit to ‘murder sleep’ in those
Who gazed upon her cheek's transcendent hue,
          Her Attic forehead and her Phidian nose.(36)
```

This calm and quiet harmony of her outward bearing makes her the more dangerous. Her comparison to the Age of Gold only holds true on the basis of the notorious ancient etymology which derived a word from its opposite: *lucus a non lucendo, canis a non canendo.* As the Age of Gold is so called because “gold was yet unknown”[37], Byron here intimates, Dudù is called kind and gentle because, in fact, she is wild and cruel[38]. The oxymoron “silent thunder”, another simile which Byron invents for her characterization, gives further emphasis to this contrast of appearance and reality[39]. The gentleness of her manner serves Dudù as a safe means of satisfying the wildness of her nature, a tool which helps her successfully to accomplish all her plans and which makes her, the slave, triumph even over the beautiful and mighty Sultana. Spellbound by her charms, Juan thoughtlessly surrenders himself to her love, fully aware that this new love-affair will arouse the Sultana's jealousy and expose his life to mortal danger, just as Byron had surrendered himself to the love of Teresa Guiccioli in spite of his suspicion of her husband's possible readiness to have his rival secretly murdered[40].

For a young man who, by mere good or bad luck, escapes such tangible physical dangers, love has prepared another snare which will necessarily ruin him,—the rational motivation though not the real emotional reason for Byron's final abandonment of Teresa Guiccioli[41]. Love spares him the death of the body to lead him first to an even crueller fate, the breaking of his vainly panting heart, that most precious and tender part of his soul:

```
          The tree will wither long before it fall;
          The hull drives on, though mast and sail be torn;
          The roof-tree sinks, but moulders on the hall
          In massy hoariness; the ruin'd wall
          Stands when its wind-worn battlements are gone;
          The bars survive the captive they enthral;
          The day drags through, though storms keep out the
                   sun;
And thus the heart will break, yet brokenly live on

          Even as a broken mirror …(42)
```

The accumulated comparisons clearly suggest that the heart's living on in shattered guise, still, cold, and bloodless[43], is not a survival, but the ruinous period of withering decay between virtual death and total physical collapse. The death of the heart precedes the death of the body, and acts of love continue as mere

physico-mechanical reflexes without any paradisaical illusions and aspirations. It is a death characterized by images of parching drought and barren sterilization, as usual in Byron's descriptions of the illusory and suicidal efforts of the hot passionate soul yearning for eternity[44]. After the death of the heart, there remain

```
          The furrows of long thought, and dried-up tears,
          Which, ebbing, leave a sterile track behind,
          O'er which all heavily the journeying years
Plod the last sands of life,—where not a flower appears.(45)
```

The “orphans of the heart” whom Byron advises to contemplate the shattered thrones and temples of Rome[46] are men of broken hearts, ruins amidst ruins like Childe Harold and Byron himself[47]. It was the same Byron who, in a later poem on the death of Thyrza or John Edleston, felt like a “time-worn slave”[48] with a heart “cold as e'en the dead can be”[49], an expired heart reawakened only with thoughts of a better past when “love and life alike were new”[50]. And it was the same Byron who, in one of his later poems written to fit already existent melodies[51], woefully deplored the “mortal coldness”[52] of his heart and the “wither'd waste”[53] of his life in stanzas that adumbrate the beauties of Baudelaire, for whom “L'amour n'a plus de goût”[54] and “Le Printemps adorable a perdu son odeur”[55]:

```
There's not a joy the world can give like that it takes away,
When the glow of early thought declines in feeling's dull decay;
'Tis not on youth's smooth cheek the blush alone, which fades so fast,
But the tender bloom of heart is gone, ere youth itself be past.(56)
```

So, in the course of his amorous career, we observe an increasing disillusionment in Don Juan. His initial expectation of regaining a terrestrial paradise in acts of love has proved a mere illusion. The dream of living ever happily on Haidée's fortunate isle has evaporated. The constant confrontation with things as they are progressively supplants the vision of things as the soul would have them, convincing Juan, quite unromantically, that there is no reality in the chimeric desires of his fancy. But the hero in whom Byron most impressively demonstrated the disastrous effects of the heart's death through love is Childe Harold. When Harold is introduced to us, his disillusionment is complete and his amorous feelings are dead. He even believes himself beyond joy and sorrow, seemingly secure and invulnerable in guarded coldness[57]. But this is an error soon discovered. His soul survives in a disintegrated and ruined state, leaving all his non-amorous and non-sympathetical feelings alive, and, in frustrated fits, continues to seek other ways to immortality than love[58]. Impelled by “the strong Necessity of loving”[59], Harold had too frequently gratified his erotic needs not to comprehend, like Byron himself, that sexual promiscuity yields no lasting satisfaction to the human soul languishing for paradise. Satiated, cloyed, disgusted, unjustly branded with a sin which is no sin, he is doomed to wander restlessly like Cain and Ahasuerus:

```
It is that settled, ceaseless gloom
          The fabled Hebrew wanderer bore;
That will not look beyond the tomb,
          But cannot hope for rest before.(60)
```

Here again, as typical of Byron, a religious concept, the disintegration of the soul through sin, has been secularized and adapted to Byron's own indictment of the ways of God to man. It is the narrator's voice, not the poet's, that pronounces Harold guilty[61], the voice of Byron's feelings as opposed to that of his rational conviction. The final death of Harold's body, a meaningfully vague fading away into destruction's mass at the end of the inverted pilgrimage of his life[62], is a benefit to the man after the death of his heart. Human nature causes him, like all others sooner or later, to fall victim to love's false magic, that “Cherub-hydra”[63] with its “dear delusive shape”[64].

The mortal danger with which love threatens both the bodies and the souls of its helpless votaries vexed and irritated Byron so much the more for its total vanity, a typical Providence of a despotic God. The vanity of

love is a theme running through the whole of Byron's poetry and prose to the poem written on the occasion of his thirty-sixth birthday, less than three months before his death at Missolonghi. Byron was no Keats who, on the sight of an urn or on the sound of a nightingale's voice, could ecstatically project himself out of the bounds of time and space into a fancied romantic world of truth correlative to earthly beauty and there freeze things of beauty at their height before their lapse into decay,

```
For ever warm and still to be enjoyed,
          For ever panting, and for ever young—(65)
```

His conviction that love was a passion for the young which, beyond the age of twenty-five or thirty, could no longer be gratified, and his consequent fear of wrinkles and grey hairs, haunted the unmetaphysically and empirically disposed Byron ever since he had left Harrow for Cambridge[66]:

```
          Who with the weight of years would wish to bend,
          When Youth itself survives young Love and Joy?
          Alas! when mingling souls forget to blend,
          Death hath but little left him to destroy!
Ah! happy years! once more who would not be a boy?(67)
```

This melancholic meditation on the satiated lover's death of heart, published when Byron was only twenty-four, foreshadows his later personal complaints in *Don Juan*:

```
Who would not sigh,  !
          That hath a memory or that had a heart?
Alas, her star must wane like that of Dian;
          Ray fades on ray, as years on years depart.(68)
```

But in *Don Juan,* as distinct from *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage,* the complaint of the short-lived nature of happy love no longer stands alone. When surfeited man has, even in his youth, exceeded the age of a lover and “mingling souls forget to blend”[69], a void is left, the cause of Childe Harold's “life-abhorring gloom”[70]. The author of *Don Juan* again abandoned such romantic lamentations and turned back to his realistic analysis of the colder passions which must fill that void after the heart's death, ambition and avarice, vices which he had detailed seven years before, in his memorable portrait of “Life's little tale, so oft, so vainly told”[71] in *Hints from Horace* (1811). The poetic technique changes, the idea remains the same:

```
          Launch'd into life, extinct his early fire,
He [man] apes the selfish prudence of his sire;
Marries for money, chooses friends for rank,
Buys land, and shrewdly trusts not to the Bank;
Sits in the Senate …
          Manhood declines—age palsies every limb;
He quits the scene—or else the scene quits him;
Scrapes wealth, o'er each departing penny grieves,
And avarice seizes all ambition leaves.(72)

My days of love are over, me no more
          The charms of maid, wife, and still less of widow
Can make the fool of which they made before;
          In short, I must not lead the life I did do.
The credulous hope of mutual minds is o'er,
          The copious use of claret is forbid too,
So for a good old-gentlemanly vice,
I think I must take up with avarice.(73)
```

The frequency of these complaints annoys many readers of Byron, but these complaints are fully integrated into the intellectual substance of his work. The ephemeral nature of love is a symptom of its vanity. When

men have reluctantly "passed life's equinoctial line"[74], love will remain no more than an erotic impulse of nature, a sexual torso deprived of its original illusory yearning for higher things and better days:

```
Love lingers still, although 'twere late to wive,
          And as for other love, the illusion's o'er.(75)
```

The thirty-three year old lover of Teresa Guiccioli keenly felt that degeneration himself. The fire of the Italian love-letters of his last attachment, translated by Iris Origo, belies his sentiment of loss and exhaustion. In his *Stanzas written on the Road between Florence and Pisa* in November 1821, while he accompanied the divorced Teresa and her parents, the Gambas, to their exile, Byron complained that his wrinkled brow and hoary head betrayed the bygone days "of sweet two-and-twenty"[76], and that the laurels of fame were a poor substitute for the freshness of youth:

```
What are garlands and crowns to the brow that is wrinkled?
'Tis but as a dead flower with May-dew besprinkled.
Then away with all such from the head that is hoary!
What care I for the wreaths that can only give glory!(77)
```

Men's amorous and sympathetic feelings will gradually harden with the approaching death of their hearts, their childish hope to regain an imagined paradise will vanish with age and experience of the world and the world's ways[78]. Scepticism will arise and tell them that such a paradise has never really existed, and that the Fall of man is a mere fiction parabolic of man's foul nature. Wrinkles and grey hairs will make it increasingly difficult to satisfy their remaining erotic desires and they will recur to other, far less positive pleasures such as political ambition[79], financial speculation[80], and, above all, the joys of mutual hate which last much longer than the joys of mutual love: "Men love in haste, but they detest at leisure"[81]. And hatred, in its most destructive form, manifests itself in war. The young Juan is a lover and soldier full of contradictory illusions of paradise and glory, his older friend Johnson a disillusioned realist whose only remaining passion still to be gratified is that "for pence or praise"[82] in the military profession. Byron thus keeps the reader aware of the short-lived nature of Juan's enviable success in matters of love which will ebb and dwindle to nothing with his passing years and decaying beauty, unless the dangers inherent in love kill Juan, as they kill Haidée, in the bloom of his youth. The unreal idyll of Juan's and Haidée's love is represented as unearthly and beyond the laws of time and space, only to shatter the paradisaical illusion and to call the reader back to the contrast of tough reality:

```
Their faces were not made for wrinkles, their
          Pure blood to stagnate, their great hearts to fail.
The blank grey was not made to blast their hair,
          But like the climes that know nor snow nor hail
They were all summer. Lightning might assail
          And shiver them to ashes, but to trail
A long and snake-like life of full decay
Was not for them—they had too little clay.(83)
```

Clay or dust on the one hand and fire or flame on the other, it has been demonstrated in a study on Byron's imagery[84], symbolize the two irreconcilable and discordant components of man's antithetically mixed nature, a view sharply opposed to Wordsworth. The one represents all that aspires for eternity and infinitude: the passions of love and glory. The other represents all that frustrates those airy aspirations and renders them illusory by constraints of finitude and limitation: the decay of corporal existence. hence, as has been pointed out several times, Byron usually describes the passionate efforts of the mind or soul, doomed to produce mere illusions in its bodily confinement, under the images of intolerable heat and unquenchable fever. It is the disease of all Byron's heroes, to name but Manfred, who has lived too long "With the fierce thirst of death—and still unslaked!"[85]

That disharmonious conflict of the human soul with the human body forms indeed the central problem of *Manfred*[86]:

```
How beautiful is all this visible world!
How glorious in its action and itself!
But we, who name ourselves its sovereigns, we,
Half dust, half deity, alike unfit
To sink or soar, with our mix'd essence make
A conflict of its elements, and breathe
The breath of degradation and of pride,
Contending with low wants and lofty will,
Till our mortality predominates,
…(87)
```

Manfred, the Child of Dust and Earth with the high aspiring mind, who would rise above the order of his despised race[88], fails to find the oblivion that would make him forget his agonizing mortal condition[89]. He realizes the truth so often formulated by Byron that, as the sick heart's death is the only cure for its sickness, so the sick soul's only cure is the demolition of its fleshly prison: “Old man! 'tis not so difficult to die”[90].

Another Child of Dust whose “aspirations Have been beyond the dwellers of the earth”[91] is Rousseau, in the third canto of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*[92]. That unusual man, “whose dust was once all fire”[93], a Byronic eremite like all aspiring minds, differed from Manfred insofar as he was not aware of his mortal constraints and earthly condition. He lived in an illusory world of pure mind and soul, enamoured of ideal beauty which is not real[94] and setting the world in flame with erring thoughts and dreams of social equality which cannot come true[95]. His failure in all things showed Byron the immovable limits of bodily mortality which weigh upon and oppress the uprising soul. Only physical death can give the soul the freedom to roam in endless regions congenial to its immortality and to gather endless knowledge congenial to its infinity, “Eternal, boundless, undecay'd, A thought unseen, but seeing all”[96]. An early death is to be welcomed not only for its termination of an increasingly gloomy life of bodily bondage, but also for its initiation of an increasingly joyful life of the mind or soul at last set free:

```
Above or Love, Hope, Hate, or Fear,
          It lives all passionless and pure:
An age shall fleet like earthly year;
          Its years as moments shall endure.
Away, away, without a wing
          O'er all, through all, its thought shall fly,
A nameless and eternal thing,
          Forgetting what it was to die.(97)
```

As we have seen[98], Byron ridiculed Plato's soma-sema-doctrine so interpreted that souls, unconfined by their bodies, could unite in non-erotic and non-physical love. The deeper reason is now obvious. But the genuine Platonic doctrine of the soul yearning to break through its bodily confinement and finding its fulfilment in the hour of death, as discussed in *Phaidon,* was closely related to Byron's thought, and Byron highly esteemed the value of its numerous emblematical illustrations. So the emblem of the wild-born falcon vainly striving to rise with his clipped wings, as used in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*[99], offered itself as a picture of man's illusory passions.

Man is a conflicting compound of “fiery dust”[100], the one ascending up into the air, the other weighing down unto the earth. In the unreal idyll of their paradise of eternal summer, Juan and Haidée have “too little clay” ever to be the victims of “dull decay”[101]. But with their reawakening, the illusory dreams of immortality and lasting youth give way to the real facts of slowly approaching old age and death. The death of the heart preceding the death of the body, Byron had sufficiently demonstrated in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage,* is worse than physical death in the midst of illusory expectations of a terrestrial paradise. The premature demise of the

young John Edleston, the choirboy to whom Byron felt romantically attached during his Cambridge days and whose death he half lamented and half welcomed in his Thyrza poems, involved this blessing: it withdrew the imperfections of change and disillusion as well as decay on both sides of the grave from each other's eyes and allowed Byron the survival of an ideal affection[102], just as he could best preserve a loving memory of Augusta Leigh and Teresa Guiccioli from a long distance. In that sense, John Edleston was happy to die before Byron, in those better, illusory days when "love, however vain"[103], shone warm and expectant:

I know not if I could have borne
          To see thy beauties fade;
The night that followed such a morn
          Had worn a deeper shade:
Thy day without a cloud hath passed,
And thou wert lovely to the last;
          Extinguish'd, not decay'd;
As stars that shoot along the sky
Shine brightest as they fall from high.(104)

Similarly, Haidée's premature decease may be envied rather than deplored because it spares her and her lover the torment of seeing her tender skin wrinkle and her glossy hair turn grey:

Through years or moons the inner weight to bear,
          Which colder hearts endure till they are laid
By age in earth. Her days and pleasures were
          Brief, but delightful, such as had not stayed
Long with her destiny. But she sleeps well
By the seashore, whereon she loved to dwell.(105)

And, also, it spares her the sad disappointment of seeing her love grow a dull habit[106]. Byron's scurrilous digressions on love and marriage must be seen in connection with this symptom of love's vanity[107]. Love and marriage bear the same relation to each other as wine and vinegar, the celestial and delicious wine being turned by time to "a sad, sour, sober beverage"[108] with "a very homely household savour"[109]. Byron took this for a satisfactory explication of the well-known fact that, in medieval and Renaissance literature, the adventures and sentiments of young lovers are rarely traced into their married lives:

There's doubtless something in domestic doings,
          Which forms in fact true love's antithesis.
Romances paint at full length people's wooings,
          But only give a bust of marriages,
For no one cares for matrimonial cooings;
          There's nothing wrong in a connubial kiss.
Think you, if Laura had been Petrarch's wife,
He would have written sonnets all his life?(110)

This manifestation of love's vanity within the intransgressible limits of bodily existence and cause of man's disillusionment conducive to his heart's death finds an exhaustive treatment in the Egeria-stanzas of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*[111]. The would-be romantic dreamer and must-be realist Byron knew that Egeria, the legendary nymph beloved by the legendary Roman King Numa Pompilius, was a mythical creature of the fancy, conceived by some mortal and real man in search of immortal and ideal beauty[112]. Be it that this man nympholeptically imagined her in his terrestrial despair[113], or that he euhemeristically deified a charming woman of this world[114], Egeria is no more than "a beautiful thought … softly bodied forth"[115]. Only thus can she be immortal and remain unwrinkled with years like the face of her cave-guarded spring[116]. Only thus could love keep its earliest promise to man, immortalize his transports, and spare his soul "the dull satiety which all destroys"[117]. But, as things are, this paradise is unreached[118] and its celestial fruit is forbidden to our wants[119]. Whoever tastes of love, that tempting but poisonous apple on the tree of life, Byron slyly insinuates

on a second level of meaning, brings death upon himself as, in biblical mythology, Eve brought death upon mankind. The adoring young lover falls sick, his diseased soul fevering into false celestial creation, his alchemical phantasy vainly trying to turn the base metal of this world into the precious gold of paradise, stubbornly refusing to admit that death is the only cure for his raving malady[120]:

```
          Who loves, raves—'tis youth's frenzy—but the cure
          Is bitterer still, as charm by charm unwinds
          Which robed our idols, and we see too sure
          Nor worth nor beauty dwells from out the mind's
          Ideal shape of such; yet still it binds
          The fatal spell, and still it draws us on,
          Reaping the whirlwind from the oft-sown winds;
          The stubborn heart, its alchemy begun,
Seems ever near the prize—wealthiest when most undone.(121)
```

Love, holy love, thus idolized in sick man's raving brain, was the earliest oracle[122], an idea suggested by Egeria's enchanted cave, implying that, as usual in classical mythology, the enticing deceitfulness of such divine prophecies only served to drive the victim faster into his destruction. But, though our first experience should teach us love's myths to be unreal and love's oracles to be false, we linger on believing in love, votaries and martyrs of a vain faith, till, disillusion heaped upon disillusion, our heart breaks with our feverish soul's sterilizing disease:

```
          Oh, Love! no habitant of earth thou art—
          An unseen seraph, we believe in thee,—
          A faith whose martyrs are the broken heart,—
          But never yet hath seen, nor e'er shall see
          The naked eye, thy form, as it should be;
          The mind hath made thee, as it peopled heaven,
          Even with its own desiring phantasy,
          And to a thought such shape and image given,
As haunts the unquench'd soul—parch'd, wearied, wrung, and riven.(123)
```

Another idolized creation of man's own desiring phantasy, resembling Egeria in her dangerous delusiveness, Byron found in the immortal and unearthly beauty of the Venus of Medici in Florence. In those stanzas of the same fourth canto of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* in which he covertly disavows Keats's view of art's reality[124] Byron loses himself with seeming ecstasy in a drunk and dazzled contemplation of that captivating work of art, and, as usual, abruptly awakens from his seraphic dream of romantic illusion to the bitter bleakness of mortal reality: "… but the weight Of earth recoils upon us:—let it go!"[125] Another illusion gone, another act of faith destroyed, a further step done on the road to the vain martyrdom of love. To Byron, as opposed to Keats, beauty was not truth. "Beauty is Illusion, Illusion Beauty"[126], would have been his own substitute for Keats's famous dictum.

This aspect of the vanity of love involves a theme perpetually recurring in Byron's works, love's inconstancy. With respect to women, Byron's persuasion of their inconstancy need not surprise us, being an echo of his earliest experiences as analysed above. Byron's lifelong discord between the allurements of romance and the dictates of reality, his reluctance but need to quit the realms of golden dreams for the realms of truth, had as early as *Hours of Idleness* associated the faithfulness of a fair smiling woman with the boundless but deceitful reign of fancy of which, in his poem *To Romance,* he took a pathetic shortlived farewell:

```
And yet 'tis hard to quit the dreams
          Which haunt the unsuspicious soul,
Where every nymph a goddess seems,
          Whose eyes through rays immortal roll;
While Fancy holds her boundless reign,
          And all assume a varied hue;
```

```
When virgins seem no longer vain,
          And even woman's smiles are true.(127)
```

But, just as the *femme fatale* and *homme fatal* are aspects of the divinely decreed danger of love, woman's inconstancy finds its counterpart in man's inconstancy, as parallel manifestations of love's divinely decreed vanity:

```
And must we own thee but a name,
          And from thy hall of clouds descend?
Nor find a sylph in every dame,
          A Pylades in every friend?
But leave at once thy realms of air
          To mingling bands of fairy elves;
Confess that woman's false as fair,
          And friends have feeling for—themselves!(128)
```

Sardanapalus is inconstant to his wife, the sister of Salemenes, being too much attracted by the fair boys and girls of his court, and his justification of his conduct in answer to the reproaches of Salemenes sets out from the principle that he only obeys the laws of human nature:

```
I married her as monarchs wed—for state,
And loved her as most husbands love their wives.
If she or thou supposedst I could link me
Like a Chaldean peasant to his mate,
Ye knew nor me, nor monarchs, nor mankind.(129)
```

True love is but a momentary “fever which precedes the languid rout Of our sensations”[130], and the loving of faithful pairs, we have seen, is a mere pretence[131]. “… how the devil is it that fresh features Have such a charm for us poor human creatures?”[132] Byron asks, seemingly perplexed about the fact that Juan completely forgets Julia at sight of the beautiful Haidée:

```
I hate inconstancy; I loathe, detest,
          Abhor, condemn, abjure the mortal made
Of such quicksilver clay that in his breast
          No permanent foundation can be laid.
Love, constant love, has been my constant guest,
          And yet last night, being at a masquerade,
I saw the prettiest creature, fresh from Milan,
Which gave me some sensations like a villain.(133)
```

Inconstancy is an inalienable component of love and consequently as uncontrollable as love itself. Inconstancy will have its way, whether one likes it or not, and no rational argument can check its course. Byron illustrates this by continuing the digression in his usual ironical manner:

```
But soon Philosophy came to my aid
          And whispered, ‘Think of every sacred tie!’
‘I will, my dear Philosophy,’ I said,
          ‘But then her teeth, and then oh heaven, her eye!
I'll just inquire if she be wife or maid
          Or neither—out of curiosity.’
‘Stop!’ cried Philosophy with an air so Grecian
(Though she was masked then as a fair Venetian).

‘Stop!’ So I stopped.(134)
```

The philosophy which comes to his aid and suppresses the symptoms of his inconstancy is not rational argument, but his jealous female companion demanding her due. Nor can one extenuate this natural ingredient

of love by any kind of Platonic sublimation and explain it away as “A fine extension of the faculties, … Drawn from the stars, and filtered through the skies”[135]. Like love itself to which it is inseparably attached, it is a primarily erotic power calling for physical satisfaction:

```
          In short it is the use of our own eyes,
With one or two small senses added, just
To hint that flesh is formed of fiery dust.(136)
```

Even after Juan's tragic love-affair with Haidée, when the reader least expects that Juan would break his solemn vows of constancy, he sees the heroically resolved Juan yield to as trite a motive as the tears of the beautiful Gulbeyaz:

```
Juan was moved; he had made up his mind
          To be impaled, or quartered as a dish
For dogs, or to be slain with pangs refined,
          Or thrown to lions, or made baits for fish,
And thus heroically stood resigned,
          Rather than sin—except to his own wish.
But all his great preparatives for dying
Dissolved like snow before a woman crying.

As through his palms Bob Acres' valour oozed,
          So Juan's virtue ebbed, I know not how.
And first he wondered why he had refused,
          And then, if matters could be made up now,
And next his savage virtue he accused,
          Just as a friar may accuse his vow,
Or as a dame repents her of her oath,
Which mostly ends in some small breach of both.(137)
```

Triteness is another aspect which, in *Don Juan,* unmasks love's profound vanity. Traditional literature showed only half the truth and told plain downright lies when it idealized love and represented it as an ever-burning passion outliving even the lovers and eternalizing their memory. Byron, whose aim it was to show his readers the whole truth with only slight restriction, was naturally anxious to stress the ephemeral nature of love and, in addition to this, to stress its corporeality and materiality in opposition to the wrong literary concept of heavenly and angelical love. This is the true aim and purport of Byron's digressions about love's dependence on food and physical health. Juan's resolution to remain faithful to Julia in his banishment is firm and seemingly unshakeable, but it hardly survives as trite a thing as seasickness:

```
Love's a capricious power. I've known it hold
          Out through a fever caused by its own heat,
But be much puzzled by a cough and cold
          And find a quinsy very hard to treat.
Against all noble maladies he's bold,

          But vulgar illnesses don't like to meet,
Nor that a sneeze should interrupt his sigh,
Nor inflammations redden his blind eye.

But worst of all is nausea or a pain
          About the lower region of the bowels.
Love, who heroically breathes a vein,
          Shrinks from the application of hot towels,
And purgatives are dangerous to his reign,
          Seasickness death.(138)
```

The idea of the corporeality of love is most prominent in the Haidée episode, obviously in order to provide the necessary counterpoise to the paradisaical illusion. Here lies the chief function of Haidée's maid Zoe, a character often compared to Shakespeare's Nurse in *Romeo and Juliet.* Though Byron almost certainly misread *Romeo and Juliet* as the tragedy of two innocent young lovers, it must be kept in mind that the aim of Shakespeare's drama was totally different from that of Byron's epic poem. Shakespeare's Nurse, though like Zoe a comic go-between, emphasizes the sinfulness of the primarily erotic lovers[139], whereas Byron did not recognize the existence of any form of primarily ideal love and discerned no sin in the frank sexuality of Juan and Haidée. Zoe serves as cook to the young lovers, acting her part as go-between by keeping their love alive with coffee and fried eggs, aware "that the best feelings must have victual"[140]. Love is erotic and not ideal, earthly and not paradisaical, and hence it "must be sustained like flesh and blood"[141]:

```
For health and idleness to passion's flame
          Are oil and gunpowder; and some good lessons
Are also learnt from Ceres and from Bacchus,
Without whom Venus will not long attack us.

While Venus fills the heart (without heart really
          Love, though good always, is not quite so good),
Ceres presents a plate of vermicelli
          (For love must be sustained like flesh and blood),
While Bacchus pours out wine or hands a jelly.

          Eggs, oysters too, are amatory food,
But who is their purveyor from above
Heaven knows; it may be Neptune, Pan, or Jove.(142)
```

B) THE DANGER AND VANITY OF GLORY

The dangers of war into which Johnson and Juan bring themselves to quench their "thirst For glory gaping o'er a sea of slaughter"[143] are too obvious, the description of the gruesome carnage on the battlefield at Ismail is too lively, to need further comment. Byron's exposition of the vanity of all glory, however, requires a detailed discussion. Its close relationship to the vanity of all love is made apparent in the first stanza of canto seven, forming the transition from the love-adventures to the war-adventures of Don Juan:

```
Oh Love! Oh Glory! what are ye who fly
          Around us ever, rarely to alight?
There's not a meteor in the polar sky
          Of such transcendent and more fleeting flight.
Chill and chained to cold earth, we lift on high
          Our eyes in search of either lovely light.
A thousand and a thousand colours they
Assume, then leave us on our freezing way.(144)
```

The image of the polar lights, aurora borealis and aurora australis, seen by a wanderer in the arctic regions, again suggests the irreconcilable antithesis of illusion and reality. Man refuses to see this distinction and follows the treacherous will-o'-the-wisps, reaching for the impossible, because, in the "waste and icy clime"[145] of reality, he stands in need of illusions. This is a point in Byron's pessimistic thought that will again claim our attention.

Thus man's airy dreams of military glory must inevitably expire in blank disillusionment. It is this order and law of nature which Byron has in mind when he makes Alp prefer the sight of dying soldiers weltering in their warm blood to the sight of dead soldiers fed upon by vultures, dogs, and worms[146]. The first sight still admits notions of fame and honour, whereas the second, the necessary sobering consequence of the first, leaves nothing but the humiliating impression of decay and time's triumph[147]. Future glory, Byron comments in an

ensuing reflection, must share the fate of all past glory, as future monuments must share the fate of all past monuments, falling a prey to all-devouring and all-oblivious time:

```
There is a temple in ruin stands,
Fashion'd by long-forgotten hands;
Two or three columns, and many a stone,
Marble and granite, with grass o'ergrown!
Out upon Time! it will leave no more
Of the things to come than the things before!
Out upon Time! who for ever will leave
But enough of the past for the future to grieve
O'er that which hath been, and o'er that which must be:
What we have seen, our sons shall see;
Remnants of things that have pass'd away,
Fragments of stone rear'd by creatures of clay!(148)
```

The young twenty year old Byron had already discovered the illusory and vain pursuit of immortality through military glory to be one of the ineradicable roots of human misery. As early in his life as 1810, on his first voyage to the East, Byron had paid daily visits to the fabled battleground of Troy[149], “That field which blood bedew'd in vain”[150]. He had stood there, thrilled with awe and agitation, musing on the evanescent transitoriness of martial splendour. All that remained of Troy was “a lone and nameless barrow”[151]. The tombstones outlive the dead, dust outlives the tombstones, but in Troy the “very dust is gone”[152]. Without the songs of Homer, none would recall the names of either Dardans or Greeks who sought immortality in the battle of Troy[153]. True, Byron had to admit that the great conquerors of the earth were still sporadically remembered, at least by the educated, but he also knew how short they had fallen of their illusory ambitions. On looking down from the abode of the dead, Napoleon must smile to see the “little that he was and sought to be”[154]. And, as far as Alexander is concerned,

```
How vain, how worse than vain, at length appear
The madman's wish, the Macedonian's tear!
He wept for worlds to conquer—half the earth
Knows not his name …(155)
```

Ismail, the fortified town in Bessarabia held by the Turks since the sixteenth century and taken by the Russians in 1790, belonged neither to the occupants nor to the assailants. That war between the empires of Turkey and Russia did not count among the romantic wars of liberation which Byron fully sanctioned[156], and in the support of which he finally died[157]. The sole political motive behind it was “lust of power”[158]. Both the Sultan of Turkey and Empress Catherine of Russia are far away from the scene of action, beguiling their time, the one with his harem of pretty slaves, the other with her guard of tall soldiers[159]. To both, politics is a bothersome interruption of their pleasures, and so they confer it upon their plenipotentiaries, to the detriment of their own and their peoples' interests:

```
Had Catherine and the Sultan understood
          Their own true interests, which kings rarely know,
Until 'tis taught by lessons rather rude,
          There was a way to end their strife, although
Perhaps precarious, had they but thought good
          Without the aid of prince or plenipo:
She to dismiss her guards and he his harem
And for their other matters meet and share 'em.(160)
```

But as it is, the Sultan leaves the matter of Ismail to his chief Pasha, and Catherine, the “greatest of all sovereigns and whores”[161], to one of her six foot high paramours, the Prince Potemkin[162], who orders the capture of Ismail without even consulting the Empress[163]. When the city is taken and lost, the chief Pasha, in his safe stone bastion, at length condescends to ask for information concerning the outcome of the battle, and

does not even think it necessary to negotiate and sign the surrender himself[164]. Byron's description of his martial stoicism in the midst of his city's ruins is a splendid example of the poem's ironic style:

In the meantime, cross-legged with great sang-froid
Among the scorching ruins he sate smoking
Tobacco on a little carpet (Troy
Saw nothing like the scene around), yet looking
With martial stoicism. Nought seemed to annoy
His stern philosophy, but gently stroking
His beard, he puffed his pipe's ambrosial gales,
As if he had three lives as well as tails.(165)

When, after the Russian victory, Juan leaves for the Court of Petersburg, we see how shockingly the Russian sovereign's interest in the fate of her valiant soldiers resembles that of the chief Pasha. Unmoved by the cruel deaths of so many human beings, Catherine looks on the war as on a cockfight in which she has made her bets, turning the fate of thousands into a pastime for sovereigns:

Don Juan, who had shone in the late slaughter,
Was left upon his way with the dispatch,
Where blood was talked of as we would of water;
And carcasses, that lay as thick as thatch
O'er silenced cities, merely served to flatter
Fair Catherine's pastime, who looked on the match
Between these nations as a main of cocks,
Wherein she liked her own to stand like rocks.(166)

It is in the service of such luxury-spoiled, debauched politicians, far away from and virtually not even interested in the scene of action, that the soldiers risk their lives and vainly die in pursuit of an immortality which glory will never confer upon them. The soldiers promptly swallow the deadly baits laid out for them, in the shape of an embroidered uniform and medals, ironically called "things immortal to immortal man, As purple to the Babylonian harlot"[167]. They see glory and run before it as pigs were proverbially (according to one of the old zoological pseudodoxia epidemica) said to see and run before the wind, an image which immediately recalls another, the ship metaphor as discussed above:

But glory's glory, and if you would find
What that is—ask the pig who sees the wind.

At least he feels it, and some say he sees,
Because he runs before it like a pig;
Or if that simple sentence should displease,
Say that he scuds before it like a brig,
A schooner …(168)

The implications of these two comparisons are obvious. Glory is an irresistible passion which man cannot help yielding to, although it is mere wind and nothingness. The pig which instinctively runs before that wind reminds us of the 'nine farrow' of the sow of glory enumerated in the poem's second stanza:

Vernon, the butcher Cumberland, Wolfe, Hawke,
Prince Ferdinand, Granby, Burgoyne, Keppel, Howe,
Evil and good, have had their tithe of talk
And filled their signposts then, like Wellesley now.
Each in their turn like Banquo's monarchs stalk,
Followers of fame, 'nine farrow' of that sow.(169)

This is the actual reason why Byron perverts the traditional presentation of the epic hero in the first lines of his own epic poem:

```
I want a hero, an uncommon want,
          When every year and month sends forth a new one,
Till after cloying the gazettes with cant,
          The age discovers he is not the true one.(170)
```

It would be a barren oversimplification to see this perversion of the exordial "Arma virumque cano …" as a mere formal sign that Byron was about to write an anti-epic as Sterne wrote an anti-novel. Byron wants a hero because, in his view of things, deeds of valour confer but a short-lived, fickle, and transient glory upon the warrior which is incompatible with the epic immortality of Ulysses and Aeneas, Orlando and Rinaldo as claimed by Homer, Virgil, Ariosto, and Tasso:

```
Nelson was once Britannia's god of war
          And still should be so, but the tide is turned.
There's no more to be said of Trafalgar;
'Tis with our hero quietly inurned,
Because the army's grown more popular,
          At which the naval people are concerned.
Besides the Prince is all for the land service,
Forgetting Duncan, Nelson, Howe, and Jervis.(171)
```

The Marquis Gabriel de Castelnau, upon whose *Essai sur l'histoire ancienne et moderne de la nouvelle Russie*[172] Byron based his account of the siege of Ismail[173], despaired of relating all the events even of the first day of the Russian attack and limited his report to the feats of some distinguished strangers fighting on the Russian side, the Prince de Ligne, Langeron, and Damas[174]. Byron cites this as another proof of the short-lived nature of martial glory:

```
This being the case may show us what fame is.
          For out of these three preux chevaliers, how
Many of common readers give a guess
          That such existed? And they may live now
For aught we know. Renown's all hit or miss;
          There's fortune even in fame, we must allow.(175)
```

The only soldier among the three who can be dimly remembered is Field Marshal Charles Joseph, Prince de Ligne, whose published writings have "half withdrawn from him oblivion's screen"[176]. But the memory of the others who fought no less heroically has completely faded, together with the names of innumerable fallen heroes printed in the gazettes:

```
Of all our modern battles, I will bet
You can't repeat nine names from each Gazette.(177)
```

Newspaper glory enjoyed for a day after death is one of Byron's favourite proofs of the folly of seeking immortality in war, a folly which he admittedly could not resist himself:

```
I wonder (although Mars no doubt's a god I
          Praise) if a man's name in a bulletin
May make up for a bullet in his body?(178)
```

And even this fleeting shadow of glory was insecure insofar as many names were misspelt in the casualty lists:

```
          Thrice happy he whose name has been well spelt
In the dispatch; I knew a man whose loss
Was printed Grove, although his name was Grose.(179)
```

Soldiers should realize that their very names struck them from the roll of fame and left them a victim to eternal oblivion. As for the Russian soldiers, they fought as cruelly and valiantly as Achilles himself, but they do not share his immortality for as simple a reason as the harshness of their names[180]. The poet, Byron ironically demonstrates, cannot erect a lasting monument to their fame because he will find it quite impossible to harmonize their unpronounceable names with the demand for poetic euphony:

Still I'll record a few, if but to increase
Our euphony. There were Strongenoff and
Strokonoff,
Meknop, Serge Lwow, Arseniew of modern Greece,
And Tschitsshakoff and Roguenoff and Chokenoff
And others of twelve consonants apiece.
And more might be found out, if I could poke
enough
Into gazettes; but Fame (capricious strumpet),
It seems, has got an ear as well as trumpet

And cannot tune those discords of narration,
Which may be names at Moscow, into rhyme.(181)

As to the English soldiers in the service of the Russian army, they were Tom, Dick, and Harry, persons of no note at least with respect to their names:

'Mongst them were several Englishmen of pith,
Sixteen called Thomson and nineteen named Smith.(182)

Their Christian names, too, obstruct their road to fame with their commonness. Among the sixteen Thomsons, there were one Jack, one Bill, and fourteen Jameses[183]. Among the nineteen Smiths, there were three Peters and an unspecified number of “Jacks and Gills and Wills and Bills”[184]. And, finally, Byron adds, their obscure origin, as well as their common names, exclude them from more than mere newspaper praise:

But when I've added that the elder Jack Smith
Was born in Cumberland among the hills
And that his father was an honest blacksmith,
I've said all I know of a name that fills
Three lines of the dispatch in taking Schmacksmith,
A village of Moldavia's waste, wherein
He fell, immortal in a bulletin.(185)

This also explains Byron's choice of the name of John Johnson. Byron ingeniously contrasts this ordinary name with the man's extraordinary valour to keep the reader constantly aware of the self-acknowledged vanity of Johnson's pursuit of military glory. Here a typically ironic specimen of this technique of satire:

Up came John Johnson (I will not say Jack,
For that were vulgar, cold, and commonplace
On great occasions, such as an attack
On cities, as hath been the present case)—
Up Johnson came …(186)

So Byron ridicules the courage of Juan and Johnson, who, with nothing but ephemeral newspaper praise to expect instead of real heroic immortality, cut their way through thousands of dead and dying soldiers, not even able to guess where they might be going,

But fighting thoughtlessly enough to win
To their two selves one whole bright bulletin.(187)

The aimlessness of the two soldiers on the battlefield is symbolic of the aimlessness of their whole engagement in the war. This is made especially plain in the case of Juan[188]. Separated from Johnson and his corps, Juan finds himself alone and at odds against the enemy. Neither knowing nor caring where he fights[189], forgetting even the welfare of his own corps[190], he rushes where the hottest fire is seen and the loudest cannon heard[191]. By comparing him to lonely travellers hunting a will-o'-the-wisp over bog and brake or to shipwrecked sailors looking for the nearest shelter, Byron exposes the vanity and danger of man's passion for glory as well as his instinctive propensity to wreak his own destruction, a component of human nature which we shall have to revert to for a more systematic treatment:

```
Perceiving nor commander nor commanded
          And left at large like a young heir to make
His way to—where he knew not—singlehanded,
          As travellers follow over bog and brake
An ignis fatuus, or as sailors, stranded,
          Unto the nearest hut themselves betake,
So Juan, following honour and his nose,
Rushed where the thickest fire announced most foes.(192)
```

There exists, however, another, quite harmless and certainly more positive, mode of pursuing glory, the artist's effort to immortalize both his creations and himself. The creatures of the mind survive the creatures of clay and are “Essentially immortal” in their bodiless existence[193]: Shakespeare's Shylock and Othello, for instance, or Otway's Pierre, famous Venetians in famous English dramatic works[194]. It is in them that the poet seeks a refuge from his state of mortal bondage[195], as indeed all poetic creation is, to Byron, an attempt to escape from this dull life into a brighter world and more beloved existence[196]. But, again, the would-be dreamer's reason knows and convinces him and us that such escapes are short-lived illusions. Only for a moment could be stand on the Bridge of Sighs, view Venice sink back like seaweed into the sea from which she rose, imagine her decay completed and repeople the solitary shore with Shylock, Othello, and Pierre[197]. Then he would infallibly experience the factual world's superior strength and see the real constellations outshine the stars of the imagination[198]:

```
                                                  … waking Reason deems
          Such overweening phantasies unsound,
And other voices speak, and other sights surround.(199)
```

This further awareness of the impossibility of escaping mortality in this life without indulging illusions does, however, not necessarily involve the impossibility of achieving literary immortality after death. In *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage,* even in the fourth canto published as late as 1818, Byron still held some illusory confidence in a possible immortality of literary creation, though he showed quite uncertain of his own poetical perpetuity[200]. In undiminished splendour, the works of ancient authors still stand out among the vast heap of ruin and decay which the poet of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* is contemplating. Cicero, “Rome's least-mortal mind”[201], Dante, Petrarch, Ariosto, and Tasso have outlived the ruin of both Rome and Italy and will not fall into oblivion[202]. The proud palaces of Venice are crumbling to the shore, the Rialto is in a state of decay, Tasso's echoes have died with the voice of the songless gondolier, but Tasso's memory survives[203]. Alfonso, Duke of Ferrara, could humiliate Tasso's body by debasement and imprisonment among maniacs, but, while his own name is rotting in oblivion, he proved unable to quell Tasso's immortal fame:

```
                                                                      Glory without end
Scatter'd the clouds away; and on that name attend
The tears and praises of all time.(204)
```

In contrast to *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, Don Juan* contains no such fervid apotheosis of literary immortality. The incredible credo has vanished, biblical transfiguration and hymnic glorification are no longer attributes of fame. Again, a beautiful romantic illusion has evaporated, the illusion of not having lived and

worked in vain. In Ravenna, Byron found both the column commemorating the victory and death of the young Gaston de Foix, who, in 1512, had conquered that Italian city for the French King, and the little cupola above the tomb of Dante, whose ambition was not

```
          To add to the vain-glorious list of those
          Who dabble in the pettiness of fame,
And make men's fickle breath the wind that blows
          Their sail, and deem it glory to be class'd
          With conquerors, and virtue's other foes,
In bloody chronicles of ages past.(205)
```

True, the peasants show their contempt of the hero by defiling his column with human excrement, whereas reverence is paid to the sepulchre of the poet[206]. None the less, the monuments of the hero and the poet are subject to the same laws of decay. Dante's humble tomb was opened and desecrated as well as the proud and strong pyramid of King Cheops of Egypt[207]. In *Don Juan,* the ashes of Dante are no longer seen as the ashes of Michelangelo, Vittorio Alfieri, Galileo Galilei, and Niccolò Machiavelli, buried in the pantheon of Florence, had been seen in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage,* dust which is even in itself an immortality. Together with the decay and profanation of their monuments, the memories of the hero and poet will alike fade to nothingness, like the memories of the heroes and poets of remote antiquity. The hero's and the poet's unequal attempts to "identify their dust From out the wide destruction"[208] are equally vain:

```
The time must come, when both alike decayed,
          The chieftain's trophy and the poet's volume
Will sink where lie the songs and wars of earth
Before Pelides' death or Homer's birth.(209)
```

The principle of *litera scripta manet* may be allowed to hold a grain of truth insofar as the printed word survives the author's tomb[210], a thought we have already found in Byron's reflections upon the distinguished foreigners fighting on the Russian side in the battle of Ismail, notably the Prince de Ligne. Deeds of war unremembered in words are doomed to quick oblivion, so that the heroes of Troy would long have been forgotten but for Homer's famous epic[211]. But, seen in larger historical dimensions, *tempus edax rerum* will inevitably prove the stronger principle. One day the author's grave will be a blank and even his nation will exist no more save in chronicles. Then, Byron sarcastically remarks,

```
Some dull MS, oblivion long has sank,
          Or graven stone found in a barrack's station
In digging the foundation of a closet,
May turn his name up as a rare deposit.(212)
```

The writings of Georges Cuvier confirmed Byron's scepticism about literary immortality, the gift of Mnemosyne, by setting human civilization into even larger dimensions of time and space. This world of ours, Byron believed, is but one of many worlds to be destroyed like all the worlds before[213]. And there will arise new worlds to which our civilization will be

```
Like to the notions we now entertain
          Of Titans, giants, fellows of about
Some hundred feet in height, not to say miles,
And mammoths and your wingèd crocodiles.(214)
```

It has been contended that Byron's adoption of the cosmic world view of Georges Baron de Cuvier, as well as his acquaintance with Sir John Frederick William Herschel's new stellar discoveries, imbued him with a sense of the immensity of nature which began to enable him to control his passions and assuage his revolt[215]. But Byron's growing awareness of immensity confirmed rather than attenuated his sense of the vanity of human efforts. His proud complaints of increasing depression and melancholy[216] show that his final resignation was

bitter rather than serene. There had arisen nothing in him of “Zuversicht, Hoffnung und tröstlicher Versenkung in die Schönheit und Unendlichkeit der Schöpfung”[217] when he died over the composition of *Don Juan.* Nothing had changed since January 1821, when, on reading, in a case of murder, that a grocer at Tunbridge had sold bacon wrapped up in a leaf of Richardson's *Pamela,* he had written in his diary:

> What would Richardson, the vainest and luckiest of *living* authors (i.e. while alive)—… what would he have said, could he have traced his pages from their place on the French prince's toilets (see Boswell's Johnson) to the grocer's counter and the gipsy-murderess's bacon!!!
>
> What would he have said? What can any body say, save what Solomon said long before us?[218]

Thus Byron wrote his work in spite of his awareness of the vanity of seeking glory and immortality in art[219], just as he loved and fought in spite of his awareness of the vanity and danger of love and war. This frustrating consequence of Byron's view of human nature is an aspect to be considered in our next chapter.

Notes

1. Byron, *Mazeppa,* lines 375-795, and Coleridge, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner,* 1798, lines 81-546.
2. Also cf. Gleckner, Byron and the Ruins of Paradise, p. 309. Gleckner makes the point by way of a casual literary comparison, without realizing the similarities between the two narrative poems.
3. Byron, Letter to Augusta Leigh, 17-9-1816, in *Letters and Journals,* ed. Marchand, London. 1973, V. 94. There is an unconscious seriousness in Byron's bantering, as also in his mocking comment on his mother-in-law's recovery from illness (Letter to Thomas Moore, 28-4-1821, in *The Works of Lord Byron, Letters and Journals,* ed. Prothero, London, 1891-1901, V. 272):

   Lady Noel has, as you say, been dangerously ill; but it may console you that she is dangerously well again.

   Also v. Byron, Hints from Horace, lines 663-664:

   ```
   Orpheus, we learn from Ovid and Lempriere,
   Led all wild beasts but women by the ear.
   ```
4. Cf. Byron, Letter to John Murray, 16-2-1821, in *Letters and Journals,* ed. Prothero, V. 242-243. For a comparative study of the Don Juan legend from seventeenth- to twentieth-century European literature v. Leo Weinstein, *The Metamorphoses of Don Juan,* Stanford, 1959.
5. Edward Everett Bostetter points out the tragic possibilities inherent in Juan's situation at Norman Abbey (Bostetter, The Romantic Ventriloquists, p. 246).
6. Byron, The Bride of Abydos, 1813, 2. 563-568.
7. Byron, The Siege of Corinth, 1816, lines 847-896.
8. Byron, *The Corsair,* 1814, 2. 225-252.
9. ibid. 3. 196-199. Cf. Byron, *Don Juan,* 2. 199. 1-8.
10. v. Byron, Don Juan, 4. 73. 7-8:

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                            Let none think to fly the danger,
    For soon or late Love is his own avenger.
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11. Praz, *The Romantic Agony,* 1933, New York, 1960. Translated from the Italian by Angus Davidson.
12. ibid. pp. 61-81.
13. ibid. p. 81.
14. ibid. p. 73.
15. Byron, *Manfred,* II/2, 184-185. The story is that of Pausanias and Cleonice as told by Plutarch in his

Life of Cimon, and retold by Goethe in his review of *Manfred,* Uber Kunst und Altertum, II, 1820, in Sämtliche Werke, Jubiläums-Ausgabe, ed. von der Hellen, Stuttgart and Berlin, 1902-1912, XXXVII. 185-186. It is, however, doubtful whether Goethe understood the real purport of the story, or whether he mistook it literally for a parallel elucidation of Manfred's guiltless crime.

16. Byron, *Manfred,* II/4, 153. For Byron's personal dislike to vampires and vampirism also v. his Letter to the Editor of *Galignani's Messenger,* 27-4-1819, in *Letters and Journals,* ed. Marchand, VI. 118-119, and his self-tormenting regretful words to his wife, "… it is my destiny to ruin all I come near" (Ethel Colburn Mayne, *The Life and Letters of Anne Isabella Lady Noel Byron,* New York, 1930, p. 190).
17. Byron, *Herod's Lament for Mariamne,* lines 1-24. To adapt the story to his own purposes Byron deviated from the historical facts in making Herod, in his dramatic monologue, express love and repentance, whereas, in reality, Herod had married Mariamne for nothing but her Hasmonean descent to justify his usurpation of the Jewish throne, and had led a wretched married life.
18. v. Weinstein, *The Metamorphoses of Don Juan,* p. 81.
19. Byron, *Don Juan,* 13. 12. 3.
20. ibid. 13. 12. 1-7.
21. ibid. 1. 60-61.
22. ibid. 1. 72. 5. For the strengthening of the passion of love by hypocritical repression also cf. the images characterizing the apparent indifference of Adeline Amundeville, ibid. 13. 36-39.
23. ibid. 1. 73. 2-3.
24. v. Homer, *Odyssey,* canto 10; Virgil, *Aeneid,* canto 4; Tasso, *Gerusalemme Liberata,* cantos 4, 7, 10, 14, 15, 16, et 20.
25. Byron, *Don Juan,* 1. 71. 6-8.
26. ibid. 2. 117. 1-2.
27. ibid. 2. 117. 7-8. For the raven as a literary symbol foreboding death and destruction v. e. g. Shakespeare, *Titus Andronicus,* II/3, 97; *Troilus and Cressida,* V/2, 191; *Macbeth,* I/5,
28. Byron, *Don Juan,* 2. 143. 7.
29. ibid. 2. 143. 8.
30. Byron, The Waltz. An Apostrophic Hymn, 1813, lines 87-88.
31. Byron, *Don Juan,* 2. 144. 1-2.
32. ibid. 2. 197. 7-8.
33. ibid. 3. 2. 1-8.
34. v. e. g. Spenser, *The Fairy Queen,* 1. 6. 26. 1-5. Also cf. Caroline Lamb, Letter to Byron, 9-8-1812, in Marchand, *Byron. A Portrait,* p. 130.
35. Byron, *Don Juan,* 5. 96. 1-5.
36. ibid. 6. 42. 1-4.
37. ibid. 6. 55. 2. For this ancient etymology also v. ibid. 11. 21. 2.
38. ibid. 6. 55. 1-8.
39. ibid. 6. 57. 7-8.
40. Byron, Letter to John Cam Hobhouse, 17-5-1819, in *Letters and Journals,* ed. Marchand, VI. 130-131:

    … the Cavalier Conte G[uiccioli] her respected Lord—is shrewdly suspected of two assassinations already—… be that as it may—every thing is to be risked for a woman one likes—…

    Also cf. Byron, Letter to John Cam Hobhouse, 30-7-1819, ibid. p. 188; and Byron, Diary, 28-1-1821, in *Letters and Journals,* ed. Prothero, V. 189, where the poet planned to write a tragedy in five acts on the story of Francesca da Rimini and her lover Paolo, both murdered by her husband, Paolo's brother, whom she had married for political convenience. Byron apparently never wrote his tragedy, though he had translated the Francesca da Rimini episode from Dante's Inferno in 1820.
41. v. Blessington, *Conversations of Lord Byron,* ed. cit. p. 49:

"… I am worn out in feelings; for, though only thirty-six, I feel sixty in mind, and am less capable than ever of those nameless attentions that all women, but, above all, Italian women, require."

42. Byron, *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage,* 3. 32. 2-9 et 3. 33. 1. Here, however, the heart is not broken with the unquenchable fever of love, but with the unquenchable fever of that other great passion, the vain expectation of immortality in military glory (ibid. 3. 31. 1-9): if anything can recall the dead of Waterloo to life, it is the archangel's, not glory's, trumpet.
43. ibid. 3. 33. 6-7.
44. v. p. 72 infra.
45. ibid. 3. 3. 6-9. Also cf. ibid. 3. 6. 9: "… my crush'd feelings' death". For a further instance v. p. 78 infra.
46. ibid. 4. 78. 1-9.
47. ibid. 4. 25. 3.
48. Byron, One Struggle More, and I am Free, line 37.
49. ibid. line 47.
50. ibid. line 42.
51. Byron, Stanzas for Music, March 1815, line 9.
52. ibid. line 20.
53. For Byron's practice of writing original poems to fit traditional melodies v. Joseph Slater, 'Byron's Hebrew Melodies', in SP, XLIX (1952), pp. 75-94, and Thomas L. Ashton, Byron's Hebrew Melodies, London, 1972, passim.
54. Baudelaire, Les fleurs du mal, 'Le goût du néant', 1857, line 7, in *Oeuvres complètes,* Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, Paris, 1968, p. 72.
55. ibid. line 10.
56. Byron, Stanzas for Music, March 1815, lines 1-4. At the age of thirty-five, Byron, in a Letter to Count Alfred D'Orsay dated 22-4-1823, expressed his regret that the young twenty-one year old count should have been disillusioned so early in his life (*Letters and Journals,* ed. Prothero, VI. 195):

    But I am sorry for you; for if you are so well acquainted with life at your age, what will become of you when the illusion is still more dissipated?

    Also cf. Byron, Fare Thee Well, 17-3-1816, lines 57-60, addressed to his divorced wife Annabella Milbanke:

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    Fare thee well! thus disunited,
              Torn from every nearer tie,
    Sear'd in heart, and lone, and blighted,
              More than this I scarce can die.
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    and Byron, The Dream, July 1816, which has been correctly interpreted as "a capsule history of his life from youthful idealism through disillusionment to sad resignation and melancholy despair" (Marchand, *Byron. A Portrait,* p. 246). For the destruction of Byron's youthful idealism and the unbalancing of his soul by experiences of unfortunate love v. the Maddalo figure in Shelley's *Julian and Maddalo* (1818), and Charles E. Robinson, *Shelley and Byron. The Snake and Eagle Wreathed in Fight,* Baltimore, 1976, passim.
57. Byron, *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage,* 3. 10. 1-5.
58. ibid. 3. 15. 1-9.
59. ibid. 4. 125. 2-3.
60. ibid. 'To Inez', 5. 1-4.
61. For an analysis of these two separate voices in Byron's *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage,* analogous to the "empirical I" and the "poetic I" in Dante's *Divina Commedia,* v. Gleckner, *Byron and the Ruins of Paradise,* pp. 39-90, 225-250, 267-297.

62. Byron, *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage,* 4. 164. 1-9.
63. ibid. 1. 65. 8.
64. ibid. 1. 65. 9. Note the oxymora characterizing love's enticing appearance and dangerous reality.
65. Keats, Ode on a Grecian Urn, 1819, lines 26-27, in Poems, ed. cit. p. 535. Byron, in contrast, even felt that his fancying the presence of his late beautiful and beloved chorister John Edleston and of his far-away daughter Augusta Ada led to mere frustration and a sickly, feverish brain: v. *Childe Harold's Pilgramage,* 2. 95-96; 3. 6-7; and, with general application, 3. 42. 1-9 (note here the usual heat and fever imagery in Byron's descriptions of the mind's and imagination's vain efforts). For the limitations and failures of the mind and imagination, due to man's fragile corporeality, v. the excellent article of Ward Pafford, 'Byron and the Mind of Man', pp. 105-127.
66. v. Byron, Detached Thoughts, 72 (1821), in *Letters and Journals,* ed. Prothero, V. 445:

    … it was one of the deadliest and heaviest feelings of my life to feel that I was no longer a boy. From that moment [of leaving Harrow] I began to grow old in my own esteem; and in my esteem age is not estimable.

    Byron left Harrow in the summer of 1805, aged 17. Three to four years later, in English Bards and Scotch Reviewers (line 1057), he nostalgically boasted of having "so callous grown, so changed since youth".
67. Byron, *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage,* 2. 23. 5-9. For Harold's irreparable loss of love also v. ibid. 2. 31. 1-9. This death of the heart occurs even in youth: cf. ibid. 2. 98. 8-9 et 3. 5. 1-3, and Byron, *Manfred,* III/1, 138-148:

    ```
              Look on me! there is an order
    Of mortals on the earth, who do become
    Old in their youth, and die ere middle age,
    Without the violence of warlike death;
    Some perishing of pleasure, some of study,
    Some worn with toil, some of mere weariness,
    Some of disease, and some insanity,
    And some of wither'd or of broken hearts;
    For this last is a malady which slays
    More than are number'd in the lists of Fate,
    Taking all shapes, and bearing many names.
    ```
68. Byron, *Don Juan,* 16. 109. 1-4. The imagery of these lines recalls the famous lyric in Byron's Letter to Thomas Moore, 28-2-1817, in *Letters and Journals,* ed. Marchand, V. 176, expressing the poet's ebbing love under the images of the inconstant moon's fading light and the sword's wearing out its sheath:

    … I find "the sword wearing out the scabbard", though I have but just turned the corner of twenty-nine.

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    So we'll go no more a roving
              So late into the night,
    Though the heart be still as loving,
              And the moon be still as bright.

    For the sword outwears its sheath,
              And the soul wears out the breast,
    And the heart must pause to breathe,
              And Love itself have rest.

    Though the night was made for loving,
              And the day returns too soon,
    Yet we'll go no more a roving
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          By the light of the moon.
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For a stimulating formal interpretation of the poem in the light of Byron's *gesamtwerk,* in conscious opposition to its imaginative disintegrators, v. Hans-Jürgen Diller, Byron: 'So we'll go no more a-roving', in *Versdichtung der englischen Romantik,* ed. Riese/Riesner, Berlin, 1968, pp. 251-262; it is, however, regrettable that Diller's recognition of Byron's continuity of imagination, as also apparent from his earlier study of the poet, does not entail a recognition of Byron's continuity of thought, which would have given more solidity to his aesthetic analysis by setting the lyric into its intellectual context.

69. Byron, *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage,* 2. 23. 7.
70. ibid. 1. 83. 8.
71. Byron, Hints from Horace, lines 220-262.
72. ibid. lines 243-254.
73. Byron, Don Juan, 1. 216. 1-8. Also cf. Blessington, *Conversations of Lord Byron,* ed. cit. pp. 102-103:

    Byron never wished to live to be old … He said, it was a mistaken idea that passions subsided with age, as they only changed, and not for the better, Avarice usurping the place vacated by Love … "And this," continued Byron, "is what age and experience brings us. No; let me not live to be old: give me youth, which is the fever of reason, and not age, which is the palsy. I remember my youth, when my heart overflowed with affection towards all who showed any symptom of liking towards me; and now, at thirty-six, no very advanced period of life, I can scarcely, by raking up the dying embers of affection in that same heart, excite even a temporary flame to warm my chilled feelings."

    and Byron, To the Countess of Blessington, lines 9-12:

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    I am ashes where once I was fire,
              And the bard in my bosom is dead;
    What I loved I now merely admire,
              And my heart is as grey as my head.
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74. Byron, *Don Juan,* 13. 5. 4.
75. ibid. 12. 2. 5-6.
76. Byron, Stanzas written on the Road between Florence and Pisa, line 3.
77. ibid. lines 5-8. Note the past tense of stanzas three and four.
78. v. Gleckner, *Byron and the Ruins of Paradise,* pp. 332-344.
79. Byron, *Don Juan,* 13. 5. 7-8 et 13. 6. 1-3.
80. ibid. 12. 2. 7-8 et 13. 6. 4.
81. ibid. 13. 6. 8.
82. ibid. 5. 22. 8. I cannot quite agree with the theory that the siege of Ismail is Byron's "terrifyingly coherent vision of the shattered, violent, bestial world that is left after the death of the heart and the loss of Eden" (Gleckner, *Byron and the Ruins of Paradise,* p. 344). Juan's participation in the battle is not a result of his lost illusions of love, but a manifestation of his antithetically mixed human nature as experienced by Byron himself, enabling him alternately to follow two contradictory illusions, to love and to kill at short intervals. Byron's Conrad is also a splendidly typical example of how the virtue of lawless erotic love may coexist with the vice of reckless war and bloodshed.
83. Byron, *Don Juan,* 4. 9. 1-8; cf. ibid. 4. 8. 1-8. Also cf. Byron, If Sometimes in the Haunts of Men, 14-3-1812, lines 39-40, on the death of his beloved and beautiful young choirboy John Edleston:

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    Thou wert too like a dream of Heaven
              For earthly Love to merit thee.
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84. Elledge, *Byron and the Dynamics of Metaphor,* p. 8.
85. Byron, *Manfred,* II/1, 48.

86. v. Armin Geraths, 'Lord Byron, *Manfred',* in *Das englische Drama,* ed. Mehl, Düsseldorf, 1970, II. 131.
87. Byron, *Manfred,* I/2, 37-47. Moreover, Byron repeatedly stresses the disharmony of body and soul in opposition to the Platonic doctrine of kalokagathia, maintaining that the mind may be great and aspiring in the most rotten and deformed body: v. *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage,* 4. 20. 1-9, and *The Deformed Transformed* (with regard to Arnold and Socrates), 1824, I/1, 145-146 et 217-220.
88. v. Pafford, 'Byron and the Mind of Man', p. 107:

    … *Manfred* dramatizes the tragic dilemma of mind aspiring to complete independence but constrained by its fleshly condition within a deterministic universe.
89. Byron, *Manfred,* II/4, 158-159:

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    He is convulsed.—This is to be a mortal
    And seek the things beyond mortality.
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90. ibid. III/4, 151. Also cf. ibid. II/2, 172-176:

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    How few—how less than few—wherein the soul
    Forbears to pant for death, and yet draws back
    As from a stream in winter, though the chill
    Be but a moment's
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91. ibid. II/4, 58-59.
92. Byron, *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage,* 3. 76-81.
93. ibid. 3. 76. 4.
94. ibid. 3. 78-79.
95. ibid. 3. 77.7 et 3.81. 1-4. Note the comparison of Rousseau's phrensied equalitarian philosophy (as basis of the French Revolution) to the false Pythian Oracle at Delphi, promising fair things but to lead to disillusion and destruction. Also v. Blessington, *Conversations of Lord Byron,* ed. cit. p. 79:

    "Who can walk the earth, with eyes fixed on the heavens, without often stumbling over the hindrances that intercept the path? while those who are intent only on the beaten road escape. Such is the fate of men of genius: elevated over the herd of their fellow-men, with thoughts that soar above the sphere of their physical existence, no wonder that they stumble when treading the mazes of ordinary life, with irritated sensibility, and mistaken views of all the common occurrences they encounter."
96. Byron, When Coldness wraps this Suffering Clay, lines 9-10.
97. ibid. lines 25-32. Also of Byron, Detached Thoughts, 96 (1821), in *Letters and Journals,* ed. Prothero, V. 457:

    The Stoics, Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius, call the present state "a Soul which drags a Carcase": a heavy chain, to be sure; but chains, being material, may be shaken off.

    Even though meant as a Modest Proposal for mad poets, "To die like Cato" held a certain fascination for Byron (Hints from Horace, lines 823-832), much as he would have preferred not to have lived at all (Detached Thoughts, 95, ibid. V. 456).
98. v. p. 31 supra.
99. Byron, *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage,* 3. 15. 1-9:

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    But in Man's dwellings he [Childe Harold] became a thing
    Restless and worn, and stern and wearisome,
    Droop'd as a wild-born falcon with clipt wing,
    To whom the boundless air alone were home:
    Then came his fit again, which to o'ercome,
    As eagerly the barr'd-up bird will beat
    ```

His breast and beak against his wiry dome
Till the blood tinge his plumage, so the heat
Of his impeded soul would through his bosom eat.

100. Byron, *Don Juan,* 2. 212. 8; v. p. 81 infra. Also cf. Blessington, *Conversations of Lord Byron,* ed. cit. p. 68:

    They who accuse Byron of being an unbeliever are wrong … He is a sworn foe to Materialism, tracing every defect to which we are subject, to the infirmities entailed on us by the prison of clay [i.e. the mortal body] in which the heavenly spark [i.e. the immortal soul] is confined.
101. Byron, *Don Juan,* 4. 9. 7-8.
102. Byron, And Thou art Dead, as Young and Fair, lines 5-45.
103. ibid. line 62.
104. ibid. lines 46-54.
105. Byron, *Don Juan,* 4. 71. 2-8; cf. ibid. 4. 11. 1-8 et 4. 12. 1-8. Also cf. Byron's reflections on the advantages of Zuleika's very similar premature death from grief in The Bride of Abydos, 2. 641-650:

    Ah! happy! but of life to lose the worst!
    That grief—though deep—though fatal—was thy first!
    Thrice happy …

    and on the tomb of Cecilia Metella in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage,* 4. 102. 1-6:

    Perchance she died in youth: it may be, bow'd
    With woes far heavier than the ponderous tomb
    That weigh'd upon her gentle dust, a cloud
    Might gather o'er her beauty, and a gloom
    In her dark eye, prophetic of the doom
    Heaven gives its favourites—early death …

    Byron disconcerted and worried Lady Blessington with similar ideas, connecting the boon of an early death with his view of life as a progressively destroyed texture of illusions (Blessington, *Conversations of Lord Byron,* ed. cit. p. 163):

    "People complain of the brevity of life, (said Byron,) should they not rather complain of its length, as its enjoyments cease long before the halfway-house of life is passed, unless one has the luck to die young, ere the illusions that render existence supportable have faded away, and are replaced by experience, that dull monitress, that ever comes too late? While youth steers the bark of life, and passion impells her on, experience keeps aloof; but when youth and passion are fled, and that we no longer require her aid, she comes to reproach us with the past, to disgust us with the future."
106. Byron, Don Juan, 4. 16. 1-8.
107. ibid. 3. 5-10.
108. ibid. 3. 5. 6.
109. ibid. 3. 5. 8. Also cf. Byron, The Waltz, lines 93-104.
110. Byron, Don Juan, 3. 8. 1-8.
111. Byron, *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage,* 4. 115-126.
112. ibid. 4. 115. 1-3.
113. ibid. 4. 115. 3-5.
114. ibid. 4. 115. 6-8.
115. ibid. 4. 115. 9.
116. ibid. 4. 116. 2-3.
117. ibid. 4. 119. 8.
118. ibid. 4. 122. 7. Throughout the twelve Egeria-stanzas, Byron contrasts the paradise of the fancy against the desert or wilderness of the real world.

119. ibid. 4. 120. 9.
120. Note the accumulation of words denoting disease and death in all twelve stanzas. In stanza 126, the last and strongest of the number, the above-mentioned tree of life appears as an all-blasting upas whose leaves and branches are the “skies which rain their plagues on men like dew”, an inversion of the biblical dews of Heaven.
121. ibid. 4. 123. 1-9.
122. ibid. 4. 118. 9.
123. ibid. 4. 121. 1-9. Note the inversions of the Christian credo as well as of biblical imagery, the sacrifice of the broken heart (Psalm 51. 17) and the panting and thirsting of the soul for God (Psalm 42. 1-2).
124. ibid. 4. 48-52. Note the close imitation of Keats's style, his synesthesia (“ambrosial aspect”), his paradox (“the Goddess loves in stone”), his gemination (“there—for ever there”), his sensuous ecstasy of united pleasure and pain (“We gaze and turn away, and know not where, Dazzled and drunk with beauty, till the heart Reels with its fulness”), and his luxuriously erotic images (“thy lips are With lava kisses melting while they burn, Shower'd on his eyelids, brow, and mouth, as from an urn”).
125. ibid. 4. 52. 5-6.
126. v. Keats, Ode on a Grecian Urn, 1819, line 49, in Poems, ed. cit. p. 537. The “truth and beauty” of the Venuses of Titian and Giorgione, which Byron claims in *Beppo* (12. 1), is yet another instance of an illusion soon destroyed. To conclude from stanzas 11-14 of Beppo that Byron, in the last seven years of his life or so, had arrived at a quasi-Platonic conviction of the inseparable integrity of the real and the ideal as well as of body and soul, and of an imparadised earth where man continually finds the equivalent of lost beauty, is to mistake for a philosophical statement what was obviously meant for an ironic contrast (McGann, *Fiery Dust,* pp. 290-294). Against the background of the Venetian Carnival, itself a symbol of perverted values and disguised truth, Beppo reveals the reality of illusion and deception hidden behind the artistic splendour of “Italian beauty” and “the land which still is Paradise” (46. 1-2), much as Don Juan reveals the reality of illusion and deception hidden behind the beauty and piety of Spain.
127. Byron, To Romance, lines 9-16. Also cf. Byron, English Bards and Scotch Reviewers, line 78, “Believe a woman or an epitaph”, and Hints from Horace, lines 689-696, where the poet compares the inconstancy and faithlessness of the Muse to the same characteristics of women in general.
128. Byron, To Romance, lines 17-24. Note the symmetry of lines 19-20 with lines 23-24, in connection with Byron's growing distrust of his erotic love of woman and man.
129. Byron, Sardanapalus, I/2, 213-217.
130. Byron, *Don Juan,* 9. 75. 6-7.
131. ibid. 9. 74. 2-8; v. p. 31 supra.
132. ibid. 2. 208. 7-8.
133. ibid. 2. 209. 1-8.
134. ibid. 2. 210. 1-8 et 2. 211. 1.
135. ibid. 2. 212. 2-4. Also cf. Byron, *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage,* 1. 83. 1-5:

    Yet to the beauteous form he was not blind,
    Though now it moved him as it moves the wise:
    Not that Philosophy on such a mind
    E'er deigned to bend her chastely-awful eyes:
    But Passion raves herself to rest, or flies.

136. Byron, *Don Juan,* 2. 212. 6-8. Jerome John McGann's study of Byron's poetic development, *Fiery Dust,* takes its title from this significant passage. (For the symbolism of fire and dust in Byron's poetry v. p. 72 supra).
137. Byron, *Don Juan,* 5. 141. 1-8 et 5. 142. 1-8. This is also another instance of Byron's morbid dread of the dangers emanating from women; cf. e. g. his lines on the all-powerful seductive strength of female tears in *The Corsair,* 2. 543-554:

    Oh! too convincing—dangerously dear—

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In woman's eye the unanswerable tear!
That weapon of her weakness she can wield,
To save, subdue—at once her spear and shield:
Avoid it …
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138. Byron, *Don Juan,* 2. 22. 1-8 et 2. 23. 1-6.
139. v. Franklin Miller Dickey, *Not Wisely but too Well,* San Marino, 1957, pp. 63-117.
140. Byron, *Don Juan,* 2. 145. 1.
141. ibid. 2. 170. 4.
142. ibid. 2. 169. 5-8 et 2. 170. 1-8.
143. ibid. 7. 50. 6-7. Also cf. Byron, Letter to Thomas Moore, 8-8-1822, in *Letters and Journals,* ed. Prothero, VI. 101:

    … these cantos contain a full detail (like the storm in Canto Second) of the siege and assault of Ismael, with much of sarcasm on those butchers in large business, your mercenary soldiery …
144. Byron, *Don Juan,* 7. 1. 1-8. For man's vain pursuit of love and glory, illustrated by the image of the meteor's fleeting course, also cf. Byron, *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage,* 4. 124. 1-9:

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          We wither from our youth, we gasp away—
          Sick—sick; unfound the boon, unslaked the thirst,
          Though to the last, in verge of our decay,
          Some phantom lures, such as we sought at first—
          But all too late,—so are we doubly curst.
          Love, fame, ambition, avarice—'tis the same,
          Each idle, and all ill, and none the worst—
          For all are meteors with a different name,
And Death the sable smoke where vanishes the flame.
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    and Napoleon's dramatic monologue in Byron, Napoleon's Farewell, lines 5-6:

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I have warr'd with a world which vanquish'd me only
When the meteor of conquest allured me too far.
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145. Byron, *Don Juan,* 7. 2. 4.
146. Byron, The Siege of Corinth, lines 479-484.
147. ibid. lines 485-494.
148. ibid. lines 495-506.
149. Byron, Diary, 11-1-1821, in *Letters and Journals,* ed. Prothero, V. 165-166.
150. Byron, The Bride of Abydos, 2. 23. Byron's reflections on Troy in the second canto of The Bride of Abydos were occasioned by the geographical proximity of Abydos to Troy.
151. ibid. 2. 49.
152. ibid. 2. 54.
153. ibid. 2. 26-27.
154. Byron, The Age of Bronze, line 92.
155. ibid. lines 33-36.
156. Byron, Don Juan, 7. 40. 1-4; 8. 4. 7-8 et 8. 5. 1-8.
157. v. Marchand, *Byron. A Portrait,* 'A Death for Greece', pp. 444-460.
158. Byron, Don Juan, 7. 40. 5.
159. ibid. 6. 90-93.
160. ibid. 6. 95. 1-8.
161. ibid. 6. 92. 8.
162. ibid. 7. 37. 1-8.
163. ibid. 7. 40. 1-8.
164. ibid. 8. 120. 1-8.
165. ibid. 8. 121. 1-8; cf. ibid. 8. 98. 2-5.

166. ibid. 9. 29. 1-8.
167. ibid. 7. 84. 3-4. Reference to Revelation 17. 1-5. Byron habitually associated the Babylonian whore's garments of purple and gold with the spilling of blood, as in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage,* 1. 29. 6-9, where the Babylonian whore denotes the murderous Roman Catholic Church:

    But here [in Mafra] the Babylonian whore hath built
    A dome, where flaunts she in such glorious sheen,
    That men forget the blood which she hath spilt,
    And bow the knee to Pomp that loves to varnish guilt.

168. Byron, *Don Juan,* 7. 84. 7-8 et 7. 85. 1-5; v. Steffan's and Pratt's commentary, ed. cit. p. 661.
169. ibid. 1. 2. 1-6.
170. ibid. 1. 1. 1-4. Also cf. ibid. 7. 83. 1-4:

    When I call 'fading' martial immortality,
    I mean that every age and every year
    And almost every day in sad reality
    Some sucking hero is compelled to rear.

171. ibid. 1. 4. 1-8.
172. 3 vols., Paris, 1820.
173. v. Steffan's and Pratt's commentary, ed. cit. p. 658.
174. v. Byron, *Don Juan,* 7. 32. 1-8.
175. ibid. 7. 33. 1-6.
176. ibid. 7. 33. 7-8.
177. ibid. 7. 34. 7-8.
178. ibid. 7. 21. 1-3.
179. ibid. 8. 18. 6-8.
180. ibid. 7. 14. 3-8.
181. ibid. 7. 15. 1-8 et 7. 16. 1-2.
182. ibid. 7. 18. 7-8.
183. ibid. 7. 19. 1-2.
184. ibid. 7. 19. 5-8 et 7. 20. 1.
185. ibid. 7. 20. 2-8.
186. ibid. 8. 97. 1-5.
187. ibid. 8. 19. 7-8.
188. v. ibid. 8. 29. 1-3:

    Juan, who had no shield to snatch and was
    No Caesar, but a fine young lad, who fought
    He knew not why …

189. ibid. 8. 33. 1.
190. ibid. 8. 31. 8.
191. ibid. 8. 33. 5-8.
192. ibid. 8. 32. 1-8.
193. Byron, *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage,* 4. 5. 1-2.
194. ibid. 4. 4. 5-9.
195. ibid. 4. 5. 2-9 et 4. 6. 1-2.
196. ibid. 4. 6. 3-4. Also v. Ridenour, *The Style of Don Juan,* p. 33.
197. Byron, *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage,* 4. 1-5.
198. ibid. 4. 6. 5-9. Also v. Marchand, *Byron. A Portrait,* p. 270:

    … he [Byron] always returned from the most airy speculations to reason and common sense.

Byron's emotional love but rational distrust of the imagination is also manifested in his romantic desire yet unromantic inability to find, like Wordsworth, tranquil joy in the remembrance of things past, best expressed in his lyric poem to the moon variously set to music:

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SUN of the sleepless! melancholy star!
Whose tearful beam glows tremulously far,
That show'st the darkness thou canst not dispel,
How like art thou to joy remember'd well!

So gleams the past, the light of other days,
Which shines, but warms not with its powerless rays;
A night-beam Sorrow watcheth to behold,
Distinct, but distant—clear—but, on how cold!
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199. Byron, *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage,* 4. 7. 7-9.
200. ibid. 4. 9. 4-9 et 4. 10. 1-5.
201. ibid. 4. 44. 2.
202. ibid. 4 passim. Byron intimates Petrarch's immortality by presenting him as “Watering the tree which bears his lady's name [i. e. the laurel] With his melodious tears” (ibid. 4. 30. 8-9); the laurel, an evergreen, served as a symbol of immortality, both on the poet's brow and on the believer's tomb.
203. ibid. 4. 3. 1-2.
204. ibid. 4. 36. 8-9 et 4. 37. 1. In view of the fact that Byron had already doubted “the sanguine poet's hope, To conquer ages, and with time to cope” in English Bards and Scotch Reviewers (lines 949-960), this apotheosis of literary immortality must be seen in a polemical rather than confessional light.
205. Byron, *The Prophecy of Dante,* 1821, 1. 53-58.
206. Byron, *Don Juan,* 4. 103. 1-8; 4. 104. 1-4; 4. 105. 1-8.
207. ibid. 1. 219. 5-8. Also cf. the preceding stanza. For Byron's knowledge of the political attempts to unearth and desecrate Dante's relics v. *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage,* 4. 57. 9.
208. Byron, *Don Juan,* 4. 101. 4-5.
209. ibid. 4. 104. 5-8.
210. ibid. 3. 88. 7-8.
211. ibid. 3. 90. 5. Also cf. ibid. 12. 19. 1-8:

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Why, I'm posterity and so are you;
          And whom do we remember? Not a hundred.
Were every memory written down all true,
          The tenth or twentieth name would be but blundered.
Even Plutarch's Lives have but picked out a few,
          And 'gainst those few your annalists have thundered;
And Mitford in the nineteenth century
Gives with Greek truth the good old Greek the lie.
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212. ibid. 3. 89. 5-8.
213. ibid. 9. 37. 1-8. Also cf. Byron's preface to *Cain,* 1821, ed. Truman Guy Steffan, Austin and London, 1968, p. 157.
214. Byron, *Don Juan,* 9. 38. 5-8. Also cf. Byron's Byronically heroic fist-shaking at and braving of time's irresistible tyranny, To Time, lines 33-40:

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One scene even thou canst not deform;
          The limit of thy sloth or speed
When future wanderers bear the storm
          Which we shall sleep too sound to heed:

And I can smile to think how weak
          Thine efforts shortly shall be shown,
When all the vengeance thou canst wreak
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Must fall upon—a nameless stone.
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215. Manfred Eimer, *Byron und der Kosmos,* Heidelberg, 1912.
216. v. e. g. Byron, Detached Thoughts, 73, 74, et 104 (1821), especially 104, where he claims the authorities of Aristotle and Plutarch for his opinion “that in general great Geniuses are of a melancholy turn” and continues (Letters and Journals, ed. Prothero, V. 460):

    Of my Genius, I can say nothing, but of my melancholy, that it is ‘increasing and ought to be diminished’—but how?

    For the benefit of his ease and comfort, Byron would rather have had it the other way round, the saturnine Sheridan for dinner, the pleasant Colman for supper (Detached Thoughts, 107, ibid. V. 461).

    Byron's deepening pessimism entailed an increasingly dark and bleak view of reality (The Dream, 1816, 7. 177-183):

    ```
    Have a far deeper madness, and the glance
    Of melancholy is a fearful gift;
    What is it but the telescope of truth?
    Which strips the distance of its fantasies,
    And brings life near in utter nakedness,
    Making the cold reality too real!
    ```
217. Eimer, ibid. p. 201.
218. Byron, Diary, 4-1-1821, in *Letters and Journals,* ed. Prothero, V. 148-149.
219. For Byron's morbid thirst of glory v. Lady Blessington, *Conversations of Lord Byron,* ed. cit. p. 222:

    Byron had so unquenchable a thirst for celebrity, that no means were left untried that might attain it: this frequently led to his expressing opinions totally at variance with his actions and real sentiments, and *vice versa,* and made him appear quite inconsistent and puerile. There was no sort of celebrity that he did not, at some period or other, condescend to seek, and he was not over nice in the means, provided he obtained the end.

    For Byron's exposition of the transience of literary fame in his controversy with Bowles on Pope v. Wellek, *A History of Modern Criticism,* II. 123-124.

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Criticism: Charles J. Clancy (essay date 1979)

SOURCE: Clancy, Charles J. “Aurora Raby in *Don Juan*: a Byronic Heroine.” *Keats-Shelley Journal* 28 (1979): 28-34.

[*In the following essay, Clancy argues that the character of Aurora Raby is a feminine version of the trademark Byronic hero.*]

Aurora Raby is one of the most fascinating characters in the English episode of Byron's *Don Juan.* Her character, and her significance, have elicited comment from a large number of Byron critics. They indicate, in their variety, a lack of agreement as to her role in the totality of the poem. T. S. Eliot calls Aurora “the most serious character of his [Byron's] invention.”[1] Edward E. Bostetter refers to her as “the most cryptic of all his [Byron's] women characters.”[2] Karl Kroeber notes that she is Byron's “most complex representation of his dream heroine, the pure and wise child-woman.”[3] Andrew Rutherford refers to her as “exceptionally interesting, not as a successful character creation, but as an attempt on Byron's part to establish a religious-moral ideal of the kind we find in Pope, in place of the ‘romantic’ values of some of the earlier cantos.”[4] Without distinguishing the merits of these insights, it is possible to agree with Leslie A. Marchand's observation that “more attention is given to her [Aurora's] personality than that of any character other than

Adeline …"[5] in this episode. Aurora's significance becomes clearer when one notes an aspect of her character not explored by the critics. Pursued in context, this viewpoint illuminates both her nature and her role in *Don Juan.* Her character is in many respects that of the typical Byronic hero transmuted into feminine form. Aurora Raby is a Byronic heroine.

The Byronic hero is the literary type that Byron created in his Oriental Tales and romances, and in certain dramas, and critics have observed that these heroes share an array of fundamental characteristics. Peter Thorslev, in his work *The Byronic Hero: Types and Prototypes,* lists a series of physical and psychological traits which recur in the presentation of such a hero.[6] According to Thorslev, the Byronic hero possesses a dark brow, dark hair, dark eyes, a hesitant smile, the air of a fallen angel, a powerful intellect and will, great sensitivity, an attitude of mixed defiance and remorse, and the capacity to love, to be faithful, and to be loved. Aurora possesses many of these characteristics. The following pages will attempt to establish that Byron consciously created her character to contrast to this male counterpart, to embody the outstanding and valuable characteristics of such a literary type in a dimensioned being. Aurora is not merely a Byronic hero in feminine form; she is a more complex, multi-dimensional comic creation. In Aurora, Byron achieves a culmination of a literary type that he created for far different purposes.

In the Oriental Tales the Byronic hero's physical description frequently includes a pale complexion, dark hair, startling eyes, and a demeanor which suggests past emotional and psychological strife. These characteristics reappear in Childe Harold, the Corsair, the Giaour, Lara, Selim in *The Bride of Abydos, Manfred,* and *Cain.* There is a similar sense of mystery and of evil, in each, about his barely hinted at past, a sense of moral rectitude (individual as opposed to social) about his physical habits in the present, and an "aspect" that both startles and commands. Almost all the Byronic heroes suffer the torments of past memory, experienced especially in dreams, and they usually suffer alone.

Thorslev has noted that "The Romantic hero types … are invariably solitaries."[7] The Byronic hero of the tales and dramas is no exception. *Childe Harold* I presents a protagonist in isolation. The narrator of *Childe Harold* later intones in stanza 71 of Canto III "Is it not better, then, to be alone, / And love Earth only for its earthly sake?"[8] The Giaour shrinks "from Nature's face" (line 1197). Selim, in *The Bride of Abydos,* complains that he "love[s] not solitude" (line 64). The Corsair frequently finds himself alone (I.133), or "Lone, wild, and strange" (I.271). Lara "wandered lone" (I.87). Manfred complains "My solitude is solitude no more, / But peopled with the Furies" (II.ii.130-131). And Cain, early in the drama, seeks solitude because he is sick at heart (I.i). Aurora is of the *beau monde,* yet apart ("her aspect had an air so lonely" [XV.44]).[9]

Aurora's separation from society begins at birth, for her parents, those people that would normally introduce her to it, are dead. She is "silent, lone" (XV.47). She is from an old Roman Catholic lineage, and faithful to her religion: "she was the last, / She held their old faith and old feelings fast" (XV.46). Unlike the Byronic hero, Aurora believes in the God of her religion. The Giaour is described as faithless (line 458), an apostate (line 619), one who refuses the sacraments (line 801), and only looks a Christian (line 811). The Corsair says "My sole resources in the path I trod / Were these—my bark—my sword—my love—my God! / The last I left in youth!—He leaves me now—/ And Man but works his will to lay me low" (II.1082-84). Lara seeks solace from neither "priest nor leech" (I.251), at death he refuses a cross (II.xix). Selim is an unbeliever. Manfred rejects the Abbot, saying "I shall not choose a mortal / To be my mediator" (III.i.54-55). The *beau monde* of England stresses conformity, and in this Aurora is a rebel whose religious practice has a political dimension.[10] She constantly risks exclusion from the *beau monde* for the sake of her beliefs. This in part explains her isolation.

As the Corsair, Selim, and Lara were respected by their pirate and outlaw bands, so the socially and morally debased *beau monde* of England respects Aurora. She evokes an immediate response: "There was awe in the homage which she drew; / Her Spirit seemed as seated on a throne" (XV.47). The island, the pirate vessel, the monastery, the ancestral keep of Romantic isolation are replaced by a metaphoric state above the stage

pantomime of the *beau monde.* Aurora's spirit occupies a throne, a position of physical and spiritual eminence above all that touches her.

Both appearance and lineage contribute to effect command for the Byronic heroes and Aurora. The Giaour has "A noble soul, and lineage high" (line 869); the Corsair possesses a "high-born eye" (I.543); Lara was "Born of high lineage, linked in high command" (I.97). Aurora is "Of the best class" (XV.43), "Rich, noble, but an orphan" (XV.44). Her family has performed great deeds and affected the fate of nations, "and had never bent or bowed / To novel power" (XV.46).

Aurora's behavior recalls the controlled habits of the Byronic hero, who manifests neither sensual nor physical excess. Childe Harold, the Corsair, and Lara are all monogamous, and they refrain from wine, or other sensual indulgence. Even Lambro, the Byronic hero grown old in *Don Juan,* is self-controlled (III.53). Aurora is "austere" (XV.46), "purer than the rest" (XV.55). She is "As pure, as Sanctity itself, from Vice" (XV.52). She has no desire for worldly possessions; neither does she envy Adeline's social status.

Thorslev has noted two characteristics which particularly distinguish the Byronic hero—his air of sadness and of sublimity.[11] These are expressed through his eyes, which make them one of his most outstanding features. Aurora also "had something of Sublime / In eyes which sadly shone, as Seraphs' shine" (XV.45). But Aurora's sorrow is not for herself. She does not suffer from misanthropy or self-pity, as the Byronic heroes do. The Giaour describes the world as a paradise ruined by man, the principle of evil in the world (lines 46-67). Selim in *The Bride of Abydos,* says "and all, save the spirit of man, is divine" (I.15). The Corsair is described as one who "hated Man too much to feel remorse" (I.262), and he describes his love for Medora in the following terms: "I cease to love thee when I love Mankind" (I.405). Lara considers himself apart from common humanity: "But still he only saw, and did not share, / The common pleasure or the general care" (I.101-102). He condemns mortality: "He call'd on Nature's self to share the shame, / And charged all faults upon the fleshly form / She gave to clog the soul, and feast the worm" (I.332-334). Even the peasant revolt he leads begins for reasons of revenge: "Too high for common selfishness, he could / At times resign his own for others' good, / But not in pity—not because he ought, / But in some strange perversity of thought" (I.337-340); "He raised the humble but to bend the proud" (II.898). Manfred "disdained to mingle with / A herd" (III.i.121-122) that he describes as "half dust half deity, alike unfit / To sink or soar" (I.ii.40-41).

Aurora's sorrow is for humanity. "She looked as if she sat by Eden's door, / And grieved for those who could return no more" (XV.45). M. K. Joseph notes that:

> When he [Juan] encounters Eden again it will be—a fainter echo still—London society in its "earthly Paradise of 'Or Molu'", "this Paradise of Pleasure and Ennui"; and then, with redoubled force, Aurora Raby appears as a seraph at the gates of Paradise, mourning for fallen mankind.[12]

Her grief is epical, an aspect of the positive Titanism that Thorslev feels is present in *Manfred* and *Cain.*[13] She pities "Man's decline" (XV.45), recognizing his present state as a denial of his potential. She sees civilization and finds it evil. The Byronic hero struggles with an alien materialistic world, while Aurora uses her imagination and her Catholic orthodoxy to create a new social vision. She views man as a mortal orphan, cut off from eternal happiness by original sin, but having the recourse of self-redemption.

Childe Harold "had learned to love" (III.54), "*That* love was pure—and, far above disguise" (III.55). The Giaour asserts that "Love will find its way" (line 1048), and for him it ennobles all the rest:

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Yes, Love indeed is light from heaven;
A spark of that immortal fire
With angels shared, by Alla given,
To lift from earth our low desire.
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Devotion wafts the mind above,
But Heaven itself descends in Love—

(lines 1131-36)

Selim announces “The war of elements no fears impart / To Love, whose deadliest bane is human Art” (II.940-941). Lara asks “Is human love the growth of human will?” (II.1176). And Cain as hero is superior to Lucifer because of his ability to love: “Yes, [I] but love more / What makes my feelings more endurable, / And is more than myself, because I love it” (II.ii.320-322). While their visions of love are private, Aurora's is public. The ability to love, that characteristic which is usually the redeeming feature of the Byronic hero, becomes in Aurora an humanitarian function.

Thorslev has pointed out that almost all the Byronic heroes express a death wish.[14] The Giaour hears a voice “which beckons onward to his grave, / And lures to leap into the wave” (lines 830-831). The Corsair, before his final venture, announces, “it irks me not to die” (I.333). Manfred attempts suicide (“Earth! take these atoms!” [I.ii.109]) and finally faces death: “Away! I'll die as I have lived—alone” (III.iv.90). Aurora has encountered death at an early age, and it attracts her. As an orphan she feels that her “best ties [are] in the tomb” (XV.44). Donald M. Hassler, in “*Marino Faliero,* the Byronic Hero, and *Don Juan,*” has noted that the Byronic hero, though attracted to death, is “somehow … eternal.”[15] In Aurora we see a “fairy one” (XV.43), one who has “an aspect beyond Time” (XV.45). She possesses transcendental qualities, like those of the Byronic heroes.

Hassler further defines the Byronic hero: “As he appears in the early work, the Byronic Hero is the outcast from society who has cast society out.”[16] Childe Harold is “The wandering outlaw of his own dark mind” (III.3) who is “Self-exiled” (III.16). The Giaour was “born to bear … abhorrence” (lines 1161-62). In *The Corsair* we read: “Yet was not Conrad thus by Nature sent / To lead the guilty … His soul was changed, before his deeds had driven / Him forth to war with Man and forfeit Heaven, / Warped by the World in Disappointment's school” (I.249-253). Aurora, by contrast, retains her place in society. Although she has not cast society out, she distinguishes its essential sterility. Her spirit “strong / In its own strength” (XV.47) permits her to judge Adeline, the *beau monde*'s ideal woman, in a clear light. She illuminates Adeline's character for the reader:

The dashing and proud air of Adeline
Imposed not upon her: she saw her blaze
Much as she would have seen a glow-worm shine,
Then turned unto the stars for loftier rays.

(XV.56)

Although Aurora in this episode plays no active role, Byron appears to have placed her amidst the *beau monde* of England as a moral exemplar, a touchstone for the reader. She reveals the aberrancy of English society, not in bold actions or long speeches, but in subtle and gentle touches. She is a transcendental form given life, a Christ figure who endures and at the same time judges the society in which she finds herself. She is poised uneasily in this society between inner dissent, a state of mind, and active resistance. She quietly suggests the evil of the *beau monde,* but does not oppose it; she walks the fine line between ostracism and compromise.

The character of Aurora Raby draws upon the catalogue of heroic attributes possessed by the Byronic hero. The Byronic hero is characterized by an air of mystery. His noble descent is suggested by his demeanor, but his origins are never revealed. Aurora is also mysterious, but this is caused by the fact that her actions are so indefinite, her words so few. Unlike the noble outlaw, the hero of sensibility who is given new form in the Oriental Tales, and certain dramas, Aurora is contemplative and not active.[17] She is ambiguous because she

must be so in order to survive. She represents only a potential force for good. It seems clear that many aspects of her character are transformations of the qualities found in earlier Byronic heroes, here adapted to serve a different function. She represents an advance over the earlier Byronic heroes because she “kept her heart serene within its zone” (XV.47). She is more composed, more at peace with herself than they were, and also more ideal. Her stability in a world of material and intellectual flux is a product of the *mind,* that great single principle which the later Byronic heroes use to visualize the world.

In *Childe Harold,* the creation of the mind is new life (III.6). Lara's “mind … had fixed her throne / Far from the world, in regions of her own” (I.349-350). Manfred describes his mind as “the Spirit—the Promethean spark, / The lightning of my being” (I.i.154-155), and he later says “The Mind which is immortal makes itself / Requital for its good or evil thoughts” (III.iv.129-130). Cain links insight and goodness: “The snake spoke *truth*; it *was* the Tree of Knowledge; / It *was* the Tree of Life; knowledge is good, / And Life is good; and how can both be evil?” (I.i.36-38).

Aurora's strength seems “most strange in one so young” (XV.47). She possesses the serenity the Byronic heroes seek, a personal communion with the infinite. It is not expressed in the solipsistic egoism of the Byronic hero, but in a true Christian humanism. Aurora is one who practices a grand passion of the intellect, freely confesses it, and triumphs.

Notes

1. T. S. Eliot, “Byron,” *The English Romantic Poets: Modern Essays in Criticism,* ed. M. H. Abrams (New York: Oxford University Press, 1960), p. 207.
2. Edward E. Bostetter, *The Romantic Ventriloquists* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1963), p. 243.
3. Karl Kroeber, *Romantic Narrative Art* (1960; rpt. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1966), p. 49.
4. Andrew Rutherford, *Byron: A Critical Study* (1961; rpt. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1965), p. 202.
5. Leslie A. Marchand, *Byron's Poetry: A Critical Introduction* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1965), p. 229.
6. Peter Thorslev, *The Byronic Hero: Types and Prototypes* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1962), pp. 149-151.
7. Thorslev, p. 66.
8. George Gordon Lord Byron, *The Poetical Works of Lord Byron,* ed. E. H. Coleridge, 1 vol. (1905; rpt. London: John Murray, 1958), p. 195. Hereafter references to the poetry and drama, cited from this edition, will appear in the text.
9. George Gordon Lord Byron, *The Works of Lord Byron: Poetry,* ed. E. H. Coleridge, 7 vols. (London: John Murray, 1918), VI, 557. Hereafter references to *Don Juan,* cited from this edition, will appear in the text.
10. George Gordon Lord Byron, *The Works of Lord Byron: Letters and Journals,* ed. R. E. Prothero, 6 vols. (1900; rpt. London: John Murray, 1922), II, 431-443.
11. Thorslev, p. 68.
12. M. K. Joseph, *Byron the Poet* (1964: rpt. London: Gollancz, 1966), p. 230.
13. Thorslev, p. 122.
14. Thorslev, pp. 160-161.
15. Donald M. Hassler, “*Marino Faliero,* the Byronic Hero, and *Don Juan,*” *Keats-Shelley Journal,* 14 (1965), 58.
16. Hassler, p. 58.
17. Thorslev, p. 149.

Criticism: Peter J. Manning (essay date summer 1979)

SOURCE: Manning, Peter J. "*Don Juan* and Byron's Imperceptiveness to the English Word." *Studies in Romanticism* 18, no. 2 (summer 1979): 207-33.

[*In the following essay, Manning examines the various symbolic ways that characters in* Don Juan *employ silence and language.*]

In a famous essay which mixes praise and contempt in characteristic fashion, T. S. Eliot observed in 1937:

> Of Byron one can say, as of no other English poet of his eminence, that he added nothing to the language, that he discovered nothing in the sounds, and developed nothing in the meaning, of individual words. I cannot think of any poet of his distinction who might so easily have been an accomplished foreigner writing English.[1]

From this stigma of "imperceptiveness … to the English word" Byron and Byron criticism have yet wholly to recover.[2] The condemnation is best challenged by examining the assumptions on which it rests.

Eliot's privileging of the word is true to his symbolist heritage. Implicit in the negative verdict on Byron is the recommendation of an evocative poetry, one that gathers itself into a dense concentration of almost magically suggestive power, a poetry marked by moments at which meaning seems to overflow mere connotation, by nodal points at which meanings accumulated throughout an entire work converge and are released. The sense of an investment of meaning beyond the capacity of words creates a brief illusion of intensity and inclusiveness. A standard that invokes the word thus tends to acquire the hieratic associations of the Word, the authoritative utterance in which not only meaning but also being seem actually to reside. For Coleridge, the most reflective theorist of this mode among the English Romantics, symbolism was, as J. Robert Barth has recently reiterated, intimately bound up with a sacramental view of the world.[3] At its extreme, however, Eliot's position values the single pregnant phrase, the resonant, gnomic aphorism. Keats's Grecian Urn, animated by the inquiries of its beholder, itself speaks only teasingly or remains silent. Unheard melodies can be judged sweeter than real ones because with them the gap between signifier and signified is widest, and the power of suggestion verges therefore on the infinite.

Other premises for poetry are possible, and attitudes other than awed contemplation are appropriate ends. One could sketch a poetics based not on the word but on words: that is, not on the charge granted the individual word (whether through special diction, as the focus of an imagistic or narrative pattern, or by an aura of numinous presence), but on the relationship between words in themselves unremarkable. In contrast to Eliot's bias toward the symbolic, hence the static, one might urge the disjunctive and the dynamic; in place of Eliot's favoring of "full" speech, one might posit a discourse based on absence, one that never offers the consolations of climax or comprehensiveness, never holds forth the promise of an order suddenly made manifest. *Don Juan* exemplifies these procedures, and its richness refutes Eliot's judgment of "this imperceptiveness of Byron's to the English word" by revealing the narrowness of Eliot's criteria. I shall argue that it is precisely in proportion to his refusal to exalt the individual word that Byron is able to display the multiple functions of language itself.

I

The language of *Don Juan* can be approached through the role of language as it is conceptualized *in* the poem. The most satisfying starting-point is paradoxically a scene in which language is unnecessary, Byron's depiction of the embrace of Juan and Haidée. "They had not spoken; but they felt allured, / As if their souls and lips each other beckon'd," the narrator observes (II.187):

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They fear'd no eyes nor ears on that lone beach,
They felt no terrors from the night, they were
All in all to each other: though their speech
Was broken words, they thought a language there,—
And all the burning tongues the passions teach
Found in one sigh the best interpreter
Of nature's oracle—first love,—that all
Which Eve has left her daughters since her fall.
```

(II.189)[4]

Byron develops the theme of Juan's and Haidée's ability to communicate without the mediation of words from the moment that Juan arrives on the island. Haidée, infatuated with her handsome shipwrecked guest, imagines that Juan calls to her, though he is asleep: “she thought … He had pronounced her name—but she forgot / That at this moment Juan knew it not” (II.135). Conversation remains impossible even when Juan revives because Juan and Haidée have no common language, but that barrier proves crossable. “Her eyes were eloquent,” comments the narrator on Juan's bewilderment by Haidée's Romaic, even if “her words would pose” (II.150):

```
Now Juan could not understand a word,
Being no Grecian; but he had an ear,
And her voice was the warble of a bird,
So soft, so sweet, so delicately clear,
That finer, simpler music ne'er was heard;
The sort of sound we echo with a tear,
Without knowing why—an overpowering tone,
Whence Melody descends as from a throne.
```

(II.151)

This characterization of Haidée's voice presents a familiar Romantic figure, at once pathetic and sublime. Voice is here an absolute presence, capable of doing without the agency of words and directly inspiring a response from its hearers. The less Haidée and Juan can talk, the more intensely they share:

```
And then fair Haidée tried her tongue at speaking,
But not a word could Juan comprehend,
Although he listen'd so that the young Greek in
Her earnestness would ne'er have made an end.
```

(II.161)

Freedom from language becomes the very mark of intimacy:

```
And then she had recourse to nods, and signs,
And smiles, and sparkles of the speaking eye,
And read (the only book she could) the lines
Of his fair face, and found, by sympathy,
The answer eloquent, where the soul shines
And darts in one quick glance a long reply;
And thus in every look she saw exprest
A world of words, and things at which she guess'd.

And now, by dint of fingers and of eyes,
And words repeated after her, he took
A lesson in her tongue; but by surmise,
No doubt, less of her language than her look:
As he who studies fervently the skies
```

```
Turns oftener to the stars than to his book,
Thus Juan learn'd his alpha beta better
From Haidée's glance than any graven letter.
```

(II.162-63)

Just before the return of Lambro brings it to an end Byron presents again the preternatural harmony between Juan and Haidée:

```
The gentle pressure, and the thrilling touch,
The least glance better understood than words,
Which still said all, and ne'er could say too much;
A language, too, but like to that of birds,
Known but to them, at least appearing such
As but to lovers a true sense affords;
Sweet playful phrases, which would seem absurd
To those who have ceased to hear such, or ne'er heard. …
```

(IV.14)

The poem puts forward two analogies to the communion that ordinary language is too clumsy to express. The first is mythical and honorific: "They were alone once more; for them to be / Thus was another Eden" (IV.10). Byron delineates the privacy of Juan and Haidée as a mutual transparency, a vision of complete reciprocal love seemingly prior to the fall into selfhood. This formulation is co-ordinate with another of differing tenor; the poem continues: "All these were theirs, for they were children still, / And children still they should have been" (IV.15). The second analogy introduces an infantile coloring into the paradisal scene.

Haidée and Juan both appear as children to the narrator, enmeshed in a bewildering adult world, but within the story their roles are clearly distinguished: Haidée functions as the mother of the infantile Juan. Famished and half-drowned, Juan is reborn from the sea and nursed back to health in Haidée's warm, well-provisioned, and womb-like cave. As the weakened Juan sleeps, Haidée "bent o'er him, and he lay beneath, / Hush'd as the babe upon its mother's breast" (II.148); when he revives, Haidée, "who watch'd him like a mother, would have fed / Him past all bounds" (II.158)

These similes and the narrative configuration in which they occur place the ideal wordlessness of Haidée and Juan in parallel to the symbiotic union of mother and infant, at that early stage of human development before the infant comes to see himself as separate from the mother. Language at this level is a secret and subtle bond, a process of ceaseless and delicate adjustment, of needs understood and gratified before they are expressed. The figurative identification of the erotic sublime, as it were, with the dyad of mother and infant has important consequences for the conceptualization of language in *Don Juan.*

Juan participates briefly in a state anterior to the formation of an independent identity, but this fantasy of boundary-less bliss conflicts with the continued integrity of the adult who imagines it. To aspire toward the condition of Haidée and Juan carries the threat of self-abolition: to an autonomous being the idealized fusion is equivalent to a dangerous dissolution.[5] Inevitably, the beloved Haidée is therefore also a figure of death. As many critics have remarked, ominous overtones surround her from the moment of her introduction:

```
Her hair, I said, was auburn; but her eyes
Were black as death, their lashes the same hue,
Of downcast length, in whose silk shadow lies
Deepest attraction, for when to the view
Forth from its raven fringe the full glance flies,
Ne'er with such force the swiftest arrow flew;
'Tis as the snake late coil'd, who pours his length,
```

```
And hurls at once his venom and his strength.
```

(II.117)

Even Haidée's most maternally protective gestures bear, in exact relation to their nurturing power, vampiric suggestions:

```
And then she stopp'd, and stood as if in awe,
(For sleep is awful) and on tiptoe crept
And wrapt him closer, lest the air, too raw,
Should reach his blood, then o'er him still as death
Bent, with hush'd lips, that drank his scarce-drawn breath.
```

(II.143)

These sinister aspects are reinforced by the two other instances of wordlessness in *Don Juan* with which the episode of Haidée and Juan is thematically connected. The first concerns the grotesque "misshapen pigmies, deaf and dumb" (v.88), who guard Gulbeyaz's door:

```
Their duty was—for they were strong, and though
They looked so little, did strong things at times—
To ope this door, which they could really do,
The hinges being as smooth as Rogers' rhymes;
And now and then with tough strings of the bow,
As is the custom of those eastern climes,
To give some rebel Pacha a cravat;
For mutes are generally used for that.

They spoke by signs—that is, not spoke at all;
```

(V.89-90)

Through the seemingly capricious comparison with the verse of Samuel Rogers, Byron links "smooth" writing to muteness and death, while the slant rhyme of "do" with "though" and "bow" makes clear that he himself rates lithe movement above euphony.[6] The conversation between Juan and General Lascy during the battle of Ismail displays a second, but different, linking of speechlessness and death; this exchange, like that between Juan and Haidée, is marked by linguistic incompatibility:

```
Juan, to whom he spoke in German, knew
As much of German as of Sanscrit, and
In answer made an inclination to
The General who held him in command;

Short speeches pass between two men who speak
No common language; and besides, in time
Of war and taking towns, when many a shriek
Rings o'er the dialogue, and many a crime
Is perpetrated ere a word can break
Upon the ear, and sounds of horror chime
In like church bells, with sigh, howl, groan, yell, prayer,
There cannot be much conversation there.
```

(VIII.57-58)

Byron's description of Juan's enthusiasm for battle recalls several features of the episode of Juan and Haidée and so brings the two episodes into relationship:

```
But of the first, our little friend Don Juan
Walked o'er the walls of Ismail, as if nurst
Amidst such scenes—though this was quite a new one
To him, and I should hope to most. The thirst
Of glory, which so pierces through and through one,
Pervaded him—although a generous creature,
As warm in heart as feminine in feature.

And here he was—who upon Woman's breast,
Even from a child, felt like a child; howe'er
The man in all the rest might be confest,
To him it was Elysium to be there;
And he could even withstand that awkward test
Which Rousseau points out to the dubious fair,
"Observe your lover when he leaves your arms";
But Juan never left them, while they had charms,

Unless compelled by fate, or wave, or wind,
Or near relations, who are much the same.
```

(VIII.52-54; italics added in 53)

The end of this sequence reminds the reader of Juan's enforced departure from Julia as well as from Haidée, and the incongruity of echoing Juan's amorous exploits in the midst of carnage is Byron's means of reinforcing the fundamental kinship of the opposites. Juan is “nursed” in battle as he is nursed by Haidée; for Juan to be alone with Haidée “was another Eden” (IV.10), and for him to be fighting “was Elysium” (VIII.53). Byron announces “fierce loves and faithless wars” (VII.8) as his subject, and the reversal of Spenser is possible because at one level love and war function identically. The link between the two actions is passion, etymologically the root of passivity. Juan's much-remarked passivity might be considered as the annulment of psychological distance, the consequence of an overwhelming presence. The thirst for glory “pervades” Juan, or, to cite the *O.E.D.* definitions, it diffuses and spreads through or into every part of him, it permeates and saturates him. Common to the intensity of war and love is an obliteration of detachment, and, as the introduction of the configuration both here and in the Haidée episode insinuates, the prototype of this experience, erasing the outlines of the self, is the fusion of infant and mother.

The fantasy of fusion is situated at two poles: it is a fantasy of origins, of mother and infant, and it returns as a fantasy of prospective conclusions in sexual union, or in war and death. These become prominent in Byron's portrayal of the lustful Empress Catherine whose troops destroy Ismail. Catherine's infatuation with Juan establishes the equivalence of the “oh!” of sexual joy and the “ah!” of misery:

```
Oh Catherine! (for of all interjections
To thee both oh! and ah! belong of right
In love and war) how odd are the connections
Of human thoughts, which jostle in their flight!
Just now your's were cut out in different sections:
First Ismail's capture caught your fancy quite;
Next of new knights, the fresh and glorious hatch;
And thirdly, he who brought you the dispatch!
```

(IX.65)

Byron began the description of Catherine by expanding upon Horace's ascription of war to sexual passion: “nam fuit ante Helenam cunnus taeterrima belli / causa” (Satire I.3.107-08). The *doubles entendres* of that passage are not more remarkable than its insistence that the gate of life and death is one:

Oh, thou "teterrima Causa" of all "belli"—
Thou gate of Life and Death—thou nondescript!
Whence is our exit and our entrance,—well I
May pause in pondering how all Souls are dipt
In thy perennial fountain:—how man fell, I
Know not, since Knowledge saw her branches stript
Of her first fruit; but how he falls and rises
Since, Thou hast settled beyond all surmises.

Some call thee "the worst Cause of war," but I
Maintain thou art the best: for after all
From thee we come, to thee we go, and why
To get at thee not batter down a wall,
Or waste a world? Since no one can deny
Thou dost replenish worlds both great and small:
With, or without thee, all things at a stand
Are, or would be, thou Sea of Life's dry Land!

Catherine, who was the grand Epitome
Of that great Cause of war, or peace, or what
You please (it causes all things which be,
So you may take your choice of this or that)—

(IX.55-57)

Catherine, at once aggression and sexual passion, birth and death, source and end, is an image of woman as the terrifying and engulfing force who must be resisted. The light she retrospectively casts alters the impression made by Juan and Haidée. Their intimacy offers the sole example of complete communication in *Don Juan,* and Byron's treatment of it, in itself and as part of the series culminating in Catherine, suggests how the fantasy union presses toward a lethal silence. Catherine's Russian is as foreign to Juan as Haidée's Romaic, nor does Catherine speak directly in the poem. If Haidée and Juan transcend the usual barriers of the self, the poem also delineates the limitations inherent in their ecstasy. Insofar as their love is perfect it is finished, incapable of development: "for they were children still, / And children still they should have been" (IV.15). Haidée and Juan reach a state of atemporal happiness, but from the human perspective such freedom from time is stasis and death. The narrator observes as Haidée and Juan join their lives on the beach that she:

had nought to fear,
Hope, care, nor love beyond, her heart beat here.

And oh! that quickening of the heart, that beat!
How much it costs us!

(II.202-03)

What the illusion of the all-encompassing *here* costs is the past and still more the future, the change of the self in time. The totality of Juan's and Haidée's passion is a fearful exclusion, but the countervailing claims of the life they sublimely reject are kept before the reader by the interventions of the narrator. He enables us to perceive that the fantasy of full speech and full understanding, with its attendant values of wholeness, presence, and atemporality, is not an isolated ideal: the thematic networks within which it exists in *Don Juan* expose its connection with silence and the death silence figures. Juan's passion annihilates him on the breast of Haidée, and an ultimate value of silence brings to an end the role of the poet. The narrator and Juan, the poet and the character, are equally endangered: the Latin root of "infant" means "he who does not speak." The episode of Haidée and Juan is Byron's version of the *Ode on a Grecian Urn*: in Byron's meditation on his lovers, as in Keats's, the values of an encompassing, symbolic, finally static imagination are set against the humbler commitments and narrative imaginings of the speaker himself. Both poets at last withdraw from the

potent ideal they have imagined—the figures on the urn, Juan and Haidée—to face the imperfections of "breathing human passion." But whereas Keats throughout his career remains uncertain what language to put in place of the ennobling fictions of epic and romance that he repeatedly elaborated only to reject, Byron deploys a language which acknowledges and enacts the inescapable facts of absence and loss while affirming human vitality. "You have so many 'divine' poems," Byron vexedly exclaimed to his publisher, "is it nothing to have written a *Human* one?"[7] The style of *Don Juan* is co-ordinate with the role of speech in the poem: it is best studied through the plot it represents.

II

Somewhat later in his essay on Byron, Eliot turns to "a long passage of self-portraiture from *Lara*" already singled out by Charles Du Bos in *Byron et la besoin de la fatalité* and declares:

> Du Bos deserves full credit for recognizing its importance; and Byron deserves all the credit that Du Bos gives him for having written it. This passage strikes me also as a masterpiece of self-analysis, but of a self that is largely a deliberate fabrication—a fabrication that is only completed in the actual writing of the lines. The reason why Byron understood this self so well, is that it is largely his own invention; and it is only the self that he invented that he understood perfectly.

Eliot here brilliantly specifies the self-creation Byron wrought in the Byronic hero, but the creation was not wholly uncontingent. If the Byronic hero was no simple transcription of Byron but a fabrication, it was nonetheless a fiction responsive to the fears and desires of its author. The role required of the Byronic hero is displayed in the relationship in *Don Juan* between Juan and Lara's descendant, Haidée's father Lambro.

At first glance Lambro functions merely as a *senex* who intrudes upon the lovers and puts an end to their happiness. Insofar as Haidée's love imperils Juan, however, Lambro is also a savior who rescues Juan from an absorption he is too weak to withstand. Byron's two heroes are the opposing faces of a single figure (biographically, Juan embodies parts of Byron's childhood and Lambro, returning to his shattered home, expresses aspects of Byron's response to his broken marriage[8]). *Don Juan* presents in the temporal sequence of drama the continuum of a psychological strategy: the stern warrior is the protagonist Byron generates to preserve the passive child from collapsing back into his mother. Alfonso's interruption of Juan's affair with Julia in Canto I operates as a similarly providential occurrence, because Juan risks being crushed by the older women for whom he has become the pawn: his mother, Inez, who contrived at the affair for her own reasons, and Julia, suddenly transformed at the end of the canto from a sympathetically self-deceiving lover into a skillfully deceitful intriguer.[9]

As the defense Julia makes on the night the lovers are discovered (I.145-47) reaches its climax, Byron's rhetoric rises toward the sublime: "… pale / She lay, her dark eyes flashing through their tears, / Like skies that rain and lighten" (I.158). While the tide of Julia's apology breaks over Alfonso and his posse Juan lies inert, hidden in the bed between Julia and her maid, "half-smother'd" (I.165), in danger of "suffocation by that pretty pair" (I.166). Here as elsewhere in *Don Juan,* the powerful speech of others is a menace to the hero.

The erotic triangle in both these episodes bears unmistakable Oedipal overtones, and in both the function of the father-figure as a principle of difference is apparent. By forcibly separating Juan from the mother whose love overwhelms him, Lambro, like Alfonso before him, makes possible Juan's independence. Moreover, even as the child models his identity on the father whom he cannot supplant, so Juan asserts himself in responding to this older rival. Attacked by Alfonso, Juan is driven to act: "His blood was up: though young, he was a Tartar, / And not at all disposed to prove a martyr" (I.184). So too, after his weakness and silence in Canto II and his position in Canto III as Haidée's consort, dependent on her for wealth and status, Juan achieves a brief autonomy in his defiance of Lambro: "'Young man, your sword'; so Lambro once more said: / Juan replied,

‘Not while this arm is free’” (IV.40). This confrontation is virtually the first time that Byron presents Juan in direct discourse, and his speech is the proof of his temporary self-sufficiency.[10]

When Lambro overcomes Juan and casts him forth he sets in renewed motion the oscillating and ambiguous journey whose curves shape *Don Juan.* In his passivity Juan falls into a repetitive series at each stage of which he is almost absorbed by a dominating woman—Julia, Haidée, the “imperious” Gulbeyaz, the devouring Catherine, the “full-blown” Fitz-Fulke, and Adeline, “the fair most fatal Juan ever met” (XIII.12); circumstances free him from her, but only to propel him toward the subsequent lapse. The journey is ambiguous because this potentially deadly woman, mother and lover, is a figure of desire and because Juan's freedom consists only of this endless chain of disruptions and losses.

Two alternatives to this dilemma would seem to exist in *Don Juan.* One is typified by Lambro, whose isolated marauding life and coolly powerful manner show him as the avatar of the hero who fills Byron's earlier works. The absolute masculine will with which Lambro crushes Juan and re-establishes his priority, however, *Don Juan* exposes as no solution at all. His contest is depicted by the narrative as more with Haidée herself than with her love-object. Haidée's resistance to Lambro (IV.44-45) is uncolored by the irony with which Byron tinges Juan's, and the extended pathetic description of her death (IV.54-71) completes the eclipse of Juan's moment of bravery. In exerting his authority over Haidée, Lambro destroys the peace of his home: the desolate fate he brings on his island and himself (IV.72) reveals that he too cannot exist apart from the mother-figure. The second solution is embodied in the narrator, who is not so much in the story as above it, but whose words are shaped by the same exigencies as those his story witnesses.

Don Juan locates the origin of language in the Edenic harmony of mother and child: Haidée teaches Juan his “alpha beta” (II.163). The narrator develops the myth from his own experience:

'Tis pleasing to be school'd in a strange tongue
By female lips and eyes—that is, I mean,
When both the teacher and the taught are young,
As was the case, at least, where I have been;
They smile so when one's right, and when one's wrong
They smile still more, and then there intervene
Pressure of hands, perhaps even a chaste kiss;—
I learn'd the little that I know by this:

(II.164)

Language here figures as innately sexualized: talk is desire. Byron underscores the connection in writing of Italy in *Beppo*:

I love the language, that soft bastard Latin,
Which melts like kisses from a female mouth,
And sounds as if it should be writ on satin,
With syllables which breathe of the sweet South,
And gentle liquids gliding all so pat in,
That not a single accent seems uncouth,
Like our own harsh, northern whistling, grunting guttural,
Which we're obliged to hiss, and spit, and sputter all.

I like the women too. …

(44-45)

Yet the consummation of the desire for women must be resisted, deferred, because it would annihilate the poet's voice. As the puns on death and dying in Elizabethan poetry reveal, orgasm is “the little death.” It is

also, as a rejected stanza of *Don Juan* suggests, a phenomenon literally beyond language:

```
But Oh! that I were dead—for while alive—
Would that I ne'er had loved—Oh Woman—Woman—
All that I write or wrote can ne'er revive
To paint a sole sensation—though quite common—
Of those in which the Body seemed to drive
My soul from out me at thy single summon
Expiring in the hope of sensation. …
```

(XVII.13)

Juan's career and the narrator's reflections thus place language between two equally dangerous termini, both of which are approached with desire yet self-protectively put off. At one extreme looms the power of erotic bliss to annul self and voice, at the other the similar threat of the fusion of infant with mother.

In this schema language exists as the unresolved middle between the states that would abrogate it. Moreover, this middle is a middle of repetitions, for the story *Don Juan* tells is of the loss of the desired object in the necessary separation from her, the yearning for her, and the fresh flight from her. Human existence, as the poem sees it, perpetually reenacts the primary liberating catastrophe of separation. A repetition is also a re-petition, a re-asking: the repetitions of the poem set forth again and again the mournful questions "How did I become separate?" "Who am I?" Women as much as men exemplify the pattern: once begun, they too must re-enact their initiating gesture:

```
In her first passion woman loves her lover,
In all the others all she loves is love,
Which grows a habit she can ne'er get over,
And fits her loosely—like an easy glove,
As you may find, whene'er you like to prove her:
One man alone at first her heart can move;
She then prefers him in the plural number,
Not finding that the additions much encumber.

I know not if the fault be men's or theirs;
But one thing's pretty sure; a woman planted—
(Unless at once she plunge for life in prayers)—
After a decent time must be gallanted;
Although, no doubt, her first of love affairs
Is that to which her heart is wholly granted;
Yet there are some, they say, who have had none,
But those who have ne'er end with only one.
```

(III.3-4)

The last stanza illustrates the ever-varying inter-penetrations of the story level and the narrative commentary in *Don Juan,* the two aspects Robert Escarpit has distinguished as "le temps fictif" and "le temps psychologique."[11] This inter-penetration breaks down any simple distinction between the story and its telling: there is only the modulation of language. The narrator's seemingly unmotivated generalization recalls Julia, banished to a convent a canto earlier, and her imposed constancy is the fate his fluid mode avoids. Juan vows eternal fidelity:

```
"And oh! if e'er I should forget, I swear—
But that's impossible, and cannot be—
Sooner shall this blue ocean melt itself to air,
Sooner shall earth resolve itself to sea,
Than I resign thine image, Oh! my fair!
```

```
Or think of anything excepting thee;
```

(II.19)

This protestation is notoriously interrupted by retching, and happily, for Juan's romantic dedication to a single image is the willed counterpart to Julia's unwilling stasis. Juan can go forward because he forgets, and because he is prevented from ever looking back. Similarly, Byron's refusal to linger over the episode of Juan and Haidée is a refusal of fixation, a refusal of the seductions of completion and finality. He writes their story not as a self-contained heroico-pathetic romance like his own earlier tales, but as part of an ongoing narrative whose rhythms undo the authority both of its dreams of bliss and of its conclusion. Byron repudiates his own temptation by the totalizing fantasy of Juan and Haidée (IV.52-53, 74), passionate union or faithful death, to affirm the vital multiplicity of his own independent existence: not for him the diminishing pledge not to "think of anything else, excepting thee." In so doing he restores the intermediate space in which language (and hence his poem) can continue to exist. The space is empty, and marked by absence and lack, but it is an emptiness that invites filling by the imagination of the poet.

III

At the end of the first canto of *Don Juan* Byron threatens to promulgate a definitive set of "poetical commandments": "I'll call the work 'Longinus o'er a Bottle, / Or, Every Poet his *own* Aristotle'" (I.204). In no respect does Byron differ more greatly from the rules than in his departure from the Aristotelean precept that a work of literature should have a beginning, a middle, and an end: *Don Juan* is all middle. The epic conventionally begins *in medias res,* but at the actual middle point of epic is a stabilizing device, a place about which the story can be organized: Odysseus narrating his adventures, Aeneas describing the fall of Troy to Dido, Raphael recounting the war in Heaven to Adam and Eve as an instructive example. In *Don Juan,* however, the condition of unfinishedness is not merely an aspect of the story, a temporary fiction exposed when the whole is complete, but one that attaches to the poet himself and influences the ongoing creation of his text.

The lines of *Don Juan* which the notion of indeterminacy perhaps first brings to mind are the melodramatic ones at the end of Canto XV:

```
Between two worlds life hovers like a star,
'Twixt night and morn, upon the horizon's verge:
How little do we know that which we are!
How less what we may be!
```

(XV.99)

This fundamental unsettledness speaks in other tones as well:

```
Of all the barbarous Middle Ages, that
Which is the most barbarous is the middle age
Of man; it is—I really scarce know what;
But when we hover between fool and sage,
And don't know justly what we would be at,—
A period something like a printed page,
Black letter upon foolscap, while our hair
Grows grizzled, and we are not what we were,—

Too old for youth,—too young, at thirty-five,
To herd with boys, or hoard with good threescore,—
I wonder people should be left alive;
But since they are, that epoch is a bore:
```

(XII.1-2)

This reflection has been prepared for by the allusions to Dante in the previous cantos (e.g., X.27), but Byron transforms the tradition that thirty-five, as the midpoint of man's allotted span of years, is a moment of decision; the era which in *The Divine Comedy* marks a crisis becomes in *Don Juan* a particularly anomalous stage in which meaningful choice seems impossible. The stanzas connect the uncertainties of middle life directly to the paradoxes of a text—“A period something like a printed page, / Black letter upon white foolscap”—and this odd conjunction recurs at the opening of the fifteenth canto, where Byron opposes the fertile indeterminacy of his text to the brevity of life and the blankness of boredom:

```
Ah! What should follow slips from my reflection:
Whatever follows ne'ertheless may be
As àpropos of hope or retrospection,
As though the lurking thought had follow'd free.
All present life is but an Interjection,
An “Oh!” or “Ah!” of joy or misery,
Or a “Ha! ha!” or “Bah!” a yawn, or “pooh!”
Of which perhaps the latter is most true.

But, more or less, the whole's a syncope
Or a singultus—emblems of Emotion,
The grand Antithesis to great Ennui,
```

(XV.1-2)

Here is another form of the paradox already noted. The contradiction recurs, for the “syncope” of emotion which combats boredom itself abolishes consciousness: a syncope is also the loss of syllables and sounds in the middle of a word, hence also the emblem of the cutting-short of the poet's voice. The sexual overtones of the “Oh!” of “Joy” and their equivalence to the “Ah!” of “Misery” recall the dangerous themes previously developed in the portrait of Catherine (see IX.65 quoted above).

The intermediate position *Don Juan* occupies thus appears as a positive *modus vivendi.* The repeated suspension of the story functions on two levels. Juan is caught between infantile unconsciousness and sexual self-annihilation, and the poem's interruption of all his affairs corresponds to a refusal to allow passion its obliterating force. The narrator, yearning for both states, is also caught between his lost youth (“No more—no more—Oh! never more on me / The freshness of the heart can fall like dew” [1.214]), and a future which must ultimately be death. His refusal to treat life according to the familiar pattern of crisis-autobiography is a dissent from the notion of a fixed identity, of a life stiffening into shape once and for all, just as his refusal to precipitate a single final meaning is a mode of ensuring the inexhaustible vitality of his text. On both levels he is committed to filling the empty present, to staving off closure at any cost: “the past tense, / The dreary ‘Fuimus’ of all things human,” which “must be declined” (XIII.40), must be resisted as long as possible. The pun on “decline” again links life and language by operating brilliantly in both contexts. The poem's insistence on its own indeterminacy and arbitrariness is its style of freedom: by rejecting the points of fullness, origin and end, Byron devotes himself to a discourse of absences, fragments, and losses which can yet keep the moment open.

The characteristic mode of this discourse is excursive, associative, metonymic, in contrast to the kind of metaphoric, symbolic concentration lauded by Eliot. As we have seen, Byron's resistance to such nodes of convergence is a matter both of substance and of technique: he denies the fatal power of certain meanings by continuing past them, and refuses permanence to identifications and identity. *Don Juan* is thus an antisublime poem, a poem which no sooner reaches a point of intensity than it undoes its own effects: the poem advances by negating the obsessions to which it returns, and then moving on, again and again.[12] Insofar as Juan represents aspects of Byron's own life, for example, they are admitted only by negation: Juan's crises are

Juan's, never acknowledged as the narrator's. Byron, in contrast to Coleridge and Wordsworth, deliberately stays on the surface (as much as he can), and that is why, despite the extravagantly artificial manner of *Don Juan,* he appears as a realist.[13]

The narrative of *Don Juan* seems to be set free of the constraints of purposefulness:

```
I ne'er decide what I shall say, and this I call
Much too poetical. Men should know why
They write, and for what end; but, note or text,
I never know the word which will come next.
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(IX.41)

Don Juan abounds in this sort of confession, each a protest against a vision of complete authorial control. Byron renounces the goal of a fictitious (and factitious) unity, of a designed poem whose meaning would be thoroughly determinate, thoroughly subservient to an end. In so doing he reinstates the power of language to initiate an endless play of meanings, a range of possibilities unrestricted by the demands of an author obviously shaping, or invested in, his work: compare, for example, the increasing pressure Wordsworth places on his narrative in the later books of *The Prelude* as he strives to make his lived experience accord with a scheme in which "All [is] gratulant, if rightly understood" (1805, XIII.385).[14] Byron's structureless habit of proceeding enables him to combat his anxieties by playing them out; it allows him to take on as his own some of the characteristics of the women whom he has placed as the potent other, desired and feared. His characterization of his poem is suggestively similar to that which he gives of women's letters:

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The earth has nothing like a She epistle,
And hardly heaven—because it never ends.
I love the mystery of a female missal,
Which, like a creed, ne'er says all it intends,
But full of cunning as Ulysses' whistle,
When he allured poor Dolon. …
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(XIII.105)

The digressive manner of *Don Juan* bespeaks a relaxation of will which permits ominous material to surface: instead of repression, whose indefinite force heightens the sublime, the associative chains of *Don Juan* work toward expression and neutralization.[15] Symbolic and metaphoric poetry achieves its richness through compression and ambiguity: *Don Juan,* which, like women's letters, also "ne'er says all it intends," creates its vitality by extended meanings—inexhaustible sequences rather than pregnant points.

Eliot remarks that "if Byron had distilled his verse, there would have been nothing whatever left," but he is uninterested in the positive implications of his witticism. Byron's manner liberates his unconscious: it enables him to write a poem that can continually surprise its author. The long poem for which the Romantics strove, only to find their aspirations turn into an onerous task or poignant failure, is for Byron a spontaneous, ceaselessly proliferating process. Novelty, rather than inevitability, marks the growth of *Don Juan.* The result is a poetry of surprising conjunctions and momentary delights. Consider, for example, the last quoted stanza. "The earth has nothing like a She epistle" sounds, apart from the oddity and false literariness of "She epistle," like a cliché, but the weakly descriptive phrase acquires force when a buried comparison is released in the second line: "And hardly heaven." This in turn becomes the starting point of a brief but consistent series of religious terms: "mystery," "missal," and "creed." If, as the revisions printed in the variorum suggest, Byron was trapped into "whistle" by the need to rhyme with "epistle" and "missal," he resourcefully overcame the awkwardness with the allusion to Dolon and Ulysses. The unexpected change of context, from Christian to classical, is found elsewhere, notably in the clash between epic and Christian values which Byron insists that the reader confront with Siege of Ismail. The poem repeatedly draws on epic tradition: Ismail is the modern

counterpart of Troy, and Juan's wanderings are a skewed version of Odysseus', as the echoes of the *Odyssey* in the Haidée episode make explicit.[16] The linking of female letters to epic craftiness insinuates again the replacement in *Don Juan* of physical adventure by the greater psychological perilousness of “cruizing o'er the ocean woman” (XIII.40). Moreover, the juxtaposition of religious terms and deception—“you had better / Take care what you reply to such a letter” ends the stanza—connects the seemingly chance allusion to the theme of hypocritical piety running throughout the poem: think of Donna Inez keeping the erotically ornamented “family Missal” for herself (I.46). It also recalls the elaborate love-letter written by the convent-bound Julia in Canto I. Byron drops the allusions at the close of the stanza, but not before they have provoked trains of association that send the reader over the whole poem. To read *Don Juan* is to encounter a succession of such tantalizing occasions, a succession which is not determined by any obvious logic, which is inconsecutive but not therefore inconsequential. The sequences begin with license but as they develop become meaningful: they are justified by what they unfold, and so rise above irrelevance. *Don Juan* is not so much “fortuitous,” as Jerome McGann describes it, as it is “overdetermined”: it is because the “fortuitous” happenings can be situated in many overlapping configurations that they possess meaning.[17] The reader may explore each occasion or not, as he chooses, before the flow of the narrator's talk carries him on to the next. The poem, then, is not precisely the “grand poetic riddle” (VIII.139) the narrator once calls it. Riddling is part of its appeal, but—to use a word which in its various forms occurs twenty-three times in the poem—it is rather a multiplicity of “puzzles.” *Don Juan* asks less for comprehensive interpretation than for participation.

This range of meaning is possible only when the radically private language of mother and child represented in the relationship of Juan and Haidée is broken by the separation of the child from the mother. The taboos of the Oedipus complex send the son forth on his metonymic career, seeking satisfaction not in his mother but in a surrogate for her, not striving to usurp his father in actuality but to become like him in another setting. The Oedipus complex is thus, as Freud insisted, the foundation of culture, because it is through the Oedipus complex that the child passes from the family to his broader culture. To do so is to pass from the private language of mother and child to the pre-existent terms of the culture, to dream nostalgically of that lost transparency of communication but to feel oneself doomed to speak in the always slightly misfitting words the culture provides; at this level the everpresent allusions of *Don Juan* are the emblem of the pre-emption of the narrator's own voice by the babble of all who have preceded him. “Doomed” but also “enabled”: in *Don Juan* Byron exploits this dilemma instead of concealing it by a myth of symbolic plenitude.

To illustrate the strengths of Byron's manner it may be useful to turn once more to Coleridge. Arguing in the *Biographia Literaria* against Wordsworth's assertion that the *Lyrical Ballads* were written in “the real language of men,” Coleridge examines the fallacy on which the statement rests:

> Every man's language varies, according to the extent of his knowledge, the activity of his faculties, and the depth or quickness of his feelings. Every man's language has, first, its *individualities*; secondly, the common properties of the *class* to which he belongs; and thirdly, words and phrases of universal use. The language of Hooker, Bacon, Bishop Taylor, and Burke differs from the common language of the learned class only by the superior number and novelty of the thoughts and relations which they had to convey. The language of Algernon Sidney differs not at all from that which every well-educated gentleman would wish to write, and (with due allowances for the undeliberateness, and less connected train, of thinking proper and natural to conversation) such as he would wish to talk. Neither one or the other differ half so much from the general language of cultivated society, as the language of Mr. Wordsworth's homeliest composition differs from that of a common peasant. For “real” therefore we must substitute *ordinary,* or *lingua communis.* And this, we have proved, is no more to be found in the phraseology of low and rustic life than in that of any other class. … Anterior to cultivation the lingua communis of every country, as Dante has well observed, exists every where in parts and nowhere as a whole.[18]

In the Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads* Wordsworth had espoused a view of language as deriving directly from objects; Coleridge exposes the mistake of this "natural" view by maintaining that "the best part of human language … is derived from reflection on the acts of the mind itself," and is "formed by a voluntary appropriation of fixed symbols to internal acts" (II.39-40). He thus restores language to the distinctively human matrix in which it comes into being, and his formulation permits a recasting of Eliot's critique. To say that Byron "added nothing to the language" is, in Coleridge's more discriminating framework, to indicate the lack of any strongly idiosyncratic "individualities" in his style, but also to throw the emphasis on its "common properties" and "words and phrases of *universal* use."

Byron cherishes the membership of *Don Juan* in the linguistic community to which it ineluctably belongs. The words he speaks have a history of their own, meanings they carry with them from their innumerable uses outside and prior to the poem. They are his only for an instant, loaned to him only briefly for his own purposes, before they return to their larger ongoing life. "If, fallen in evil days on evil tongues," Byron writes in the Dedication to *Don Juan,* "Milton appeal'd to the Avenger, Time," and continues: "… Time, the Avenger, execrates his wrongs, / And makes the word 'Miltonic' mean '*sublime*'" (l. 10). Of more interest than Byron's enlistment of Milton to lambaste Southey is his highlighting of the historical process by which words acquire meaning. The allusion to *Paradise Lost* is typical of *Don Juan,* a veritable echo-chamber reverberating with phrases, imitations, parodies, and halfheard fragments from Homer, Virgil, Dante, Shakespeare, Milton, Pope, and scores of lesser figures. These shadowy presences augment Byron's voice by locating him within his tradition: even were it true, as Eliot charges, that Byron added nothing to the language, one might yet reply that through him a whole tradition is summoned and renovated. His contempt for the "insolent … wish," as he saw it, of Southey, Coleridge, and Wordsworth "to supersede all warblers here below" (Dedication, 3) is the corollary of his refusal to give superordinate value to the concept of originality which, given his consciousness of, and commitment to, the public continuities of language, could only seem to him an impoverishing mystification.

Allusion is only a special case of the way in which *Don Juan* continually unmasks the illusion of its own autonomy in order to reap the benefits of acknowledging all that lies outside it. To choose words already invested with significance by their recognizability as literature—allusions—is in one respect to beg the central issue, because one of the fundamental questions raised by *Don Juan* concerns the conventional distinctions between the literary and the non-literary. Macassar oil, Congreve's rockets, the brand names of ships' pumps, and all the other odd objects that find their way from daily life into *Don Juan,* on the one hand, and the highwaymen's slang, parodied jargons, and the mention of pox and like taboo subjects, on the other, constitute a challenge, less socially radical than Wordsworth's but kindred and no less far-reaching, to the notion of a specialized poetic diction. *Don Juan,* building on the comic precedents of the previous century,[19] demonstrates more thoroughly than does Wordsworth's own work the contention of the Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads* "that there neither is, nor can be, any essential difference between the language of prose and metrical composition." The conversation poem which "affects not to be poetry," that undertaking about whose implications Coleridge remained uneasy, reaches a triumphant apogee in *Don Juan.*[20]

Yet to speak, as in the title of Ronald Bottrall's essay, of "Byron and the Colloquial Tradition in English Poetry," is still somewhat to underestimate the ramifications of *Don Juan,* because the poem places itself in relation not only to a tradition *within* literary history but also to what would seem to stand outside it.[21]*Don Juan* could scarcely exist without the conventions Byron manipulates to make his meaning. If his "narration [of her genealogy] / May have suggested" (I.59) that Julia will be the culmination, that is only because of the expectations of a pattern held by readers and writers within a given culture, their common literary competence. But Byron does not privilege these patterns or, to put it more accurately, he privileges them by calling attention to their artificiality. To read *Don Juan* is to be made aware of the arbitrary agreements on which the making and maintaining of meaning rest. The relationship between flamboyant literariness and ostentatious anti-, or non-, literariness is a differential one: each throws the other into relief, and both together direct our attention to the functioning of language, to the conventions by which it works and the domains into

which historically it has divided itself. By unveiling the artificiality of his own procedures Byron displays the fictiveness of language generally and the delicate and complex consensus through which it is preserved. The myriad slippages and maladjustments of that social network create the gaps in which his irony and satire operate.

Don Juan, to return to the quotation from Coleridge, can imitate "the indeliberateness, and less connected train, of thinking proper and natural to conversation" because it sees conversation as an exemplary act performed in language, hence different in degree only, not kind, from literature. Byron repeatedly announces a freedom guided only by his own intelligent curiosity: "So on I ramble, now and then narrating, / Now pondering" (IX.42). By refusing to mark itself off absolutely from everyday life, by denying that it constitutes any sort of special experience, *Don Juan* gains the power to include its opposite within itself. "This narrative is not meant for narration," the narrator comments, "But a mere airy and fantastic basis, / To build up common things with common places" (XIV.7). Byron had chosen as the motto for the first cantos of *Don Juan* "Difficile est propria communia dicere," a phrase he had translated in *Hints from Horace* as "Whate'er the critic says or poet sings / Tis no slight task to write on common things."[22] He thereby directly connects the difficulty of his art to the prosaic nature of his medium: because his words claim no magic in themselves and because he regularly turns us outward from his words to their uses elsewhere, Byron demonstrates with remarkable clarity the basis of poetry not in "individual words," as Eliot implies, but in the relationship they mutually establish. Though seeing that Byron must be quoted at length to make his effect, Eliot does not recognize the alternate conception of language his practice successfully illustrates: individually colorless counters are transformed into a compelling series by the unexpected but self-validating connections Byron fabricates between them. The aggregative and associative mode of the poem is a virtual paradigm of Coleridge's definitions of the Fancy, but the loss of the intensity Coleridge ascribed to the Imagination only is more than offset by the revelation of the power of language itself, both within and without this particular poem. Despite Byron's evident pride in his achievement, *Don Juan* is almost less concerned with its own status as a unique *parole,* to use a Saussurean distinction, than it is with the overall function of *langue.*[23]*Don Juan* advances its claim to our interest not so much by conveying *a* meaning as by making its readers aware of the prior conventions on which any sharable meanings whatever depend.[24] Or, to remain with Coleridge, to read *Don Juan* is to be made aware of the characteristics of that "lingua communis [which] … exists everywhere in parts and nowhere as a whole."

Despite such declarations as that of Wordsworth in the Prospectus to *The Recluse* that he would employ "words / Which speak of nothing more than what we are," the poetics of Romanticism habitually resorts to a language of intimation. If the period is one of Natural Supernaturalism, as its most magisterial recent description would have it, that terminology itself betrays the very binary opposition the poetry seeks to mediate. In the Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads* Wordsworth sets forth his aims in a fashion which similarly maintains a distinction: he proposed, he says, "to choose incidents and situations from common life" and "to throw over them a certain coloring of imagination, whereby ordinary things should be presented to the mind in an unusual way." To see merely the object is the sign of Peter Bell's imaginative poverty: "A primrose by a river's brim / A yellow primrose was to him, / And it was nothing more" (ll. 58-60). Though he insists on the "real," Wordsworth takes the object as instrumental to the transforming imagination. For Coleridge likewise the symbol is defined by its embodiment of a realm beyond itself: it "is characterized by a translucence of the Special in the Individual, or of the General in the Especial or of the Universal in the General. Above all by the translucence of the Eternal in and through the Temporal."[25] But in poetry there can be only words, and this illusion of depth and timelessness is a linguistic conjuring trick, a sleight of hand performed in language and inseparable from it. Byron's satiric and anti-sublime deconstructions strip away this illusion, insisting that we recognize that it is through our own language that we create the images that enchant us. He stresses not the "mystery" putatively residing in the object but the "doubt" caused by our own fallible mental activities. Paradoxically, it is by thus affirming the priority of our constructions that Byron returns us to the object world, but not as an empirical, objective given. To stretch Oscar Wilde, he too knows that it is only shallow people who do not judge by appearances: *Don Juan* shows that "the real" is the totality of our conventions, the

agreed-upon social vision of reality. Here too Coleridge provides a useful gloss. In a footnote to Chapter IV of the *Biographia Literaria* he discusses the evolutionary process by which synonyms initially "used promiscuously" gradually distinguish themselves from each other: "When this distinction has been so naturalized and of such general currency that the language itself does as it were *think* for us (like the sliding rule which is the mechanic's safe substitute for arithmetical knowledge) we then say, that it is evident to *common sense*" (I.63). *Don Juan* continually lays bare the dangers of this "common sense" by correcting delusion, attacking cant, brutally reiterating the brutal "facts" of war and death, but simultaneously calling to our attention the sway of language and the social bonds on which it in turn rests. "I write the world" (XV.60), Byron can declare, because in writing he fully enters the transpersonal medium in which "the world" represents (and misrepresents) itself to itself.

Language in *Don Juan* thus points not to a supralinguistic reality (and hence is spared the agonizing doubt of language characteristic of a Shelley) but to a community of speakers and readers in the world their language builds up. In his influential *Romantic Image* Frank Kermode showed how "inextricably associated" in the Romantic-Symbolist tradition are the beliefs "in the image as a radiant truth out of space and time, and in the necessary isolation or estrangement of men who can perceive it."[26] These views may be found throughout *Childe Harold* and occasionally in *Don Juan,* but the nature of the latter poem qualifies the statements made within it. Even as he reduced the magical image Byron restored the poet to his fellow-men. Their common habitation in language binds together the two central figures of *Don Juan,* the narrator and the reader his fiction projects: the isolation Byron-as-Juan suffers is recuperated in the affiliation of Byron-as-narrator to his audience.

Though the web of words which is *Don Juan* reveals "the class to which [Byron] belongs," and the aristocratic Whig liberalism of his principles, the poem is remarkably unprescriptive of its reader. Assent, or the maneuvering of the reader into a point of view congruent with that of the author, is only one of the many and successive aims of the poem: the implicitly dramatized responses range from shock and anger to laughter at the author's image of himself, the narrator. The most generous aspect of *Don Juan* is the depth and variety of the experiences it acknowledges: the poem solicits the reader to bring with him all the works of literature he has read, all the political controversies in which he is enmeshed, all the mundane objects through which he moves, all his conflicting passions as child, parent, and lover. The poem functions not so much centripetally, directing attention to its uniqueness (though it does so gleefully), as much as centrifugally, returning each reader to the complex of private and public experiences which make up his particular life.[27] The comprehensiveness of *Don Juan* and the much debated question of its status as epic are subjects that can be reformulated in terms of the inclusiveness of the response it figures but does not restrict.[28] There is no single perfect reading of *Don Juan*: the text enfranchises all that infinite series of readings, neither idiosyncratic nor stock, which the common cultural context of author and reader empowers. It earns this richness because it is shaped not by the concept of uniqueness but of difference. The narrator demonstrates that identity exists only through the roles furnished by his culture, and hence is something both his and not his. To avert a threatening alienation, an imprisonment in a role, he must continually repudiate the stances he adopts, defining himself not by fixed points but by the shifting pattern of his movement between them. At one level *Don Juan* is a prolonged elegy for the loss of the union of mother and child represented by Haidée and Juan, but the poem also deploys a tenacious and resilient resistance to the temptations of that fantasy. The attempt to master the conflict perpetuates it: the repetitions of *Don Juan* reiterate the dilemma, revealing Byron's continued subjection to, as well as his conquest of, his desires and fears. The place of language in *Don Juan* is inevitably ambiguous: the situations in which it might be superseded by transparency of communication Byron rejects as self-destructive, and so he remains trapped, his reliance on language the sign of all that he has lost. Language for Byron can never be what it briefly is for Haidée and Juan, private and innocent: every fresh employment of it further implicates him in the continuum of history and society. Caught in words, however, Byron makes the exposure and exploitation of their treacherous wealth serve his ends. By displaying the unavoidable inauthenticity of language he liberates its fictiveness and sets in motion the self created only through it. He unmasks the illusion of full meaning dear to Eliot and the symbolists, asking us to recognize that poetry can

be made not only by saturating the individual word, but also by ceaselessly uncovering the paradoxes hid in the use of ordinary words. The contra-dictions at the center of an existence defined by a language that is creative but inevitably conventional, his but not his, a means of connection but a story of separation, a mode of recovery but an admission of loss, a fantasy of wholeness that is desired but resisted, Byron accepts and makes generate the elaborate play which enlarges the narrator and animates the words of *Don Juan.*

Notes

1. "Byron," *On Poetry and Poets* (1943; rpt. New York: Noonday, 1964), pp. 232-33.
2. I mean only to indicate that this accusation has not been rebutted, not to underrate the excellent studies of Byron's style. In addition to the works cited below I would single out George M. Ridenour, *The Style of DON JUAN* (New Haven: Yale U. Press, 1960), M. K. Joseph, *Byron The Poet* (London: Gollancz, 1964), and W. W. Robson, "Byron as Poet," rpt. in his *Critical Essays* (London: Routledge, 1966), pp. 148-88. Two recent essays of relevance are Bernard Beatty's "Lord Byron: poetry and precedent," in *Literature of the Romantic Period 1750-1850,* ed. R. T. Davies and B. G. Beatty (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1976), pp. 114-34, and Francis Berry's "The Poet of *Childe Harold,*" in *Byron: A Symposium,* ed. John D. Jump (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1975), pp. 35-51, which also takes up Eliot's critique.
3. *The Symbolic Imagination: Coleridge and the Romantic Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton U. Press, 1977).
4. All quotations of *Don Juan* are from *Byron's DON JUAN: A Variorum Edition,* ed. T. G. Steffan and W. W. Pratt, 4 vols., 2nd rev. ed. (Austin: U. of Texas Press, 1971).
5. See on this subject Jean Laplanche, *Life and Death in Psychoanalysis,* tr. Jeffrey Mehlman (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins U. Press, 1976).
6. The variant for line 4 printed by Steffan and Pratt shows the original contrast to have been between the quiet of the doors and the vitality of Byron's own speaking voice: "The hinges being much smoother than these rhymes."
7. Letter of April 6, 1819, *Byron's Letters and Journals,* ed. Leslie A. Marchand, VI (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard, U. Press, 1976), 105.
8. Lambro, usually said to be modelled on Ali Pacha, has autobiographical roots too. See III.51-52.
9. To the degree that Inez connives at the affair she and Julia converge. Juan's affair with Julia thereby seems a displacement of maternal incest: Alfonso's intervention is thus punishment for the forbidden act and rescue from a dangerous absorption.
10. Juan first speaks in the poem during the second canto, when his farewell is quickly cut short by seasickness (II.18-20), and when he bars the panicky crew from the grog (II.36), where Byron takes his speech directly from a scene in his sources. He is unheard during the subsequent 180 stanzas of Canto II and throughout Canto III.
11. *Lord Byron: Un Tempérament Littéraire,* 2 vols. (Paris: Cercle du Livre, 1957), II, 58.
12. It could not, of course, repeatedly undo the sublime if it did not repeatedly strive for it. This movement is akin to that described as "desublimating" by Thomas Weiskel, *The Romantic Sublime* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins U. Press, 1976). I have not used the term because the relation between "the sublime" and "sublimation" within Weiskel's otherwise stimulating argument remains problematic.
13. Roman Jakobson proposed the relationships of metaphor to symbolism and metonymy to realism in section 5, "The Metaphoric and Metonymic Poles," of his essay, "Two Aspects of Language and Two Types of Aphasic Disturbances," Roman Jakobson and Morris Halle, *Fundamentals of Language,* 2nd rev. ed. (The Hague: Mouton, 1971), pp. 69-96.
14. The notion of free play is taken from Jacques Derrida; see, for example, "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," *The Structuralist Controversy,* ed. Richard Macksey and Eugenio Donato (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins U. Press, 1972), pp. 247-65.

15. The relationship of repression and the sublime is a theme of the recent criticism of Harold Bloom; see *A Map of Misreading* (New York: Oxford U. Press, 1975).
16. E.g., III.23, on Lambro's arrival: “An honest gentleman at his return / May not have the good fortune of Ulysses.” The allusions are studied in my *Byron and his Fictions* (Detroit: Wayne State U. Press, 1978).
17. “Fortuitous” is a word McGann often uses to describe the growth of the poem in *DON JUAN In Context* (Chicago: U. of Chicago Press, 1976). The accretive chains, however, are often generated by the anxieties aroused by certain recurrent subjects, such as women. The motives for the resulting digressions and evasions are partly concealed from Byron himself. These gaps and switches suggest that the meaning of *Don Juan,* to use a Lacanian phrase, is not simply one that Byron speaks but one that speaks him. It is precisely such “arbitrary” links as that the rhyme forces between epic craft and female cunning which show the connection and inscription of personal and cultural themes in the unconscious. *Don Juan* seems to me a little less rationally experimental, less scientifically instructive and more anarchic (as well as obsessive) than it appears in McGann's presentation. *DON JUAN In Context* is nonetheless the most penetrating discussion yet of the mode of the poem; that, starting from such different premises, my conclusions should often coincide with McGann's I wishfully interpret as corroboration of their general rightness.
18. John Shawcross, ed., *Biographia Literaria,* 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1907), II, 41-42. Subsequent page references are incorporated in the text.
19. A. B. England has explored Byron's affinities with Butler and Swift as well as the more commonly cited Pope and Fielding in *Byron's DON JUAN and Eighteenth-Century Literature* (Lewisburg, Penn.: Bucknell U. Press, 1975).
20. See Max F. Schulz, *The Poetic Voices of Coleridge* (Detroit: Wayne State U. Press, 1964), pp. 81, 179.
21. *Criterion,* 18 (1939), 204-24, and rpt. in M. H. Abrams, ed., *English Romantic Poets: Modern Essays in Criticism* (New York: Oxford U. Press, 1960), pp. 210-27. Bottrall answers Eliot by arguing that Byron's “interest was rather in the fundamental rhythmic movement of speech than in the word.”
22. Given in the variorum *Don Juan,* IV, 4.
23. *Course in General Linguistics,* ed. Charles Bally, Albert Sechehaye, and Albert Riedlinger, tr. Wade Baskin (New York: McGraw Hill, 1966), Chapter 3.
24. In an essay of that title Roland Barthes locates “the structuralist activity” in the reconstruction of an object in order to show its rules of functioning (tr. Richard Howard, *Partisan Review,* 34 [1967], 82-88). The structuralist critic Barthes describes focuses not on the content of meanings but on the act of producing them: he “recreates the course taken by meaning, he need not designate it.” A criticism based on these principles reveals virtues in Byron ignored by the still-prevailing organicist or apocalyptic camps.
25. “The Statesman's Manual,” *Lay Sermons,* ed. R. J. White, *Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge,* VI (London: Routledge, 1972), 30.
26. (1957; rpt. New York: Random House-Vintage, 1964), p. 2.
27. Ruskin commented long ago on a conjunction between the prose-like directness in Byron and the suggestive freedom he grants the reader. Observing that “He is the best poet who can by the fewest words touch the greatest number of secret chords of thought in the reader's own mind, and set *them* to work in their own way,” Ruskin chooses as specific example a couplet from *The Siege of Corinth*: “‘Tis midnight: on the mountains brown—The Pale round moon shines deeply down.’ Now the first eleven words are not poetry, except by their measure and preparation for rhyme; they are simple information, which might just as well have been given in prose—it *is* prose, in fact: It is twelve o'clock—the moon is pale—it is round—it is shining on brown mountains. Any fool, who had seen it, could tell us that. At last comes the poetry, in the single epithet, ‘deeply’. Had he said ‘softly’ or ‘brightly’ it would still have been simple information. But of all the readers of that couplet, probably not two received exactly the same impression from the ‘deeply’, and yet received more from that than from all the rest together. Some will refer the expression to the fall of the steep beams, and plunge

down with them from rock to rock into the woody darkness of the cloven ravines, down to the undermost pool of eddying black water, whose echo is lost among their leafage; others will think of the deep *feeling* of the pure light, of the thousand memories and emotions that rise out of their rest, and are seen white and cold in its rays. This is the reason of the power of the single epithet, and this is its *mystery.*" Quoted in *Byron: The Critical Heritage,* ed. Andrew Rutherford (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1970), pp. 426-27.

28. See, for example, Donald Reiman's forceful brief essay, "*Don Juan* in Epic Context," *SiR,* 16 (1977), 587-94.

Criticism: Andrew M. Cooper (essay date 1983)

SOURCE: Cooper, Andrew M. "Shipwreck and Skepticism: *Don Juan* Canto II." *Keats-Shelley Journal* 32 (1983): 63-80.

[*In the following essay, Cooper argues that the shipwreck scenes in* Don Juan *Canto II symbolize the author's pessimistic view of the world at large.*]

> "Life is, in itself and forever, shipwreck. To be shipwrecked is not to drown. …
> Consciousness of shipwreck, being the truth of life, constitutes salvation."

Ortega y Gasset, "In Search of Goethe from Within"

Mazeppa, composed simultaneously with *Don Juan* Canto I during the late summer of 1818, constitutes in several respects a preliminary version of the shipwreck episode in Canto II. In both cases a youthful adulterer undergoes a kind of descent into Hell, finally awakens before a Nausicaa, and thereafter remains exiled from his homeland. More important, Byron's active juxtaposing of different historical contexts in *Mazeppa* sheds light on his considerably subtler manipulations of ottava rima in *Don Juan. Mazeppa*'s opening stanza, alluding to the recent fall of Napoleon, introduces the poem as contemporaneous. The narrative, however, takes place immediately following the battle of Pultowa in 1709; and within that narrative, the old hetman tracks his "seventy years of memory back" to his "twentieth spring," 1660 (lines 126-127).[1] The time-frames distance the reader from the events of Mazeppa's story, yet by forming a continuum they implicitly connect us at the far end. The effect is of a progressive historicism, as the intensely private experience standing at the core of the narrative (virtually a nonexperience, since Mazeppa loses consciousness at the nadir of his journey) is gradually subsumed into a public context, becoming transformed from, first, the original, near-solipsistic event itself, to the long stored-up memory of a single individual, to a beguiling story intended for a small "band of chiefs" (line 44), to, finally, a poem whose audience includes ourselves.

Mazeppa thus appears less a formal poetic object willed directly by an author than a naturally evolved artifact inseparable from the surrounding contours of European history. Those contours, moreover, are seen to be defined largely by chance. *Contra* William Marshall, who ingeniously makes Mazeppa a parody of Charles's common sense, the narrator's position is not "clearly anti-providential," nor does Mazeppa express by contrast an "organized moral view of the universe" according to which his rescue by the Cossack maid constitutes a "providential intervention."[2] Quite the opposite, the moral of Mazeppa's tale is that he was saved by an unforeseeable stroke of luck, the same luck that will perhaps save Charles now. In devising a clever torture for Mazeppa, the Count Palatine inadvertently raised him to power and so ensured his own defeat; by the same token, the defeated Charles may also live to destroy his enemies.[3] The narrator's remark about "the hazard of the die" (line 15) therefore tends to support Mazeppa's affirmation of chance as a positive force. If you have hit bottom, if the odds are "ten to one at least [for] the foe" (line 114), then even random change can only help. This capacity to sustain ups and downs is what makes man more than merely animal, despite his untamed passions, which the wild horse plainly represents. Whereas the horse's unrelenting instinct for its

homeland proves self-destructive, Mazeppa, whose home is simply wherever he happens to find himself (as shown in stanzas 3 and 4), survives his trek to love again. Similarly, the reason "Danger levels man and brute" (line 51) is that it brutalizes man; but of course danger is not the sole condition of human existence, and hence Mazeppa ridicules Charles for making war to the exclusion of love (lines 126-142). Indeed, the satirical thrust of his tale is its tacit advice that, since we all must suffer defeat sooner or later, it is better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all and still to have lost.

Yet even random change has its limits; the dice may be fickle, but their permutations repeat. Thus the constant recurrence within the poem of rivers (the Borysthenes, the dark unnamed stream of fifty years past), horses (Gieta's, Mazeppa's Bucephalus, and the wild Tartarian courser), and an assortment of personal and military defeats suggests that, although meaningful causal connections between the individual occasions of experience may be impossible to determine, nevertheless life's various circumstances do unmistakably embody distinct patterns of contrast and resemblance. So the top and bottom of man's universe—paradise and death, love and brutalization—emerge from the narrative as fixed lineaments of experience without which it would lose self-differentiation and simply dissolve into the general flux. As random as an individual's life may be, it can never trespass those bounds beyond which lies the merely unimaginable: gods and dust.

Far more than even *Mazeppa, Don Juan* abounds with chance surprises, above all in the shipwreck episode of Canto II, where raw forces of nature solely propel the narrative. Subjugated by storms from without and starvation from within, man appears throughout the episode as a cipher lacking effective power to resist. A total newcomer to the larger world in which henceforth *Don Juan* takes place, Juan is here less a protagonist than just another sufferer scarcely to be distinguished from everybody else aboard ship. One recalls only his heroic stance, pistols drawn, before the rum-room (II.xxxv-xxxvi), and his tacit refusal to eat Pedrillo (II.lxxviii). The shipwreck, then, is Juan's rite of passage into "our nautical existence" (II.xii) on the sea of adventitious circumstance, the Deluge which precludes any direct return to Spain and Donna Inez. It serves to define the Stygian nadir of his new-found universe, much as the subsequent Haidée idyll defines its paradisal apex.

For Byron himself, moreover, it seems the decision to continue the poem beyond Canto I, apparently first designed as a separate poem like *Beppo,* involved an embarkation similar to his hero's.[4] The two well-known stanzas he added to the completed draft of Canto I make the parallel almost explicit:

```
No more—no more—Oh! never more on me
          The freshness of the heart can fall like dew,
Which out of all the lovely things we see
          Extracts emotions beautiful and new;
Hived in our bosoms like the bag o' the bee.
          Think'st thou the honey with those objects grew?
Alas! 'twas not in them, but in thy power
To double even the sweetness of a flower.
```

(I.ccxiv)

"Thou" evidently refers to Byron's reader. Assuming our ignorance of the melancholy truth he wishes to convey, the poet rejects the earlier first-person plural and addresses the reader directly. Yet the continuing second person of the next stanza reveals that Byron is really addressing his own heart, perhaps has been all along:

```
No more—no more—Oh! never more, my heart,
          Canst thou be my sole world, my universe!
Once all in all, but now a thing apart,
          Thou canst not be my blessing or my curse:
The illusion's gone for ever.
```

(I.ccxv)

Ultimately, however, such distinctions fail, for Byron's heart and his implied readers are one and the same. His heart can no longer be his universe, because it now must take account of the larger world outside itself, the world of concrete human life existing beyond poetry and encompassing ourselves as actual readers. Hence *we* become the objects out of which the disillusioned poet will extract new emotional sustenance. The series of contexts that *Mazeppa* deployed as a framing device, then, *Don Juan* Canto II actively incorporates as a method of composition. The consequent relationships between Juan's occasion of shipwreck, the author's collateral expressions of skepticism, and finally the individual reader's subsuming experience of both, supply the subject of this essay.

Unexpected as it is, the shipwreck episode starts out open-ended. Anything might happen. Yet it is almost completely closed off at the other end, and Juan seems to escape through an orifice. This development stems from the way the law of attrition at sea logically works itself out: “Famine—despair—cold, thirst and heat, had done / Their work on them by turns” (II.cii), to which one might add drowning, bad meat and delirium, over-exposure, and sharks. If the one doesn't get you, the others will. The form of the episode is therefore a vortex of diminishing possibilities. Juan's situation grows progressively more cramped and isolated as he moves from the Seville aristocracy to a ship carrying approximately 250 people to a longboat containing 30. Within the longboat, Juan's refusal to turn cannibal distinguishes him from “all save three or four” (II.lxxviii) who die anyway, leaving Juan the sole survivor. As the allusion to Dante's Ugolino suggests, cannibalism is the innermost ring of this Hell; Juan's solitary struggle with Ocean's “insatiate grave” (II.cviii) is the nadir; like Dante he squeezes through it and emerges into a new world, Haidée's island.

Byron articulates the descent as a series of small mishaps in which hopes are raised only to be dashed. The episode begins in full expectation of a safe passage; but then “at one o'clock” the ship is suddenly about to sink (II.xxvii). Then it appears the pumps will save them; but then they almost capsize in a squall (II.xxx). Then there comes “a flash of hope once more” as the wind lulls with “a glimpse of sunshine” (II.xxxviii); but then the storm renews and the boats must get out (II.xlv). Then we learn that, as “'T is very certain the desire of life / Prolongs it,” “people in an open boat [can] live upon the love of life” (II.lxiv-lxvi); but then we also learn that this will not suffice them indefinitely because “man is a carnivorous production. … He cannot live, like woodcocks, upon suction” (II.lxvii). Then arrives a sleep-inducing calm that restores the survivors' strength; but then they awake and eat all their provisions (II.lxviii). And so forth. The sequence suggests that events trick us into hope in order that we may be doubly defeated when they subsequently turn more dangerous yet. For the failure of each new promise of deliverance leaves the men not the same as before, but worse, because they have irrevocably used up on more chance for survival. “'T is best to struggle to the last,” advises the narrator, “'T is never too late to be wholly wreck'd” (II.xxxix)—good advice, surely; and yet three stanzas later one discovers its terrific irony, as the pumps give out and the dismasted ship rolls “a wreck complete” (II.xlii). It is as though the struggle to keep it afloat only led to a greater devastation (in fact, they deliberately cut away the masts to avoid broaching). This almost systematic way in which various saving possibilities only serve to become fresh defeats distinctly conveys the impression of an impersonal, casually malignant power of circumstance gradually revealing itself through the course of the episode.

Yet as their situation worsens, the men hope all the more intensely. From the cannibalism to Juan's final arrival on the beach, the poem presents a series of auguries: the shower of rain, the rainbow, the white bird, the turtle. The episode begins with an objective narrative of suspenseful action telling with considerable show of authority exactly what the ocean did to the ship and what the crew is doing to save it (II.xxvii). The reality of the world “out there” is assumed; it may be inhuman and destructive, but one can still be confident of knowing how to handle an emergency. Later, however, the objective narrative virtually disappears—appropriately so, for no longer is anything taking place out there; inert, the survivors are not engaged in visible activity. The poem therefore shifts to a phenomenalistic presentation of their experience of reality, a realm in which belief, illusions, and symbolism play a vital part. Causality stands in abeyance; as the

boat drifts, events seem to transpire without what Hume calls “necessary connexion,” comprising instead simply an observed succession of independent phenomena (a rainbow, a bird, a turtle). In such a world, as in Coleridge's Ancient Mariner's, there is no reason for rational, purposive action because no likelihood exists that it will produce its intended effect. Mental activity such as hope appears at least as effective.

This is not to imply that the phenomenal world of the longboat survivors is experienced directly by the reader the way the Ancient Mariner's is. “We” are not in the longboat, “they” are: we see them through the narrative presentation. But this is just what we were *not* conscious of doing at the outset of the episode, when the narrative appeared objective. Now it is indeed a presentation and, moreover, a skeptical one. Says Byron of the rainbow: “Our shipwreck'd seamen though it a good omen—/ It is as well to think so now and then / … And may become of great advantage when / Folks are discouraged” (II.xciii). In their helplessness the survivors have made a possibly useful interpretation, no more or less. Byron's remarks are final, but they do not dispel our appreciation of how lovely the rainbow looked to “the dim eyes of these shipwreck'd men” (II.xci). Their hope, which interprets natural phenomena as evidences of things unseen, is a tentative form of faith. Furthermore, the comparison of the rainbow to “Quite a celestial kaleidoscope” (II.xciii) suggests that such faith, under the circumstances, is inevitable. Like a kaleidoscope, a rainbow is not simply seen, but seen *into,* for it is an optical illusion existing as object entirely in the eye of the beholder. Being all appearance, as it were, the rainbow is thus whatever the half-dead men in the longboat perceive it to be.

If we prefer the narrator's skepticism here, it is with awareness that he stands outside the longboat and can afford to be rational. Standing in “their” shoes (which anyway they have already eaten), we might well find skepticism to be just one more discouragement. The point about the survivors' providential attitude is that it is more pragmatic than rationalism. They shrewdly anticipate a twofold benefit from the turtle and the sacred-seeming white bird: the animals are regarded as both auguries and meat, and the two viewpoints do not conflict. After all, given a boatload of starving men, how else is a turtle evidence of heavenly concern but that it may serve to sustain life? Similarly, what makes the bird a “bird of promise” is partly its promise of becoming food. Had the Ancient Mariner done the natural thing with *his* white bird—eaten it—he might have spared himself much grief, for the killing in that case would not have been wanton.

Such pragmatism gets its force from the way we experience the form of *Don Juan*'s ottava rima. Much has been said on this score, with attention usually directed toward the closing couplet rhyme. Alvin Kernan has emphasized the “but then” movement of the poem, its vital unpredictability; for him, the wave-like “onward rush of life” that the poem imitates, “upward to a pause, and then a sweep away, is most consistently present in the stanza form. … The first six lines stagger forward, like the life they contain, toward the resting place of the concluding couplet and the security of its rhyme—and a very shaky resting place it most often is.”[5] Edward Bostetter replies that the reader's expectations are not simply thwarted but renewed as curiosity; he proposes a complementary movement, “what next?” which “puts the emphasis on the anticipatory suspense.”[6] What perusal of the poem's individual stanzas shows is that these two movements coalesce so as to deny readers an accustomed complacency. We are drawn into and then thrust out of each stanza, which thus forms a miniature vortex. We end where we began, but meantime have become consciously aware of experiencing a fiction. Then we suspend that consciousness and proceed to repeat the process by moving on to the ever-imminent next stanza. The vortex form of the *Don Juan* stanza is not, however, simply a stylistic version of the thematic “falling” first discerned in the poem by George Ridenour;[7] it is less the characteristic Romantic fall into reality or experience than a freely willed descent into a specifically literary self-awareness, into what both Jerome McGann and Peter Manning, borrowing a phrase from Wallace Stevens, term “the fictions of reality.”[8] “The actions of the poem complete themselves in [the reader's] consciousness,” says Manning;[9] yes, and they do so by directly exercising our moral imaginations. The questions Byron raises entail active examination of ourselves as social individuals. In Canto II he is not asking, “What would you do if stuck in a longboat with thirty others without any food?”—as though unshipwrecked readers could give any answer that were not fantasy. The question lacks ballast; one wants to reply, “*I* would heroically save them all (but don't press me for details).” Instead Byron asks, “Exactly what *does* one do, having arrived at such a

situation through force of circumstance?"—and what one does is, as usual in life, no one particular thing: not everybody eats Pedrillo. To repeat myself, "we" are not in the same boat as "them," but it is conceivable we could be because clearly their world much resembles ours. This consciousness of sharing the same context of possibilities as the shipwrecked men, without sharing even vicariously in their experience, is clarified by scrutinizing the individual stanzas themselves.

First consider stanza xxvii, the beginning of the end for all but Juan:

```
At one o'clock the wind with sudden shift
          Threw the ship right into the trough of the sea,
Which struck her aft, and made an awkward rift,
          Started the stern-post, also shattered the
Whole of her stern-frame, and, ere she could lift
          Herself from out her present jeopardy,
The rudder tore away: 'twas time to sound
The pumps, and there were four feet water found.
```

In poetry, the prototype for such a nautical *tour de force* was William Falconer's *The Shipwreck* (1762), an exciting first-hand account in which numerous professional-sounding marine terms are casually retailed in rhyming couplets. But Byron's stanza is effective as much by what it does not do as by what it does. It is all objective narrative, a sudden accumulation of events without any development. The wind shifts, and then no less than six violently active verbs happen to the ship one after the other; even the syntax, perfectly unextraordinary in itself, appears jerked about to fit the ottava rima. One realizes the helplessness of the ship, and the immense arbitrary power of the ocean that has evidently cuffed it. Appropriately, therefore, we find the birthday-snapper in the couplet rhyme is too damp to explode except matter-of-factly. Events have so overwhelmed the crew that it is not until line 7 that it manages to take defensive action; but even then, all the men do is discover still another way in which Ocean has anticipated them. So by forcibly failing to meet our expectations, this unusual stanza serves to reveal what, in fact, we expect of the usual *Don Juan* stanza: namely, that it begin with an objective narrative of events leading to description of an active human response, leading in turn to commentary by the narrator himself. Not coincidentally, this is the same pattern of development we saw take place within the episode overall: Canto II moves from an impersonal narrative of the sinking ship implying confidence in the reality of the world "out there," to a presentation of the survivors' subjective construing of that world, to Byron's disinterested but sympathetic statements of skepticism.

Stanza l I take to be the ottava rima model on which Byron elsewhere plays changes. It is a manipulation of narrative, but not to make any particular point. However, the manipulation involves several distinct shifts of perspective. We can enumerate them.

```
Some trial had been making at a raft,
          With little hope in such a rolling sea,
A sort of thing at which one would have laugh'd,
          If any laughter at such times could be,
Unless with people who too much have quaff'd,
          And have a kind of wild and horrid glee,
Half epileptical, and half hysterical:—
Their preservation would have been a miracle.
```

Lines 1-2) Objectively speaking, the raft is a futile effort. 3) So futile, the reader might find it ridiculous. 4) Now, however, we are grimly reminded that under the circumstances a raft is better than nothing. 5-7) And yet there is room for compromise between the two points of view: if you want to laugh, laugh with them, the hideous despairing drunks. 8) This line cuts off the lurid description of the laughter, itself slightly hysterical, by giving a blunt assessment of the raftsmen's chances. It thus repeats lines 1-2, only now it is the colloquial Byron speaking, not the impersonal narrative ("a miracle," not "little hope"). The stanza bends into the reader, challenging us directly with the "If" of line 4. Then, with the concessional "Unless," it turns back toward the

fictive scene, which however now seems real in that it ironically subsumes our own response to it; with the introduction of “wild and horrid glee,” the reader is forced to recognize that, under the pressure of actual shipwreck, his armchair amusement at the raft could well become something less pleasant. The intervention of Byron in line 8 completes the proof that we are not entitled to judge these people, only their chances for survival.

In the previous stanza, xlix, the same pattern was used first to suggest the existence of an evil Deity hidden in matter, then skeptically to show that people aboard a storm-beaten ship at least have good reason to believe so. The first four lines, with their hint of a reversed Genesis, present the uncreating God of Byron's “Darkness.” (What makes the last line of stanza l so potent is partly its suggestion that the raftsmen need *two* miracles, one to save them, plus one to create the good God who might bother to do so.) But then this vision is attributed to “hopeless eyes” looking only at “the night.” Yet there is no cynicism here, for it next appears that the night these people saw really did “grimly darkle o'er the faces pale, / And the dim desolate deep.” The horror they imagined therefore was not *all* illusion, a point the narrator reinforces by affirming that “now Death was here.” The skepticism cuts too deep to be cynical.

Too deep, perhaps, for those who see in stanza lv only a failure of good taste. Even Andrew Rutherford, author of the tough-minded “*Don Juan*: War and Realism,” hits upon this stanza as “the only one … in which Byron lapses into a flippant derisive tone which would have been perfectly appropriate in *Beppo* but which constitutes a blemish, a breach of decorum, in his wonderful description of the wreck.”[10]

```
All the rest perish'd; near two hundred souls
          Had left their bodies; and what's worse, alas!
When over Catholics the Ocean rolls,
          They must wait several weeks before a mass
Takes off one peak of purgatorial coals,
          Because, till people know what's come to pass,
They won't lay out their money on the dead—
It costs three francs for every mass that's said.
```

Certainly the lapse is there; yet in a sense it belongs as much to the reader as to Byron. For consider the context. As early as stanza xxxiv, the ship presents the spectacle of a *Walpurgisnacht*: “Some plundered, some drank spirits, some sung psalms / … Strange sounds of wailing, blasphemy, devotion, / Clamoured in chorus to the roaring Ocean.” The spectacle intensifies once the sinking commences. We now become witnesses to a microcosm revealing the various ways in which men prepare to meet death: “Some went to prayers … / … Some looked o'er the bow; / Some hoisted out the boats,” “Some lashed them in their hammocks; some put on / Their best clothes, as if going to a fair; / Some cursed the day on which they saw the Sun, / And gnashed their teeth,” “Some trial had been making at a raft” (II.xliv-l). The ship sinks in a virtual apocalypse: “the sea yawn'd round her like a hell,” “And first one universal shriek there rush'd, / Louder than the loud Ocean … / … and then all was hush'd” (II.lii-liii). Or almost all: wind and ocean continue, and “at intervals there gush'd, / Accompanied with a convulsive splash, / A solitary shriek, the bubbling cry / Of some strong swimmer in his agony.” In retrospect, an instant and utter apocalypse would have been a relief. Instead of anything so final, one ship went down. The point of Byron's bringing in the agonized drowning castaway of William Cowper's poem here is to provide some distance from this disaster, which is absolute in itself but limited; he shifts our perspective to the survivors in the longboat (II.liv).

To read the limpid elegiac opening of stanza lv, then, is to prepare for a eulogy: “All the rest perish'd; near two hundred souls / Had left their bodies.” The second phrase is taken as a pathetic restatement of the first, recalling as it does the Ancient Mariner's “Four times fifty living men” whose “souls did from their bodies fly … / Like the whizz of my crossbow.”[11] But it becomes a trick, for Byron proceeds, in a travesty of Coleridge's literalism, to belabor theological assumptions hidden in the phrase. The result is a satire of the eulogy we expected. For plainly the “leavetaking” of these men's souls was not the graceful affair such a formula

implies. After so horrific a spectacle, what remains to say? Only “cant.” If we realize this, then the circumspection with which we read that “Nine souls more went” in the cutter will steady us to accept lines otherwise unacceptable:

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They grieved for those who perish'd with the cutter,
And also for the biscuit-casks and butter.
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(II.lxi)

“High thought / Link'd to a servile mass of matter” is Lucifer's Hamletlike description of man in *Cain.*[12] Here the couplet performs the linkage.

We began this perusal with stanza xxvii, an objective account telling precisely what happened to the ship the moment the wind shifted. We end with lovely, allusive stanza lxxxiv:

```
And that same night there fell a shower of rain,
          For which their mouths gaped, like the cracks of earth
When dried to summer's dust; till taught by pain,
          Men really know not what good water's worth;
If you had been in Turkey or in Spain,
          Or with a famish'd boat's-crew had your berth,
Or in the desert heard the camel's bell,
You'd wish yourself where Truth is—in a well.
```

By contrast with meat, which must be hunted and killed, the rain shower comes spontaneously as a gift. Like Truth, water is valuable essentially; it is free, yet under the circumstances it makes these men “rich” (II.lxxxvi). Chiefly, though, it is the biblical quality of the poetry that makes the rain so much resemble grace or manna. Lines 2-3 echo the thought that man is dust of the earth, his life a summer's day; there is a deep, melancholy sympathy for this fiery dust who feels his thirst so urgently. Almost immediately, however, this developing awareness of the boatcrew's universality begins to become rationalized by the philosophy of suffering introduced in lines 3-4. Line 5 goes a step further and addresses us directly; taking us outside the narrative, it establishes a global context for thirst in which “a famish'd boat's-crew” is but a local instance. Their predicament is not essentially different from that of others whose thirst we find small difficulty in imagining. The joke at the end becomes effective by our recognizing that it is our universal experience of water's preciousness that makes us identify it with Truth in the first place. This is the same pragmatism we met with earlier in the providential turtle. The allusiveness that functions as pathos in lines 1-3 thus becomes an explicit intellectual point in line 8—almost, but not quite, the butt of a joke. The rain shower *has* really seemed like grace; but it is no wonder that it should.

Clearly, Byron's skepticism is less a definite philosophic rationalism than a perpetual process of pragmatic adjustment. Hence it completes itself only in the reader's mind (not the narrator's, whose thought, however various, remains determined by what Byron actually wrote), as over and over we are made to confront, examine, and revise our own prior responses to the poem. To a skepticism so paradoxically thoroughgoing in its tentativeness, an affirmation any less indirect is bound to appear merely self-approving. As Peter Manning points out:

> *Don Juan* baffled contemporaries and incurred accusations of cynicism because its first readers did not realize that Byron had transferred the locus of meaning from within the poem outside to them. Pope draws his audience into a compact of solidarity against the fools he presents—the Dunces, the Timons, the Sir Balaams. In Byron, however, the object of satire is not a fictive, representative character, but the false assumptions in the individual reader that his reactions to the poem bring to the surface.[13]

So with regard to the shipwreck episode, what is most striking about first readers' reactions is not their horror, but specifically their mortification, as though they felt Byron had personally duped them somehow. All protest their excruciated “consciousness of the insulting deceit which has been practised upon us. … Every high thought that was ever kindled in our hearts by the muse of Byron … every remembered moment of admiration and enthusiasm is up in arms against him”—thus the *Blackwood's* reviewer.[14] Keats—whom *Blackwood's* held anathema—less prissily expresses the same sense of betrayal; in Severn's report he flung the book down, exclaiming that Byron had evidently grown so jaded “that there was nothing left for him but to laugh & gloat over the most solemn & heart-rending scenes of human misery; this storm of his is one of the most diabolical attempts ever made upon our sympathies. …”[15] Such reactions are quite accurate in their way. Most of the stanzas just examined contain a development whose challenge to the reader could easily be construed as mockery or betrayal. As stanza l shows no less than lxxxiv, *Don Juan* elicits pathos not for the sake of pathos alone, but in order that we may consider its appropriateness within a particular context. Normally, this entails the intervention of the narrator whose irony, as in the stanza Rutherford singled out, can seem even to unmoralizing modern readers like the devilish laughing and gloating Keats imagined. Among contemporaries it appears that only Shelley, applying the arguments of *Areopagitica,* was able to grasp how the poem locates its meanings within the individual reader, thus making his response a direct moral act. “You unveil & present in its true deformity what is worst in human nature,” he wrote Byron, “& it is this what the witlings of the age murmur at, conscious of their want of power to endure the scrutiny of such a light.”[16]

Byron's implicit rejection of the cannibalism, the aspect of the shipwreck it remains to consider, follows from the premium *Don Juan* places upon the socialized individual. That the cannibalism is to be regarded as a moral issue appears from the fact that somebody is killed. Nevertheless the reader is not allowed to pass judgment, and the narrator judges the event only by its consequences.

```
          'T was not to be expected that [Juan] should,
Even in extremity of their disaster,
Dine with them on his pastor and his master.

'T was better that he did not; for, in fact,
          The consequence was awful in the extreme;
For they, who were most ravenous in the act,
          Went ranging mad—Lord! how they did blaspheme!
And foam, and roll, with strange convulsions rack'd,
          Drinking salt-water like a mountain stream,
Tearing, and grinning, howling, screeching, swearing,
And, with hyæna-laughter, died despairing.
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(II.lxxviii-lxxix)

The “extremity” to which they resort is repaid in kind by the consequence being “awful in the extreme”; but holier-than-thou readers who believe the cannibals got what they deserve must immediately confront a mock-serious distortion of themselves: “Lord! how they did blaspheme!” The narrator here is holier than anybody, and as a result seems merely hypocritical: “Kill and eat people if you must, but swearing like that is an affront to society.” Cannibalism thus appears as “man's worst—his second fall,” the fall of civilized man into barbarism;[17] the last two lines describe primarily the behavior of monkeys. This is Byron's societal version of Coleridge's Death-in-Life. Yet the Ancient Mariner sucked only his own blood, whereas Byron's boatcrew in much the same situation—compare the calm at stanza lxxii with that in *The Rime* Part II—choose to sacrifice a victim to their vampiric surgeon.[18]

Leading as it does to madness and “a species of self-slaughter” (II.cii), the cannibalism is seen to be a socialized form of suicide. Unlike hope, “the desire of life [that] / Prolongs it” by binding “people in an open boat” into a hardy little community (II.lxvi), the killing and eating of Pedrillo is an act of cynicism. It is the individual's capitulation to his instinct for self-preservation at any cost, a desire of life murderous in the event.

In the boat the men “lay like carcasses; and hope was none, / … They glared upon each other … And you might see / The longings of the cannibal arise / (Although they spoke not) in their wolfish eyes” (II.lxxii). Like original sin, the longings arise and intensify from within; motionless, the men are visibly regressing into barbarism (apparently they have lost the power of speech); “like carcasses” is how they now perceive one another. It would appear that Byron's survivors see only the low half of what Lucifer saw, the “servile [and serviceable] mass of matter.” Moreover, having consumed Pedrillo, “as if not warned sufficiently,” the men next dispense with democratic lottery and like a wolfpack fix upon the master's mate “As fattest” (II.lxxx-lxxxi). Their dehumanization emerges vividly in the next stanza: “At length they caught two Boobies and a Noddy, / And then they left off eating the dead body” (II.lxxxii). Previously the feast possessed a certain macabre gusto (II.lxxvii); now it seems genuinely necrophilic, an impression heightened by the ensuing reference to Dante's Ugolino. With the reappearance of normal food sources, normal standards of edibility resurface, and the other meat is recognized with horror as the damaged corpse of Pedrillo.

Cannibalism, then, represents the furthest reach from Spanish society, the barbaric inner ring of Hell below which lies the merely animal, Juan's struggle with Ocean. In a parody of the Genesis God's prolificness, Byron shows the survivors' day-by-day exhausting of their provisions; finally on “the seventh day” (I.lxxii), the day God created man and gave him life, the boatcrew kills the Christly Pedrillo and consumes him. Yet this Hell opens up within a group of ordinary, civilized Europeans. The reader looks down into it from the circle of his own values, which are the same—hence the encapsulated quality of the whole episode. The cannibalism is barbarism localized as an unlikely but genuine possibility occurring within a broader social context that, though it usually escapes barbarism, nevertheless cannot control the force of circumstance that makes barbarism always a danger. Pedrillo's skillful euthanasia by a doctor we may regard as Byron's *reductio* of a runaway principle of enlightened rational self-interest, his own Modest Proposal to the Malthusians in the audience.

Juan's heroism in the shipwreck is his Promethean persistence in civilized values that he knows, implicitly, to be greater than his own personal annihilation or suffering. “‘No! / 'T is true that death awaits both you and me, / But let us die like men, not sink / Below like brutes” (II.xxxvi), he tells the whiskey-craving crew, and silently proves his credo in the nasty crucible of the longboat. Unlike the others, he resists “the savage hunger which demanded, / Like the Promethean vulture” (II.lxxv), the sacrifice of Pedrillo. For Byron, civilized man is a Prometheus who internalizes the vulture that gnaws him. Barbarism occurs when the individual looses his personal vulture to gnaw upon somebody else; inside and outside then merge, and the individual actually becomes his vulture. The cannibalism is Byron's literalization of this myth of the modern Prometheus; the bestial deaths that result, simply the natural penalty for so uncivil a “pollution” (II.lxxv; the word translates the Aeschylean *miasma,* or blood-guilt, which as E. R. Dodds remarks, “is the automatic consequence of an action, belongs to the world of external events, and operates with the same ruthless indifference to motive as a typhoid germ”[19]). No matter then that “None in particular had sought or planned it,” the cannibalism is inevitably self-defeating.

Admittedly, Juan's persistence may be ingenuous, but it reflects nonetheless a vigilant sensitivity to the possibilities for true, unspecious survival—that is, for Byron, survival “like a gentleman,” without compromise. The change of mind whereby Juan finally eats his favorite spaniel shows not only that his forbearance of Pedrillo is something more than fastidiousness; it also attests his moral continence under even the most trying conditions. When it comes to the crunch, we see, the profligate Juan is able to make the crucial discriminations between the moral and the sentimental, the human and the merely animal, seeing which of them is inessential and expendable and which not. It is no coincidence that Byron's manipulation of his readers through the ottava rima involves us in discriminations of the same kind. Not that Juan is therefore a directly exemplary figure, but his behavior during the shipwreck does illustrate the same resolute pragmatism we discovered in stanzas l-lxxxiv. This we may summarize as follows. Hope for the best, and act accordingly, but do not expect this or that consequence to follow or you will soon despair. To doubt something, on the other hand, is not to believe it is impossible, but only unlikely; far from necessarily

conducing to despair, every doubt thus contains in itself the hopeful germ of a possibility. Or as bold Mazeppa put it, the battle lost, his forces routed, and himself surrounded by an enemy "ten to one at least": "What mortal his own doom may guess? / Let none despond, let none despair."[20] The shipwreck episode of *Don Juan* represents Byron's exploration of the ellipsis between these two statements, the first skeptical, the second affirmative, and his laying bare the moral fabric that connects them.

Notes

1. *Byron: Poetical Works,* ed. Frederick Page, rev. John Jump, 3rd ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), pp. 341-342. All subsequent quotations of Byron's poetry are from this edition.
2. William H. Marshall, *The Structure of Byron's Major Poems* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1962), pp. 120-124.
3. Comparison of *Mazeppa* lines 417-422 ("For time at last sets all things even. …") with the letter to Lady Byron of 5 March 1817 suggests Byron identified his own position after the separation with that of Mazeppa: "For myself I have a confidence in my Fortune which will yet bear me through—['Chance is more just than we are']—the reverses which have occurred—were what I should have expected. …—However I shall live to have to pity you all … time & Nemesis will do that which I would not—even were it in my power remote or immediate.—You will smile at this piece of prophecy—do so—but recollect it.—it is justified by all human experience—no one was ever even the involuntary cause of great evils to others—without a requital—I have paid and am paying for mine—so will you." *Letters & Journals,* ed. Leslie A. Marchand (London: John Murray, 1976), V, 181. See also the letter to Lady Byron of 18 November 1818.
4. See Jerome McGann, Don Juan *in Context* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), pp. 59-61. The fullest account of *Don Juan*'s composition is Truman Guy Steffan's in *The Making of a Masterpiece: Byron's* Don Juan, Vol. I of *Byron's* Don Juan: *A Variorum Edition,* 2nd ed. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1971). See esp. pp. 362, 365-367.
5. Alvin Kernan, *The Plot of Satire* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1965), pp. 176-179.
6. *Twentieth Century Interpretations of* Don Juan, ed. Edward E. Bostetter (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1969), p. 14.
7. George Ridenour, *The Style of* Don Juan (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1960).
8. Peter J. Manning, *Byron and His Fictions* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1978), Chapter 7; and Jerome McGann, Don Juan *in Context,* pp. 111-112, 156, Chapter 8 passim. The reader's cyclical experience of *Don Juan*'s stanzas resembles William James's account of the process by which truths become verified: "Truths emerge from facts; but they dip forward into facts again and add to them; which facts again create or reveal new truth, and so on indefinitely. The facts themselves are not *true.* They simply *are.* Truth is the function of the *beliefs* that start and terminate among them." *Pragmatism: A New Name For Some Old Ways of Thinking* (1907; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1975), p. 108.
9. Manning, *Byron and His Fictions,* p. 260.
10. Andrew Rutherford, *Byron: A Critical Study* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1961), p. 172. Rpt. in *Twentieth Century Interpretations,* pp. 51-62.
11. *Coleridge: Poetical Works,* ed. E. H. Coleridge (1912; rpt. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973), p. 196.
12. *Cain* II.i.50-51.
13. Manning, *Byron and His Fictions,* p. 260.
14. "Remarks on Don Juan," *Blackwood's Magazine,* 5 (August 1819), 512-518. Rpt. in *Byron: The Critical Heritage,* ed. Andrew Rutherford (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1970), pp. 166-172.
15. *The Critical Heritage,* p. 163.
16. Letter of Shelley to Byron, 21 October 1821, in *The Critical Heritage,* p. 197. Compare Byron's letter to Murray of 1 February 1819: "I maintain that it is the most moral of poems—but if people won't discover the moral that is their fault not mine." *Letters & Journals,* VI, 99.

17. *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* IV.97; cited in McGann, Don Juan *in Context,* pp. 146-147.
18. Pedrillo's death is a comment on the earlier assertion that “the desire of life / Prolongs it”:

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          … this is obvious to physicians,
When patients, neither plagued with friends nor wife,
          Survive through very desperate conditions,
Because they still can hope, nor shines the knife
          Nor shears of Atropos before their visions:
Despair of all recovery spoils longevity,
And makes men's miseries of alarming brevity.
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    (II.lxiv)

    For Pedrillo, it was not the knife of Atropos that shone before his vision, but the surgeon's scalpel that glimmered before his eyes: the men have tried to take fate into their own hands. It is hard to know what McGann means when he claims of the stanza that “even in the doctor/patient context one is forced to concede the virtues of despair. As Byron suggests, it ‘makes men's miseries of alarming brevity. …’ In Byron's view, if anything is human—like hope and despair, for example—it will serve human ends, sometimes well, sometimes equivocally, sometimes badly” (Don Juan *in Context,* pp. 164-165). But something that serves human ends badly does not really serve human ends at all. Thus for the cannibals the “virtues of despair” are nonvirtues. Far from simply offering the men relief from a painful existence, the cannibalism gives them the worst of both worlds: *more* suffering (despair, insanity, and convulsions rolled into one), and death as well. Such misery is “alarming” indeed.
19. E. R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1951), p. 36.
20. *Mazeppa,* lines 114, 853-854.

Criticism: Anne Barton (essay date 1987)

SOURCE: Barton, Anne. “*Don Juan* Reconsidered: The Haidée Episode.” In *Byron,* edited by Jane Stabler, pp. 194-203. Edinburgh Gate, Eng.: Addison Wesley Longman, 1998.

[*In the following essay, originally published in* The Byron Journal *in 1987, Barton assesses the relationship between Don Juan and Haidée and the significance of Lambro's advances toward the couple in Canto II of* Don Juan. *Barton argues that this incident is the focal point of the poem.*]

When Byron's Lambro returns home from his last piratical voyage at the beginning of Canto III of *Don Juan* he goes ‘ashore without delay, / Having no custom-house nor quarantine / To ask him awkward questions on the way’.[1] It takes Byron, however, a very long time—one thousand, one hundred and eleven lines—to bring Haidée and the father who will destroy her face to face. Lambro is immobilized, strikingly, three times as he covers the short distance from the harbour to his house: once (at line 163) on the summit of the hill overlooking it, where, we are told, ‘he stopp'd’, while the narrator digresses for several stanzas, again (at 330) when he pauses to question the revellers in the garden, and finally (line 482) when he ‘pass'd unseen a private gate / And stood within his hall at eventide’. Lambro will remain standing in that hall, artificially arrested and still, not only for the remainder of Canto III, but for the first 279 lines of its successor.

The narrator of *Don Juan* is, of course, constantly interrupting and retarding his own story-line. Towards the end of the unconscionable length of poetic time that it takes Lambro to walk a few hundred yards, Byron offers the reader his customary mock-apologies: ‘But let me to my story: I must own / If I have any fault, it is digression’ (III. 96) or ‘I feel this tediousness will never do—/ 'Tis being *too* epic’ (III. 111). And yet for all the predictability of such excuses, the situation which gives rise to them here is unique. In the first place, Lambro's maddeningly protracted advance in the direction of the unsuspecting Juan and Haidée is, as Byron

has made clear from the inception of their love, back in Canto II, that of Nemesis itself. Juan will be Haidée's first and also her last lover. The looming confrontation between father and daughter must destroy her. It will also shatter a paradisal episode, the centre in many ways of the entire epic, in which (for once) man's—and woman's—state has not proved pathetically inadequate to their conceptions.

I have adapted this last phrase from Byron's own account of how Lucifer, in *Cain,* reduces the hero of the play to that condition of unreasoning despair in which he can murder his brother Abel. It has become something of a commonplace of Byron criticism to see the theme of the Fall, a lost Eden apprehended briefly in childhood or in the raptures of first love, but fundamentally unobtainable, as one of the unifying preoccupations of his poetry. And certainly, there is much that not only feels but is specifically identified as pre-lapsarian about Juan's sojourn on the island. Quite as important, however, as this specifically Christian context is Byron's insistence that what he is describing in the relationship of Juan and Haidée is life lived on the level and with the intensity of great art, effortlessly corresponding to the sculptor's, the poet's, or the novelist's ideal:

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This is in others a factitious state,
          An opium dream of too much youth and reading,
But was in them their nature, or their fate:
          No novels e'er had set their young hearts bleeding.
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(IV. 19)

Such an achievement, as Byron recognizes ruefully from the start, in itself almost impossible, can only be ephemeral.[2] Indeed Time, an enemy potentially as destructive as Lambro, is already beginning to threaten it, even before the return of that ‘good old gentleman’, the ‘sea-attorney’, as Haidée and her lover, moving indoors after Lambro's supposed death in Canto III, exchange the naked simplicity of their early embraces in the sea-cave for rich garments, ‘crystal and marble, plate and porcelain’, a profusion of sherbets and sweetmeats, and the dubious company of black eunuchs, dwarfs and dancing girls. None of this luxury has any power to diminish their complete absorption in one another, or corrupt their love. That remains so flawless and unshaken that Time itself, ‘though foe to love’, recoils from the necessity of greying this particular couple's hair, imprinting wrinkles on their brows and muddying their pure blood.

People capable of a passion so rare, Byron maintains,

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… were not made in the real world to fill
          A busy character in the dull scene,
But like two beings born from out a rill,
          A nymph and her beloved, all unseen
To pass their lives in fountains and on flowers,
And never know the weight of human hours.
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(IV. 15)

Juan and Haidée, unlike other humans, for whom passion scarcely outlives the moment of possession, can love like classical demi-gods. But physically they remain subject to decay. That being so, the best gift that could be offered them, the narrator insists at the beginning of Canto IV, is early death. Yet, like Time itself, he seems oddly reluctant to initiate the work of destruction. Of course, Byron keeps Lambro waiting in the wings for so long, a momentarily arrested doom, partly to generate suspense. But it is suspense of a special kind, singularly lacking elsewhere in the poem. And when the catastrophe finally comes, when Haidée collapses into madness and then death, while Juan, without ever knowing what has become of her, enters a bondage that is metaphoric as well as literal—enslaved henceforward to the world and time—it proves remarkably all-embracing. The island itself becomes mysteriously ‘all desolate and bare / Its dwellings down, its tenants past away’ (IV. 72), overtaken, as it seems, by a fate even bleaker than that of the castle in Keats's ‘Eve of St. Agnes’ after the lovers flee away into the storm. The story of Haidée and Lambro is still known, and told or

sung, on other islands. But where they actually lived, for reasons which Byron refuses to divulge, even their graves are lost.

An Edenic vision disappears with Haidée, never to return in the poem, except fleetingly in Canto VIII, as Byron wistfully contemplates the life of Daniel Boone in the backwoods of America—itself, significantly, a legend of the past—or in the parody offered by London suburbia, with its '"Rows" most modestly called "Paradise", / Which Eve might quit without much sacrifice' (XI. 21). Eden, however, is not the only paradigm shattered in Canto IV. I said earlier that on the island, for a little while, Byron allows Juan and Haidée to do something which he was always trying (and failing) to accomplish in his own existence: to live with the intensity, the total commitment of great art, to realize myth. That is true in specific terms, as well as general. Jerome McGann has pointed to the way Byron draws upon Homer's *Odyssey* in the Haidée section: in particular upon the Nausicaa episode and (in Lambro's homecoming) upon Odysseus's return to a riotous house which no longer recognizes him as its master.[3] In both cases, what in Homer had turned out happily leads to disaster. An 'honest gentleman at his return', as Byron observes, 'may not have the good fortune of Ulysses' (III. 23). He is likely to find his Penelope unchaste, 'and that his Argus bites him by—the breeches'. This, effectively, is what happens to Lambro. Even so, Haidée learns, unlike Nausicaa, that introducing her father to the handsome castaway she has discovered is the way to destroy the stranger's fortunes, not to mend them.

I want to add to McGann's Homeric paradigm another equally important: Shakespeare's *The Tempest.* It is clear that this play was explicitly in Byron's mind at stanza 134 of Canto II. Just after Haidée tears herself away reluctantly from the sleeping stranger, Byron initially toyed with a final couplet about dreams which leave 'No "baseless fabric", but "a wreck behind"': a phrase adapted from Prospero's famous valediction 'Our revels now are ended'. He cancelled the line in the end—as he not infrequently did with Shakespearean quotations which might seem to undermine his consciously constructed and essentially mischievous dissent from contemporary Bardolatry—but its shadowy presence clarifies something which might otherwise have been harder to isolate: the way Prospero, Ferdinand and Miranda, another island trio of irascible father, shipwrecked lover and disobedient daughter, hover behind Byron's Lambro, Juan and Haidée.

As with the echoes from Homer, this second fictional paradigm poignantly helps to define what might have been against what, in Byron's more pessimistic handling of the situation, actually is. A man even more embittered and disabused than Prospero, Lambro's affections are wholly bound up with this one child who shares his essentially solitary existence. She constitutes his last remaining human tie. But the anger which Prospero merely feigns against Ferdinand, 'lest too light winning make the prize light', the contempt for his 'silly' sword, and imposition of fetters and forced labour—features which in *The Tempest* are steps on the way to a happy ending—become, in Byron, the agents of catastrophe. Shakespeare's story re-told goes wrong before our eyes, as life multiplies its rebellions against the patterns of art.

Just how much emotion Byron had invested in the Haidée episode becomes clear in the fourteen extraordinary stanzas of Canto IV describing her progress from coma to frenzy to death. The narrator observes his heroine's dissolution rather as Byron had in the last minutes of that criminal whose execution he witnessed at Rome in 1817: with an opera glass in hand to pick up detail, because 'one should see everything once with attention', but psychologically distressed to the point of being scarcely able to hold it steady. And when it is over, when Haidée, Lambro and the place where they lived have all been swept away, a crisis declares itself in the poem.

McGann has argued persuasively that when he began *Don Juan,* Byron thought of the Donna Julia episode in what is now Canto I as complete in itself—a companion piece to *Beppo*—not recognizing until early September 1818 that he was in fact launched on an epic.[4] The shipwreck of Canto II and the romance of the island into which it leads comprise a clearly defined second unit of the poem. But the problem of where to go from there, of what could possibly succeed this second unit, was far more acute than the question of what to do with Juan after the mingled mockery and tears of the Julia affair. The episode of the island, after all, comes

to an unequivocally tragic conclusion, ends in a desolation which leaves neither the narrator nor the reader with anything at which to laugh. The only large-scale event in the entire poem, including the shipwreck and the Siege of Ismail, of which this is true, it threatens not only the balance, the characteristically mixed tone, of *Don Juan,* but the very possibility of its continuation. Byron must have recognized this. If Juan—not to mention the reader—was to overleap this catastrophe, while retaining our interest and respect, some way had to be found of letting go of Haidée and the experience she symbolized, without forgetting, let alone dishonouring, either.

Byron's characteristically brilliant solution to the problem posed for the entire poem by Haidée's death can be found in stanzas 80 to 94 of Canto IV. It is a solution made possible, to a large extent, by his life in Venice. When Juan stumbles up, 'wounded and fetter'd', 'weak still with loss of blood', on to the deck of the slave-ship in which he has been quite literally 'cabin'd, cribb'd, confined' since his violent expulsion from the island, he discovers that although he appears to have been transported from the world of Shakespearean romance to that of tragedy, at least the players are there with him in Elsinore. They are players of a very special and composite kind. Raucocanti and his associates testify to the deep impression left on Byron by Shakespeare's use of the travelling actors, the tragedians of the city, in *Hamlet,* but also to his memories of time spent on the Drury Lane Committee in London. More immediately, they derive from his residence in Venice, and regular attendance at the Fenice there: an opera house which (as he rapturously assured his sister Augusta in a letter of the 20th of January 1817) was not only cheaper but much finer than anything London could provide. Like Byron's Marino Faliero or Jacopo Foscari, Raucocanti, the loquacious buffo of that modest Italian opera company sold into slavery by its Machiavellian impresario, is both Shakespearean and Venetian: yet another testimony of the kind of artistic cross-breeding encouraged by Byron's exile in Italy.

Raucocanti's function in *Don Juan* is crucial. For one thing, the little buffo allows Byron to build a bridge between *The Tempest* and *Hamlet. Hamlet* is a play of great overall importance in *Don Juan,* not only for the number of specific verbal echoes but because—especially in Canto IX—it can be seen to colour the climate of long stretches of the poem. Byron's indebtedness to this particular Shakespearean work might seem predictable, given the general romantic obsession with its hero. His interest, however, is characteristically individual. He seems far less drawn to the melancholy, introspective figure of the prince himself—the main focus of attention for contemporaries—than to other characters and aspects of the work: Polonius, Gertrude, the gravedigger, the ghost or, as here in Canto IV, the travelling actors. Also, Byron is keenly alive, as Coleridge or Goethe for instance were not, to the comic qualities of the play. That may be one reason why he found it so easy to sense the underlying connection between *Hamlet* and *The Tempest*—the noblest of Shakespeare's revenge plays, as it has been called—and so to remember Elsinore as well as Prospero's island in a Mediterranean context.

The association in Byron's mind of *Hamlet* with *The Tempest* begins back in Canto III. Lambro, returning to find that everybody in his house has recovered quite expeditiously from the shock of his death and is engaged in feasting of the bounty of that 'new patron / Who seem'd to have turn'd Haidée into a matron' (44), had not only represented a type of Odysseus. When Byron observes on Lambro's behalf that 'certainly to one deem'd dead returning, / This revel seem'd a curious mode of mourning' (49), the wedding that followed with such indecent haste upon the funeral of old Hamlet (so much so indeed that it seemed to the prince as though the same banquet did double service for both) nudges at the reader's memory. It seems to have been at the back of Byron's mind as well. Just before Lambro's entry, he describes Haidée, in an allusion that McGann rather surprisingly seems to have missed, as 'defying augury' (IV. 24) just as Hamlet did before his own death: 'Not a whit, we defy augury'. But it is by way of Raucocanti that Byron's creative use of Shakespeare declares itself most strikingly, and also serves to rally his poem at a critical juncture. Just as, in Shakespeare's play, the actors arrive to cheer everybody up—including, for a moment, young Hamlet himself—after the funeral of the old king and the prematurely convivial marriage, so Byron is able to use their equivalents in *Don Juan* to persuade us that nothing is ever quite the end, that even after the painful, long delayed and seemingly final disaster of the island, the show can and will go on.

Raucocanti's dramatic monologue (82-89), his quite unsolicited, scabrous and detailed personal description of the other members of the travelling company is, in its way, as brilliant as anything Robert Browning ever produced in the genre. It makes one wonder how critics could ever have claimed that Byron had no gift for the creation of character, that he never speaks with any voice but his own. Like Browning's ‘A Toccata of Galuppi's’, Raucocanti's monologue draws inspiration from the festive, the carnivalesque in Italian life. But it shocks at the same time that it delights the reader. As Raucocanti gabbles on, exposing in the process the intricacies of his own nature quite as much as those of the other members of the troupe, we are suddenly made aware of something hitherto obscure: the extraordinary and, in a sense, artificial extent to which the Juan/Haidée relationship had been independent of the spoken word. That independence was in part—but only in part—a product of the fact that these two initially could not understand each other's language. When Haidée, back in Canto II, bent over Juan and

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          … told him, in good modern Greek,
With an Ionian accent, low and sweet,
That he was faint, and must not talk, but eat.

… Juan could not understand a word,
          Being no Grecian.
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(150-51)

It was the smell of Zoe's cooking that made Haidée's point, even as (later) Zoe's sign language prevented him from gorging himself to a degree hazardous for a starving man. As for Haidée, illiterate, Byron informs us, even in her own tongue, she

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… read (the only book she could) the lines
          Of his fair face, and found, by sympathy
The answer eloquent, where the soul shines
          And darts in one quick glance a long reply;
And thus in every look she saw exprest
A world of words, and things at which she guess'd.
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(162)

Later, the narrator assures us, Juan picked up at least enough Romaic to be able to suggest to Haidée that stroll along the sea-beach at the end of which they consummate their love. But it is plain that (in sharp contrast with Juan's earlier affair with Julia) this relationship—the libertine's wish-dream of a perfect sense experience which remains itself while at the same time reaching out to incorporate a world of pure spirit—to a large extent bypasses language.

Even towards the end of their story, Juan and Haidée have apparently progressed only to a kind of private, half-gestural speech—‘like unto birds’, the narrator says—known only to them, as though they were the sole examples of some rare species. Which, in a sense, they are. No promises are exacted or made in the arcane and special language these two have devised, no constancy sworn, no marriage proposed. Pared down to the minimum, it is fundamentally extra-social. Juan's first love, Julia, had been highly articulate in a common tongue—whispering ‘I will ne'er consent’ just before consenting, in her diatribe against Alfonso, in her letter of farewell. But it is not until she is obliged to plead with Lambro for Juan's life that we actually hear any words that Haidée speaks. They prepare us, simply by being uttered at all, for the shattering of the idyll. But that idyll really becomes a thing of the past, allowing the next section of the poem to get underway, only when Raucocanti embarks on his monologue in Canto IV. In doing so, he forcibly reminds Juan, and the reader, that all the time there has been a world elsewhere.

It is an intensely social world. Raucocanti's little company, tenor and bass, prima donna, baritone, castrato and dancers, suddenly presents Juan with a kind of microcosm of the contemporary European civilization he had for a time escaped. As the buffo goes on describing the qualities of his fellow performers and how they live, the images of Haidée's island—sea-cave and sunsets, throngs of dancers, story-tellers, the snow-white ram wreathed with flowers by childish hands, even that dubious itinerant, the poet who sang 'the isles of Greece'—not only come to seem like the stuff that dreams are made on, they acquire the quality of an operatic scene: entrancing but unreal, something constructed out of canvas and false lights, peopled by players who, when the show is over, will be at one another's throats, intriguing to carry off 'Count Cesare Cicogna' from some elderly Roman princess, or scheming to get their relatives a job.

Although Raucocanti's world is of an indubitably fallen kind, it is remarkably hard to dismiss, or even condemn. Raucocanti himself may be 'a busy character', but the scene in which he plays is not, after all, 'dull', when Byron comes once again to confront it. On one level a 'blackguard', as the narrator calls him, and certainly spiteful and malicious, Raucocanti nonetheless bears himself under trying circumstances with 'gaiety and grace'. Byron may be continuing the parallel with *The Tempest* when he makes the little buffo cheerfully press Juan to come and hear him sing next year at 'the fair of Lugo'—he has, after all, no more assurances that he will ever be released from slavery than Shakespeare's Stefano does of realizing his ambition of getting off the island and exhibiting Caliban for money in England. But there is something endearing about Raucocanti's irrepressible optimism, about the aplomb with which he accepts what has happened to him and immediately sets about speculating how if only 'the Sultan has a taste for song', the whole seedy troupe may yet be in a way to prosper.

Things equally strange have, of course, been known to happen. Byron's own note on the Raucocanti passage is interesting. Of the fictional hi-jacking of the Italian opera company he writes:

> This is a fact. A few years ago a man engaged a company for some foreign theatre; embarked them at an Italian port, and carrying them to Algiers, sold them all. One of the women, returned from her captivity, I heard sing, by a strange coincidence, in Rossini's opera of 'L'Italiana in Algeri', at Venice, in the beginning of 1817.[5]

Byron was understandably delighted by the 'strange coincidence' which allowed him to hear a woman who had escaped from slavery in Algiers, singing in an opera whose plot is about the escape of an Italian girl from the harem of the Bey of Algiers. It confirmed him in his characteristic belief that there was something wrong with things 'all fiction', and that there should always be 'some ballast of fact for the most airy fabric', pure invention being 'but the talent of a liar'. A vertiginous compound of imagination and truth, in a way validating the fantastic plot of Rossini's opera, his recollections of the strange fortunes of the Italian singer at the Fenice also helped him to set his epic on an even keel again, after an episode which had carried an abnormally light ballast of fact. It seems even to have suggested where the poem could go next: to a harem, although Juan will meet Gulbeyaz and Dudù not in Algiers but in Constantinople.

We never know what became of Raucocanti himself, left chained to the tenor, a man he hated with what Byron, obviously remembering his days at Drury Lane, calls 'a hate found only on the stage' (93). Although the narrator promises, at the end of Canto IV, to describe the various destinies of the captives in 'further song', he never does so. Only Juan himself and his new friend Johnson are carried over into the next canto. Raucocanti and his associates simply vanish into that slipstream of oblivion which has already claimed a number of characters in the poem without explanation. In ensuing cantos, it will swallow up not only Johnson, but even the woman Byron is about to introduce as his 'third heroine': Gulbeyaz, the Sultaness who dominates Cantos V and VI. In the case of Raucocanti and the opera troupe, Byron's reticence does not matter. Like the players in *Hamlet,* who also disappear after Act III into a future about which we know nothing, they have fulfilled their purpose in the poem.

I have been trying in this essay to say something about the way in which *Don Juan* is put together: a method in which are combined that extraordinary flexibility we have always known about—our sense of the poet's freedom to incorporate anything he chooses, to move not only in terms of digression, but of plot in any new direction that invites him—with a refined and conscious artistry that we have only belatedly given Byron credit for possessing. I've been concerned primarily with the subtlety of his use of Shakespeare, through direct allusion and also through larger, unstated parallels with *The Tempest* and *Hamlet,* as a way of complicating our response to the Haidée episode. And with the creative intelligence which recognized so acutely just what the character of that episode was and how special the strategy would need to be which permitted the poem both to consolidate and to continue on its course beyond it. It is not the least of the many paradoxes of *Don Juan* that for a work in some ways so random, it should also end up being so finely planned. Byron may not have any clear idea, note or text, about the word or the incident that will come next: he retains, as the Raucocanti episode demonstrates, a vivid sense of what he has already written, and of its relationship to what he is about to commit to paper.

Notes

1. All quotations from *Don Juan* refer to the edition by Jerome J. McGann, in *The Complete Poetical Works,* Vol. V (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986).
2. See the Commentary, p. 690 of McGann's edition of *Don Juan.*
3. See my earlier essay, '*Byron and the Mythology of Fact*', Nottingham Byron Lecture, 1968.
4. Jerome J. McGann, *Don Juan In Context* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1976), pp. 59-60.
5. To John Murray, Venice, 2 April 1817.

Criticism: Caroline Franklin (essay date winter 1990)

SOURCE: Franklin, Caroline. "'Quiet Cruising o'er the Ocean Woman': Byron's *Don Juan.* and the Woman Question." In *Byron,* edited by Jane Stabler, pp. 79-93. Edinburgh Gate, Eng.: Addison Wesley Longman, 1998.

[*In the following essay, originally published in* Studies in Romanticism *in winter 1990, Franklin chronicles the methods by which Byron challenged traditional ideas about marriage, chastity, fidelity, and female power.*]

The importance of the debate on the woman question, and of [Christoph] Meiners and [Joseph Alexandre Pierre] Ségur particularly, in framing a context in which to view Byron's 'sexual Jacobinism' is plain. In his comic epic, Byron employs the same procedure as the Enlightenment histories of progressing from primitive to civilized countries; the same relativistic sociological stance towards sexual morality; the same assumption of the influence of climate on Northern and Southern *mores.*[1] Most importantly, he too focuses on female morality as the perspective through which to view the *ancien régime* and finally the Revolution itself. Ségur and Meiners portrayed the *ancien régime* as an effeminate civilization where the corruption of authority is measured by the ability of women to wield illicit power. This is the controlling perspective of the poem, too. For all the adult women of the poem are in positions of power or authority over Juan as his mother (Inez); elder (Julia); rescuer (Haidée); purchaser (Gulbeyaz); guide to harem life (Dudu); employer (Catherine); hostess (Adeline) and practical joker (Duchess). The poet begins by lamenting 'I want a hero' (I.i). He portrays a Europe lacking in male public-spiritedness. England is a 'gynocrasy' (XII.66; XVI.52), whose aristocracy is maintained by dynastic marriages arranged by female coteries (IV.109; XIII.82). All the male characters of the poem have lost the 'masculine' capacity to serve the state or to wield power disinterestedly, for universal justice. Lambro, the Greek poet, the Sultan, Johnson, Lord Henry: all have given way to dynastic or mercenary self-interest. The poet denigrates Britain's modern political and military leaders, Castlereagh and Wellington, in the same terms: the first as a moral eunuch and both as self-seeking hirelings.

However, when we look more closely, there are some fundamental differences. The female domination in *Don Juan* is always of a purely sexual nature rather than self-seeking or materialistic. The format of a progression from primitive Greek isle to Turkish despotism, to Catherine's attempt to graft enlightened monarchy on to Russian feudalism, and finally to British constitutionalism leads the reader to expect a similar correlation between the standards of sexual morality and the portrayal of ever more civilized societies, as that Meiners and Ségur had sought to establish. But by using this framework as the background for repetitive stories of Don Juanism, a tension is set up between the expectation of progress dictated by the format, and the portrayal of actual human sexuality, unvarying, unchanged and untamed, despite the differing *mores.* Byron undermines the concept of reforming society through endowing women with the role of guardian of morals, by suggesting that the unalterable dynamics of human sexuality have appertained throughout time and place, and that woman is by nature as much a creature—or more—of sexual appetite as is man. The poet's satiric strategy in *Don Juan* is that employed in *The Vision of Judgement*: he replicates the formula of an existing text in order to subvert it. Byron presents the same thesis as Ségur and Meiners that the development of a modern constitutional state necessitates ever-increasing control by women of their libido. However, with devastating comic irony he indicates in the English cantos the resulting choice between naive idealism (Aurora), self-repression (Adeline) and outright hypocrisy (the Duchess), which represent three stages in an Englishwoman's life. Byron does not apotheosize the chaste wife of Northern European protestant society, but romanticizes a libertarian ideal on a primitive Greek isle. Control of the libido by the rational will, on the other hand, is linked with the psychology of dynastic aggrandizement and political repression.

Just as British women are as adulterous as their primitive sisters, so the increasingly sophisticated governments of the various countries are not presented as illustrating a smooth progression in the freedom of the subject either. Even in ‘The land of the free’, as long as poverty continues to make prostitutes and criminals of the people, the advanced form of the institutions of government does not benefit them. Juan is as enthusiastic about Britain as Ségur and Meiners. He declares: ‘Here are chaste wives, pure lives … Here laws are all inviolate’, but he is interrupted by a holdup (XI.10). His hotel is an image of the British class-system: an oasis of luxury, surrounded by a ‘tide’ of servants, the mob of common people and ‘several score’ of prostitutes, all hoping to sell their services (XI.30). The material facts of life, whether sexual or economic, are presented by Byron as part of the life force, as uncontrollable by institutions as the ocean. The whole concept of law, whether despotic, constitutional or moral is presented negatively, as benefiting the ruling class but either irrelevant or inimical to the freedom of the individual.

While Meiners and Ségur demonstrate that the development of monogamous marriage for love is the *sine qua non* of the liberties of the property-owning classes, Byron counters this by showing that all forms of marriage (monogamous, polygamous and polyandrous) are equally destructive of the freedom of the *individual* for both sexes. All marriages depicted in the poem are unsatisfactory. Don José and Donna Inez are ‘wishing each other, not divorced, but dead’ (I.26); the Fitz-Fulkes have ‘that best of unions past all doubt, / Which never meets and therefore can't fall out’ (XIV.45). Marital unhappiness is also experienced by Julia and Alfonso, Gulbeyaz and the Sultan, Catherine and the Czar, Johnson in his second and third marriages, and the Amundevilles. In Canto III. 5-8, the poet overtly denies the bourgeois identification of romantic love with marriage:

Marriage from love, like vinegar from wine—
          A sad, sour, sober beverage—by time
Is sharpen'd from its high celestial flavour
Down to a very homely household savour.

Byron's poem deconstructs Ségur's and Meiners's reasoning. The rhetoric of the social importance of the feminine domestic virtues actually masks the repression of the individual's sexual freedom. His original epigraph for the poem was ‘Domestica facta … Horace’. Horace was referring to domestic governmental policy. Byron's pun indicates that his subject-matter is sexual politics: the political significance of the

reactionary new emphasis on domestic morality.

Ségur's notion of complementary equality in difference between the roles of the sexes is also exposed as a sham, for even the highest social class cannot override a woman's inferiority by sex.

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The gilding wears so soon from off her fetter,
          That—but ask any woman if she'd choose
(Take her at thirty, that is) to have been
Female or male? a school-boy or a queen?
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(XIV.25. Compare II.201)

The creation of a cult of feminine morality, yet its simultaneous relegation of women to the tasks enjoined by the material aspects of existence is a waste: ‘Their love, their virtue, beauty, education, / But form good housekeepers, to breed a nation’ (XIV.24).

Those of the generation who had experienced the French Revolution, like Coleridge, Ségur and Meiners, were seeking to reestablish the authority of male over female, and imbue the female familial role with moral sanctity, as a bulwark against rampant individualism; a protest against aristocratic promiscuity; and an affirmation of the importance of the hereditary transmission of property. Because he was of the second generation of liberals, an aristocrat and libertine himself and an individualist above all, Byron was in a unique position to challenge the new puritanism. He based his sexual satire on the indivisibility of the individual and the common physicality of all humanity, rejecting the split between reason and passion for both sexes alike.

We may compare *Don Juan* with [Mary] Wollstonecraft's *Vindication.* Both seek to challenge [Jean Jacques] Rousseau's insistence in *Émile* on the necessity of dividing the public life of the citizen from the private life of the family through sharply differentiated sexual roles (which is the basis of Meiners's and Ségur's thesis, but applied to the lessons of the Revolution). Wollstonecraft rejects Rousseau's identification of the feminine with irrational sentiment, and wants both the ‘masculine’ public and the ‘feminine’ private spheres to be judged by the universal standard of Enlightenment rationalism. However, Byron's romantic sexual satire challenges the very basis of the reason / sentiment, culture / nature dichotomy itself. Ursula Vogel has contrasted rationalism and romanticism as two divergent strategies for women's liberation in this period. She comments on the romantic position:

> Not ‘rational fellowship’ among citizens, but romantic love freed from the confines of conventional sexual roles points towards the utopia of a regenerated world. … While the rationalist associates the oppression of women, and the defects of present society in general with the all-pervasive effects of social and political inequality, the romantic critic focuses on the hypocrisy and pettiness of bourgeois philistine morality in which he sees the most telling signs of the profound corruption of modern culture.[2]

Romantic thinkers repudiated the constraint on individuality of character imposed by sexual stereotyping. Both Meiners and Ségur had deplored the sexual equality of the ancient Spartan republic, as destructive of femininity. But in *Theorie der Weiblichkeit,* Friedrich Schlegel admired both the strength and independence of Spartan women and the gentleness of the men, compared to the exaggerated sexual differences of modern times:

> Both the impatient will to dominate in man and the self-denying submissiveness in woman are exaggerated and ugly. Only self-reliant womanhood and gentle manhood deserve to be called good and beautiful.

(Quoted in Vogel, 1986: 37)

Like Byron, Schlegel claimed that the sensual passion of Southern women was more natural than the ‘northern frostiness’ held up as a feminine norm in Europe. Unlike rationalists like Wollstonecraft, the romantics included the liberation of woman's sexuality in their idea of female independence.[3] In fact they saw romantic love as a means of personal liberation: the creation of a private enclave of freedom. Byron's most idealized heroine, Haidée, provides a paradisal haven for Juan on her Greek isle. She acts spontaneously, not constrained by Christian morality or social considerations. Her frank sexuality is therefore presented as more ‘natural’ to woman than chastity (II.190). The libertarian ideal of the Haidée episode, and *The Island* (1824), like Diderot's *Supplément au Voyage de Bougainville* (1772), privileges the relaxed sexuality of primitive Southern society, over European rigid Christian morality which seeks to suppress the laws of nature.

Rather than positing reform on the basis of the separation of public and private, by the reinstituting of sexual difference, Byron's poem diagnoses the lack of true male heroism as actually the *result* of such reductive dualism—based as it is on a false dichotomy between nature and culture. The lack of true male public-spiritedness is not attributed to the female attempt to wield ‘petticoat influence’ (as in Meiners and Ségur), but to the splitting-off of public from private spheres, and the consequent overvaluing of policy over sentiment. This theme is also explored in the political Venetian plays, where male rulers like Faliero and Foscari are expected to repress natural feeling in the interests of an oligarchic State, while women like Angiolina and Marina are guardians of conscience yet powerless to act.

Thus although Byron's critical view of the effeminization of modern society is comparable in many ways with Ségur's and Meiners's, he is nevertheless not prepared to hymn sexual differentiation by endowing the domestic sphere with a neo-spiritual sanctity in his poetry like Coleridge and Wordsworth or make the nuclear family the central plank of his liberalism. The poem begins in Canto I, with a savage denunciation of the bourgeois hagiography of the family, which for Ségur and Meiners was the basis of political stability. Byron attacks it for personal, literary and political reasons: his anger at his own failed marriage; contempt for the bourgeois protestant ethos which characterized contemporary English poetry; his perception that the new emphasis on sexual morality signalled the extension of the concerns of power into all aspects of life. The poem's stylistic features—irony, cosmopolitanism and refusal of closure—are all designed to expose the small-mindedness and insularity of the cant of personal morality, by reference to a cosmopolitan, aristocratic perspective.

Thus the portrait of Donna Inez, the moralizing mother, is not just a personal attack on Annabella and Mrs. Byron, but has a wider satiric purpose. The poet parodies the effusions on the ideal mother that we have found in Ségur. Inez is ‘perfect past all parallel’ (I.17); ‘a prodigy’ (I.12), ‘with virtues equall'd by her wit alone’ (I.10); she makes ‘the good with inward envy groan’ and ‘her noblest virtue was her magnanimity’ (I.12). As well as demonstrating the insipidity of the ideal (I.18), the poet shows Inez to have internalized the feminine ideal of morality and obedience to such an extent that whereas primitive women had to be physically oppressed to ensure their chastity, the modern woman is ‘an all-in-all-sufficient self-director’ (I.15). The moralizing mother then becomes the tool of institutional authority in policing others. She is compared to Romilly, ‘the Law's expounder and the State's corrector’, and is shown to be in league with the legal establishment and the Church to conquer and bring about the death of Don José (I.34). The ideal of the moralizing mother is portrayed as not ‘natural’ to woman as Meiners and Ségur assert, but a deliberately cultivated, artificial aura of perfection (I.18), an ideology of femininity propounded by texts and manuals:

In short, she was a walking calculation,
Miss Edgeworth's novels stepping from their covers,
Or Mrs. Trimmer's books on education,
Or ‘Coeleb's Wife’ set out in search of lovers,
Morality's prim personification.

(I.16)

Maria Edgeworth, Sarah Trimmer and Hannah More and cited here as the female proponents of woman's role as guardian of morality.

Inez's function in life is to devote herself to the personal superintendence of her child's education, the role outlined by Rousseau and Edgeworth. Like Émile, he is supervised for all his waking hours (I.49). But Inez's favourite Evangelical women educationalists have put more emphasis on religion, and puritanically suppress all mention of the physical aspects of existence. This results in the philistinism of her ensuring Juan's studies do not include natural history (I.39), a large part of the classics (40-5) or even the Confessions of Saint Augustine (47-48). When he leaves Spain she applies her educational philosophy to the children of the poor:

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In the mean time, to pass her hours away,
          Brave Inez set up a Sunday school
For naughty children, who would rather play
          (Like truant rogues) the devil, or the fool;
Infants of three years old were taught that day,
          Dunces were whipt, or set upon a stool:
Their manners mending, and their morals curing,
She taught them to suppress their vice and urine.
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(II.10. The final couplet was censored in the proofs.)

Byron plainly portrays the appeal of the role of moralizing mother to women as a sublimated power strategy. Inez's material ambition is made clear in her letter to Juan commending Catherine's ‘maternal’ friendship for her son, and advising him to conceal his religion so as not to impair his advancement (X.31-34). The poet's technique of accretion enables him to later reveal Inez as a hypocrite anyway: although she acts the part of the wronged wife, she herself has had an affair with Alfonso (I.146), and schemed to break up *his* marriage in order to marry him herself (I.101).

Julia and Adeline are more subtle analyses of the new woman. Julia is a parody of the sentimental heroine of Rousseau's Julia, ou la Nouvelle Héloïse (1761), in her comical attempts to cherish only platonic feelings for her lover, remaining faithful to the elderly husband of an arranged marriage (I.75-85). Adeline loves her cold husband only with an effort (XIV.86), her natural spirit ‘frozen into a very vinous ice’ (XIII.37). Julia and Adeline try to live the feminine ideal, and spiritualize or rationalize their feelings about Juan, unable to admit their sexual origin. This is a source of comedy, but Byron also empathizes with and dramatizes the tragic frustration of these women. The notion of writers like Ségur and Meiners of extolling woman as ‘made for love’, dooms them to a role in life related only to the sexual, yet also constrained from self-expression by a concept of femininity based entirely on passivity and self-restraint. The contradiction on which this ideology of femininity is based is exposed by Julia's letter:

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‘Man's love is of his life a thing apart,
          'Tis woman's whole existence; man may range
The court, camp, church, the vessel, and the mart,
          Sword, gown, gain, glory, offer in exchange
Pride, fame, ambition, to fill up his heart,
          And few there are whom these can not estrange;
Man has all these resources, we but one,
To love again, and be again undone.’
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(I.194)

However, the context of the letter renders ironic Julia's envy of the masculine prerogative to separate love from life, and derive satisfaction from both the private and public spheres. For as an anti-epic the poem as a

whole calls into question the *masculine* ethos of love as ‘a thing apart’ and in inevitable conflict with duty. The masculine honor of the court, camp, church, vessel and mart will each be shown in the poem to have degenerated into pragmatism and selfish materialism, as a result of relegating subjectivity to the inferior sphere of the private life. Military glory, fame and ambition are contemptuously portrayed by Byron as motivating the men of an age of bronze, in *Don Juan,* instead of true patriotism and love of liberty. A further irony is that Juan does not fill up his heart with public affairs like most men anyway, but by adopting the female role of a life devoted only to love, manages to keep his innocence and natural goodness. The expression of the sentiments through even promiscuous sexuality is thus shown to be less morally harmful to the individual than the separation of his private from his public life to facilitate the concerns of policy.

On what foundation does Byron base his attack on the notion of woman as reforming wife and mother? He relies on two points of view, which are the systole and diastole of the poem: the eighteenth-century aristocratic libertine tradition, and the antinomianism of extreme romantic individualism. The resulting shifts in tone towards woman, between cynicism and idealism, have led critics to assume the poet had no controlling purpose behind his sexual satire. In fact the libertine and romantic impulses are polarized around the two personae of middle-aged narrator and Juan as young natural man/man of sentiment, with the underlying suggestion that they are age-related aspects of the same man (the poet). The libertine pose does give the humor an antifeminist edge occasionally, in routine jokes about the bluestockings for example, and in portrayals of women as loquacious (VI.57); capable of extreme rage (XII.50); revengeful (I.124); and obtaining sway by the use of tears (V.118), lies (XI.36) and through matchmaking (XV.31). The tone is patronizingly teasing, but has none of the contempt of Pope's antifeminist satire, or the repulsion towards women we find in Swift, though there are jibes at women as creatures of insatiable appetite (see the treatment of Catherine II, and the stanzas joking about geriatric rape).

The libertine tradition also gives the poem its unique language—aristocratic, masculine and colloquial. By using it, Byron is signalling his preference for the notoriously immoral Whig aristocratic ruling class of the past, over the present Tory administration which was influenced by the Evangelical mercantile classes. In fact, he identifies himself with the very salon society that Meiners and Ségur had accused of paving the way to Revolution through their freethinking and sexual laxity. Paulson rightly comments that Byron's sexual comedy looks back to the libertarian ethos of Sheridan and Rowlandson, which is that of the Foxite Whigs of the 1790s.[4] In France too, sexual license had been a prominent feature of the first phase of the Revolution. The Liberty tree and Phrygian cap derived from Roman fertility rites, before becoming the emblems of Liberty, and were often portrayed as phallic symbols in cartoons of the period. Hostile English reviewers of *Don Juan* made the connection between the poem's free sexuality and those early days of revolutionary fervor in France: comparing Byron to Louvet and Laclos, who were revolutionaries as well as authors of sexually-explicit novels.[5]

However, when Robespierre came to power, erotic libertarianism had gone out of favor, and the Jacobins reverted to defining the state as a collection of male-headed families. The second phase of the revolution was sectarian and homophile in character. In the purges of the Terror, eccentric individualists like Anarchasis Cloots and female revolutionaries and feminists such as Olympe de Gouges were ritually guillotined. This would have been the period when Juan was destined for the block. As the victim of the re-emergence of puritanical moral law, the Don would thus become a comic martyr for sexual liberty. The poet thus neatly combines his hero's aristocracy with his potential for radical subversion of society.

For the aristocratic nature of the libertinism of *Don Juan* is complemented by a definitively romantic and antinomian view of human sexuality, which is based on the individual, and egalitarian in its implications. Byron's Juan is not the traditional libertine as sexual predator, but an ordinary individual released from the confines of social mores. His sexuality is the result of his acting spontaneously, in accord with his emotions like the man of feeling or the natural man of eighteenth-century novels of sentiment. The romantic antinomianism of the portrayal of his love affairs makes the moral rigor of the men and women of the ‘literary

lower empire' (XI.62) appear unnatural by comparison.

Far from enabling them to act disinterestedly for the public good, the repression of their natural sexuality is portrayed by Byron as leading to the self-inflated fuelling of diseased imaginations with delusions of grandeur. Thus Wordsworth is compared to Joanna Southcott, a mystic who, when she swelled up with dropsy imagined she had been impregnated by God (Prose preface), and to other messianic fanatics—Swedenborg, Brothers, Tozer, di Cagliostro and the Baroness de Krüdener. Sexual impotence is linked with linguistic incoherence in the comparison of Southey's empty bombast with sexual intercourse without emission (Dedication 3), and in the comparison of Wordsworth's introspection and Coleridge's metaphysics with the confused yearnings of Juan's puberty (I.90-93). Castlereagh, too, is simultaneously mocked for his inarticulacy, and for his homosexuality, he is an 'it', a time-serving eunuch, 'emasculated to the marrow' (Preface to Cantos VI-VIII), taking a perverted sadistic pleasure in subjugating Ireland (Dedication 12).[6]

The notion of repressed or perverted sexual energy causing physical symptoms of disease, mental disturbances and aggression is not merely a device for satirizing individuals, but the controlling principle of the poem. Byron analyses the cause of imperial aggrandizement—represented by the Siege of Ismail—in psychological terms. The monarchs of Turkey and Russia are described as having perverted their sexuality into an unnatural exercise of power over others, expressed in their amassing of both harems and armies. The energy created by this distortion of the libido can only find its outlet through genocide. The only other alternative would be a therapeutic imperial copulation:

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        There was a way to end their strife …
She to dismiss her guards and he his harem
And for other matters, meet and share 'em.
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(VI.95)

We could compare Swift's 'A Digression concerning Madness', in *A Tale of a Tub.* Both Byron and Swift use a materialist perspective derived from Lucretius's *On the Nature of the Universe* to explain the sexual basis of their satire of imperial warfare. Swift attributes the imperial aggrandizement of Henry IV of France to unfulfilled lust for the Princesse de Condé:

> … the collected part of the Semen, raised and enflamed, became adust, converted to Choler, turned head upon the spinal Duct, and ascended to the Brain. The very same Principle that influences a *Bully* to break the Windows of a Whore, who has jilted him, naturally stirs up a Great Prince to raise mighty armies, and dream of nothing but Sieges, Battles, and Victories.

… *Teterrima belli causa* …[7]

Byron, too, quotes from Horace *Sat.* I.iii.107, and stresses the fact that he takes the unspoken word 'cunnus' as the cause of war, rather than—by synecdoche—woman. In other words, not woman but the womb itself—or human libido—generates hysteria on a world scale. Libido functions beneficially in furthering procreation under Venus, yet is converted into the death-dealing aggression of Mars if thwarted or perverted (IX.55-56). Sexual stereotyping is overturned by having Catherine make the martial decision to take the city at any cost, and likening Juan, in his military uniform to Cupid, the god of love. This emphasizes that the libido works both positively and negatively in both sexes alike. In fact the selection of the Siege of Ismail as an image of carnage, in which the warring nations are headed by both a male and a female monarch, emphasizes that the dynamics of sexuality and power operate in exactly the same way in men and women. This pan-sexual diagnosis of both personal and social aggression is biological, rather than cultural in emphasis. It therefore undermines the progressive historicism of Montesquieu's myth of the influence of climate and Meiners's view of racially-determined sexual mores. Byron's viewpoint is fundamentally psychological (anticipating the ideas

of Freud and Wilhelm Reich).

Don Juan is emancipatory in that it also challenges belief in definitive feminine and masculine roles. The poem specifically attacks both the notion of woman's role as reformer of the nation's morals, and the masculine military ethos lauded by traditional epic. Central to this endeavor is Byron's use of the comedy of sexual role reversal. His version of the Don Juan story is innovative in that his Juan is a passive cipher; the women seduce him. This satirizes the notion of female sexuality as either non-existent or at least naturally modest and chaste. Frederick Beaty has suggested that Byron was probably inspired by the pantomime tradition, and may have read Hazlitt's review in *The Examiner* for 25th May 1817, of a new after-piece, based on *The Libertine,* in which Don Juan was for the first time portrayed as the victim of female circumstance 'forced into acts of villainy against his will'.[8] However, Byron's use of sexual role reversal differs from this pantomime as from *Joseph Andrews,* in that he makes Juan not a chaste and reluctant victim, but vulnerable to seduction through his capacity for emotion. The purpose of the sexual role reversal is thus extended: showing men as equally capable of 'feminine' sentiment, as well as women not above showing 'masculine' appetite.

Byron also draws on the transvestite tradition of pantomime, carnival and masquerade, particularly in the Turkish episode when Juan is dressed as a female slave, and the mock Gothic ghost story in Norman Abbey, when the Duchess impersonates a monk. In her excellent article on cross-dressing in *Don Juan,* Susan Wolfson comments: 'In the heightened forms of cross-dressing, Byron foregrounds the artifice that sustains much of what we determine to be "masculine" and "feminine".'[9] The codes and laws of gender are continually challenged through transgression in these episodes, though the subversive energy of sexual role reversal is temporarily contained by the comic resolution of each story in a reassuring restatement both of Juan's male potency and his lovers' 'feminine' sentiment. The intention is not to substitute a new definition of masculine and feminine roles, but to celebrate the capacity of the individual to override all such categorization. The existing concepts of masculinity and femininity are not rejected in themselves, but individualism is privileged over gender identity.

The double standard of sexual morality, on which the thesis of Ségur and Meiners rests, is constantly attacked in the poem. In both the Turkish and the Russian episodes, Juan is dressed and/or treated as a concubine, and evaluated by his owner/employer in purely physiological terms. In Russia his sexual prowess is even tested by 'l'eprouveuse' before his services are engaged. The unusual view of a man used in this way brings home to the reader the humiliating sexual oppression of women accepted as normal in many societies. The satire simultaneously shows women in authority like Catherine and Gulbeyaz to be as capable as men of using sexuality in the context of a power relationship. Juan initially reacts with tears (V.118); and later complies through vanity and self-interest (IX.68: 72), as women conventionally do. The Russian courtiers behave in response to the role reversal: the women leer enviously at Juan, while the men are tearful with jealousy (IX.78). Clearly, the poem demonstrates 'feminine' and 'masculine' behavior as culturally rather than biologically determined.

Byron uses the same cultural polarities as Ségur and Meiners—the North/South myth—but reverses the usual value judgement by portraying Southern passionate heroines positively and the European women as cold and calculating. There are only two exceptions—Gulbeyaz and Aurora, for Byron gave both Julia and Haidée Moorish blood to emphasize their Southerness. England, which to Meiners was 'a paradise for women', where they enjoyed 'rational liberty' is shown at length in Cantos XI-XII to possess the most highly-organized system of bartering women for money: the aristocratic marriage market (XI.48-49; XII.13-16; 58-61), which forms an ironic point of comparison with the Turkish slave market of Canto V (7; 10; 26-30). Marriage is here a matter of lawsuits not passion (XII.68), and money above all (XII.32-38). Adeline, as circumspect mistress of her country house and hostess to the local gentry, is not shown fulfilling a redemptive moral role in provincial society, but coldly performing an artificial and uncongenial exercise in political management and public relations.

Norman Abbey is an emblem of *Northern* marriage. The juxtaposition of its ruined church and opulent mansion indicates that the decline of the Church's influence in the state has contributed to the power of the landowning dynasties. Its carved religious symbols are gone: only the female icon of virgin mother and child is left to preside over an empty arch (XIII.61-64), just as the only vestige of Christianity in public life is the vapid sentimentalization of domesticity. The ghost of the Black Friar haunts the Amundevilles' marriagebed (XVI.340-41). Adeline's role as wife and mother is thus symbolically constrained by the life-denying morality of a largely defunct religion. She could cast it off by night as does the Duchess her cowl to play the game of adultery, but only at the risk of her social position.

Aurora presents a third choice: a genuine Christian heroine. Here Byron comes closest to the feminine ideal of Ségur and Meiners. ‘Infantine in figure’, she has none of the threatening sexuality of the mature woman; she is sad and silent (XV.47), beautiful (XV.48), pure (XV.55) and austerely religious (XV.46). She differs, though, in that as a Catholic she is automatically an outsider from the governing class; as an orphan she is lonely and not a member of a nuclear family (XV.44); she is also strong (XV.47), contemptuous of society (XV.53), self-possessed (XV.57), bookish (XV.85) and not given to ‘feminine’ wiles, blushes and smiles (XVI.93-94). Byron is here uniting the virtues of female chastity with individual choice and independence rather than with obedience and submission to the dictates of family or society.

This study of the context of Byron's ‘sexual Jacobinism’ shows it to be a point of view subversive not only of orthodox Christian morality, but of one of the fundamental tenets of liberal ideology: the notion of the state as a collection of male-headed families, whose ability to transmit hereditary property rests on the ideology of female submission and chastity. Just as the revolutionary concept of universal suffrage threatened the political authority of these property-owners, so sexual individualism would undermine male primogeniture and dissipate their economic power. Byron took from Coleridge the idea of a new treatment of Don Juan, ending his days in the Terror, in order to vent his scorn, not just on the Tories, but at the bourgeois and reactionary turn liberalism had taken after the French Revolution.

Had he completed the poem, Juan's death on the guillotine would have explicitly underlined the relationship of the political and sexual, which has been virtually ignored by the modern reader. The subverter of dynastic marriages all over Europe, the aristocratic Don Juan is a sexual Jacobin, and one who continues to pose a threat to the contemporary re-establishment of the *ancien régime,* since all known social and governmental systems are shown in the poem to be based on control of female sexuality to further dynastic alliances. Sexual libertarianism, such as the Don's, is an aspect of the Natural Law which, it had been thought, would replace the authority of Church and King, in the earliest days of the Revolution. But the guillotining of Juan by the Jacobins themselves—alongside such idealists as Anarchasis Cloots and Olympe de Gouges—would also show how incompatible are true individualism and political government of any color.

The political danger of sexual Jacobinism was clear at the time. The Poet Laureate thundered:

> This evil is political as well as moral, for indeed moral evils are inseparably connected … there is no means whereby that corruption can be so surely and rapidly diffused as by poisoning the waters of literature.[10]

Southey was particularly worried by two sections of Byron's readership: women and the working class. The poem was being brought out in numerous pirated editions by Radical publishers like Benbow, Onwhyn and Sherwin in half-a-crown duodecimo volumes, which would enable the poorer classes to buy it.[11] Women formed a large part of Byron's readership. Women and the working class were both characterized as so susceptible to subjectivity and irrationality that they would be more easily corrupted by the dangerous individualism of the poem into subversive lawlessness. It is an historical irony that it was a libertine who was in a position to challenge the consensus on the necessity for female chastity, and an aristocrat who could discern the bourgeois nature of contemporary liberal thought.

In the nineteenth century the view of Ségur and Meiners prevailed of course. The notion of woman's role as biologically and culturally determined to be guardian of morals in the family was used as an argument to press for reforms in female education, and later even to demand the vote. Wollstonecraft's rejection of conventional ‘femininity’ and Byron's assertion of female sexuality were both anathema to the majority of women, who found that stressing their feminine sentiment and superior capacity for morality was more effective in gaining concessions from the male hegemony than attacking the ideology of sexual difference itself. The issue is still current in contemporary feminism.

In the postwar reconstruction of society after the anarchy of the Revolution, the personal had become the political. Writers like Meiners, Ségur and Coleridge saw female chastity as the measure of effective political authority. Byron's poem accepts the premise. He merely restates it in terms of individual freedom. Freedom over his/her sexuality is the measure of the individual's degree of autonomy.

Notes

1. On Byron's imagery of climate, see Gerald Wood, ‘The Metaphor of the Climates’, *BJ,* 6 (1978): 16-25.
2. Ursula Vogel, ‘Rationalism and Romanticism: Two Strategies for Women's Liberation’, in *Feminism and Political Theory,* ed. by Judith Evans et al. (London: Sage, 1986), pp. 17-46. On the comparison between the attitudes of the rationalists and the romantics to sexual difference and to romantic love, see also H. G. Schenk, *The Mind of the European Romantics: An Essay in Cultural History* (London: Constable, 1966; rpt. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), pp. 151-8.
3. Wollstonecraft minimizes the importance of passion and sexuality: ‘A master and a mistress of a family ought not to continue to love each other with passion. I mean to say that they ought not to indulge those emotions which disturb the order of society …’ Mary Wollstonecraft, *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), ed. by Miriam Kramnick (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975), p. 114.
4. Ronald Paulson, *Representations of Revolution (1789-1820*) (New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, 1983), p. 279. On *Don Juan* and libertinism, see also Leonard W. Deen, ‘Liberty and Licence in Byron's *Don Juan*’, *Texas Studies in Literature and Language,* 8 (1960): 345-57; and Sheila J. McDonald, ‘The Impact of Libertinism on Byron's *Don Juan*’, *Bulletin of Research in the Humanities,* 86.3 (1983-1985): 291-317.
5. *The Romantics Reviewed,* part B, ed. by Donald Reiman, 5 vols (New York: Garland, 1972), Vol. I, pp. 307, 207.
6. Frederick Garber has noted that this crude abuse of Castlereagh and others, for their impotence or chastity, can be compared to the origin of satire, as described by Robert C. Elliot's *The Power of Satire,* in fertility festivals. See his ‘Self and the Language of Satire in *Don Juan*’, *Thalia: Studies in Literary Humor,* 5 (1982): 40.
7. Jonathan Swift, *A Tale of a Tub,* ed. by Kathleen Williams (London: Dent, 1975), pp. 103-4.
8. Frederick L. Beaty, ‘Harlequin Don Juan’, *JEGP,* 67 (1968): 395-405.
9. See Susan J. Wolfson, ‘“Their She Condition”: Cross-dressing and the Polities of Gender in *Don Juan*’, *ELH,* 54 (1987): 585-617 [see below, Chapter 6]. See also Katherine Kernberger, ‘Power and Sex: The Implication of Role Reversal in Catherine's Russia’, *BJ,* 10 (1982): 42-9.
10. Robert Southey, Preface to *A Vision of Judgement, The Poetical Works of Robert Southey* (London: Longmans, 1838), Vol. X, p. 206.
11. See Hugh J. Luke Jr., ‘The Publishing of Byron's *Don Juan*’, *PMLA,* 80 (1965): 199-209. See also N. Stephen Bauer, ‘Romantic Poets and Radical Journalists’, *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen,* 79 (1978): 266-75.

All quotations from *Don Juan* are taken from *Lord Byron: The Complete Poetical Works,* ed. by Jerome J. McGann, Vol. V (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986). References are by canto and stanza.

List of Abbreviations

BJ	*Byron Journal*
ELH	*Journal of English Literary History*
JEGP	*Journal of English and Germanic Philology*
PMLA	*Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*

Criticism: Peter W. Graham (essay date 1990)

SOURCE: Graham, Peter W. "All Things—But a Show?" In Don Juan *and Regency England,* pp. 62-88. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1990.

[*In the following essay, Graham examines the impact of popular spectacular theater on the style of* Don Juan.]

> *The pantomimes of the ancients no longer exist. But in compensation, all modern poetry resembles pantomimes.*

Friedrich Schlegel, *Athenaeum Fragments*

In *England and the English,* that insightful study of culture and character in the last years before Reform, Bulwer-Lytton observes that Byron would never have put a coronet above his bed had he not written poems.[1] This statements tells something about the Regency Ton, an aristocratic and determinedly amateur set of people; but it also shows some important things about Byron: his insistence on being recognized, wherever he was, for what he was (an "English milord") and his coexistent ability or need to be seen as more than just that, as the citizen of many worlds. In *Don Juan* this cosmopolitan ability or need reveals itself in literary matters as well as social and political ones.

As we have already seen in the first two essays, the densely allusive poem seriously and playfully draws not only upon "real life"—Byron's and everyone else's, in a broad sweep from history to gossip—but also upon the widest possible range of literary genres, authors, and periods. Byron's models for *Don Juan* are classical works and modern ones, poems, novels, and plays, masterpieces and less exalted productions (such as *Letters from England*). All of these he manages to bend and blend to suit his own purposes. The many literary realms toured by the composing presence of *Don Juan,* the motley coat he wears on his pilgrimage, and the hybrid nature of his utterances make it impossible to point out *a* source for a passage in *Don Juan,* though many critics from Elizabeth Boyd on have accurately indicated the multiplicity of source materials and usefully characterized the nature and extent of particular sources.[2] But how are these many sources—utterly diverse in sense, subject, style, and period, variably successful in achieving what they set out to do, some of them admired and some wickedly mocked by their borrower—subsumed into one work: and a work with a consistent, effective, strongly individual tone at that? My intent here is to answer that question by looking at how the conventions, subjects, and attitudes of a particular generic microcosm, that of popular spectacular theater—the little world from which the "motley coat" mentioned just above is borrowed—influence and parallel *Don Juan.* I am not suggesting that this influence excludes others. In the case of Byron at least, one is closer to the truth in approaching the study of literary influence as an enterprise of gathering rather than ruling out—and many of the features I shall present as coming from spectacular theater can also be discerned in conversational or "middle style" poetry or in the art of the Italian *improvvisatore.* This essay's intent, then, is to examine one particular source among the many—but that one, I suggest, offered Byron a precedent and way to be inclusive, to assimilate all and any sources in his melting pot of a poem.

The extent of *Don Juan*'s relationship to spectacular theater is inadequately acknowledged despite the explicit connection Byron himself makes in canto 1 and despite Frederick L. Beaty's excellent short study "Harlequin

Don Juan," an essay convincingly arguing that Byron's poem draws usefully upon the various comic Don Juan plays that, riding the wake of Mozart's *Don Giovanni,* swept over London in 1817 and the years following—just when Byron took "our ancient friend" as nominal subject.[3] The comparative neglect of this influence is understandable, partly because spectacular theater is like *Don Juan* a shifty and heterogeneous phenomenon, partly because until fairly recent times the works contained in "subliterary" genres have not been widely seen as worth serious examination. My goal in this essay is to look at how two closely allied national variants of spectacular theater, England's pantomime, burletta, and extravaganza, and Italy's commedia dell'arte, resemble, and may have influenced, *Don Juan.* Byron's interest in English theater, high and low, was long-standing; and the commedia was a form of entertainment popular and ever-visible at Venice, where he was living when he wrote the earlier parts of *Don Juan.* It seems likely that the commedia of the world in which he moved and British journals' accounts of what was being staged in that world he had left behind would evoke by association Byron's memory of plays and pantomimes he had formerly enjoyed. Memory, present experience, and the secondhand knowledge offered by reading could well combine, as in fact they often do in *Don Juan,* to show Byron the rich and happy comic potential of Don Juan, that epic hero and poetical subject he makes great show of choosing arbitrarily, and only after many other possibilities have been raised and dismissed.

Examining the character of Don Juan as he appears in the various forms of spectacular theater can show that Byron's comic don is not quite the unprecedented and idiosyncratic production Leo Weinstein describes in *The Metamorphoses of Don Juan,* where he states that "By taking the utmost liberty with hero and subject, Byron opened the way to what amounts to license. Henceforth Don Juan becomes a name that an author may freely bestow on any hero, just so long as he has some adventures with women." But surveys of the archetype have been made and well made.[4] Accordingly, I shall say comparatively little about theatrical Don Juans and Giovannis previous to the time when Byron and his readers "all have seen him in the pantomime." Instead, most of my efforts will go toward showing Byron's familiarity with spectacular theater and exploring his poem's affinities with the genre.

Whether we read the resemblances as sources or parallels, we can find in them a key to some of *Don Juan*'s distinctive structures, features, and propensities. Like spectacular theater, Byron's poem is improvisational, topical, eclectic, accumulative, volatile, characterized by rapid and formulaic inversions and transformations, and dominated by the resourceful and potent being (shall we say actor?) who serves as transformer and who constructs what order there is. In offering Byron a precedent and method for assimilating diverse materials (among them the poem's many and varied other influences) through transformation and construction, spectacular theater might even be seen as the poem's ultimate influence. And this double dramatic influence, an imported and domesticated but quintessentially English taste subsequently modified by Italian experience, vividly expresses and embodies the sort of cosmopolitanism Byron advocates in his poem.

If one interesting topic not to be treated at length in this essay is the history of Don Juan's various incarnations, theatrical and otherwise, another equally interesting matter calling for concise rather than exhaustive discussion here is the nature and conventions of English spectacular theater, particularly pantomime, and the Italian commedia dell'arte from which pantomime derived and diverged. Readers interested in detailed consideration of these fascinating theatrical enterprises are encouraged to refer to some of the books indicated in the list of cited works. For now, let me just sketch the basic lines of spectacular theater as it existed in Byron's day.[5] After doing that, I shall go on to examine Byron's involvement with the several forms of spectacular theater, discuss the resemblances between them and *Don Juan,* and analyze in some detail the most richly pantomimic interlude in the poem. First, some background on pantomime and commedia.

The Greek components of the word *pantomime,* joining as they do the notion of universality with that of acting or imitating, suggest a comprehensiveness of range, an ability to perform all parts high or low, tragic, comic, or parodic, that one might claim as the essence of *Don Juan.* But in Byron's day and our own the word

pantomime meant and means something rather different. As Byron uses it in *Don Juan, pantomime* refers to an increasingly conventionalized form of popular entertainment centered on the pursuits of the Italian commedia dell'arte characters—Harlequin, Columbine, Pantaloon, and Clown, among others. In commedia, which developed sometime during the sixteenth century, these characters, distinctively costumed and masked and based on Italian regional types, act out improvisational, acrobatic farces in which the theme is always romantic intrigue. The particulars of plot and scene vary widely, being specified by a *corago,* or stage manager, in the form of a brief narrative or "argument" to which the actors spontaneously add their personal understandings of the traditional characters as they devise the actual lines, jokes, and comic business of the play.

English pantomime, a more thoroughly scripted form of spectacular theater, differs from commedia most notably in the conventions of plot and scene. Romantic intrigue may lie at the heart of commedia, but the breadth of this topic and the large number of commedia characters allow for almost infinite variations on the theme. Whatever the details of the plot may be, the setting is generally the same: an all-purpose street scene containing several houses equipped with plenty of doorways, windows, trapdoors, and concealed entries and exits for farcical involvements, exchanges, deceptions, and pursuits. In contrast to the simple commedia scene, early nineteenth-century pantomimes provided a wide variation of elaborately contrived settings. Thus a pair of reversals: Visual and mechanical intricacy of scene gives pantomime the variety that commedia achieves through twists and turns of plot; and like the predictable yet serviceable commedia street scene, the bones of pantomime plot remain the same, however the surface may be garnished.

Let us now see just what those bones are and how they are arranged. In Byron's day a pantomime typically was a one-act play divided into some twelve to twenty-two scenes and consisting of two parts, the opening and the harlequinade. The opening, which was the shorter part and the one that generally provided the title of the play, might draw its specifics from classical myth (Vulcan and Venus), popular legend (Friar Bacon and the Brazen Head), a nursery tale (Dick Whittington), a literary production, whether masterpiece or minor work (Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* or Combe's *Doctor Syntax in Search of the Picturesque*), or a well-known play or opera (Mozart's *Don Giovanni*). Whatever the source of the details, though, the plot is unvarying. A pair of young lovers wish to marry but are opposed by a despotic older man who wields paternal authority over the girl, whether or not he is her actual father. His grounds of opposition are the young man's inferior social or financial status, and that opposition expresses itself in an unsuccessful campaign to change the maiden's mind followed by an attempt to have her suitor killed or kidnapped, which proves equally unsuccessful because a benevolent agent (generally female and always equipped with supernatural powers rather than social and economic ones—thus a fit counterbalance to the hostile father figure) intervenes, chiefly on behalf of the lovers but sometimes secondarily to punish a minor indiscretion of which they are guilty. The supernatural intervention constitutes the "transformation scene," a spectacular effect that divides opening from harlequinade. Here the benevolent agent, typically speaking in rhymed couplets, turns the young man into Harlequin and the girl into Columbine, the petty tyrant into Pantaloon, the comic servant or duenna into Clown, the socially and economically preferable suitor (if there is one in the opening tale) into Dandy Lover or Lover pure and simple. Harlequin is assigned a quest or task, the completion of which will demonstrate his worthiness, and provided with a magic bat to help him in his labors.

From this point, all is harlequinade. Harlequin pursues his quest (and thereby Columbine) while eluding Pantaloon and his allies. Speechless during the harlequinade, Harlequin performs feats that are largely gymnastic, acrobatic, and visual. He leaps and soars, vanishes or suddenly appears through trapdoors, rises to great heights and swoops down from them courtesy of stage machinery. His preeminent weapon against Pantaloon and his attendants is the magic bat, which gives him, like the guiding presence who provided it, powers of transformation. He animates the furnishings of a scene, freezes his foes or sets them in hapless movement, makes food appear or disappear, heals wounds, raises the dead. His tricks, or "visual similes," are a principal means of satire in pantomime: the slap of a bat enacts transformation and thereby alters the audience's understanding of an object, character, or setting by disclosing its previously undetected

resemblance to something else.

The slapstick comedy dominated by Harlequin's antics (and increasingly Clown's, for reasons we shall see) holds the stage until the harlequinade's penultimate scene, called the “dark scene” because it always occurs in some gloomy place—a grotto, cave, tomb, ruin, or desolate landscape. Here Harlequin, having accomplished his task, embraces Columbine, whom he has won. But in so doing he relinquishes the bat with which he has won her. It is a Freudian field day: Pantaloon recovers the means of potency, reasserts his dominance over Columbine, and threatens to punish Harlequin. Now the benevolent agent intervenes yet again. She reconciles the characters and transports them to an exotic and elaborate final scene, which offers the apotheosis of love and, sometimes, the return of original identities.[6]

The outline above might describe more or less accurately English pantomime from the age of John Rich to the present. The conventional features that distinguished early nineteenth-century pantomime from what preceded and followed it are responses to several constraints, first among them the restrictions established by the theatrical licensing laws enacted in 1737. These regulations limited the use of dialogue to certain “patent houses,” Drury Lane and Covent Garden, but permitted a wider range of theaters to stage loosely defined entertainments consisting of rhymed musical comedy with songs, recitative, slapstick stage business, and spectacular effects. Among the dramatic forms that circumvented the Licensing Act were burletta, extravaganza, and pantomime—which like burletta and extravaganza was not an utterly speechless form of theater, though its audience's understanding of what goes on certainly does not hinge on the words.[7]

Early nineteenth-century pantomime was also shaped by forces less abstract than the licensing laws. Until the present day of film and television, theater had always been the artistic genre most directly responsive to public tastes and values; and pantomime was—as it remains—a particularly accurate and collaborative theatrical reflection of what the masses, as opposed to a cultural elite, demanded. What the early nineteenth-century paying public called for was provided by such resourceful and responsive arrangers of spectacle as Thomas Dibdin of Drury Lane and Charles Farley of Covent Garden. But perhaps the most crucial determinant of what pleased the public in Byron's day was the comic brilliance of the actor Joseph Grimaldi, in tribute to whom clowns are now called “Joey.” Grimaldi's tastes, talents, and preferences in roles combined with the licensing restrictions, the abilities of the theatrical arrangers, and the demands of the public to make pantomime what it was in the years between 1806, when the great success of *Harlequin and Mother Goose* (in which Grimaldi first acted the role of Clown) stabilized its conventions, and 1823, when Grimaldi retired. During these years, Mayer claims, the form was at its best: “pantomime in this period, by the very nature of its wide scope and satiric tone, was an unofficial and informal chronicle of the age.”[8] It is a striking coincidence that the dates bracketing the age of Grimaldi are equally useful for indicating the start and close of Byron's poetic career.

The son of Giuseppe Grimaldi, ballet master at Drury Lane and Sadler's Wells, “Joey” or “Joe” Grimaldi possessed a genius as cosmopolitan as was the art in which he excelled, or as I am arguing *Don Juan* to be. George Augustus Sala characterizes Grimaldi's peculiar powers as the product of two cultures: “He seems to have possessed a talent for pantomimic expression so eminently the gift of the Italian race allied to a strong sense of popular English humour. The happy combination of the fine perception and high colouring which suits John Bull's blunter sense of humor has vanished with him.”[9] Grimaldi's preference for playing the role of Clown, the figure who generally emerges from a servant or duenna in the transformation scene, greatly altered the character of the harlequinade. Clown as Grimaldi presented him was no mere comic henchman in the service of absurd patriarchal authority, and thus a butt for Harlequin's bat-induced humor, but instead a free and potent mocker himself. As Mayer describes him, the Clown portrayed by Grimaldi and his son J. S. Grimaldi as an incarnate spirit of satiric buffoonery: “Clown had a buoyancy, a barely suppressed impudence and irreverence that encouraged pantomime audiences to share vicariously and willingly condone his seeming impatience with manners, his mockery of class distinctions, his disregard for property, and his absolute disrespect for authority. If Clown had fixed traits, they were all ones that mocked convention and exposed social habits pretending to morality or self-conscious graciousness. He rebelled against stuffiness and tradition

and did what others wished to do but never dared."[10]

The Grimaldi Clown brings all Harlequin's physical agility to his role, but also demonstrates a supple, creative wit that rivals and ultimately surpasses the trick work Harlequin achieves with his bat and its invisible ally the stage machinery. Comparing the younger Grimaldi with his father, the *Times* reviewer of 27 December 1823 pays elegaic tribute to "Joey" in these telling words: "Apart from all twisting and tumbling there was so much intelligence about everything he did."[11] Grimaldi's Clown deployed this intelligence in acts of "construction," figurative presentations based on the same assumption underlying Harlequin's transformations—namely that objects share unperceived relationships that can be disclosed through artful juxtaposition. Clown begins with a seemingly random collection of articles, things united only by the fact that none of them belongs to him. He proceeds, much in the fashion of a Regency cartoonist or of the composing presence in *Don Juan,* to marshal these diverse objects into a bizarre order—a human shape, vehicle, or monster, a laughable still life that can become still funnier when Harlequin's bat animates it to its creator's utter befuddlement.

Clown's new prominence and independence were delightful in themselves, but they tended to diminish the harlequinade by rivaling or eclipsing the antics of Harlequin and to weaken the comic pursuit by making Clown, as a subversive persecutor of Pantaloon, an implicit ally to the young lovers. Another device that compromised the classical commedia shape of the harlequinade was the "diorama," the elaborate scenic effect introduced into pantomime during the Grimaldi era and retained to this day as a key ingredient of English spectacular theater. The diorama entertained but also edified as it carried audiences not just to the world of Gothic, Oriental, or mythic fantasy but to real places (English, Continental, Eastern) they might otherwise experience only by traveling—a luxury denied to the general populace at most times, and particularly during the Napoleonic period. Also introduced as an occasional novelty into Regency pantomime was the cross-dressing that, in Victorian times, became an obligatory feature of the entertainment.

Though "dame" and "principal boy" were not yet pantomime conventions in the early years of the century, Grimaldi acted "Queen Rondabellyana" in *Harlequin and the Red Dwarf,* played the duenna who becomes Clown in *Harlequin and Asmodeus,* and in *Harlequin Whittington* represented Dame Cecily Suet while "a very clever little dog" acted the part of her cat.[12] There were other instances of men acting the female benevolent agent or wearing women's dress for disguise in the harlequinade;[13] and "breeches roles" for actresses, though not the defining feature they would later become, were not unknown. Interestingly for our purposes, Don Giovanni was probably the most celebrated of these transsexual impersonations. Moncrieff's extravaganza *Don Giovanni* (1817) first featured in the title role Mrs. Gould, "whose masculine habits won her the name of 'Joe' Gould";[14] but the role came to be particularly associated with Mrs. Gould's successor, the "English Adonis" Madame Vestris. Writing in the high noon of Victorian pantomime, George Vandenhoff paid retrospective tribute to her memorable achievement: "Vestris was admirably gifted, cut out, and framed to shine *en petit maître.* … Believe it, reader, no actress that we now have (1860) can ever give an idea of her attractions, the fascinations, the witcheries of Mme Vestris in the hey-day of her charms."[15] We can well imagine that Byron would have heard of such "witcheries" even in Venice.

Although Byron's knowledge of Madame Vestris's bravura performance and the other interesting English burlesques and transformations inflicted upon Don Juan's character after the great London success of *Don Giovanni* would have to be secondhand, in the years prior to his self-exile he had direct experience of English spectacular theater and considerable admiration for its practitioners. Byron's letters and Dickens's *Memoirs of Joseph Grimaldi* both attest to Byron's interest in Grimaldi's performances from 1808 on.[16] If we could seat Byron in the Covent Garden audience watching "Joey" reenacting his role of Scaramouch in the "tragic pantomimic ballet" of *Don Juan* that opened on 20 November 1809, there would be straightforward and convincing evidence of a causal link between pantomime and epic poem. But that evening must be seen as a different sort of anticipation in Byron's life: 20 November 1809 found him not in London but pausing on his travels through Greece to stop at Missolonghi, where he would die some fifteen years later. Although there is no solid proof that Byron knew and admired Grimaldi's performance in *Don Juan,* Dickens speaks of the

relationship that evolved between the men as friendship, though their acquaintance started awkwardly due to some facetious hostility on Byron's part when the two met at Berkeley Castle in October 1812. The actor and the poet seem to have met both at private parties and at Covent Garden, where Byron would sometimes wait in the wings to resume a conversation interrupted by a performance. There is palpable evidence of Byron's continued esteem for the comic actor and his talents. On his departure from England in 1816, Byron presented Grimaldi with "a valuable silver snuff-box, around which was the inscription, 'The gift of Lord Byron to Joseph Grimaldi,'"[17] a courteous memento of the sort one sovereign offers to another. Byron, fond of seeing himself as the Napoleon of poets, habitually admired preeminence in others; and his gracious valedictory gesture here strikes a note of sincere regard rather than mere formality.

There is a still more interesting connection between Byron and Thomas John Dibdin, the prolific writer of musical comedies who along with Alexander Rae succeeded Whitbread as manager of Drury Lane Theatre during the years when Byron was officially and informally active in that theater's affairs. As a member of the subcommittee for management, Byron gave more than a noble name to the Drury Lane committee, much to Lady Byron's regret. His involvement with the actors and management was both personal and businesslike. He read manuscripts, even served as go-between for writers of plays, notably Coleridge and Maturin. Once, at least, a brief note to Dibdin shows Byron closely attentive to the smallest details of a Drury Lane offering. The subject of Byron's criticism—a matter of diction and decency—and the tone he takes on that subject are amusingly identical to what he would chafe under some years later when Hobhouse voiced a collective concern about *Don Juan*'s morality: "Dear Sir,—is not part of the dialogue in the new piece a little too double, if not too broad, now and then? for instance, the word 'ravish' occurs in the way of question, as well as a remark, some half dozen times in the course of one scene, thereby meaning, not raptures, but rape" (*LJ* 4:304).

As the salutation quoted above suggests, Byron's relationship with Dibdin does not appear to have been a close one; but the comic playwright's lyrics stayed in Byron's mind long after the period of association at Drury Lane had ended. It is from Dibdin's play *The British Raft* that Byron drew the phrase "tight little island," an epithet he was famously fond of applying to his native land, and especially when he was resident of a much smaller and yet much less constrictive island society, Venice (see, for instance, *LJ* 5:136). Similarly, when Byron chose to mock Henry Gally Knight in one of the doggerel ballads he enjoyed including in his letters to John Murray, the original he travestied was a Dibdin song, "The Grinders" (*LJ* 6:28 n. 4). During his Italian exile Byron did not encounter Dibdin's plays only in memory or the London papers, though. One night at Venice's Benedetto theater he saw a French farce Dibdin and Kinnaird had translated for Drury Lane. "It turns upon a Usurer personating a father—" recalls Byron as he writes to Kinnaird, "and did not succeed at D[rury] L[ane]. I think it was better acted here than there.———What were the odds at that time—against my seeing the same farce at Venice?" (*LJ* 5:140; see also *LJ* 5:143).

What odds indeed? Perhaps not such long ones. Though theater began as a communal ceremony, it has also proved a highly portable commodity. Itinerant actors, alone or in troupes, have traveled far and wide, taking their native dramas with them; and if Byron could watch at Venice a French play he had formerly seen in London, he also could and did reacquaint himself with Italian works, most notably the comedies of Goldoni, plays he had once viewed on the English stage and now could appreciate in their proper cultural frame. If Venice set Goldoni in context, Goldoni also seemed to set Venice in context for Byron. His letters show that he sometimes conceived of the cosmopolitan life he was enjoying as one of those plays brought to life: "I am at present on the Brenta—opposite is a Spanish Marquis—ninety years old—next his Casino is a Frenchman's besides the natives—so as Somebody said the other day—we are exactly one of Goldoni's comedies (La Vedova Scaltra) where a Spaniard—English—& Frenchman are introduced;—but we are all very good neighbours, Venetians, &c. &c. &c." (*LJ* 5:238).

Perhaps it is worth recalling that the dramatist whose works Byron's life here imitates was a master of the commedia dell'arte—and produced a Don Juan play (*Don Giovanni Tenorio ossia il dissoluto*) that despite its mediocrity has certain things in common with Byron's masterpiece. One can detect the similarities by looking

at the reasons why historians of the Don Juan motif deprecate Goldoni's version. Mandel sees the Goldoni don as lacking “his folk vigor, his humor, and his intelligence”; and Weinstein characterizes Goldoni's play as an unhappy “modernization” that “reduces the grandiose Burlador to an ordinary, vulgar seducer” and diminishes the mythic catastrophe to a naturalistic one.[18] Of course, the story of Don Juan is more pretext than text for Byron, and his poem aims to demonstrate its narrator's vigor, humor, and intelligence rather than the protagonist's. Thus what constitutes a weakness in Goldoni's work can be a strength or a neutral feature in Byron's—yet the attributes themselves may be more or less the same. Perhaps the most striking common quality the two works share is a teasingly confessional air. Theater historians generally agree that public interest in the play rose less out of any literary or theatrical merits than out of the general knowledge that material from Goldoni's life found its way into the play. In the discussion of canto 1 we have already seen how Byron's disapproving but fascinated readers detected the poet's personal affairs scattered throughout Juan's story; and as Elizabeth Boyd points out, Byron would have known about the dramatist's mixing autobiography with the story of Don Juan from “an amusing and notorious passage” in the Goldoni memoirs, a book Byron valued highly enough that, having sold his first copy in the 1816 auction of his library, he three years later traded Thomas Moore a copy of Ariosto for a replacement.[19]

My chief reason for mentioning Goldoni at this point is not to compare his treatment of Don Juan with Byron's but to stress the connection between real life and theatrical illusion, a point made explicit in Byron's letter quoted above. Fresh ways of looking at relations between acting and being, play and reality, England and Italy, past and present, converged on Byron in various ways, some of which we have already seen, as he was writing *Don Juan.* But nowhere in Byron's prose does this question of identity's boundaries and the means of getting beyond them present itself more richly than in the following passage, where yet again we find ourselves at a pantomime. Here, however, the masked thespian is none other than Byron, and what he is enacting both is and is not his own life. “In the Pantomime of 1815-16—there was a Representation of the Masquerade of 1814—given by ‘us Youth’ of Watier's Club to Wellington & Co.—Douglas Kinniard—& one or two others with myself—put on Masques—and went *on* the Stage amongst the —to see the effect of a theatre from the Stage.—It is very grand.—Douglas danced amongst the figuranti too—& they were puzzled to find out who we were—as being more than their number.—It was odd enough that D.K. & I should have been both at the *real* Masquerade—& afterwards in the Mimic one of the same—on the stage of D.L. Theatre” (*LJ* 9:36-37).

This passage appears in “Detached Thoughts,” the remarkable journal Byron maintained between 15 October 1821 and 18 May 1822, a period that found him living chiefly at Pisa and refraining, as he had promised the Contessa Guiccioli, from continuation of *Don Juan.* He would resume the poem some two months after abandoning these prose “Thoughts”—or, more precisely, he would assimilate their gossipy and elegaic particulars into the story of Juan, whose adventures in English society are the bulk of incident in the final cantos. The quotation shows that Byron's experience contained a connection with Regency theater still closer than his involvement with Drury Lane would generally afford—and it also hints at certain attitudes and conventions important to the composition and understanding of *Don Juan.* This theatrical escapade clearly displays Byron's familiarity with and enjoyment of pantomime—his love of mystification—his recurring need to transcend limitation—to experience everything. For Byron, it is not enough to know theater as the audience does. He must have the view from the stage as well, not so much because he needs to feel himself an actor but because in a mutable world, unstable to its very foundation, the actors in a pantomime are the most blatant players of parts, but not the only ones. A masked actor is more obviously role-playing than is an unmasked one—any actor is more clearly assuming an identity than is any member of the audience—anyone present at the ritual is more evidently cast in a part than is someone bustling by outside the theater. Nonetheless, in the world Byron and the rest of us experience, everyone is both an actor and a spectator. In going masked on stage to see how the collaborative venture of theater looks from there, Byron demonstrates in life and art that in living our lives we are all creating roles, whether we be poets, seducers, slaves, empresses, soldiers, politicians, highwaymen, or poet laureates.

This episode of the perpetually theatrical Byron acting, for once, on a professional stage rather than in the theater of personal relationships has a complexity not yet fully acknowledged. In writing down these words among his “Detached Thoughts,” Byron reenacts or relives a past moment of acting and living. Recording the experience, Byron “authorizes” that moment, an anonymous reenactment (Byron and Kinnaird being masked, not known even by the performers) of an earlier enactment, also masked and technically though not completely anonymous in that the spectators familiar with Watier's Club at least could guess who masquers might be. Now what if anything is “real life” in all these embedded roles? What is “acting”? I find it impossible to answer that question except with another one, a query posed in *Don Juan*: “*What* after *all,* are *all* things—but a *Show*?” (*DJ* 7.2). The Byronic self-dramatization through combined self-revelation and self-concealment that we see crystallized in this biographical incident is one of the great puzzles and great pleasures of *Don Juan.*

It is interesting for a reader of *Don Juan* to notice that the Watier's masquerade honored Wellington, whose name appears at the start of canto 9, written a few months after the “Detached Thoughts” were put aside. The subject of the pantomime, which was entitled *Harlequin and Fancy, or the Poet's Last Shilling,* also deserves attention. In this entertainment, Harlequin's bat is associated with the writer's pen. An impoverished poet foreswears Fortune and invokes Fancy, under whose sponsorship he transforms his life—by writing a pantomime. The reflexiveness of *Harlequin and Fancy* is comparable to that of *Don Juan,* widely recognized as being a poem about its own composition. The pantomime's connection between writing and money suggests moments of poetical moneygrubbing (the laureate's, Wordsworth's, and the self-confessedly avaricious narrator's) in *Don Juan*'s Dedication and first canto. The mock soliloquy in which the pantomime poet asks himself what to write obviously derives from *Hamlet,* a work alluded to and “colouring the climate” throughout *Don Juan* but especially in canto 9.[20] Here in *Harlequin and Fancy* we see the starving poet as prince of Denmark, his late last shilling in the role of Ghost:

```
To write and what to write, that is the question
Whether 'tis nobler in the Bard to write
The Bowl and Dagger of the Tragic Muse
Or to take arms against a host of critics,
And make a pantomime—to fly, to run
To jump and by a jump to say we 'scape
From Pantaloon, the Clown, and every foe
That Harlequin is heir to. 'Tis a transformation
Devoutly to be wished.(21)
```

“To write and what to write?” That is the poet's perennial question. It would be characteristic of Byron to recognize and exploit the ironical possibilities announced here. Byron, like the pantomime poet, saw himself as ill-used by Fortune—having been once courted (in the days of the Watier's Club masque and the Drury Lane production being recalled), then vilified, by a canting public. Why not embrace Fancy and the fanciful device of transformation? Why not have a joke on the fickle, provincial English public by constructing, as Grimaldi's Clown might, an English epic out of the least promising, most outrageous materials: that collection of odds and ends Byron refers to when he claims “Almost all Don Juan is *real* life—either my own—or from people I knew” (*LJ* 8:186). And why not take as the means of reanimating these odds and ends the transforming pen, or wand, or bat, of pantomime?

I have just tried to suggest how English and Italian spectacular theater—especially pantomime, most particularly *Harlequin and Fancy*—offer subjects, vehicles, roles, and a supply of tricks that could prove useful to Byron in the composition of *Don Juan.* Now it is time to step into the world of the poem and to see what evidences of spectacular theater we can find there. The second of Leigh Hunt's 1817 *Examiner* essays on pantomime asserts that “The three general pleasures of a Pantomime are its bustle, its variety, and its sudden changes.”[22] All these features distinguish *Don Juan* with equal validity. Within the poem, bustle, variety, and sudden changes are consequences or companions of transformation, that most important device *Don Juan*

shares with pantomime. All three features characterize both the plot and the intellectual flow of the poem—and here again, comparison with pantomime proves illuminating. As David Mayer understands it, Regency pantomime was not conceived to be systematically and single-mindedly satiric: “Its structure enabled fleeting comedy or satire to be directed at many topics without requiring that they be shown in a logical or plausible sequence. It was more effectual by being random rather than precise. A few laughs on one topic and the action of the pantomime moved on to another subject”[23]—and so it is with *Don Juan.* Those laughs are frequently achieved though the device called construction—and again, so it is with *Don Juan.* For instance, we have already seen in the Southey essay how the Byronic narrator builds a witty and substantial digression on human knowledge out of apples: Adam's and Sir Isaac Newton's. (*DJ* 10.1-3) Similarly, in the canto we are about to consider at some length, construction operates in the forms of historical resonance and linguistic resemblance, adding three queens (Semiramis, Caroline the wife of George IV, and less importantly for the moment Catherine the Great) and two words (*courser* and *courier*) to make a wonderfully economical yet intricate illustration of the premise that “Love like religion sometimes runs to heresy.” (*DJ* 5.61)

An art that ranges wide, moves fast, and fills the scene to bursting runs the risk of undiscriminating eclecticism or superficiality or both. Mayer recognizes these as the besetting problems that keep Regency pantomime from offering the best chronicle of its age, though he concludes that these flaws are not fatal ones: “Still, the two qualities which are pantomime's weakest, lack of discrimination and lack of profundity, when coupled with its greatest strength, its comprehensiveness, permit seeing this portion of the nineteenth century as Britons of no special perceptiveness were likely to view it.”[24] But suppose a similar sort of chronicle offered by a Briton of extraordinary perceptiveness. Suppose that the chronicler is writing a sprawling work over a period of years, and hence is free from the obligation of fitting his vision into the two or so hours an audience will sit without squirming—always able to amplify, change his mind, return to subjects he has presented earlier. Furthermore, suppose this chronicler an expatriate poet, independent of British censorship and consequently free to mock religion, royalty, and politics, three institutions protected from pantomime satire by the lord chamberlain's examiner of plays. What you have supposed is the circumstances that could produce a pantomime with variety and rapidity as well as profundity achieved through recursion, with comprehensiveness and sharp though artfully underplayed discrimination. What you have supposed is *Don Juan.*

For *Don Juan* and spectacular theater alike, one important way of achieving “realism” is through features just discussed—the topical references and details from contemporary existence that so often provide the raw materials of improvisational humor. But truth to life calls for a certain universality along with accurate specificity if an allusive work is to speak to audiences after the fashions, events, and people it presents are gone. In theater exploiting the old commedia types, the timeless element of realism does not come from psychological complexity of the kind exhibited by a Shakespearean character: Caliban, for example, in the course of a single play. Instead, the sense of reality or vitality comes more gradually through a series of theatrical encounters with the character, as the result of what Allardyce Nicoll calls “the dramatic presentation of accumulative personalities.”[25] The essence of Harlequin does not vary. It is as formulaic as his obligatory costume. But when we see his character in play after play, pantomime scene after pantomime scene, commedia situation after commedia situation, the very act of endurance over time and through space makes him a real presence to us. Thus also Don Juan, that “variation of the English Harlequin,” as Beaty terms him.[26] Byron's chosen protagonist comes alive for us partly because of his having endured as a literary tradition, having sinned his sad or merry way though work after work, and partly because of the many situations and scenes through which Byron insists that we follow him in the course of the full yet unfinished poem.

One great advantage attending on this sort of accumulative character development is that, as is the case with psychological realism, there is room for inconsistency, a real enough quality in life but one fatal to other dramatic methods of comic delineation through type. Jonson's Volpone, his identity compressed into a single play, cannot lapse from foxiness without ceasing to be himself. But Harlequin or Don Juan can vary wildly.

Each impression, whether it builds on or contradicts what is already there, is part of a character that is the sum of its particular presentations.

If seeing how spectacular theater creates character can help us understand *Don Juan,* so can knowledge of pantomime's plot. *Don Juan* may seem an errant epic, but it seems that way largely because of the digressions, those dazzling moments of transformation, topical satire, and verbal construction achieved by a narrator who behaves sometimes as benevolent agent, sometimes as Grimaldi Clown. Digressions aside, the plot is in fact a clear and simple one—and that simplicity emerges most clearly when we consider the narrative sequence in the light shed by our awareness of pantomime conventions. Canto 1, the part of the story set in Don Juan's native country, can be seen as analogous to the opening of English pantomime. Certainly this tale of young though adulterous lovers parted by a cuckolded father-husband (remember Alfonso's fifty years to Julia's twenty-three) has at least as much in common with pantomime as it does with the Don Juan myth. Juan's transformation into Harlequin is oblique but evident, I think:

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Here ends this canto.—Need I sing or say,
          How Juan, naked, favour'd by the night,
Who favours what she should not, found his way,
          And reach'd his home in an unseemly plight?
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So says the narrator in stanza 188, though in fact thirty-four and a half stanzas remain to be sung. The last thing that has happened within the narrative is the struggle between Alfonso and Juan, an encounter that realistically strips away a garment that, in pantomime, would be removed from the young lover by magic. It falls to a supposedly benevolent, certainly female agent, Juan's mother, to provide a new costume, and a new identity (that of Harlequin Traveler), and a quest ("To mend his former morals, or get new")—but those final thirty-four stanzas, increasingly remote from the narrative and progressively closer to the narrator, who progressively comes to resemble the author, remind us who really is enacting the change. It is Byron, the truly benevolent and truly potent transformer, who sends Juan off on his harlequinade in various costumes and through assorted cultures. The order is certainly not random. Juan's travels recapitulate a sort of cultural evolution. He goes from animal existence (shipwreck) to a primitive community (Lambro's island) to an Eastern despotism to Catherine the Great's Europeanizing Russia to what the implied reader of the poem is likely to consider the pinnacle of civilization, which Juan progressively ascends: from Western Europe to England to London, and finally to an aristocratic country house—Whig emblem, as Malcolm Kelsall has put it, of power's diffusion "away from the centralised autocracy."[27] As the exotic scenes change, Juan's costumes vary from rags to Greek finery to Ottoman drag to a Cossack artilleryman's uniform to Russian court dress and finally Anglo-dandaical impeccability.

We must not push the parallels too far or forget that Byron's comic epic has models other than spectacular theater. A technical or narrative transformation of the sort seen in pantomime does occur between cantos 1 and 2, as the boy is dispatched on his travels like Harlequin sent off on his quest. Still, Juan develops psychologically (as Tom Jones does, for instance) as well as accumulatively, and his personal transformation from naïf to cosmopolite takes place gradually—starting in canto 5 and continuing through canto 8. The chief agent of this transformation may be seen as Byron, or "Byron," or the Byronic narrator with his "supernatural machinery," but his assistant, a character incarnate in the pantomime world of the poem, is the practical philosopher whose name is an Anglicized doubling of Juan's and who plays experience to the Spanish youth's innocence—that is to say, John Johnson. The way in which English values embodied in Johnson preside over Don Juan's transformation is a matter for the fifth essay, "England in *Don Juan.*" For now our concern is with the most clearly pantomimic interlude in *Don Juan,* the seraglio episode in canto 5, where our awareness of the story as artifice is heightened by such pantomime devices as sudden and drastic scene changes, exotically artificial settings, recurring personal transformations and gender reversals, blatant manipulation of characters and events by various stage managers, inside, outside, and above the narrative.

As the canto opens Don Juan, whom we have just seen chained in a company of actors, is dramatically situated in the slave market at Constantinople. The crowd scene's contrived quality is stressed: “Like a backgammon board the place was dotted / With whites and blacks, in groups on show for sale” (*DJ* 5.10). So is the flimsy, backdrop quality of the city itself: “Each villa on the Bosphorus looks a screen / New painted, or a pretty opera-scene” (*DJ* 5.46). Purchased, Juan is dispatched to the splendor of the seraglio, and it proves a place “Which puzzled nature much to know what art meant” (*DJ* 5.64), a place where “Wealth had done wonders—taste not much” (*DJ* 5.94). The stanza last quoted goes on directly to acknowledge that “such things / Occur in orient palaces, and even / In the more chasten'd domes of western kings” (*DJ* 5.94). Thanks to these words, the gaudy unreality of canto 5's mise-en-scène cannot be seen as a simple slap at Ottoman aesthetics. Even as he evokes an exotic empire through which he once traveled, Byron also calls to mind both the insistently picturesque “Eastern” stage sets of many a West End pantomime and the more sturdily built if not much more authentic or chasten'd dome from which many such sets were imitated: the Prince Regent's Brighton Pavilion. Interestingly and appropriately enough, Byron here draws inspiration from a London fashion he helped promote, through writing his Oriental tales and setting a personal example (his and Hobhouse's Albanian costumes having been the making of more than one fashionable masquerade), and not least through having furnished Dibdin with some two hundred drawings of Turkish costumes. Byron claims to reject inspiration in the act of embracing it, though, for Eastern details offer him a temptation to do what he has done often and profitably in his literary past from *Childe Harold* on, to create a lush verbal diorama for the reader. Thus the narrator grows insistently prominent as Juan, Johnson, and Baba the eunuch are winding “through orange bowers and jasmine, and so forth,” eminently describable backdrops

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(Of which I might have a good deal to say,
          There being no such profusion in the North
Of oriental plants, “et cetera,”
          But that of late your scribblers think it worth
Their while to rear whole hotbeds in their works
Because one poet travell'd 'mongst the Turks).
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(*DJ* 5.42)

This crotchety rejection of easy success in pandering to his audience's love of the picturesque may apply specifically to horticultural description, but it has wider relevance in the canto. Byron seems positively compelled to intrude personal or cross-cultural references that pull out the Turkey carpet from under readers' feet whenever there is the faintest chance that the narrative and its setting will prove absorbing or engrossing enough to offer an illusion of reality rather than just an illusion. This wonderfully perverse parenthesis and other similar references, which constitute a sort of chronic parabasis in the comic tale, will be a major topic of the essay (ch. 5) treating English elements in cantos 2-9. For now, let it be enough to recognize the perfect timing of the pantomimic “bustle and variety” such rhetoric injects. Byron's cultural contrast and autobiographical intrusion make themselves felt just at the dangerous moment when the reader's critical intellect, lulled by pure description, might go to sleep.

Like the backdrop, the characters of canto 5 are perfect specimens for spectacular theater. The assorted slaves and enslavers from the pirate ship offer a striking crowd scene to start. Juan and Johnson, physically attractive in their different national ways, are perfect “stage gentlemen.” Indeed, as Johnson immediately notices (*DJ* 5.13), they are the “only gentlemen” among the “motley crew”—and that adjective “motley” is crucial—of the canto. Johnson applies the phrase to the various folk for sale at the slave market, but it refers equally well to the people of the palace, all those singled out for particular description being freakish or incomplete, physically and spiritually “ungentlemanly” in different ways. Baba the eunuch, the matched set of mute dwarves who open doors (and close lives) on command, Gulbeyaz the favored bride, and the sultan himself are all flattened out, spectacular figures—people diminished to roles. They are that way partly, I think, because of generic constraints and partly because of thematic ones. The two pressures work together superbly: Byron has chosen a self-evidently “unnatural” form for this episode to show that a palace (Oriental or

Occidental, it matters not) is not a hospitable environment for what is natural *or* what is best in humanity. The headquarters of a despotism is an uncongenial backdrop for that improvisational play we call the human comedy.

Instead, Byron plays out against the imperial stage set an amorous farce of forcible disguise and crude stereotyping, a situation that might prove merely ridiculous but when skillfully handled can allow for crossed purposes, surprises, and rapid role reversals—the sort of situation that has been a staple of pantomime, especially from Victorian days to the present. The sultana Gulbeyaz, having seen Juan and Johnson at the slave market, has commanded Baba to purchase the promising lad for her personal use, the mature man for some unknown end. To be smuggled to the lady's apartments, Juan must submit to a transformation: he must dress, and play, the part of a harem girl, a prospect the highborn Spaniard finds outrageous. Casting Juan in this role is an act of transformation beyond the powers of a slave and eunuch like Baba. Only the voice of independent, sensible, securely masculine experience could convince Juan here—and just how the change comes about is a matter for later discussion when we go into John Johnson's role in Juan's education.

But come about it does, and Byron's use of pantomime cross-dressing enriches, and thereby transforms, the stock humorous device. Dressing a man as a woman may be a comic turn that never fails to amuse a British audience, but the joke does not in itself make any point about traditional gender roles and their underpinnings. Byron, however, is interested in exploring such roles, along with their political, philosophical, and psychological implications.[28] In the scene with Gulbeyaz, Byron obliges Juan not merely to wear the trappings of femininity, but to take upon himself less tangible yet more cumbersome attributes conventionally ascribed to women, while the sultana, operating from her position of power, acts with prerogatives conventionally reserved for men. But the situation is no simple reversal. As we shall see, Juan(na) and the sultan(a) are potential and essential mirrors of one another. Each seems equally well characterized by the mixture of qualities said to be projected (or reflected) by Gulbeyaz's eyes: “half-voluptuousness and half command” (*DJ* 5.108). Each is in a certain sense a man in women's clothes—Don Juan by dint of nature, Gulbeyaz thanks to the social accident that gives her prestige and permits her to be dominant, imperious, and aggressive. As their comic encounter begins, social masculinity takes precedence over the biological sort. Gulbeyaz is the amorous predator; Juan, the reluctant quarry.

Byron's inversion of conventional roles is brilliantly, somewhat blasphemously highlighted as the sultana issues a command in interrogative form—“‘Christian, cans't thou love?’” (*DJ* 5.116)—and Juan bursts into tears. Weeping, he enacts and embodies the stock spiritual qualities generally ascribed to the woman in such amorous skirmishes. He loves another and intends fidelity to her memory. He disdains a physical liaison with someone else whom he does not love. He resents being objectified, reduced to a desirable thing by that powerful stranger's lust. But what troubles him most deeply is the forcible violation implicit in his circumstances and in Gulbeyaz's command. All the components of Don Juan's deepest being are for the moment denied. He is a noble Spanish Christian male in love with a woman not at hand—yet he is forced, in rapid succession, to adjust to being a slave, entertaining the possibility of Islamic circumcision, dressing as a Turk and a woman, and serving as the romantic toy of a woman who is his mistress in just the way that Haidée was not. Stripped of all his accustomed privilege, subjugated in every possible sense, our hero in heroine's costume is forced to feel feminine and reduced to behaving (or freed to behave, depending on how one chooses to look at it) in accordance with his disguise—but his crying is a womanly act with a difference, as both the narrator and Gulbeyaz note:

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She was a good deal shock'd; not shock'd at tears,
          For women shed and use them at their liking;
But there is something when man's eye appears
          Wet, still more disagreeable and striking:
A woman's tear-drop melts, a man's half sears.
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(*DJ* 5.118)

Paradoxically enough, Juan's expression of his feminine side is precisely what stresses his essential masculinity and evokes Gulbeyaz's innate but undeveloped womanliness. Wishing to console but not really knowing how, she finds herself for the first time able and inclined to nurture and sympathize: the "odd glistening moisture in her eye" mirrors and answers Juan's tears and demonstrates that "nature teaches more than power can spoil" (*DJ* 5.120). But while still unshed, the "woman's tear-drop" mentioned above cannot "melt" opposition; and in fact the sultana's incipient softening is perhaps what permits Juan to harden his heart and call "back the stoic to his eyes" (*DJ* 5.121). His reassertion of self-control is reflected in Gulbeyaz's resumption of her regal station. She now draws on both her masculine and her feminine powers to court Juan with a gesture superbly blended but nonetheless unsuccessful:

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At length, in an imperial way, she laid
          Her hand on his, and bending on him eyes,
Which needed not an empire to persuade,
          Look'd into his for love, where none replies.
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(*DJ* 5.125)

When her suit still does not prosper, Gulbeyaz instinctively makes an act of submission. She throws herself on Juan's breast and, playing the simple woman, enables Juan's simple manliness to reassert itself—as it does first with a proud look, then with a melodramatic speech beginning "'The prison'd eagle will not pair'" (*DJ* 5.126) and grandiosely terminating "Heads bow, knees bend, eyes watch around a throne, / And hands obey—our hearts are still our own" (*DJ* 5.127).

I have recapitulated the details of the love duel this fully to demonstrate its great potential for presentation in pantomime. Most of the time, the two characters mutely express themselves through formulaic glances and gestures. When they speak, the words are blatantly theatrical. Juan's heroic resolves are only a little less incredible than is his feminine disguise; and anyone who entertains the notion that the Turkish sultana understands Juan's Spanish eloquence is making a suspension of disbelief tantamount to that required for entry into the international never-never land of Harlequin and Columbine. But however fully pantomime might present the situation, its nature precludes analyzing the implications of what has been enacted. Here then the Byronic narrator—the stage manager, if you will, he who would tack up the "argument" in a commedia performance—inserts himself by means of digression. When the encounter he has set in motion resumes, it is indirectly reported. We return to the exchange of significant glances, but now these looks are relayed and explained by the narrator, whose mediating presence is thereby felt if not literally seen: "If I said fire flash'd from Gulbeyaz' eyes, / 'Twere nothing—for her eyes flash'd always fire" (*DJ* 5.134).

We do not see but are informed of the sultana's rage and the exact sequence of thoughts it sends sweeping through her mind: to "cut off Juan's head," "to cut only his—acquaintance," "to rally him into repentance," "to call her maids and go to bed," "to stab herself," "to sentence / The lash to Baba." And then the climax: "but her grand resource / Was to sit down again, and cry of course" (*DJ* 5.139). By explaining the situation as he presents it, the narrator enriches the pantomimic scene. We come to know how Gulbeyaz feels—and a skilled actress could convey the range of feelings described—but also what she thinks. We infer from that prominently placed "of course" that the womanly tears now falling from her imperial eyes were inevitable after all. Just as inevitable, by implication, is Juan's reaction: "But all his great preparatives for dying / Dissolved like snow before a woman crying" (*DJ* 5.141).

To shed those tears that melt opposition is both the most artful and the most natural thing that Gulbeyaz could do. Juan's tears seared her; now hers soften him. "Juan's virtue ebb'd," the narrator reports (*DJ* 5.142). This change of heart is conventionally feminine, in that it indicates the willingness to be wooed out of shyness or reluctance associated with coquettes from the golden age of nymphs and satyrs on. Here, though, the reversal signals Don Juan's return to manly form. He is ready to comfort a lovely woman in need of his attentions and

in so doing to enjoy rather than resist the erotic adventure put in his path.

Gulbeyaz and Juan's awkwardly achieved Turko-Spanish détente seems well on the way to becoming true concord when the arrival of the sultan delays (forever, as it turns out) the kiss of peace. The sultan as Byron renders him is a stage Ottoman of the first order. Theatrically "Shawl'd to the nose, and bearded to the eyes" (*DJ* 5.147), he could as easily be played by a woman as by a man; and his stagily masculine appearance enhances the canto's air of androgyny. Though he has come to confer on Gulbeyaz the honor of a night in his bed, the sultan pauses to admire the newly arrived Juanna. His attention brings the disguise plot full circle, and with a piquant twist of the sort especially popular in pantomime, burletta, and the other forms of spectacular theater. By suggesting that both sultan and sultana are attracted to the stranger in disguise, Byron not only reflects, as pantomime is wont to do, a well-known situation (namely the king and queen falling in love with Pyrocles/Zelmane in Sidney's *Arcadia*). He also places the "boy-bride" of farcical convention within the plot generally associated with the "female page"—and the theatrical effect thereby achieved is more or less what would result were the central deception of *Epicoene* to replace Viola's act of impersonation in *Twelfth Night.* The mixture or reversal of dramatic conventions brings about on the metalevel a cross-dressing comparable to Juan's presentation as Juanna, or to that amusing moment in *Harlequin Whittington* where Grimaldi and the "clever little dog" present themselves as Cecily Suet and her cat.

Disguise and exchange of roles, surefire prescriptions for laughter though they may be in pantomime, can serve higher comic purposes—and Byron is quick to exploit them accordingly. Calling into question Juan's and Gulbeyaz's gender roles exposes the inadequacy of all externally imposed or superficially delineated identities. Such definitions, rapidly reversible and largely interchangeable, are not merely shallow but downright false—not identities at all but roles in the most literal sense. Tears, as we have seen, are the crucial determinant of the feminine role in canto 5's amorous face-off. Weeping, a natural human act conventionally deemed appropriate to one sex only, initiates Juan's assumption of the woman's part and Gulbeyaz's resumption of it. Tears thus serve as both catalyst and evidence of the canto's shifting balance of masculinity and femininity—or, as Susan J. Wolfson puts it, as "synechdoche for the demarcations of gender."[29] The ease and swiftness with which that balance shifts or those demarcations are erased and redrawn demonstrates both the power of a surface matter (such as having drops of water spill out of one's eyes) to define a role and the essential absurdity of any such definition.

From start to finish, *Don Juan* stresses that "identity" as we tend to envision it consists of little more than the is-and-is-not of pantomime or masquerade. The poem's Dedication begins by presenting the difference in a man, the mask that is his vocation, and the super-mask that is his title: "Bob Southey! You're a poet—poet Laureate." The last completed canto's final image is a tableau of cross-dressing that reverses neatly Don Juan's nocturnal impersonation of Juanna in the seraglio: as canto 16 ends, the spectral Black Friar's robe falls back to reveal a living and most fleshly woman: "The phantom of her frolic Grace—Fitz-Fulke!" (*DJ* 16.123). Between the poem's first and last moments, we find Juan always being himself by always acting the part that falls to him, always staying true to himself by keeping faith with the changing demands of time, place, company, and circumstance.

Even as it exposes the deficiencies of roles, *Don Juan*'s pattern of disguise and reversal shows, in the very way that pantomime does, how those roles are to be transcended. The key is that all roles are roles—that like the transformations imposed by the benevolent agent of pantomime or the genial narrator of *Don Juan,* the parts humans play conceal as much as they reveal and reveal as much as they conceal. This point is perhaps most perfectly realized at Catherine's court in canto 9, where as "Love turned a Lieutenant of Artillery" Juan is charming youth transformed to conquering hero transformed to charming youth. The arrows and quiver of love turn into the sword and scabbard of war, then resume their former identities; Cupid's blindfold becomes a cravat and his wings a soldier's epaulets, then regain their romantic character. Each appearance is part of Juan's identity, but neither is his whole self.

Similarly, the psychosexual *pas de deux* Juan and Gulbeyaz enact forces each to experience the stock roles of man and of woman—thus to be for a time in touch with both the masculine and feminine sides of their natures. The serious effect of their farcical encounter is temporary wholeness and balance—momentary escape from the provinciality of gender. Both Gulbeyaz and Juan are changed, and in much the same way. She, the prisoner of palace life, for the first time enters into the feelings of another person. He, though less sheltered from the need to sympathize, nonetheless learns a lesson his mentor John Johnson has earlier in the canto pronounced well worth learning: "We know what slavery is, and our disasters / May teach us better to behave when masters" (*DJ* 5.23). Having lost all his hereditary advantages, even the most basic one of gender, Don Juan, once one of the ruling few, begins to discover how the world feels to the subordinate many. He grudgingly starts to see that attitudes can and should change, that different situations and cultures make different demands, that practicality must sometimes countermand honor and idealism. He commences the life of cosmopolitanism and more or less conscious mobility that notably distinguishes him in the rest of the poem—and makes this beginning because he has experienced the slippery, topsy-turvy, misruled, inconsistent side of life—a state of mundane reality but the special province of pantomime.

Notes

1. Edward G. E. L. Bulwer-Lytton, *England and the English,* ed. Standish Meacham (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 99.
2. Elizabeth French Boyd's *Byron's* Don Juan: *A Critical Study* (New York: Humanities Press, 1958; rpt.) is now over forty years old, but it remains indispensable for the student of Byron's literary sources. Chapters 6, 7, and 8, respectively titled "Byron's Library and His Reading," "The Literary Background of *Don Juan*: Incidents," and "The Literary Background of *Don Juan*: Ideas," are especially crucial. Among the finest of more recent studies adding to our knowledge of Byron's sources are Hermione de Almeida's *Byron and Joyce through Homer*: Don Juan *and* Ulysses (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981); Jerome J. McGann's Don Juan *in Context* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976); the *Don Juan* portion of M. K. Joseph's *Byron the Poet* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1964); Cecil Y. Lang's essay "Narcissus Jilted: Byron, *Don Juan,* and the Biographical Imperative," in *Historical Studies and Literary Criticism,* ed. Jerome J. McGann (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 143-79; and Peter Vassallo, *Byron: The Italian Literary Influence* (London: Macmillan, 1984).
3. Frederick L. Beaty, "Harlequin Don Juan," *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 67, no. 3 (1968): 395-405. Beaty's piece not only indicates pantomime as a contemporary source for Byron's comic character Don Juan but also suggests, as I am doing, that the forms of pantomime and *Don Juan* are comparable.
4. Leo Weinstein, *The Metamorphoses of Don Juan* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1959), 81. For other comparative surveys of the legendary figure, see George Gendarme de Bévotte, *La légende de Don Juan* (Paris: Librairie Hachette, 1911); John Austen, *The Story of Don Juan* (London: Martin Secker, 1939); and Oscar Mandel, *The Theatre of Don Juan: A Collection of Plays and Views,* 1630-1963 (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1963).
5. Rather than produce an intricately annotated and slow-moving survey of pantomime and commedia conventions, I have tried to read widely, assimilate, and summarize. The account of spectacular theater that has resulted derives from the following works. David Mayer's *Harlequin in His Element: The English Pantomime,* 1806-1836 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969) has because of its period focus and its critical intelligence been my single most important source. Most readers will find that the most effective and economical introduction to pantomime in Byron's day is Mayer's second chapter, "The Structures of Pantomime, 1806-1836" (19-74). I have also relied on M. Willson Disher, *Clowns and Pantomimes* (New York: Benjamin Blom, 1968); Pierre Louis Ducharte, *The Italian Comedy,* trans. Randolph T. Weaver (New York: Dover, 1966); Allardyce Nicoll, *The World of Harlequin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963) and *A History of English Drama,* 1660-1900 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1952); and A. E. Wilson, *King Panto: The Story*

of Pantomime (New York: Dutton, 1935). Throughout this chapter, I am indebted to Leigh Campbell Garrison, formerly my graduate research assistant, now a colleague in the VPI & SU English Department.

6. Mayer, *Harlequin in His Element,* 30-31.
7. Burletta and extravaganza are, like pantomime, forms of spectacular theater. Burletta was characterized by its champion George Colman the younger as “a Drama in Rhyme, entirely musical—a short comick piece consisting of recitative and singing, wholly accompanied, more or less, by the orchestra” (Colman quoted in C. Hugh Holman, *A Handbook to Literature* [Indianapolis: Odyssey Press, 1972], 77). Extravaganza, as described by its creator J. R. Planché, consists of “whimsical treatment of a poetical subject as distinguished from the broad caricature of a tragedy or serious opera, which was correctly described as burlesque” (quoted in Holman, *Handbook,* 216).
8. Mayer, *Harlequin in His Element,* 7.
9. Sala quoted in Wilson, *King Panto,* 73.
10. Mayer, *Harlequin in His Element,* 44.
11. Quoted ibid., 47.
12. Disher, *Clowns and Pantomimes,* 291.
13. Mayer, *Harlequin in His Element,* 320-21.
14. Disher, *Clowns and Pantomimes,* 48.
15. Vandenhoff quoted in Wilson, *King Panto,* 135.
16. See Charles Dickens, *Memoirs of Joseph Grimaldi* (New York: Stein and Day, 1968), 214-16 and 226-27, and *Byron's Letters and Journals,* ed. Leslie A. Marchand (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973) 1:152 and n, 3:9, and 4:153 and n.
17. Dickens, *Memoirs of Joseph Grimaldi,* 226-27.
18. Mandel, *Theatre of Don Juan,* 252; Weinstein, *Metamorphoses of Don Juan,* 51.
19. Boyd, *Byron's* Don Juan, 35, 165.
20. Anne Barton, “*Don Juan* Reconsidered: The Haidée Episode,” *Byron Journal* 15 (1987): 16.
21. Quoted in Mayer, *harlequin in His Element,* 77.
22. Leigh Hunt, *Leigh Hunt's Dramatic Criticism,* 1808-1831, ed. Lawrence Huston Houtchens and Carolyn Washburn Houtchens (New York: Octagon Books, 1977), 144.
23. Mayer, *Harlequin in His Element,* 6.
24. Ibid., 8.
25. Nicoll, *The World of Harlequin,* 22.
26. Beaty, “Harlequin Don Juan,” 405.
27. Malcolm M. Kelsall, *Byron's Politics,* 8.
28. Readers interested in pursuing this subject will certainly want to see Susan J. Wolfson's “‘Their she condition’: Cross-Dressing and the Politics of Gender in *Don Juan,*” *English Literary History* 54, no. 3 (Fall 1987): 585-617. Her reading of the poem's “transgressions of gender,” from linguistic cross-dressings to impersonations of the Juanna and Black Friar sort, is consistently insightful and solidly grounded. Her conclusion, that the poem “does not, finally, escape the roles fashioned and maintained by his [Byron's] culture, but it does explore the problems of living with and within those roles” (611), accurately characterizes one of *Don Juan*'s most important preoccupations. But it strikes me that the poem offers as much transcendence as is possible in its recognition that human roles are roles—fashioned and maintained by a culture but enacted by individuals whose freedom lies in recognizing play (or what they do) for what it is.
29. Wolfson, “‘Their she condition,’” 288.

Abbreviations

The following abbreviations appear in parenthetical references in the text:

CPW Lord Byron, *Complete Poetical Works,* ed. Jerome J. McGann
DJ Lord Byron, *Don Juan,* ed. Jerome J. McGann
G Lady Caroline Lamb, *Glenarvon,* fascimile of the first edition, intro. James L. Ruff
LE Robert Southey, *Letters from England,* ed. Jack Simmons
LJ Lord Byron, *Byron's Letters and Journals,* ed. Leslie A. Marchand
NC Lady Caroline Lamb, *A New Canto*

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Criticism: Peter W. Graham (essay date 1990)

SOURCE: Graham, Peter W. "England in *Don Juan.*" In Don Juan *and Regency England,* pp. 125-56. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1990.

[*In the following essay, Graham illustrates the ways in which Byron set* Don Juan *against the mores of Regency England and argues that the poem was written both for and from the viewpoint of the "cultivated man."*]

> *If the world is the aggregate of all that is dynamically affective, then the cultivated man will never succeed in living in just one world.*

Friedrich Schlegel, *Athenaeum Fragments*

The last three essays have shown several pragmatic reasons not to put "just one world" into literature if that one world is one's own, several different ways of telling English truths but telling them slant. In *Letters from England,* Southey assumed a Spanish mask that safely distanced him from his pronouncements on the mother country and also gave his opinions at least a semblance of cultural comparison. The English pantomime

managed to be topical, timely, and irreverent under the Examiner's watchful eye by presenting home truths and personages in fantastic scenes and manifestly unreal guises. Even Lady Caroline Lamb showed some prudence (if not enough) in displacing the tumultuous half-realities of *Glenarvon* from England, where they occurred, to Ireland, where she was sent that they might not continue.

We have seen that *Don Juan,* like *Letters from England, Glenarvon,* and the English pantomime, is made from *domestica facta.* Like the other works, it strategically ranges beyond the microcosmic source of its materials. As its preliminaries suggest, the poem is not so much about its Spanish protagonist and the lands in which he finds himself as about its British author, the British narrator through whom he speaks, and the island home they both know best of the many scenes and societies depicted—not Britain isolated so much as Britain compared with other places, peoples, and times. How Byron introduces the matter and mores of Regency England into a narrative set elsewhere, as Don Juan's story is from its outset until the sixty-fifth stanza of canto 10, will be the subject of this chapter. Why Byron does so is evident in this chapter's epigraph. The choice is more principled than practical. Having already offended his native land enough to feel himself an outcast and to act out that perceived exile, Byron had no compulsion to be anything more or less than direct in commenting on the British microcosm—but as romantic ironist and as urbane aristocrat he surely would feel the philosophical force of Schlegel's case for cosmopolitanism. Whether or not he had firsthand knowledge of the fragment or the Schlegelian opinion it crystallizes (and he may well have, for Friedrich's brother A. W. Schlegel was at Coppet when Byron stayed there in 1816), the position was one he shared. Byron's most famous endorsement of worldly experience, a statement that fleshes out Schlegel's elegant abstraction, comes in a letter to Douglas Kinnaird: “As to ‘Don Juan’—confess—confess—you dog—and be candid—that it is the sublime of *that there* sort of writing—it may be bawdy—but is it not good English?—it may be profligate—but is it not *life,* is it not *the thing*?—Could any man have written it—who has not lived in the world?—and tooled in a post-chaise? in a hackney coach? in a Gondola? against a wall? in a court carriage? in a vis a vis?—on a table?—and under it?” (*LJ* 6:232) “Good English”—“life”—“the thing”: as adequate a summation of *Don Juan* as five words are likely to convey.

Byron's choosing cosmopolitanism rather than insularity suggests things about him, but also about his ideal reader, a nonexistent being whose perfect blend of birth, breeding, erudition, experience, wit, feeling, vigor, tolerance, conviction, and various other excellences was lacking in his real readers, even those men of the world to whom he addressed his epistolary glosses on the poetic endeavor: Moore, Murray, Hobhouse, Kinnaird. I would suggest that the dominant voice heard in *Don Juan* belongs to a British version of Schlegel's “cultivated man.” Though the poem may be “remarkably unprescriptive of its reader”[1] in the sense of offering richly diverse things to a heterogeneous audience, much of the time this British cosmopolite utters words intended chiefly, or at any rate immediately, for other cultivated men of his own society and time. The poem characteristically speaks about women rather than to them, alludes to posterity instead of addressing it, shows a wide knowledge of disparate nations and classes that is itself a crucial characteristic of that exclusive club of cultivated Englishmen to which Byron belongs and in which he is at pains to place his narrator and to find some of his most important readers, if not all of them. To validate his and the narrator's credentials as fellow initiates, Byron must display from the start his understanding of the milieu in which his ideal reader resides as well as those circles through which his fictive protagonist moves. Because “soundness” in certain crucial insular matters is a prerequisite for anyone aspiring to pronounce on wider concerns, England must be brought into *Don Juan* long before Don Juan is brought into England. How to do so? Largely, of course, through the famous digressions. But in *Don Juan* cultural comparison is yet more pervasive than digressions alone would allow it to be. Other strategies are necessary. All of them, along with the digressions, can be seen as varieties of parabasis—a phenomenon that now calls for a few explanatory words.

Parabasis, literally a “coming forward,” is a feature of Greek Old Comedy—a suspension of action that takes place at or toward the middle of the play as the chorus, alone in the orchestra and unmasked, advances to present the author's sincerely and strongly held opinions, whether on art, politics, religion, or other timely matters. The parabasis shatters dramatic illusion: as Gilbert Norwood puts it, “such a passage—or rather such

a conglomerate of songs and non-dramatic recitative—is *prima facie* inconceivable in the centre of a drama."[2] But suspending the play's action and thereby stressing its illusory nature effectively contributes to the comic whole. Schlegel drew upon the paradox inherent in this theatrical convention to account for the simultaneous creation and destruction that constitute irony: irony, as Schlegel sees it, is "permanent parabasis." Hans Eichner points out that the Greek word *parekbasis* is also Schlegel's preferred term for that literary technique we tend to call "digression"[3]—and digression is one way for Byron's alter ego the narrator to step forward unmasked (while still masking the author) in *Don Juan.* There are smaller, less obvious ways of highlighting the fictive nature of the poem's narrative—providing glimpses of the stage manager behind the pantomime scenes, the essential Englishness underlying the apparent internationalism. One such means is through distinctively English mispronunciation of foreign names and other words, a strategy examined in the discussion of opening signals. Another is the continual presence of literary allusions, tags that incrementally demonstrate Byron's status as not just a well-bred cosmopolite but also a well-read one. It would be digressive here to deal at length with particular allusions—anyone requiring general confirmation of how fast, dense, and various the literary quotations, anecdotes, references, and parodies spill forth can find the proof required on most any page of McGann's resourceful notes to the Oxford *Don Juan.* For now let it suffice to say that Shakespeare, the Bible, Horace, Milton, and other venerable ingredients contribute significantly to Byron's simmering literary stew—as can less-familiar or less-respected materials, among them the three I have discussed at length: Southey, Caroline Lamb, the spectacular theater of commedia and pantomime.

Some of *Don Juan*'s allusions are obvious. Others are exceedingly subtle. Still others, I suspect, are virtually undetectable—Byron's literary dandyism manifesting itself in exclusive jokes unperceived by anyone but their perpetrator. The obvious allusions (for instance, the "poetical commandments" of canto 1) give clear warning of what Byron's game will be. The subtler ones lead readers who recognize them to admire Byron and congratulate themselves for mental agility, thereby forging a community of wit, a select society of minds thinking alike. Shared allusions, in other words, can be Byron's way of telling England's cultural elite that "I am one of you"—and his readers' way of recognizing that, whatever place and time they inhabit, they can for a moment think like Byron. Private allusions (or perhaps they should be called elusions) set a limit on this consensus of author and audience. They are the poet's way of not only keeping even his finest readers from full competence but also preventing those readers from achieving any clear sense of the ground and extent of their incompetence, in this way thwarting their chance of having, like Socrates, at least the sure knowledge of ignorance that is the first step away from it.

English interjections, from the lengthiest digressions to the most inobtrusive touches of diction, are moments of parabasis in that they take us out of the world contrived for Don Juan's adventures and back to the "real" one Byron and his characterized reader have in common. Let us first see how the feat is accomplished in the second, third, and fourth cantos, where the narrative element is comparatively strong, the tendency to digress is less pronounced than elsewhere, and there is as yet no embodiment of English values within the tale itself. Here, in blending shipwreck, piracy, idyllic love, and slavery, Juan's story is as engaging as it ever will be. Even so, we are detached from the narrative and removed from its locale by frequent and artfully placed parabases—English intrusions on a Mediterranean tale.

Canto 1 ends with a parabasis—the previously quoted and discussed couplet on Southey's borrowed rhymes and Byron's feigned fear that the lines be taken for his—and canto 2 begins with parabasis. Before the narrative resumes there is of course no way to digress from it; instead, the poem hovers between England and the Mediterranean, between fiction and teasingly real "Byroniana." We start off facing a generalization that is either obtuse or mockingly insincere—and given the nature of the narrator as revealed in the first canto, the latter seems likelier:

```
Oh ye! who teach the ingenuous youth of nations,
          Holland, France, England, Germany, or Spain,
I pray ye flog them upon all occasions,
          It mends their morals, never mind the pain.
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(*DJ* 2.1)

The second half of the stanza returns to Juan, whose “best of mothers and of educations” (equally evident insincerity) had in the previous canto failed to preserve the morals and modesty of which he has been divested “in a way, that's rather of the oddest” (insincere again, the “way” referred to being entirely natural and ordinary). Thereby a contrast is set up between the north and the south—and set up as could be done only by someone who knows both well enough to ridicule their different hypocrisies, as an “Englishman resident in Spain” or a “Spaniard who had travelled in England” might do.

Because the narrator has already made a perverse point of being wrongheaded in this canto's first few assertions, the audience is conditioned to reverse his next claim, a retrospective suggestion that a “public school” would have been just the thing to have cooled Juan's adolescent fancy (*DJ* 2.2). Having made that reversal, the reader who knows something of Byron is encouraged to think of the poet's “hot youth,” not much damped down by Harrow. The ensuing coy reference to Juan's “lady-mother, mathematical, / A———never mind” (*DJ* 2.3) likewise sends us back to Byron's personal history and specifically to Annabella, though if charged with mental manipulation of this sort he could plead innocent in just the same way that his narrator could deny *bitch* being the word meant to fill his pause, even though it is the noun most readers will instinctively supply[4] given that the context is a witty, racy poem, the referent is a female inclined to be selfish, devious, and hypocritical, and the next person to be characterized is graced with an animal epithet (“his tutor, an old ass”).

Turning to Juan's story and then away from it, the narrator dispatches his protagonist to Cadiz, then uses this shift of scene to call attention to his own traits. Not the least of these is digressiveness, for after a single line of narrative, the poem devotes three stanzas to characterizing its narrator:

```
I said, that Juan had been sent to Cadiz—
          A pretty town, I recollect it well—
'Tis there the mart of the colonial trade is
          (Or was, before Peru learn'd to rebel)
And such sweet girls—I mean, such graceful ladies,
          Their very walk would make your bosom swell;
I can't describe it, though so much it strike,
Nor liken it—I never saw the like:
```

6

```
An Arab horse, a stately stag, a barb
          New broke, a cameleopard, a gazelle,
No—none of these will do;—and then their garb!
          Their veil and petticoat—Alas! to dwell
Upon such things would very near absorb
          A canto—then their feet and ancles—well,
Thank heaven I've got no metaphor quite ready,
(And so, my sober Muse—come, let's be steady—
```

7

```
Chaste Muse!—well, if you must, you must)—the veil
          Thrown back a moment with the glancing hand,
While the o'erpowering eye, that turns you pale,
          Flashes into the heart:—All sunny land
Of love! when I forget you, may I fail
          To—say my prayers—but never was there plann'd
A dress through which the eyes give such a volley,
Excepting the Venetian Fazzioli.
```

We understand here that the narrator has traveled widely. He "recollects" Cadiz and must have been to Venice, having seen its distinctive local costume; and the procession of exotic beasts implies even more extensive journeying. We infer that his experience of women is equally wide and appreciative, Spanish women being admired in a comparative way. This connoisseur of places and women is someone whose handling of the English language and poetic conventions is both masterful and light. At once serious and playful, he demands that characterizations be accurate and that figurative tropes be precisely chosen and employed only when necessary, yet he trifles with his "chaste" and "sober" muse as if she herself were some "sweet girl"—even violating the integrity of her stanzas by leaving a parenthesis open when the couplet has closed. Rhetorically ingenious, he succeeds in having things both ways—as evidenced by his including images (like the quadraped menagerie in stanza 6) to reject them, and his pausing before, then censoring, unsuitable sentiments ("may I fail / To———say my prayers") to emphasize them. The experiences, values, and personality conveyed through this description overlap with Byron's but cannot be proved his alone in that none of the details are unique to him—they might portray any number of intelligent, amorous, and eloquent English travelers.

So might most of the other British parabases in this canto and the two following. Only a few details truly single out Byron among cosmopolitan English aristocrats. The assertion in canto 2 that Juan is a strong swimmer alludes, as Byron could not resist doing when circumstances were appropriate, to his own notable exploit in that line—"He could, perhaps, have pass'd the Hellespont, / As once (a feat on which ourselves we prided) / Leander, Mr. Ekenhead, and I did" (*DJ* 2.105)—a "real" moment whose reality is undercut by its own miniature parabasis, when the mythic Leander is brought into the company of Ekenhead and Byron. The descriptions of Juan's sufferings at sea, the facts of which come from various sources, explicitly acknowledge just one literary progenitor, *A Narrative of the Honourable John Byron …* : "his hardships were comparative / To those related in my grand-dad's Narrative" (*DJ* 2.137). Apart from these cases, though, the narrator's momentary intrusions of English matters and tastes do not uniquely characterize Byron, though they certainly fit him as well or better than they do anyone else.

The most important of such instances is a digression that rises out of Juan's linguistic apprenticeship in Romaic, his personal tutor on the pirate's island being the pirate's daughter Haidée. The circumstances remind the narrator of what delightful incentives to learning (and not learning) he has enjoyed in similar situations:

```
They smile so when one's right, and when one's wrong
          They smile still more, and then there intervene
Pressure of hands, perhaps even a chaste kiss;—
I learn'd the little that I know by this:
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165

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That is, some words of Spanish, Turk, and Greek,
          Italian not at all, having no teachers;
Much English I cannot pretend to speak,
          Learning that language chiefly from its preachers,
Barrow, South, Tillotson, whom every week
          I study, also Blair, the highest reachers
Of eloquence in piety and prose—
I hate your poets, so read none of those.
```

166

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As for the ladies, I have nought to say,
          A wanderer from the British world of fashion,
Where I, like other "dogs, have had my day,"
          Like other men too, may have had my passion.
```

In this passage the narrator supplies some details that accurately suggest Byron: travel, international adventures with women, wide reading, status in the Great World. Merrily blended with these specifics are others so blatantly uncharacteristic of Byron's situation (the claims of not having an amiable woman to teach him Italian, of having gained what small skill in English is his from parsons rather than poets, of having "nought to say" about the ladies) that they call to mind Byron's great love of mystifying an audience and thus suggest him equally as well as the accurate details do. But however successful this passage may be in turning the reader's mind to Byron in particular, it could with equal justice be applied to many another member of that class of Englishmen to which he belongs.

Attitudes distinguishing a cultural type, not merely Byron, similarly emerge when a generalization that real women surpass their stone likenesses conjures up the narrator's memory of "an Irish lady, to whose bust / I ne'er saw justice done," (*DJ* 2.119)—or when meditation on the costly nature of love makes him muse, "I wonder Castlereagh don't tax 'em" (*DJ* 2.203)—or when professed hatred of "that air / Of clap-trap, which your recent poets prize" (*DJ* 2.124) impels him to forego tantalizing suspense and identify Haidée and Zoe directly and honestly. These last three examples introduce a particular British, if not uniquely Byronic, frame of mind into the Oriental tale of Juan and Haidée. The persona spinning this Mediterranean romance is someone who can claim acquaintance with society beauties such as Lady Adelaide Forbes (the likely inspiration of the sculptural digression)[5] and their portraits. He is someone who implicitly disapproves of Foreign Secretary Castlereagh and his taxes. He is someone who opposes imported poetical systems and provincial self-congratulations of the kind the Lakers, Bowles, and other debased moderns inflict upon their readers—and the word he chooses to characterize their efforts is apt, economical, down to earth, and distinctively English.[6] The perspective from which such a being surveys the world is liberally Whig yet a bit beyond all parties, classically Augustan yet individualistically eclectic, elitist in several senses—it is *a* British viewpoint but certainly not the common one.

The more conscious we are of this perspective from which the narrator looks on his world and assembles his story, the less power the narrative has to absorb us. It is especially important that we are distanced from the story at the crucial beginnings and endings of cantos—a strategy begun in canto 1 and continued without variation in the three succeeding ones. We have already seen how the narrator draws attention away from Juan and Spain, toward himself, Byron, and their English context in the first stanzas of canto 2. This canto ends as so many do with the narrator digressing into the apparently personal. He begins by recognizing—as the reader already must have done—how his protagonist, like other versions of Don Juan and like Glenarvon in a passage quoted in the last chapter, has forgotten his absent love because of the present one. A general explanation of such behavior follows. Then comes application of the law to a particular case, the narrator's own:

```
I hate inconstancy—I loathe, detest,
          Abhor, condemn, abjure the mortal made
Of such quicksilver clay that in his breast
          No permanent foundation can be laid;
Love, constant love, has been my constant guest,
          And yet last night, being at a masquerade,
I saw the prettiest creature, fresh from Milan,
Which gave me some sensations like a villain.
```

210

```
But soon Philosophy came to my aid,
          And whisper'd "think of every sacred tie!"
"I will, my dear Philosophy!" I said,
          "But then her teeth, and then, Oh heaven! her eye!
I'll just inquire if she be wife or maid,
                    Or neither—out of curiosity."
"Stop!" cried Philosophy, with air so Grecian,
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(Though she was masqued then as a fair Venetian.)
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211

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"Stop!" so I stopp'd.—But to return: that which
          Men call inconstancy is nothing more
Than admiration due where nature's rich
          Profusion with young beauty covers o'er
Some favour'd object; and as in the niche
          A lovely statue we almost adore,
This sort of adoration of the real
Is but a heightening of the "beau ideal."
```

At this point the narrator is playing a complex game, the old platonic one of appearance and reality. The "real" Venetian lady costumed as the muse of philosophy is herself only a particular mortal embodiment of that universal and immortal essence impersonated through her disguise: notice that though the lady is at the masquerade, Philosophy is designated the actual role player, "being masqued then as a fair Venetian." Similarly, the narrator is a false face perfectly fitting (and also patterned on) Byron, the expatriate reveling, as his letters of the period announce, in the pleasures of Venice—pleasures dependent for their full flavor upon the contrasting recollected tastes of England.[7] But "Byron" in the letters and in this digression is a representative man of his class and nation. Several signs to this effect are evident in what Mikhail Bakhtin would call the "hybrid utterances"[8] of the final four stanzas, where diction, figurative language, and allusion all undercut the plausibility of the poem's fictive world. The usual means of shattering such an illusion is to emphasize the artificial nature of the literary work—here the method is to highlight *Don Juan*'s connections with "reality" known and shared by Byron, his narrator, and his implied reader. Among the specifics better suited to Regency England than Lambro's isle are "beau ideal," a French phrase indispensable to the vocabulary of the Great World, and "killing" used in its English slang sense ("graces quite as killing") with a British coin, the "shilling," as its rhyme (*DJ* 2.213). Calling a tearful existence "the English climate of our years" (*DJ* 2.214) and alluding to Burton by labeling this discussion of melancholy an "anatomy" (*DJ* 2.216) similarly enhance the aristocratic English author and narrator and diminish the exotic Juan and Haidée, who are the merest of contrivances as the canto winds up:

```
In the mean time, without proceeding more
          In this anatomy, I've finish'd now
Two hundred and odd stanzas as before,
          That being about the number I'll allow
Each canto of the twelve, or twenty-four.
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(*DJ* 2.216)

Canto 3 begins and ends with just this sort of nonchalant yet insistent undermining of the story, characters, setting, and literary conventions. "Hail Muse! *et cetera.*—We left Juan sleeping" is the brilliantly laconic start of canto 3, which leaves the hero to his happy unmarried slumbers for eleven stanzas, while love and marriage are examined and found analogous to wine and vinegar. The generalization holds in all climes and at all times. Petrarch, Dante, Milton, and by implication Byron himself illustrate different facets of the incompatibility of love and marriage. But the peculiar institution analyzed seems to be modern English marriage. Both terms and ideas are close to those found in *Glenarvon,* where, as we have seen, "In her first passion woman loves her lover" (*DJ* 3.3) and "a woman planted—/ … After a decent time must be gallanted" (*DJ* 3.4) and "love and marriage rarely can combine, / Although they both are born in the same clime" (*DJ* 3.5) and "Men grow ashamed of being so very fond" (*DJ* 3.7).

The narrator suspends the idyll of Juan and Haidée after only some sixty stanzas in which the narrative advances hardly at all—stanzas presenting Lambro's Odyssean return to a "house no more his home" and his

almost voyeuristic presence at the lovers' richly described feast—and for the last quarter of the canto turns to various poetical and metapoetical concerns, most immediately offering the famous "isles of Greece" lyric sung to Haidée, Juan, and their guests by a poet "With truth like Southey and with verse like Crashaw" (*DJ* 3.79). This lyric and its context richly complicate the Dedication's fairly simple notion that bad poetry rises from bad politics and vice versa. "The isles of Greece" is the song of a crass opportunist "preferring pudding to *no* praise" (*DJ* 3.79). Yet it is a work of genius. Not because of its political message, for that "glorious idea crumbles on closer inspection," as Malcolm Kelsall convincingly demonstrates[9]—but because it superbly achieves its generic task. A drinking song, it presents all that such a work is meant to: alternating exaltations and abasements that are sometimes personal and sometimes universal, sentiments and ironies now pleasing, now pleasantly painful. "The isles of Greece" blends oppositions to achieve the complexity that distinguishes a singularly beautiful lyric, or wine, from the ordinarily agreeable many. But my main concern here is with the poet rather than his poem. Though solidly grounded on Lambro's island, this "sad trimmer" draws our attention away from the world in which he sings and back to the real one with its real islands, especially the Venetian one where Byron composes to please himself and the British one where Southey, like the Greek poet, "earn'd his laureate pension" (*DJ* 3.80).

Characterizing his nameless modern poet, Byron is at his ironic and cosmopolitan best. He inscribes the portrait with more meaning than a reader impatient for resumed action, distracted by the lyric interlude, or intent on finding a key to real people behind the poem's fictions is likely to detect. Obviously the "turncoat" is meant to mirror Southey, and by extension Wordsworth and Coleridge, the trio of Lakers whose common excursion from the liberal sentiments of their youth is to be explicitly denounced a few stanzas farther on (*DJ* 3.93-95). But there is more. To start, there is the mention of Richard Crashaw, not just a metaphysical poet whose distinctive verse might evoke ridicule in a more austere age and a man whose name can make a comic rhyme for "Pacha." Byron introduces Crashaw because he, like Southey and the unnamed poet, is a kind of turncoat: the son of a noted Puritan cleric, he converted to Roman Catholicism. Like another changeable poet, the Byron of *Don Juan,* he also left England for Italy and abandoned English verse forms for contemporary Italian models. Thus through his likeness to Crashaw the Greek poet serves as a personal bridge connecting Southey with the Byronic narrator, who is very close to Byron at this point in the poem, and whose "hot youth—when George the Third was king" (*DJ* 1.212) provides a phrase echoed in the description of this Greek poet's "singing as he sung in his warm youth" (*DJ* 3.83). In fact, many of the descriptions of the Greek lyricist seem to embody Byron's sort of adaptability more than Southey's.[10] A few examples:

```
He was a man who had seen many changes,
         And always changed as true as any needle;
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(*DJ* 3.80)

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He had travell'd 'mongst the Arabs, Turks, and Franks,
         And knew the self-loves of the different nations;
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(*DJ* 3.84)

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His muse made increment of any thing,
         From the high lyric down to the low rational:
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(*DJ* 3.85)

Standing behind all these changeable English poets is the venerable Horace, who having praised the republic could praise Augustus—and having shifted his ground could admit as much. As Kelsall has observed, the Horatian admission itself appears in *Don Juan*[11]—aptly quoted at the start of the stanza where the Byronic narrator comments on how he has changed since his "hot youth": "'*Non ego hoc ferrem calida juventa / Consule Planco*'" (*DJ* 1.212).

Presenting a number of actual turncoat poets in one unnamed fictional lyricist is an act of construction analogous to the Grimaldi Clown's ingenious arrangement of assorted objects into visual similes or an oversacription like Caroline Lamb's choice of *St. Clare,* a name resonant with too many possible meanings to permit its working into a scheme of roman à clef. Byron's mixture of models brilliantly demonstrates that “impurity” need not debase and can actually strengthen a literary fabrication. Paradoxically, the existence of several possible models, rather than just one, confers self-sufficient integrity on the created character: because the singer of “The isles of Greece” is not purely Southey, or Byron, or Crashaw, or Horace, he can be pure poet. His essence, undiluted by the extraneous biographical attributes of any single personality, is composed of two elements: verbal talent and changeability. Through the essential example provided by the unnamed poet Byron surprises us into seeing the basic similarity between mobility, an excusable and sometimes even admirable quality in the poem, and treachery, one of the most despicable traits presented. Mobility unites many of the most important real and fictive people of *Don Juan*: the Lakers, Byron, the narrator, Don Juan, John Johnson, Julia, Lady Adeline Amundeville. Noticing this affinity between amiable characters and contemptible ones, we are driven to search for a telling distinction. We find one, I think, in the fact that a shift of position can be disinterested or interested, natural or calculated, a matter of temperament or a means of opportunism, an affirmation or a denial of what is best in the mixed nature of the mobile being.

I hope that this look at the singer of “The isles of Greece” has demonstrated how helpful to appreciating *Don Juan,* in fact how down-right indispensable to understanding certain aspects of the poem, is the cosmopolitan “cultivation” spoken of in this chapter's epigraph from Schlegel—the traveling beyond our personal boundaries that brings us closer to being Byron's ideal readers. The unnamed versifier whom we have been considering is a character completely enclosed in *Don Juan*'s fictive world; and he is almost an abstraction—the Poet pared down to a pair of defining traits (talent and mobility) along with those minimal attributes no human being can lack (a time, a place, a gender). But is this picture of the Poet a good likeness? And what is its significance? We are better able to judge if we can follow the inductive process Byron has implied in abstracting this modern Greek manifestation of the Poet from at least four real-life poetic chameleons, if we bring to the story information from other worlds, particularly from the classical and English literary traditions. Information, both intensive and extensive, is especially necessary as canto 3 closes and canto 4 begins. The stanzas spanned by this part of the poem (*DJ* 3.87-111 and 4.1—7) constitute the Byronic parabasis that most closely resembles the composite poetic device as Aristophanes, for instance, would have employed it. We part from the fictional world of Lambro's island with stanza 87's summation of the Greek poet's performance (“Thus sung, or would, or could, or should have sung, / The modern Greek, in tolerable verse”)—briefly return to “our tale” in the first six lines of stanza 101, which merely tell us that the feast has ended and the lovers are alone at twilight—then pick up “Young Juan and his lady-love” after the couplet of the seventh stanza of canto 4 brings the digression to an explicit close (“Meanwhile Apollo plucks me by the ear, / And tells me to resume my story here”).

This parabasis is in many ways a difficult one to explicate. Its range of topics is extraordinarily wide, even for *Don Juan.* It proves as dense as the most heavily name-dropping sentences of the prose Preface—and its density is even harder to penetrate because the allusions are as often as not implied ones, literary tags in addition to names or titles.[12] Even its position in the poem poses a problem the reader must solve. If we recognize the parabasis as a logically continuous passage, we must admit that its continuity, its spilling over from the end of canto 3 to the start of canto 4, violates the poem's structure. At the same time, we must acknowledge that the integrity of the parabasis is itself violated by the conspicuous and self-contradictory utterances closing one canto and opening the other: the ostensibly arbitrary shutdown of canto 3 [“I feel this tediousness will never do—/ 'Tis being *too* epic, and I must cut down / (In copying) this long canto into two” (*DJ* 3.111)]—and the insistently introductory note struck by the first lines of canto 4: “Nothing so difficult as a beginning / In poesy, unless perhaps the end.”

One original canto or two? Signs point both ways—the logical continuity suggesting the former state, the poetic and rhetorical separation indicating the latter. As it happens, the two cantos were at first a single longer

unit.[13] Byron did, as he claims, divide the one sprawling canto into two parts. But why say that he has done so "in copying"—not the true moment of bisection, as the first line of canto 4 makes perfectly evident? Why make the self-nullifying announcement "They'll never find it out, unless I own / The fact" (*DJ* 3.111)? Breaking laws is an assertion of power; the more wanton the crash through barriers, the more graphic the display of force. By conspicuously flouting the rules ordinarily applicable to the shape of a rhetorical structure, whether a canto or a parabasis, Byron offers concrete evidence that the imaginative force called the poet need not respect the conventions that have risen in its arena of creation. In the next few paragraphs we shall see that the power of words and the lies of poets are two pivotal, interrelated concerns of the parabasis. Byron's playful inconsistencies in closing one canto and opening another enact on the level of poetic structure the very truths verbally asserted in the parabasis.

As we have seen, the Byronic narrator begins his parabasis by dismissing the "modern Greek" and his "tolerable verse" from the stage of the poem. Assessment of the Greek's achievement leads to generalization about all poets:

```
If not like Orpheus quite, when Greece was young,
          Yet in these times he might have done much worse:
His strain display'd some feeling—right or wrong;
          And feeling, in a poet, is the source
Of others' feeling; but they are such liars,
And take all colours—like the hands of dyers.
```

(*DJ* 3.87)

The dyer's hand stained by the colors it employs, affected by the effect it contrives, may be the most famous part of this passage, but there are other details well worth discussion. One such matter is the appositive *liars* and its homonym *lyres.* We have already seen that the lie and the lyre taken together characterize the poet of "The isles of Greece." Because he is modern yet a countryman of Orpheus, an essence distilled from several real poets, the nameless singer can serve as Everypoet, a representative being connecting his high mythic prototype with Horace, Crashaw, Pope, Dryden, Byron—and also with debased contemporary practitioners of the art such as the detested Lakers, whose "names at present cut a convict figure, / The very Botany Bay in moral geography" (*DJ* 3.94). If we recognize that all poets are liars with lyres, we shall avoid certain erroneous assumptions, among them the unfounded faith that inferior poetry lacks the power to do harm and the equally false belief that great poetry straightforwardly reveals simple truth. Once we acknowledge that comparatively poor poetry may somehow endure and need not be completely impotent, we can understand why attacks on "bad poets" belong in *Don Juan,* despite Hobhouse's suggestion that "assault of the poor creatures so infinitely below you in poetical character would look to the world perfectly wanton and harmless except to your own great reputation which places you above even the chastisement of such grovellers."[14] And having generalized about the difficulty of finding truth in orphic utterances, where the "lie" may derive from the poet's misspeaking, the audience's misapprehending, or both, Byron has given us fair warning that even his own poetic assertions should not be uncritically accepted at face value.

Byron's remarks on poets and their productions are calculated to be universally relevant but particularly applicable to contemporary British realities. The parabasis announces timeless convictions but also provides a timely defense of *Don Juan* and an attack on those modern British poets who fall short of, and themselves assail, the standards it embodies, Augustan values inherited from Pope and Dryden. The power of poets' words justifies both the defense of "good" poets and the attack on "bad" ones: "feeling, in a poet, is the source / Of others' feelings" (*DJ* 3.87) and "words are things, and a small drop of ink, / Falling like dew, upon a thought, produces / That which makes thousands, perhaps millions, think" (*DJ* 3.88). Ensuing stanzas offer ample evidence that words make truths and poets kindle feelings. "Troy owes to Homer that whist owes to Hoyle" (*DJ* 3.90); how the present generation sees Marlborough, Milton, and Burns depends in some measure on what features have been stressed by their respective biographers, Coxe, Johnson, and Currie (*DJ* 3.90, 91,

92). Having acknowledged that the writer's selectivity produces a new reality by determining the readers' image of whomever or whatever is being animated or reified through words, Byron takes prompt advantage of his right to select. As he sees it, the Lakers (most prominently Wordsworth) have misrepresented the Augustans (especially Dryden and Pope).[15] The Lakers' views, however obscure and erroneous Byron may think them, have reached print and thus have a chance to "make thousands, perhaps millions, think." But if Byron's own words can discredit the thinkers, he can counteract their thoughts. Accordingly, he selects and exaggerates a few salient features to represent the Lake-dwellers in his poem:

```
All are not moralists, like Southey, when
          He prated to the world of "Pantisocrasy;"
Or Wordsworth, unexcised, unhired, who then
          Season'd his pedlar poems with democracy;
Or Coleridge, long before his flighty pen
          Let to the Morning Post its aristocracy;
When he and Southey, following the same path,
Espoused two partners (milliners of Bath.)
```

(*DJ* 3.93)

Because Wordsworth is the one Laker who has most directly threatened the contemporary reputations of Dryden and Pope (and also perhaps because Byron accurately perceives him, with more talent than Southey and more productivity than Coleridge, as having the most potential to cut a figure for posterity), he bears the brunt of the literary attack, though the epic *longeurs* induced by Southey's epics do receive a stanza's attention (*DJ* 3.97). The case against Wordsworth is based on specific and fairly fresh evidence, the poems singled out for ridicule being the "drowsy frowzy" *Excursion* (its second edition having been published in 1820), "The Waggoner" (published in 1819), and "Peter Bell" (published in 1819). Wordsworth's shortcomings are presented not as debatable matters of taste but as downright deficiencies. In *The Excursion* Wordsworth "builds up a formidable dyke / Between his own and others' intellect" (*DJ* 3.95)—surely a flaw if words are meant to make others think. In "The Waggoners," he is charged with plodding, provincial complacency (*DJ* 3.98). In "Peter Bell" he reveals a woeful lack of cultivation and sense. Byron's argument focuses on a detail that might, in less resourceful hands, furnish material for the merest quibble:

```
He wishes for "a boat" to sail the deeps—
          Of ocean?—No, of air; and then he makes
Another outcry for "a little boat,"
And drivels seas to set it well afloat.
```

(*DJ* 3.98)

In contrast to Wordsworth, the Byronic narrator, a man of common sense and uncommon cultivation, has no trouble finding an array of more felicitous possibilities:

```
If he must fain sweep o'er the etherial plain,
          And Pegasus runs restive in his "waggon,"
Could he not beg the loan of Charles's Wain?
          Or pray Medea for a single dragon?
Or if too classic for his vulgar brain,
          He fear'd his neck to venture such a nag on,
And he must needs mount nearer to the moon,
Could not the blockhead ask for a balloon?
```

(*DJ* 3.99)

Notice how the ground of criticism shifts away from strictly poetic concerns here: Wordsworth's choice of the

“little boat” shows him not so much a bad poet as a fuzzy thinker, something likelier to arouse the contempt of a larger segment of Byron's audience. Furthermore, the narrator's catalogue of alternative means of transport manages to impute to poor Wordsworth various deficiencies not directly relevant to the detail under present consideration. By implication the author of “Peter Bell” is ill-grounded in the classics, inadequately equipped by training or temperament for horsemanship, even ignorant of technological developments. At the end of the indictment, the ideal reader of *Don Juan* is meant to conclude that Wordsworth notably lacks certain qualities cherished by that ruling-class culture to which both poet and audience belong. Wordsworth and “Trash of such sort” may sneer “at him who drew ‘Achitophel’” (*DJ* 3.100), but the reader is not likely to side with the sneerer after what the parabasis has done to him. Byron's portraits of the Lake poets and their productions are not entirely fair likenesses—though his earlier “poets are liars” is a statement of *caveat lector* that may relieve him of any need to strive for objectivity. Whether or not the likenesses are fair, they have lasted—and in a sense they have actually triumphed over more faithfully rendered portraits. Byron's gift of words is such that readers who know Southey, Wordsworth, and Coleridge to have been less than adequately portrayed in these lines, who even understand in just what ways the quoted passages fall short of doing justice to the maligned trio and their poetic productions, may still think of the Lakers in Byron's vivid phrases and images. A great poet's lies (or contorted truths) do put ideas in other heads, *Don Juan* again serving down the ages as the best practical demonstration of the theoretical truth it asserts.

The indignant eloquence directed against Wordsworth and company will ring truer still if the reader is favorably disposed toward its speaker. Thus the beautiful and often discussed “Ave Maria!” stanzas (*DJ* 3.102-9), which in some ways seem at odds with the bitterly contemptuous denunciation that precedes them, can be seen as a useful phase in the complex argument that constitutes *Don Juan*'s chief parabasis. Byron has just shown himself able to hit hard and aim well—now he seems to soften and strategically reveals his romantic and idealistic side, his best weapon against those “casuists” who “are pleased to say, / In nameless print—that I have no devotion” (*DJ* 3.104). Wit is not exactly banished from this charming interlude, which so movingly portrays the hour of prayer and love as Byron experienced it with Teresa Guiccioli in the Ravenna pines; but sentiment and apparently candid self-revelation take center stage. The reader, especially if familiar with details of Byronic biography, is made to sympathize with the narrator. Once that sympathy is achieved the artful speaker, as if embarrassed at his uncharacteristic lapse into honest emotion, takes refuge in facetiousness: “But I'm digressing,” he says,

```
Sure my invention must be down at zero,
          And I grown one of many "wooden spoons"
Of verse (the name with which we Cantabs please
To dub the last of honours in degrees).
```

(*DJ* 3.110)

If anything, this retreat heightens the compliment implied in the intimacy of the “Ave Maria!” interlude—and just as that earlier section flatters the reader who appreciates the biographical aptness of its details, so this passage builds on what is implied to be common ground. The reader, as if a favored fellow *alumnus cantabrigensis,* feels complicity with Byron when relied on to understand university slang and classical terms and concepts (passim, and the Aristotelian party line on poetic length), when privileged to hear that the one long canto has been “*too* epic” and will be cut in two, when flattered with the confidence that “They'll never find it out, unless I own / The fact, excepting an experienced few.” As the canto closes and the parabasis enters its last phase, true confessions curtailed at just the right moment and “old boy” consensus blended of antics and esoterics prove superbly effective at ensuring that Byron, his narrator, and the reader stand together as a community of the cultivated—amateur classicists against corrupt moderns, cosmopolites against yokels, a discerning “we” against an imperceptive “they.”

Thus when the introductory generalizations on intellectual pride and how experience chastens it have begun

canto 4 very effectively indeed (despite the fact that there is "Nothing so difficult as a beginning"), the narrator speaks from Byron's personal viewpoint—a vantage point made highly sympathetic to the reader in the closing stanzas of canto 3. The tone is serious without being heavy. Wit and pertinent allusion serve, as they so often do in *Don Juan,* to make us smile even as we recognize sober truth:

```
As boy, I thought myself a clever fellow,
          And wish'd that others held the same opinion;
They took it up when my days grew more mellow,
          And other minds acknowledged my dominion:
Now my sere fancy "falls into the yellow
          Leaf," and imagination droops her pinion,
And the sad truth which hovers o'er my desk
Turns what was once romantic to burlesque.
```

4

```
And if I laugh at any mortal thing,
          'Tis that I may not weep; and if I weep,
'Tis that our nature cannot always bring
          Itself to apathy.
```

(*DJ* 4.3-4)

These lines sing out "He is an Englishman" almost as clearly as if they were W. S. Gilbert's song to that effect. The barding—the professed attempt at the national stiff upper lip (failure at complete stoicism being permissible because the speaker is a poet, hence an Englishman of feeling)—the apt mythological reference to Thetis dipping Achilles in the Styx that follows the quoted lines—all are appropriate to the voice of the expatriate Cantab who closed canto 3. That cosmopolite now launches into metapoetic commentary, elegantly making his defense of *Don Juan,* like his attack on Wordsworth's art, an integral part of the poem. The following stanzas clearly indicate the responsive nature of *Don Juan*:

```
Some have accused me of a strange design
          Against the creed and morals of the land,
And trace it in this poem every line:
          I don't pretend that I quite understand
My own meaning when I would be very fine,
          But the fact is that I have nothing plann'd,
Unless it were to be a moment merry,
A novel word in my vocabulary.
```

6

```
To the kind reader of our sober clime
          This way of writing will appear exotic;
Pulci was sire of the half-serious rhyme,
          Who sang when chivalry was more Quixotic,
And revell'd in the fancies of the time,
          True knights, chaste dames, huge giants, kings despotic;
But all these, save the last, being obsolete,
I chose a modern subject as more meet.
```

7

```
How I have treated it, I do not know;
          Perhaps no better than they have treated me
Who have imputed such designs as show
          Not what they saw, but what they wish'd to see;
```

```
But if it gives them pleasure, be it so,
          This is a liberal age, and thoughts are free.
```

(*DJ* 4.5-7)

Byron's sensitivity to British criticism—and the previously published cantos 1 and 2 had provoked plenty of it—is evident in his pose of offhandedness. But the self-deprecation is also a strategy for retaining the sympathies of the implied reader. After suggesting that Wordsworth is pompous and abstruse, yet dogmatic and provincial, Byron is at pains to avoid the appearance of putting on side. He must convey the impression of modesty, lucidity, tolerance, intense and wide experience—traits that will aid him in his desire to please the cosmopolitan reader, broaden the insular one (that cultural imperialist whose habit of dealing with "exotic" modes and matters is to domesticate them, as the poem's rhyme here has done with the word *Quixotic*) and speak convincingly to both of timely matters—false knights (and baronets and lords), dissolute ladies, pygmies who fancy themselves gigantic, and of course "kings despotic." All Europe may provide examples for this "half-serious" poem, all continents and subsequent ages may ultimately furnish readers, but the immediate English audience is the one Byron can move in a manner he can calculate and toward ends he can envision. That "kind reader of our sober clime" must be made willing to accept the narrator's home truths.

Accordingly, *Don Juan*'s associative arabesques typically establish connections between English things, words, situations, and practices and corresponding matter drawn from the wide world beyond. Sometimes English tastes or values are normative, as in canto 3 and 4, where the ordeals of shipwreck and marooning illustrate Don Juan's (and all humanity's) basic need for food and drink. "Ceres and Bacchus" take all forms in these cantos: we see nearstarvation, cannibalism, restorative seaside breakfasts in the island cave, and finally the exquisite delights of a banquet. Byron subtly but persistently connects all this feast and famine with the reader's prosaic world of eating and drinking. His means is repeated mention of those stereotypical English favorites tea and beef.[16]

Similarly, when in canto 5 Don Juan finds himself surrounded by and bedecked in unfamiliar Oriental splendor, distinctively British words or comparisons keep the reader from being drugged by the opiate of mere exotic description. When Juan, disguised as a harem girl, trips on his petticoat, Byron uses the so-called tyranny of rhyme to justify his employing a Scots vernacular pronoun: "whilk" instead of "which"—a choice he repeats in unrhymed position at the start of the next stanza: "Whilk, which (or what you please)" (*DJ* 5.77-78). The palace's massive portals may be guarded by implike dwarf-mutes, but the doors have hinges "smooth as Rogers' rhymes" (*DJ* 5.89). Juan's uncritical admiration of the "strange saloon" that lies behind the doors brings up a critical issue—the Horatian matter of *nil admirari*—that Byron makes peculiarly English, and peculiarly his own, by pinning a particular British identity (that of his publisher) on his reader, casting the matter in terms of English literature, and transforming the translation:

```
"Not to admire is all the art I know
          (Plain truth, dear Murray, needs few flowers of speech)
To make men happy, or to keep them so;
          (So take it in the very words of Creech)."
Thus Horace wrote we all know long ago;
          And thus Pope quotes the precept to re-teach
From his translation; but had none admired,
Would Pope have sung, or Horace been inspired?
```

(*DJ* 5.101)

When Don Juan balks at kissing the sultana's foot, the narrator stresses that the specifics may be foreign but the general situation is not: "There's nothing in the world like *etiquette* / In kingly chambers or imperial halls, / As also at the race and county balls" (*DJ* 5.103). And when Juan spurns the sultana's advances (surely an alien adventure for most readers) Byron directly asks that her wrath be imagined in terms of an experience

more familiar in Regency society:

```
          Ye! who have kept your chastity when young,
While some more desperate dowager has been waging
          Love with you, and been in the dog-days stung
By your refusal, recollect her raging!
```

(*DJ* 5.130)

The convergence of cultures achieved by intellectual and verbal arabesques of this sort does not merely alert Byron's fellow Britons to the home truths pointed out by Juan's international escapades—it also enriches passages concerned with primarily British matters. A five-stanza digression on bluestockings, where an elaborately false tone of regret masks Byron's real disappointment that female readers failed to appreciate "Donny Johnny" (*DJ* 4.108-12), nicely illustrates this point.[17] Here, "Oh!" "Ah!" and other exclamations alternate with rhetorical questions in a mock-mournful address to the no-longer "benign ceruleans of the second sex" (*DJ* 4.108). Byron is up to his old tricks of combining pseudobiographical recollection ("What, can I prove 'a lion' then no more?" "I know one woman of that purple school, / The loveliest, chastest, best, but—quite a fool"), literary quotation, misquotation, and allusion (bringing in Shakespeare, Wordsworth, and Southey), and witty reference to scientific developments (the cyanometer, a contrivance seemingly well-named for measuring the "*intensity of blue*" in each learned lady). But the passage's most brilliant effect involves superimposing a mythic past on the literary coteries Byron remembered from his Years of Fame following the publication of *Childe Harold*:

```
What, must I go to the oblivious cooks?
          Those Cornish plunderers of Parnassian wrecks?
Ah! must I then the only minstrel be,
Proscribed from tasting your Castalian tea!
```

(*DJ* 4.108)

Along with lining portmanteaus, wrapping pastries was a fate for which literary works gone aground were destined in Byron's day—so the cooks are not only themselves "oblivious" to the merits of *Don Juan,* they also act to promote its oblivion in the wider world. There is considerable delight in seeing Byron's skill at fusing Parnassus, the inland mountain of Apollo and the Muses, with the rocky coast of Cornwall, so deadly to ships, then blending the Cornish pillagers of shipwrecks with the metropolitan purveyors of Cornish pasties and other baked goods. The hybrid phrase "Castalian tea" adds further refinements. The idea of brewing tea for salon frequenters from the waters of the Parnassian spring Castalia suggests, as does "Cornish plunderers of Parnassian wrecks," a distinctively English debasement of something sacred—a sacrilege both literally and symbolically appropriate to the circumstances. But because the name *Castalia* commemorates a nymph who flung herself into the spring as she fled from the embraces of Apollo, this phrase has the further advantage of pertaining to the human relationship here being deplored, the shrinking of fastidious literary nymphs from the robust delights Byron/Apollo has offered them in *Don Juan.* Lest this last significance escape a reader whose grasp of Greek geography is inadequate to the occasion, Byron offers a second chance at the insight in his digression's final line: "Oh, Lady Daphne! let me measure you!" (*DJ* 4.112). Here, the coldly virtuous nymph is the one who avoided Apollo's importunities by becoming a bay tree, with foliage subsequently sacred to the god and coveted by his followers the poets. Like brewing tea from Castalian water, Byron's metamorphosing Daphne into an English nobleman's daughter diminishes what was purely mythic. At the same time, such linkage can be seen as exalting what was merely mundane. The Great World where Byron is no longer the darling of Lady Daphne and her kind is nothing so great when compared with the realm of Apollo, but the fact that the two spheres can be compared increases Regency England's appeal. Again, though, it is the cosmopolitan, the habitué of both worlds, who must make the connection.

In each of the cases so far examined, introducing English matters to *Don Juan* has involved a sort of parabasis, and thus has carried us, however momentarily, out of the fictive world in which the narrative has been unfolding. But Byron had at his disposal two "dramatic" means of bringing such matters in, of taking up English phenomena without suspending the tale. One way, transporting Don Juan to England, will be the subject of the next chapter. The other way, bringing an English person into *Don Juan,* is what Byron chose to do at the start of canto 5, as Juan finds himself part of the slave market's international merchandise. Also there for sale is John Johnson, whose likeness to Southey's "Newbury Renegado" and whose role in persuading Don Juan to enact the role of Juanna have already been mentioned. This estimable fellow becomes Don Juan's, if not *Don Juan*'s, introduction to the English character and the values and behavior that comprise it.

The extraordinarily ordinary English name John Johnson suggests, among other things, that its possessor will be a representative figure. Johnson's appearance is correspondingly that of a good English type:

```
          A man of thirty, rather stout and hale,
With resolution in his dark gray eye,
Next Juan stood, till some might choose to buy.
```

11

```
He had an English look; that is, was square
          In make, of a complexion white and ruddy,
Good teeth, with curling rather dark brown hair,
          And, it might be from thought, or toil, or study,
An open brow a little mark'd with care.
```

(*DJ* 5.10-11)

Cecil Y. Lang convincingly argues that this description affectionately portrays Byron's boxing master from bygone days, that John Johnson is based on his near-namesake "Gentleman" John Jackson.[18] The details of Johnson's appearance also tally in a general way with Byron's own looks when his health was sound (though the matter of "good teeth" may have been wishful thinking—his letters from Italy remind English friends to send "Waite's red tooth powder" with a persistence that suggests some anxiety). Johnson's cool attitude toward his former wives, at which we looked in the second essay, is, like the dental superiority, a quality Byron would be glad to have—or to have attributed to him. The premature pose of world-weariness and the ability to view his own plight with detachment and humor are Byronic features we by this point in the poem have learned to recognize as equally characteristic of the narrator. In fact Johnson turns out to be, like Byron and the narrator, an exemplary specimen of the contemporary English philosopher as delineated in chapter 6 of *England and the English,* no systematic idealist but a practical student of conduct in a material world.[19] The congruence between Johnson's perspective and the narrator's becomes evident early in canto 5, where Johnson, whose cynicism does not prevent him from making the best of circumstances, tries to comfort Juan with these words of wisdom:

```
"But after all, what is our present state?
          'Tis bad, and may be better—all men's lot:
Most men are slaves, none more so than the great,
          To their own whims and passions, and what not."
```

(*DJ* 5.25)

Two stanzas later the narrator is generalizing about the pleasure of "purchasing our fellow creatures" in much the same way:

```
And all are to be sold, if you consider
```

```
          Their passions, and are dext'rous; some by features
Are bought up, others by a warlike leader,
          Some by a place—as tend their years or natures;
The most by ready cash—but all have prices,
From crowns to kicks, according to their vices.
```

(*DJ* 5.27)

As these similar observations suggest, the worldly English empiricist Johnson embodies a certain side of the Byronic narrator, though that narrator is of course a much more complex and intriguing entity. By dint of his presence in the fictive world of the poem, Johnson is able to impart some of his and the narrator's shared practical wisdom to Don Juan. And Juan sorely needs it, for, paradoxically, his life as choice-making creature has begun with his enslavement. His previous “choices” have been variously determined—by instinct and sentiment (affairs with Julia and Haidée), internalized code (courageous endurance of shipwreck, rash defiance of Lambro), biological necessity (reliance on Haidée's nurturing, resistance to the “bella donna” on the slave ship), or mixtures of these impulses. Now, in Constantinople, Juan is stripped of his former social identity yet put into social situations calling for more difficult decisions than his previous experience has offered. As Bunyan supplied Faithful and Hopeful to help Pilgrim through the tight spots of his Progress, so Byron provides Don Juan with a comrade whose attributes, if assimilated, will help him deal with the new challenges of increasingly adult experience.

John Johnson proves himself indispensable to Juan on three occasions, in situations that ascend in complexity. As Baba conducts the purchased Europeans through the imperial precincts, young man's bravado spurs Juan to suggest that he and Johnson “knock that old black fellow on the head” and make their escape. Here (*DJ* 5.44), Johnson's simple reminder of realities suffices to correct Juan's course. Having bashed the eunuch, how would they get out? And how would getting out improve their situation? And anyway, why make any attempts before getting the badly needed sustenance of a meal?

When the two enslaved Westerners face further threats to their identities in the Turkish costumes Baba chooses for them and the circumcision he recommends (*DJ* 5.67-69), Johnson's prudence instructs Juan through example. The matter of circumcision raised by Baba evokes Johnson's cagiest courtesy and provokes an intemperate explosion from Juan. The stanzas presenting their responses offers telling contrast of temperaments. Johnson, significantly, manages to have the first and the last word:

```
For his own share—he saw but small objection
          To so respectable an ancient rite;
And, after swallowing down a slight refection,
          For which he own'd a present appetite,
He doubted not a few hours of reflection
          Would reconcile him to the business quite.
“Will it?” said Juan, sharply; “Strike me dead,
But they as soon shall circumcise my head!
```

72

```
“Cut off a thousand heads, before———”—“Now, pray,”
          Replied the other, “do not interrupt:
You put me out in what I had to say.
          Sir!—as I said, as soon as I have supt,
I shall perpend if your proposal may
          Be such as I can properly accept;
Provided always your great goodness still
Remits the matter to our own free-will.”
```

(*DJ* 5.71-72)

Johnson's diplomatic evasiveness demonstrates to Juan, always impetuous and often naive but not stupid, that a manly man need not always face coercion with direct resistance. It is Johnson's example rather than Baba's threats, I think, that leads Juan to acquiesce in his temporary transformation to Juanna. With “some slight oaths” here, some sighs there, tugs, trips, and other awkwardnesses, Juan deliberately shows that he is neither accustomed to nor pleased by putting on female apparel. But by the time the disguise is complete, he has entered into the game with the good grace that is always wise when opposition is fruitless. Johnson, rightly reading Juan's change of mood, parts from him with mixed advice and badinage; and Juan has become enough like his practical mentor to return the volley in his new and temporary character:

“We needs must follow [says Johnson] when Fate puts from shore.
          Keep your good name; though Eve herself once fell.”
“Nay,” quoth the maid, “the Sultan's self shan't carry me,
Unless his highness promises to marry me.”

(*DJ* 5.84)

In the preceding situations, Johnson's values clearly were suited to effecting a satisfactory outcome. But the Englishman's material philosophy will not suffice to handle everything Fate presents, as is evident in canto 8 when, on the battlefield of Ismail, Juan rescues Leila, a beautiful Turkish child. Though both Juan and Johnson are gentlemen, as Johnson immediately recognized in the slave market (*DJ* 5.13), and both are soldiers of fortune for the present time, they look at the problem posed by the act of rescue from different places on the human continuum. Here, as before, Don Juan shows himself hobbled by lofty ideals—but this time Johnson's pragmatism will not, unalloyed, answer the needs of the moment.

Fighting against his own comrades, the Cossacques, to save a child of the enemy is chivalrous instinct on Juan's part. When he has foiled the child's assailants, Juan gazes into her eyes and sees her with his heart, which responds with “pain, pleasure, hope, fear, mixed / With joy to save, and dread of some mischance / Unto his protégée” (*DJ* 8.96). What he sees and how he feels combine to give Juan, at this highly inconvenient moment, one of his most soberly responsible impulses in the whole poem. He vows to suffer anything for Leila's safety: “‘At least I will endure / Whate'er is to be borne—but not resign / This child, who is parentless and therefore mine’” (*DJ* 8.100). “Borne” is interestingly double here—if read as “born” it suggests acceptance not merely of the humane responsibilities implicit in “protégeé” but of parenthood's added burdens. And like a loving parent, Juan accepts more responsibility for her than any mortal can actually take for another: “‘I saved her—must not leave / Her life to chance’” (*DJ* 8.99). Though he has only just encountered the girl and in spite of the fact that he is in the midst of slaughtering her countrymen, he vows to cherish her existence above his own: “‘I'll not quit her till she seems secure / Of present life a good deal more than we’” (*DJ* 8.100). Such an attachment, instantly formed, unrealistic in its aim, and inconsistent with Juan's present role and situation, is clearly emotional rather than reasonable.

Avowing his new responsibilities, Juan calls on Johnson to “‘Look / Upon this child’” (*DJ* 8.99). The older man sees Leila with his eyes, not his heart, and accordingly perceives her youth and beauty, not the attendant associations that have won Juan's allegiance. The child's physical attributes alone are not enough to distract Johnson from his present pursuit of victory and the booty that goes with it:

…—“Juan, we've no time to lose;
          The child's a pretty child—a very pretty—
I never saw such eyes—but hark! now choose
          Between your fame and feelings, pride and pity”

(*DJ* 8.101)

In the last line quoted, the narrator characterizes the alternatives presented to Johnson's lucid Augustan mind in witty, alliterative pairings of the sort now most famous from Jane Austen titles: “fame and feelings,” “pride and pity.” Choosing between such alternatives will not be not a simple matter for Johnson, who has by no means enlisted in the ranks of those he earlier called “the world's stoics—men without a heart,” the purely material creatures who have learned that “To feel for none is the true social art” (*DJ* 5.25). As an empiricist, Johnson slights the importance of neither fame nor feelings, neither pride nor pity—but the way he balances the conflicting claims clearly shows which have primacy: “‘I should be loth to march without you, but, / By God! we'll be too late for the first cut’” (*DJ* 8.101).

The shared act of looking at Leila and the different reactions to that look epitomize Juan's and Johnson's contrasting perspectives on the world and reveal the blind spots hampering each viewpoint. Juan has strong, proper feelings but is incapable of translating them into reasonable action; Johnson shows willingness to make the expedient choice without heeding higher claims. The solution either man would reach alone is unpalatable. Juan would perversely give up fame, fortune, and perhaps his life to save a child whose safety would in no way be guaranteed by his sacrifice. Johnson, having eschewed ordinary morality in the special arena of battle, would succumb to ordinary cupidity—a debasing decision, for although in the brutal panorama of war one life may mean little, one man's share of the booty means infinitely less. But when Johnson's rational and Juan's emotional approaches combine rather than oppose one another, a solution satisfactory on emotional, moral, and pragmatic grounds becomes possible. Emotion serves as catalyst to this solution, but reason is chief agent. Faced with an “immovable” Juan, Johnson, “who really loved him in his way” (*DJ* 8.102), comes up with a practical plan of action that will allow him to have his own way while respecting Juan's feelings. The Englishman

```
Picked out amongst his followers with some skill
          Such as he thought the least given up to prey;
And swearing if the infant came to ill
          That they should be all shot on the next day;
But, if she were delivered safe and sound,
They should at least have fifty roubles round.
```

(*DJ* 8.102)

Johnson's way of love is certainly different from Juan's—it is reasonable love, a partially unemotional emotion, yet another of the poem's many demonstrations that strength can reside in mixture or impurity. Johnson's skill in reading his followers and in recognizing that Juan cannot be talked out of his attachment to the Turkish child comes from gauging heads *and* hearts, then selecting the tools (here, threats and bribes mixed with assurance of justice) best suited to move them to his ends. Ironically, Johnson's blend of warm regard for Juan, sangfroid, and cold cash makes for the success of Juan's noble gesture.

In the resolution of this dilemma we see that a truly resourceful person would combine, as Johnson comes to do, the natures (which is also to say the moral nationalities) of Don Juan and John Johnson—and the names suggest as much. Juan is literally the Spanish John—hot, emotional, acting on instinct. Johnson is the English Juan—cool, rational, acting on intention. Each sort needs some attributes of the other for physical and spiritual survival in a world larger than either one's native country. Each, in effect, needs to be a cosmopolite. Just as Juan without Johnson's reason to guide him and Johnson without Juan's feelings to consider can be seen as at or near the ends of human nature's continuum, so the world in which Don Juan is traveling seems to have gradations of climate enclosed by extremes. Juan's origin, Spain, is hot and emotional as he is. Johnson's origin (and Juan's final destination in the poem as we have it), England, is the proper sphere of calculation and money, cold in climate and temperament, as the narrator is fond of stressing. Traveling between these extremes, Juan increasingly comes to need Johnson's particular strengths—for the passage from Spain to Greece, Turkey, Russia, and England (and like it the journey from boyhood's end at sixteen to young manhood at twenty-one) is progressively chilly in moral terms, ever less the realm of the heart and more the

kingdom of the head.

Though Juan can take on some of John Johnson's practical wisdom, that material philosophy for which the English mind of Byron's day showed itself well adapted, he remains essentially different from his mentor. The difference is partly a matter of nationality, partly a function of age. But most crucially it is, like the difference between the "good" poets and the "bad" ones discussed earlier, a consequence of two distinct varieties of mobility, contrasting types offering one representation of what, for Lilian Furst, is "a central axis of the irony" in *Don Juan*—"the tension between spontaneity and self-consciousness."[20] Like Southey's "Newbury Renegado," Johnson, whether in the palace or on the field of battle, is able to see possibilities and make choices, his keen eye always looking for the path of least resistance, his intellect unprejudiced by a strong moral or emotional stance. Juan's way is not so much to choose as to react to his environment, to take on the color of his surroundings without assessing the implications of his position. As we have seen, he can be convinced to change his course when such a change does not conflict with his feelings, but (with the notable exception of his stint of female impersonation) he does not seem able to come independently to that choice. Once convinced to take any course of action, Juan becomes the new character he plays, his mind undistracted by alternatives. At Ismail, for example, once Johnson has devised the acceptable scheme for saving Leila, Juan will "march on through thunder" (*DJ* 8.103) and give over his energies to fighting with the same intensity that only moments earlier animated his newly embraced paternal role. His manner of fighting, however, indicates that Johnson's practical approach has not yet become part of his character. Like his Cossacque comrades, Juan is moved by impulse rather than strategy to spare a "brave Tartar Khan" and his five brave sons (*DJ* 8.104-6), then to assail these admirable enemies with renewed ferocity when the hopelessly outnumbered band refuses mercy (*DJ* 8.107-19).

Thus even when they partake of one another's natural and national influences, Johnson and Juan do not become identical cosmopolites. For good and for ill, Johnson is a finished being—self-propelled, self-directed, consciously manipulative. Within limits, Juan is an evolving and maturing personality. As the poem goes on, we shall see that he becomes more calculating but never down-right Johnsonian, though as he moves toward the country-house heart of England, ever farther from his native climate and into an increasingly alien one, the roles he lives call more and more for cool, rational, worldly sense. As *Don Juan*'s last cantos unfold, Johnson is no longer physically with him, but Juan survives and prospers because he has subsumed something of the older man and the culture he represents. *Don Juan*'s England as we shortly shall see it is very much Johnson's country. Only a Juan who is also part Johnson—a Schlegelian "cultivated man" who like the composing poet and his projected narrator is able to see, feel, and think—can hope to make his way in such a world.

Notes

1. Peter Manning, "*Don Juan* and Byron's Imperceptiveness to the English Word," *Studies in Romanticism* 18, no. 2 (Summer 1979): 232.
2. Gilbert Norwood, *Greek Comedy* (London: Methuen, 1931), 11-12. For more on parabasis, see ibid., 59, 239; *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics,* ed. Alex Preminger (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), 597-98; Anne Mellor, *English Romantic Irony* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984), 17-18. G. M. Sifakis's monograph *Parabasis and Animal Choruses* (London: Athlone Press, 1971) deals with parabasis on pp. 7-70.
3. Mellor, *English Romantic Irony,* 17; Hans Eichner, *Friedrich Schlegel* (New York: Twayne, 1970), 62.
4. I have surveyed some two dozen readers on this matter.
5. See McGann's Notes to *Don Juan,* 692. Visiting Rome in 1817, Byron had found the perfect image of Lady Adelaide: "The Apollo Belvidere is the image of Lady Adelaide Forbes—I think I never saw such a likeness" (*LJ* 5:227). According to chronology, of course, the real Regency beauty would have to be the "image" of the classical sculpture.

6. *Claptrap,* a word whose earliest citation in the *OED* dates from 1727, refers to a device or expression employed to gain applause, as Byron saw Coleridge's German metaphysics, Wordsworth's Note to "The Thorn," *The Excursion*'s "new system to perplex the sages," and the Lakers' mutual admiration attempting to do. Both the thing and the word *claptrap* come from spectacular theater—in fact, the *OED*'s second cited usage of the word is in Dibdin's *Musical Tour* (lxiii. 461) (see *The Oxford English Dictionary,* 2d ed, prepared by J. A. Simpson and E. S. C. Weiner [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989]).
7. For a good example of Byron's delight in cultural contrast see *LJ* 5:129-32, Byron's letter of 17 November 1816, to Moore.
8. The idea of intentional, unresolvable doubleness of voice is explored in "Heteroglossia in the Novel," pages 301-31 of Bakhtin's long essay "Discourse in the Novel," which appears in M. M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination,* ed. Michael Holquist and trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 259-422. Bakhtin sees such doubleness as an essential feature of prose (and especially the novel) rather than poetry—and its presence in *Don Juan* seems yet another indication that this "poem" embodies at all levels the cosmopolitan principle of mixed values.
9. Malcolm Kelsall, *Byron's Politics* (Brighton, Sussex: Harvester Press, 1987), 156-58.
10. Jerome McGann too sees Byron along with Southey in the "sad trimmer" of "The isles of Greece!": see "Byron, Mobility, and the Poetics of Historical Ventriloquism," *Romanticism Past and Present* 9, no. 1 (1985): 74-76.
11. Kelsall, *Byron's Politics,* 157.
12. McGann's impressive and concise gloss on these allusions is to be found in *Don Juan,* 701-3.
13. See McGann, Notes to *Don Juan,* 694.
14. John Cam Hobhouse, *Byron's Bulldog: The Letters of John Cam Hobhouse to Lord Byron,* ed. Peter W. Graham (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1984), 259.
15. See McGann, Notes to *Don Juan,* 702, and *LJ* 4:324-25.
16. Eight of *Don Juan*'s eleven references to beef, that English indispensable, occur in the shipwreck canto: see *DJ* 2.13, 47, 67, 153, 154, 155, 156 (twice). Tea is mentioned once in this canto (stanza 145) and at two key points in canto 4. In stanza 52, "the Chinese nymph of tears, green tea" seems to be controlling Don Juan's destiny by making the narrator, who is drinking that beverage, "grow pathetic." Stanza 108 alludes to "Castalian tea," a matter discussed in the body of this essay.
17. See, for instance, *LJ* 6:237 (29 October 1819, to Hoppner) and 7:202 (12 October 1820, to Murray).
18. Cecil Y. Lang, "Narcissus Jilted: Byron, *Don Juan,* and the Biographical Imperative," in *Historical Studies and Literary Criticism,* ed. Jerome J. McGann (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 154.
19. Edward G. E. L. Bulwer-Lytton, *England and the English,* ed. Standish Meacham (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 314-21.
20. Lilian R. Furst, *Fictions of Romantic Irony in European Narrative,* 1760-1857 (London: Macmillan, 1980), 109.

Abbreviations

The following abbreviations appear in parenthetical references in the text:

CPW	Lord Byron, *Complete Poetical Works,* ed. Jerome J. McGann
DJ	Lord Byron, *Don Juan,* ed. Jerome J. McGann
G	Lady Caroline Lamb, *Glenarvon,* fascimile of the first edition, intro. James L. Ruff
LE	Robert Southey, *Letters from England,* ed. Jack Simmons
LJ	Lord Byron, *Byron's Letters and Journals,* ed. Leslie A. Marchand
NC	Lady Caroline Lamb, *A New Canto*

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Criticism: David Punter (essay date 1993)

SOURCE: Punter, David. "*Don Juan,* or, the Deferral of Decapitation: Some Psychological Approaches." In *Don Juan,* edited by Nigel Wood, pp. 122-53. Buckingham, Eng.: Open University Press, 1993.

[*In the following essay, Punter examines* Don Juan *through the lens of psychoanalysis, noting particularly the theories of Sigmund Freud, Carl Jung and Otto Rank.*]

I

I write this essay as a contribution to the psychoanalytic criticism of literature, but I have to begin by saying that such criticism is in an appalling muddle. The main source of this muddle, it seems to me, stems from a continuing inability to take on board, and to attempt to find an articulation for, the analytic interrogation of the overvaluation of intellect.[1] In this respect, the critical literature recapitulates precisely the human difficulties summarizable under the head of ego-defence. The defence originates in a generating sentence of this kind: 'If I, as a critic, cannot perform my allotted function from the point of view of an *intellectual* apparatus, then where shall I begin?' For what psychoanalysis comes to assert—the revolutionary base of psychoanalysis—is the primacy of the Other, that is to say, that which begs to differ from the unitary ego of classical discourse, where the subject is defined by representing to itself what it is not. 'What it is not'—the Other—is, however, *constructed* by the desire for conscious self-definition: far from being non-existent, it significantly forms that of which the subject is not conscious. Predictably, however, the after-history of psychoanalysis has become immersed in a series of attempts at negative reincorporation. In other words, it has been seen, and is still seen, as important to find a harboured role for the Other, a way of constructing along the difficult coastline of language a typhoon shelter in which the Other may prove to abut on to language, may seek safety, while providing the continuing sailorly evidence of the wild world outside.[2]

I call this incorporation negative for obvious etymological reasons: the metaphor implies that the shore is bodily, whereas the slapping sea is disembodied. But, if we recapitulate the metaphor for a moment and think about the problem of erosion, which is the shape of the problematic relationship between the unconscious and the self, we shall see that the reverse is true and the bodilessness belongs to the misty shore, to the world diagrammatized by maps, while the final inexplorability of the sea, the resistless encroachment of that which is unknowable and unknown, deserves better the bodily end of the metaphor. As Lewis Carroll put it, the map we really want when hunting the Snark is one free of all demarcations whatsoever,[3] because only such a map opens us to the possibility that the goal of our quest may be in a different dimension from maps altogether, somewhere which cannot be described or measured by the fictions of the intellect, knowable only by echo-soundings.

I develop this metaphor partly because it will inform some of my comments on Byron's *Don Juan,* which has some of the key attributes of the pathless sea, the ocean of undifferentiation, which is the source, end and misgiving of all our desires; partly because I want to underscore the gulf between what I take to be the real potentialities of psychoanalytic criticism and the mechanical production and reproduction which has taken over the surface terrain of the attempt to deal critically with the unconscious. Along the long and bitter arc of the analytic movement, we may compare the work of Jacques Lacan with the work of, say, Ella Sharpe in order to discern the extent of reincorporation by the intellect,[4] which has again passed into the webs of the narcissistic ego as it pursues its mystical and increasingly arduous though embarrassing attempt to regarner for its current avatar something of the supremacy it remembers from the long years of unchallenge, the years of the effortless domination of reason.[5]

This, then, is a vast landscape; let me concentrate on one small area, which is the problem of psychobiography. I wish to distinguish this term from case history, in several obvious ways. Case history

originates in and refers to a communicative process, with all the gaps, dips and fissures which characterize the immanent commerce of psyches and bodies. Analysis, in this sense, points to the solving of a ‘problem’, to the reinsertion of the self into a web of practices. At its best, and certainly by intent, it retains touch with the always hovering possibility of cure, of restoration and renovation; and thus, paradoxically, of revolution in the best and most thorough sense in which, in the present state of things, the individual can know it—a sense which simultaneously relieves him or her of the beleaguered need to defend the notional territoriality of the individual, which is equally, in its interfaces with the Otherness of knowledge, the source of the symptoms in the first place. In its entry into text, it is instantly struck, as we are when we read, by the final incommunicability towards which it heads, whether this is shaped by actual death or by some other more phantasmal form of termination, in the sense that we might only ever be able to verify our ‘success’ in the terms in which we describe the conscious.

Psychobiography, on the other hand,[6] is a process of domination in muteness, a grave-robbery, a version of the burial processes which Otto Rank, in *The Don Juan Legend* (1924), later tried to sort under the various headings of stone (and here I look forward to the Stone Guest of the Juan legends): the stone of the coffin as finality; stonethrowing as an attempt to subdue the spirit by proxy; stone as that which, if it revives and breathes, will certify the indomitable will we fear, whether we choose to interpret this in human or divine guise. Stone is the seal on the tomb and eschews resurrection; and its relationship with text is instantly cosy, because this is also what text wants: the fixity of stone, the hieroglyph whose indecipherability, whether at the tombhead or not, will remain as a permanent reminder of bafflement and thus as a guarantee of the élite nature of interpretation.[7]

Thus psychobiography is the highest, most intellectual achievement of the analytic intellect; and it is therefore simultaneously the furthest from the body, for which it substitutes the corpse. It explains in order to exorcise. It is a mark of the non-vital, and signifies the yearning which marks so frequently our own obsequies: the yearning to be allowed to say, ‘Thank God, he or she is gone; there is no competition, at least from that quarter, any more.’ This question of psychobiography, I believe, hovers over psychoanalytical criticism: we succumb, or in fleeing we betray the memory not only of the author but also of the text.

In trying to steer a course between the rebarbative workings of the Lacanian machine on the one hand and the siren-song of reconstructive biography on the other, between the stone at the gate of the tomb and the elation of resurrection, I would like to bring forward an array of analytic sources, some of which have a built-in complexity of connection to the legend of Don Juan; thus I shall try to present my theoretic approach in and through various approaches to Don Juan himself. Freud, where it begins, makes only one substantive comment on the ur-myth, although it is of remarkable and typically controversial richness:

> Every collector is a substitute for a Don Juan Tenorio, and so too is the mountaineer, the sportsman, and such people. These are erotic equivalents. Women know them too. Gynaecological treatment falls into this category. There are two kinds of women patients: one kind who are as loyal to their doctor as to their husband, and the other kind who change their doctors as often as their lovers.

(Freud 1953-74, I: 209-10)[8]

Well, we are as usual tempted to say, it may have been true of turn-of-the-century Vienna, but what are we to do now with these extraordinary equivalences? The assertion here is that the Don Juan principle is originatory, not substitutive in itself—that is, not an equivalent for other manifestations of a similar tendency—that stamp collectors are manifesting a hidden erotic life; that Don Juanism is more than a coding for a strange commodity-fetishistic yearning for commensurable multiplicity, stamps safely stuck down in an album.

We could find an alternative ‘origin’ for this in Molière's *Don Juan* (1962: 223), where he speaks of ‘religion's arithmetic’ which takes us to the Marquis de Sade and also to the problematic clinical diagnosis of infant ritualism, the neurotic urge towards repetition of speech and movement which operates under an introjected edict which we may summarize, precisely in terms of the legend, as ‘the Commandant’, to be obeyed and vanquished in the endless performance of the same sequence of acts, responsible to an essential symbolic draining of meaning, much here as Freud suspects a draining of meaning from the sexual organs.[9] In this realm, obedience can never be internalized; it must always be exacted. It is suggested in Paul Goodman's curious version of *Don Juan* that:

> Though the rival of the Commandant so far as the plot goes, Don Juan is anything but his opposite number. He is no hero of instinct; on the contrary, as ‘a systematic explorer and gratifier of the aspects of the libido’, Don Juan is the enemy of impulse and the forestaller of desire, another avatar of the embattled Ego.[10]

Desire is no sooner excited than satisfied.

In listing these encounters with Don Juan, I am meaning also to suggest an analytic history and a path into Freudian mechanisms; and in this context it is important that Goodman moves on from Freud to Alfred Adler and ‘such an inspired speculator as Otto Rank’ (Goodman 1979: 17), to both of whom we shall return. J. W. Smeed provides us with the nearest thing we have so far to a history of the Don Juan legend itself, and makes some basic points very clearly:

> Don Juan's indiscriminate pursuit of women is not proof of virility, but of emotional and sexual immaturity, even of a *lack* of virility. He has a rudimentary and adolescent sexual instinct which can find its puny satisfaction with any woman.

(Smeed 1990: 117)[11]

Smeed's further comments are interesting, especially when he suggests the element of neurotic burn-out in the narrative shaping of the story (1990: 49-50)[12]; but it was, of course, Rank who made Don Juan peculiarly his own.

The Rank text is the originating one for this essay, and here I wish only to make one important point about it: namely, that the shaping of Rank's dealings with Don Juan was also the shaping of his dealing with psychoanalytic ideas in general, and the doom which Juan encounters takes its place alongside Rank's own doom of being thrust from his ‘father’, exiled from the Vienna Circle, and all for precisely the reason which imbues his treatment of the Juan legend—namely, that he found himself unable to accept the patriarchal views of Freud and preferred to believe that the apparently masculine figure of the avenging Commandant really was a displacement, and that, far from penis envy, the displaced heart of the myth was truly the inadmissible power of the mother (Rank 1975: 95).[13] Thus Rank on Juan; thus also Rank's eventual rejection of analysis altogether, and his ‘alternative fathering’ of the non-analytic free-flow therapies which still sometimes own him as their origin.

I shall, then, try to mobilize some of these ideas of Rank's, as also some of Jung's and of the neo-Jungians. The Freudian contribution I have been trying to summarize moves towards the side of mechanism, of scientism: Jung inflects his dealings with Don Juan in a different way, and I should re-emphasize here that I mean these comments on Freud and Jung as much as comments on their systems overall as on Don Juan, although this latter provides focus and catalyst. For Jung, Juan represents not the ‘originating mechanism’ of Freud but a lost past represented in the ‘noble hidalgo’; not a male fetishism but, more as in Rank, an ambivalent evasion of the mother, who is ‘unconsciously’ sought ‘in every woman he meets’, coded in the myth of Cybele and Attis.[14] The principle of occult equivalence emerges clearly:

> what in its negative aspect is Don Juanism can appear positively as bold and resolute manliness; ambitious striving after the highest goals; opposition to all stupidity, narrow-mindedness, injustice, and laziness; willingness to make sacrifices for what is regarded as right, sometimes bordering on heroism; perseverance, inflexibility and toughness of will; a curiosity that does not shrink even from the riddles of the universe; and finally, a revolutionary spirit which strives to put a new face upon the world.

(Jung 1957-79, IX: 1, 87)

All are the travails of the mother-complex; Jung here also traces in essence the history of the Don Juan legend itself, from the puritan disapproval of Tirso da Molina to the Faustian extravagances of E. T. A. Hoffmann.[15]

What remains essential here, though, is the relationship, in Jungian thought but more particularly in the neo-Jungian writings of James Hillman, between description and myth, for the shape of the analytic question as addressed by Hillman is not 'To what mechanism are we here submitting?' but 'What myth are we here incarnating?'[16] Eros, Hera, Hephaestos: all these will become characters in the shadows of the drama, the figures moving behind the veil. There is a further question here about the consciousness of these interpretations, of this masque: to see oneself as submitting to the commands of the unconscious is to enact the depressive, the form of tragedy, but to revel in the power of incarnation is to move into the manic, the form of comedy; and between these two poles too the Don Juan legend moves, and this provides us with further questions to address to Byron's version, and to the Byronic in general.

I have talked about Freud through the disaffiliation of Rank, and mentioned Jung through the revisionism of Hillman; and disaffiliation and revisionism can also be seen as the substance of Byron's *Don Juan*—disaffiliation as exile and revisionism in the sense of a radical rewriting of myth, convention, propriety, history. My third source is Melanie Klein, and, as a starting-point, a comment by George Ridenour:

> it is through art, made possible by the crime that made it necessary, that the inadequacies of a fallen state are overcome. Man transcends mutability … in a work of art that serves as expiation for a sin whose consequences alone make such expiation possible.

(Ridenour 1961: 87-8)

We have only to substitute here for a theological bias a description of the primal guilt brought about by fantasized damage caused to the loved and feared parents to have a Kleinian theory of reparation;[17] what we may be left with, however, is a doubt about the possibility of healing the wound. Hephaestos seems to me to be the god, in Hillman's terms, under whose sway Byron and *Don Juan* move: the wounded, limping god who presides over an alternative underworld, representing in class terms an artisanate, useful but feared, neutral where Hades is a negation, yet imbued as a myth with a sense of complicated debt and the guilt of the gods towards their exiled brother; the craftsman god manifested also in Blake's Los (see especially *The Book of Los,* in Blake 1977: 271), whose name implies also the loss of Olympus which Hephaestos tries in his quiet continuous way to re-enact through the labour of the forge.[18] What would the world be like if the cause of Hephaestos's labour, the expitation and power of the wound, were to be removed?

What Klein brings to psychoanalysis relates to this, I think, as a different awareness of the dangerous content of play, the way in which movement among incarnated images, whether in the child's bedroom or in the artist's studio, is always a dealing with death, an attempted propitiation which renders the toy soldier, the doll, a figure of potential horror to match the shrunken head, the dead crow on the field-fence. The reparation is always hovering, always a task to be undertaken afresh, to see whether some perfected pattern, some miraculously-drilled army of words or colours can be found which will incarnate individuality at the same time as it obliterates it, and will thus enact our doubled fascination with infant guilt. To express is to define

and so exorcise the Other, and, even when framed, its material form is never exactly what we hope it will be; we thus face here the dangerous ambivalence of 'adequate' symbolic control of guilty fantasy.

Thus, from Freudian mechanism and Jungian myth, Klein takes us through to maturation, to an organic vision of psyche not as the many-layered city but as a wounding, healing, ripening, decaying *body*; and thus returns us to the biology of selfhood, the housing of the intellect in a world of passion which presses and shapes it on every side.[19] And this term 'passion' is, I think, crucial: the rage, the joy and the suffering which are crystallized in the most sacred of our myths are also the everyday substance out of which we are woven, and we can see, in perhaps an expressionist way, every text bodying forth a passion, although of course in the process of that bodying there is always to be a traversing, a distorting, a set of boundaries to be evaded, a pilgrim's progress where monsters lurk and temptations beckon on every side.

Hephaestos, the club-foot, the 'wound that had been opened' which 'could not in fact be healed'[20] bring us direct to the peculiar position of the figure of Byron himself alongside the analysts. According to Adler, the personality centres, coagulates, around the area of biological weakness, as a protection against leakage from within and contamination from without.[21] This seems all too relevant to Byron, and we are in a way further sanctioned in these sorts of interpretation by what J. J. McGann refers to as Byron's 'determined use of literature as self-creative autobiography' (McGann 1976: 46); what is gripping, of course, is the depth of the parallelism here with the Juan legend itself. Molière's hero says, 'I like to have one witness to my real feelings and my motives for acting as I do' (Molière 1962: 243), referring to his servant and summoning a doubled image of secrecy and confession, surely a key motif in the stance of the Byronic; and Smeed refers to 'a much older ingredient of Don Juan's character'—older, as we may read it, in the archaeology of the Kleinian psyche—'showing his hero as a Spanish grandee, very conscious of his dignity and honour … a sense of honour and caste, still discernible through all his wildness and dissipation' (Smeed 1990: 94), and here we have the reversed version of the split, with the surface scored with wounds but wholeness showing through, another aspect of Byron's self-revelatory and self-concealing fictions.

Peter Manning, in his psychobiography of Byron—which is a model of its kind in the ambiguous sense I have tried to adumbrate above—speaks of 'Byron's characteristic refusal to portray a successful resolution of the oedipal conflict' (Manning 1978: 120), but I would also want to read this against the grain, as a positive refusal of fantasy, which sustains the great bridge between life and art. Manning also claims that 'the refusal of the public' in Byron's case 'to distinguish between creator and character was intuitively correct' (1978: 108); but this begs the question. The 'correctness' of this wish may also signify a desire for wholeness, an escape into fantasy and a refusal to recognize the severances and fissures which Byron so painfully depicts, a wish to *make* whole which itself relates to the reparative work, itself further summoned up by Byron's concentration on the imagined injuries inflicted on his 'body' by 'the public'; which in turn can be related back as a projection of the unacknowledged damage of infant fantasy.

Further than this we cannot go without again risking the relapse into psychobiography; what I would like to do is rather to trace the wounding and healing which take place through Byron's textual corpus and here, more specifically, in and via *Don Juan* itself. Of Byron himself, perhaps we should only add a note of the impress of life upon the transmission of work and reputation, and refer to the Byronic as a public need comparable with the endless reshaping of, for example, Sylvia Plath. Clearly there is that in the sign of Byron which attracts projection, which can be the outward and visible sign of a self-engrossing neurosis; but I think the limit of psychoanalytic criticism is reached *before* we can proceed to the attribution of the focus of the whirlpool. Beyond that, there are only analogues: the sense that, before, we have encountered situations like this in the world of lived experience should not prevent us from maintaining the 'different' nature of text as such, the muteness and lack of disclosure with which, as critics, we have to deal, and the consequent way in which we set our dreams into place as elements in the textual reconstruction, precisely because of the endlessly frustrating absence of free association, that act of wordspin never performed by the text itself, all of which confront us all the time with the sense of being in the presence of an agent which is not an agent, whose

only technical parallel is the clinical appearance of the psychotic, the violent disordering of the personality which presents itself in the guise of the person 'under orders'.

II

The Don Juan story has a long history in the West, beginning, we may surmise, with a pre-literary one and coming to its first literary crystallization with Tirso da Molina's *El Burlador de Sevilla* (1630). Since that time there have been works about Juan in most European languages, but three motifs have remained constant.

The first and most obvious is the behaviour of Juan himself, his endless seductions. Milan Kundera in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* (1984) remarks that 'men who pursue a multitude of women fit neatly into two categories. Some seek their own subjective and unchanging dream of a woman in all women. Others are prompted by a desire to possess the endless variety of the objective female world. The obsession of the former is *lyrical* … The obsession of the latter is *epic*' (1984: 201). Juan's pretensions, at least in his earlier incarnations, are clearly epic.

The second element is the fatal banquet, the inverted feast, connected symbolically with the feast of stones and water in Shakespeare's (and, according to the recent editions, Thomas Middleton's) *Timon of Athens* (1623) but here less miserly than diabolic: the food is vipers and scorpions, the wine bitter and bloody, the room hung with black. It is a transmutation of the mythic feast of the dead, signifying a corollary with the deadness of Juan's heart and the anguish he, scorpion-like, has caused his victims.

The third element is the Stone Guest, in the original versions the statue of the Commandant, the man Juan has killed in a fight occasioned by the seduction of his daughter, which then comes to life—the voice, clearly, of guilt which returns to summon to an accounting for past actions and to drag Juan down to the hell of which the black banquet has been an imaginal prefiguration.

Rank's interpretation centres around the equivalence between the wish to conquer and subjugate an endless series of women and unaccommodated dealings with the mother—transactions which cannot be completed because they originate in and return us to infantile feelings of dependence (Rank 1975: 78-102). Juan cannot bear the residues of this memory of dependence and thus seeks at all costs to 'reassemble' the mother-imago *only* in fragmentary form, so that he is always able to break with the feared rememoration before it achieves concreteness (or stone).

We may add to Rank an interpretation of the black banquet as the inverse of nurture, the fantasized withholding and supplanting of the mother's breast—precisely the outcome and concomitant of the negation, the disavowal, which is the misplaced heart of Don Juanism. The Stone Guest we can also, following Rank, see as an inversion, concealing the fear of a vengeance for a lifetime of sins against women, themselves perpetrated as part of the desire for return, remaking, reparation.

If we move direct from this material to Byron, we need to go through a further series of reversals. What is immediately apparent is the character of Byron's 'hero', who is neither a wicked seducer nor, following the post-Romantic view, a glorious seeker; he is instead passive, largely silent, lacking in linguistic and other differentiation. Indeed, he is the absent centre of the poem, as apt and willing to be shaped by circumstance and event as Voltaire's Candide, and similarly unable to learn from experience.[22]

It has generally been assumed that Byron makes no mention of the banquet and the Stone Guest, but I want to suggest that this is not true. There is the cannibalistic feast of the second canto; but also the ending of the poem, such as it is and with whatever meanings we might choose to assign to premature but prefigured termination, indeed revolves around a banquet—not a hellish feast but a realistically portrayed meal in a very British country house. Whether there is a Stone Guest is more debatable. In this ending which is no ending,

Juan is involved with three women (furies, graces, daughters): Lady Adeline is a matchmaker, and it is not clear whether or not she is interested in Juan for herself; the Duchess Fitz-Fulke is a lively, buxom heroine from Restoration farce; but Byron clearly means us to see Aurora Raby as quite a different matter.

One of the most interesting discussions of her occurs in Bernard Beatty's *Byron's 'Don Juan'* (1985): Beatty claims that all Juan's previous partners have been marked by a quality which he calls 'sexual glow', which is absent from Aurora (1985: 88-90). On this basis Beatty argues that in this ending Juan is about to pass from a period of infatuation with evidently available women and engage himself with a character altogether stronger and purer.

But I would want to go farther than Beatty, by concentrating on some actual descriptions of Aurora. She is 'Radiant and grave—as pitying man's decline'; 'Mournful', she grieves 'for those who could return no more' (all XV: 45); she is 'silent, cold' (according to Adeline) (XV: 49); described as a 'guest' at the banquet (XV: 55); she displays, emphasized more than once, 'indifference' (XV: 77, 83)—among other things, Aurora Raby—the 'rabid dawn' in which sins are called to account on the stainless sheet—is herself a displaced representation of the Stone Guest, a deflection of command from the outmoded manifest symbol of patriarchy.

How may we view these shifts of focus from an analytic perspective? Crucially, we might say that Byron here brings closer to the surface matters which are deeply encoded and concealed in the earlier works; Juan's passivity, for instance, places him very directly at the mercy of powerful female figures—teeth mothers like Gulbeyaz or the Empress of Russia. The fear of female domination is here very obvious, and if Juan appears not fully to submit to their demands this only argues for a further engagement with the problems of domination and subjugation which Rank had earlier found encoded.

Matters are similar with Aurora Raby, who might be seen as a *more* blatant version of the feminization concealed within the Stone Guest, and before whom Juan loses all certainty and self-possession, as though he is reminded of a terminal weakness and vacillation by this figure composed of purity and stillness, while at the same time he is forced up against the breast, the possibility of dependence which he has been energetically disavowing.

The relation between the banquet in Byron's *Don Juan* and the feast of hell hinges on the analytic function of humour, for it is humour which allows Byron to liberate repressed contents; it is the comic/satiric mode which loosens the weight of introjected moral disapprobation.[23] Thus the melodrama of the feast of vipers is replaced by a more 'realist' representation—replete, of course, with vipers of a rather different sort.

The move towards derepression in Byron, however, encounters its own limits. For example, although there is throughout a plain and continuing motif of fear of the mother, there is alongside it a continuing insistence on Juan's power to fascinate, now *as* an absent centre, as the vessel to contain projected female desire. We need to see this dialectically: alongside the progressive aspects of Byron's revisionism lies a further reticulation of the power and valency of patriarchy[24]—his very rehabilitation of Juan is unconsciously designed to prevent a fantasized attack on his behaviour, but as we are drawn into this web of forgiveness we notice that we are being principally allowed to forgive ourselves, for our complicity, whatever our individual gender, with patriarchal and narcissistic systems.

Originating blame, therefore, attaches here to the mother, as we might expect from Rank's hypothesis about Don Juanism; Elizabeth Boyd quotes contemporary legal opinion gained in the course of copyright action to the effect that the purpose of the poem is 'to show in Don Juan's ultimate character the ill effect of that injudicious maternal education which Don Juan is represented as having received, and which had operated injuriously on his mind' (Boyd 1945: 17). Yet this is, of course, to wrap up the psychic materials too neatly, as Beatty hints:

> There is a real sense in which the anxieties of the reader of *Don Juan* are deepened as well as appeased by reading on. We begin to feel emotions analogous to those associated with bereavement, the guilt peculiar to survivors.

(Beatty 1985: 3)

These materials are, to my mind, more evident in Molière's play, where Juan explains the basis of one of his seductions:

> I never saw two people so devoted, so completely in love. The manifest tenderness of their mutual affection awakened a like feeling in me. It affected me deeply. My love began in the first place as jealousy. I couldn't bear to see them so happy together; vexation stimulated my desire and I realized what a pleasure it would give me to disturb their mutual understanding and break up an attachment so repugnant to my own susceptibilities …

(Molière 1962: 205)

This is highly reminiscent of Satan's rhetoric in Book IV of Milton's *Paradise Lost*;[25] and, like that rhetoric, I suggest that it should be read precisely in Kleinian terms, as a displaced representation of the fantasized attack on the parents (and it is therefore thus that we should read the displacing farce of the opening sections of Byron's text) and of the accompanying knot of love and envy which originates ambivalence. The connection with bereavement is through the fantasized living out of the consequences which *would have flowed* from the primal seduction and disturbance had it been 'successful'.

Don Juan thus becomes, crucially, an account of puberty, as the recapitulation of these feelings becomes progressively more difficult and contorted with the removal of the sexual prohibitions of the latency period. The hatred of women—we may take the Russian empress as a type—which will culminate in the presentation of untouchable and inexpressible feelings to Aurora—will this new dawn provide a point of escape from the old patterns?—returns on itself in the loss of the father, crucially for the Byron text in the shipwreck and siege of Ismail scenes, which again develop from earlier elements in the legend: the presence, for example, in Molière of Juan's father who, we are told, passionately wanted a son (1962: 236); the insistence on the stone quest taking Juan's hand to lead him down to hell, which is an agonizing displacement of the potential of the father for leading the son through the mazes of maturation: the fact that two seventeenth-century French versions were subtitled '*Le fils criminel*', with all the obvious Oedipal connotations.[26] In Thomas Shadwell's play *The Libertine* (1675), Don John actually kills his father for withholding money and preaching at him.

The childlikeness and the inability to overcome the father-imago are connected biographically by Manning, and his formulation of a 'fantasy of perfect self-sufficiency' (1978: 51) is generally apt, conjuring up as it does the world of infant omnipotence: 'we want especially to be able like [Juan] to attract heroic devoted love for ourselves alone, in spite of our bad qualities' (Boyd 1945: 36).[27] This immediately opens an avenue for the deconstruction of the heroic in general as the effect of the narcissistic ego-ideal,[28] and the false and unsustainable renunciation of all evil motive associated with a splitting ego, such, in the case of Byron's Juan, that the 'good' passive self becomes untouchable by the 'bad' of activity. Here we sense a reversal of conventional gender-typing which nevertheless leaves the body unaccommodated and all too touchable by, for example, Dudù in the harem scenes.

This failure of dialectic in the psyche marks itself as repetition, an awareness of lack or gap which can be endured only by an endless series of attempts to join together that which has been sundered. Lust and sterility would be the consequences of this evasion, but, as Ridenour points out, what is interesting in the Byron version is that these are recathected—lust on to, for example, Gulbeyaz and Catherine, sterility on to the monstrous Castlereagh of the Dedication (Ridenour 1961: 68-9).[29] What Ridenour does not say is that this

therefore figures as a constructed dialogue of mother and father, and, in the attempt to analyse Byron's poem, we are faced with a work where essential qualities are always already *projected outward* from the main character, from the absent centre.

What is left is the journey, but of a plotless, planless kind because motivation has been shifted outward on to the Other; in the process of blaming the outer world for all disturbance in the inner, the sense of purposive patterning has been sacrificed in favour of abandonment before an apparently objective maze or web, the net of Blake's Urizen but in the case of Byron's *Don Juan* represented chiefly by the sea.[30] Swinburne said that *Don Juan* had ‘something of the breadth and freshness of the sea’; ‘we swim forward as over “the broad backs of the sea”’ (1875: 242-3); and of course there are historical and biographical explanations for this: the sea journey and shipwreck are intrinsic to earlier versions of the legend, and Byron himself was obsessed by the sea, as we can see for example at the end of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* (1812-18) and in comments on the ‘oceanic’ in *Manfred* (1817).[31] But, as always, such explanations are limited and do not provide a full approach to a principle of selection of psychic materials: Goodman's text, although its Don Juan comes from a very different realm, returns us usefully to Beatty's alarm at the shape of the poem's narrative: ‘Well might the sweat stand on the forehead of he who is confronted with the map of such wanderings and longings, the dossier of the unquiet soul’.[32] The unquiet of the soul, clearly, can be magnified through mapping on to the oceanic bosom the myth of undifferentiation and primal return associated with the mother.

But the ocean is also mapped on to warfare, or, rather, such mapping occurs in both directions. The wrecked ship of Canto II rolls ‘At mercy of the waves, whose mercies are / Like human beings during civil war’ (II: 42), and later

```
… the sea yawn'd around her like a hell,
          And down she suck'd with her the whirling wave,
Like one who grapples with his enemy,
And strives to strangle him before he die.
```

(II: 52)

The scenes of the siege of Ismail offer us the alternative metaphor of the ocean of blood: ‘“Let there be light! said God, and there was light!” / “Let there be blood!” says man, and there's a sea!’ (VII: 41). Heroism, or at least the evidently pathological version of heroism represented in Suwarrow and all his works, falls within the same metaphorical structure, as when Byron ruminates on the attraction of war's dangers:

```
Oh, foolish mortals! Always taught in vain!
          Oh, glorious laurel! since for one sole leaf
Of thine imaginary deathless tree,
Of blood and tears must flow the unebbing sea.
```

(VII: 68)

The problem, for Byron, is to avoid falling into this mixed, soft trap—the pit, perhaps diabolic, where under the guise of heroism all differentiation is lost in a primal merging in which blood and water can no longer be distinguished.

That there is a sexual dimension to this stream of imagery is underlined by the famous and tendentious advice offered in Canto XIII: ‘And young beginners may as well commence / With quiet cruizing o'er the ocean woman’ (XIII: 40). This ocean of the female represents a possible doom, a sinking into irrecoverable depths; but it also suggests to us the nature of the achievement which Byron is trying to vaunt, in terms of style as much as content, which is to play with these dangerous materials without being submerged in them—hence, of course, the toying with obscenity and the playful drawing-back before susceptibilities are ‘truly’ offended.

These materials are drawn together most tightly, it seems to me, in the harem scenes—not surprisingly, because the setting here is precisely an ocean of women, composed only of limbs and organs, lacking individuality and floating together on the sea of night like flotsam. At one pole stands Gulbeyaz, cathected on to the great bad mother:

```
Her rage was but a minute's, and 'twas well—
          A moment's more had slain her; but the while
It lasted 'twas like a short glimpse of hell:
          Nought's more sublime than energetic bile,
Though horrible to see, yet grand to tell,
          Like ocean warring 'gainst a rocky isle;
And the deep passions flashing through her form
Made her a beautiful embodied storm.
```

(V: 135)

There is displacement here in the notion that Gulbeyaz's storm may wreck *herself* rather than those around her, a wish for the auto-destruction of the feared vision; but a question is also proposed about depth, for there is a paradox here: if style, poetry itself, is of the surface, how can we know the depths? Perhaps these rocks signal the deep; but, equally, perhaps we are more closely in its presence when the ocean is calm, when it sleeps ‘like an unwean'd child’ (II: 70). This opposite pole is held by Dudù, portrayed as a ‘kind of sleepy Venus’ (VI: 42):

```
The strangest thing was, beauteous, she was wholly
          Unconscious, albeit turned of quick seventeen,
That she was fair, or dark, or short, or tall;
She never thought about herself at all.
```

(VI: 54)

This version of the unconscious, as opposed to Gulbeyaz's over-consciousness of her own actions and effects, represents in Dudù's unawakened form the pre-sexual on the one hand and on the other the reduction to the status of mere body which will avoid all the traumatic difficulties of trying to deal with the mother-imago in its full changefulness and complexity.

The answer to these problems, it is perhaps not surprising to note, can be held only by and in language, and this at several levels. First, language is, by virtue of its patriarchal authority, a clear avenue of escape from the maternal—although we need here to remember that Byron trusts only himself with language, not Juan.[33] Second, language is the incarnation of the ‘skimming along the surface’ which, as we see below, is the goal of *Don Juan*—as, of course, in a rather different sense it is precisely the goal of the original character of Juan, which is evasion of entrapment, the construction of a form of repetition which will resist a sucking back into the whirlpool. Byron summarizes his argument in Canto X:

```
In the Wind's Eye I have sailed, and sail; but for
          The stars, I own my telescope is dim;
But at the least I have shunned the common shore,
          And leaving land far out of sight, would skim
The Ocean of Eternity: the roar
          Of breakers has not daunted my slight, trim,
But still sea-worthy skiff; and she may float
Where ships have foundered, as doth many a boat.
```

(X: 4)

Trimness, youthfulness, a childlike quality, a propensity for being unfreighted with moral or unconscious baggage, these are the virtues which enable both the narrator *and* Juan to negotiate the reefs: hand in hand, as it were, with Juan going through the motions of action while the narrator provides the verbal defences against reincorporation into the prelinguistic form of the feminine. Byron makes the point clearly when talking about the dangers of poetic madness: ‘they say Poets never or rarely go *mad* … but are generally so near it—that I cannot help thinking rhyme is so far useful in anticipating & preventing the disorder’ (Letter to Annabella Milbanke, 29 November 1813, in Byron 1973-82, III: 179). Yet if this is so, what could be better proof of reason, and consequently of virility, than the constant playing with rhyme which forms a structuring principle of *Don Juan*? This perhaps touches on a further central ambiguity of the Juan myth. Smeed claims that ‘it is an essential ingredient of his character that [Juan] says *and means* the most extravagant things in the moment of passion’ (Smeed 1990: 100). I do not think this is true of all incarnations of the myth; but it does point us to the difficulty in the relationship between Juan and narrator in Byron, for this passional sincerity fractures between the two figures, no doubt because, in part, of the impossibility of rendering the paradox that what may be meant in the private heat of the instant will no longer be meant in the moment of cool recounting.

What is at stake here, then, is the relation of language to knowledge, as we can see in a stanza where the narrator is recounting, or perhaps *not* recounting, his own induction into the facts of life:

For there one learns—'tis not for me to boast,
Though I acquired—but I pass over that,
As well as all the Greek I since have lost:
I say that there's the place—but ‘Verbum sat,’
I think I pick'd up too, as well as most,
Knowledge of matters—but no matter what—
I never married—but, I think, I know
That sons should not be educated so.

(I: 53)

This is in reference, of course, to Juan's over mother-centred and repressive upbringing; the ‘place’ alluded to is supposedly ‘college’, although more innuendo-laden meanings become possible as the stanza moves on. Language is essential for survival, although to use it in this way will require a delicate alternating between respect for its transitory qualities (reflections of the transience of Juan's passions) and claims for the ‘skiff-like’ strength which will enable it to hold to its purpose of outlasting the perennial claims of ocean:

But words are things, and a small drop of ink,
Falling like dew, upon a thought, produces
That which makes thousands, perhaps millions, think;
'Tis strange, the shortest letter which man uses
Instead of speech, may form a lasting link
Of ages; to what straits old Time reduces
Frail man, when paper—even a rag like this,
Survives himself, his tomb, and all that's his.

(III: 88)

The terminology of this passage makes it easy to see it as Byron's contribution to deconstruction, and particularly to the argument about the primacy of writing over speech.[34] What we have here is a concentration on the materiality of text, which springs in turn, I would suggest, from the complexity of Byron's own financial and other practical relations with publishers in Britain as he attempts to maintain his own fragile links over the ocean of exile. These details of geography are here transmuted into an argument about history, but linked with the seagoing metaphors, which we find again in connection with rhyme in particular in Canto IX:

```
… (I needs must rhyme with dove,
          That good old steam-boat which keeps verses
                    moving
'Gainst Reason—Reason ne'er was hand-in-glove
          With rhyme, but always leant less to improving
The sound than sense) …
```

(IX: 74)

So in *Don Juan,* we are confronted with a narrator who is all-knowing in order that Juan's innocence may be preserved, a narrator who understands the psychic imperatives behind the doubled fascination with the oceanic, and who invites us deliciously to share his inevitable guilt.

On the other side of that guilt, we may return to the question of Juan's innocence. As Byron himself says in a letter to Francis Hodgson 12 May 1821, 'the *hero* of tragedy … must be *guilty*' (Byron 1973-82, VIII: 115) but what heroism as a represented characteristic is guilty of is always and everywhere primary narcissism; yet Juan is allowed this narcissism without guilt, and this is another way of stating the dimension in which he stands short of the heroic. Yet what is the nature and scope of this innocence? Reincarnated in Aurora Raby, as we have seen, it figures as 'indifference', a return to a time before differentiation, which is also offered us in Canto XIII as the Buddhistic outcome of wisdom, as 'indifference' begins 'to lull / Our passions' (XIII: 4). In the case of Juan, all is referred back again to an 'education' complete 'excepting natural history' (I: 39), containing 'not a page of any thing that's loose, / Or hints continuation of the species' (I: 40); which is partly a moral lesson designed to show 'how greatly Love is / Embarrass'd at first starting with a novice' (I: 74). However, the pressure of this innocence is most concentrated around the pictures of Juan and Haidée:

```
All these were theirs, for they were children still,
          And children still they should have ever been;
They were not made in the real world to fill
          A busy character in the dull scene,
But like two beings born from out a rill,
          A nymph and her beloved, all unseen
To pass their lives in fountains and on flowers,
And never know the weight of human hours.
```

(IV: 15)

A reading of his beloved Pope might make us wonder whether Byron's knowingness is betraying him in the image of the 'rill'—by no means an anatomically innocent word—but more important here is the strong hint of incest deriving from the shared birth, and this of course is present from the beginning of the poem, where we learn that Juan's father's family, noble hidalgos like the earlier Juans (and thus, of course, the fathers of *this* Juan are the other, inbred Juans of the past), 'bred *in and in* … / Marrying their cousins—nay, their aunts and nieces, / Which always spoils the breed, if it increases' (I: 57).

It does not seem to have spoiled Juan, unless we wish to account for his passivity, silence and defensive structures clinically, which would probably lead us into a discussion of the many forms of autism and its relation with the narcissistic stance;[35] but it does bear a parallel with the relationship between Juan and Julia. There are, of course, the names themselves; but there is also the jamming together of lines like 'They took by force from Juan Julia's letter' (II: 74), which in its rhythms and condensations seems to reflect precisely an inseparable twinning violated in the very act of *writing,* in the Derridean sense.

It is there more considerably with Haidée, and interestingly occurs in a context which sews beginning and 'ending' of the poem neatly together when we learn that 'young Aurora kiss'd her lips with dew, / Taking her for a sister' (II: 142)—a curious prefiguration through the channels of anima, the multiple feeling female self

which serves to image the object of desire.[36] But then, as Byron tells us a little later, ‘Happiness was born a twin’ (II: 172), of the same rill, although the darker hints of the power basis of incest, freed from the idealization of pastoral, are significantly located in Haidée's dream, or, rather, in the transition from dream to consciousness, where the identity of lover and father is drawn tight:

```
And gazing on the dead, she thought his face
          Faded, or alter'd into something new—
Like to her father's features, till each trace
          More and more like to Lambro's aspect grew—
With all his keen worn look and Grecian grace;
          And starting, she awoke, and what to view?
Oh! Powers of Heaven! what dark eye meets she there?
'Tis—'tis her father's—fix'd upon the pair!
```

(IV: 35)

And yet, of course, in Juan himself there is more matter to be made of this constellation, for we are still in the period of latency: Juan is ‘our little friend’ (VIII: 52), one ‘who upon Woman's breast, / Even from a child, felt like a child’ (VIII: 53), and this problem of the location of guilt and innocence comes to a head in the repeated irresolutions represented in the figure of Leila:

```
Don Juan loved her, and she loved him, as
          Nor brother, father, sister, daughter love.
I cannot tell exactly what it was;
          He was not yet quite old enough to prove
Parental feelings, and the other class,
          Called brotherly affection could not move
His bosom,—for he never had a sister:
Ah! if he had, how much he would have missed her!
```

(X: 53)

Again the lure of psychobiography beckons; but more important here, I think, is the textual striving for an unnameable love which will not split the passions, a love which will exist before role and which will therefore carry within it no memory of prior essential separation. It is also worth saying that Leila is next in the scale to Juan: as the narrator is to Juan, so Juan can be to Leila, and this is relevant to the way in which many of these ‘belittling’ descriptions of Juan evidently cease to be true by the time of the English cantos. Leila here is the reversal, the inoculation, of the mother/woman which allows Juan to emerge from pubescent fantasy; albeit into the drearier world beyond Shooters Hill, shorn of exotic extravagance and inhabited instead by avatars of, if anything, the fake Gothic—itself associated, of course, at least in part with ‘oriental’ roots.

In the text, the incest motif serves also as a deflection from psychic splitting, and it is in this extensive panorama of union and disjunction that we can detect the forms of Byron's anger. One focus here is upon change, and upon the issue of whether maturational development can preserve continuity or must entail a decisive break. The Juan tradition tackled these themes: the greatest, Faustian efforts at development are there:

> I grasp the immeasurable, it is mine. I must ransack the universe, experience ecstasy after ecstasy and feel myself as a god in every living being, finding this divine self in the highest and in the lowest.[37]

Yet in the case of Molière, after the first appearance of the Stone Guest, we have Juan telling us, ‘I'm just the same as I always was’ (Molière 1962: 242), and this too is portrayed as a triumph of a different kind.

In Byron, of course, rhyme—the emblem of irrational technique—acts both for and against splitting: after the horrors of shipwreck and the sinking of one of the two surviving boats, those in the other 'grieved for those who perish'd with the cutter, / And also for the biscuit casks and butter' (II: 61). But the real splitting crosses also gender divides, and thus occurs most curtly in the transvestite scenes, where Juan finds himself subject to a neutral authority which, interestingly, the narrator appears not to seek to restrain; rather, the tone is of allowing Juan his head while knowing that this attempt to preserve sexual order goes against the grain:

```
'Then if I do', said Juan, 'I'll be—' 'Hold!'
          Rejoin'd the Negro, 'pray be not provoking;
This spirit's well, but it may wax too bold,
          And you will find us not too fond of joking.'
'What, sir,' said Juan, 'shall it e'er be told
          That I unsex'd my dress?' But Baba stroking
The things down, said—'Incense me, and I call
Those who will leave you of no sex at all.'
```

(V: 75)

Leaving aside the *triple entendre* of Baba's gesture, we need here to think more about the narrator's own punishment of Juan, Byron's painful ridicule of the child within, and his joying in the inescapability of his own power—a joy doubled by an assumed neutering which places him above the world of division. For Baba's role is motherly—mother of the harem—but harmless, for he has nothing of his own to enforce his power, despite his threat to send for those who have. What is freed here is the cathexis between the damaging, and damaged, mother and the female Britain which still stands against all Byron's attempts to escape to the curved world of the scimitar:

```
Alas! could She but fully, truly, know
          How her great name is now throughout abhorred;
How eager all the earth is for the blow
          Which shall lay bare her bosom to the sword;
How all the nations deem her their worst foe,
          That worse than worst of foes, the once adored
False friend, who held out freedom to mankind,
And now would chain them, to the very mind;—
```

(X: 67)

Verbum sat, as Ken Kesey might say in the context of Big Nurse;[38] although none of this is to diminish the force behind Byron's assertion of his perception that 'Revolution / Alone can save the Earth from Hell's pollution' (VIII: 51), or to denigrate his continuing assault on the phenomenon of human warfare, or the rhetorical skill with which he mounts this attack:

```
Oh blood and thunder! and oh blood and wounds!—
          These are but vulgar oaths, as you may deem,
Too gentle reader! and most shocking sounds:
          And so they are; yet thus is Glory's dream
Unriddled, and as my true Muse expounds
          At present such things, since they are her theme,
So be they her inspirers! Call them Mars,
Bellona, what you will—they mean but wars.
```

(VIII: 1)

It is, however, to wonder what, in the saving of the 'sweet child' Leila (IX: 33), is being said about the ability to hold the contradictions of the human personality together against the frequent assaults of incoherence

(rhyme not reason) and against the continual tug of the ocean of blood in which frail innocence would disappear, along with British guilt and the neutral stance of Baba.

But then, of course, this question of individual coherence—and particularly the coherence of the 'armed' phallic male—is at stake throughout the poem, and leads us at length towards the castration motif embodied in the long destiny of decapitation under which *Don Juan* falls, as Byron himself said in alluding to Juan's final projected encounter with the guillotine.[39] The question is raised about Juan himself in Canto XV. The narrator has described what was made of Juan by society:

```
That is, with men: with women he was what
          They pleased to make or take him for; and their
Imagination's quite enough for that:
          So that the outline's tolerably fair,
They fill the canvass up—and 'verbum sat'.
```

(XV: 16)

The narrator, naturally, describes his own semiotic chorus in a rather different way:

```
Temperate I am—yet never had a temper;
          Modest I am—yet with some slight assurance;
Changeable too—yet somehow 'Idem semper';
          Patient—but not enamoured of endurance;
Cheerful—but, sometimes, rather apt to whimper:
          Mild—but at times a sort of 'Hercules furens':
So that I almost think that the same skin
For one without—has two or three within.
```

(XVII: 11)

Occurring as it does very near the end of the poem, this passage deconstructs not only the narrator's personality but simultaneously the '*mise en scène*' of the poem itself, with the 'two or three' not being at all a throwaway but precisely a Jungian question about whether a 'third term' (here is the shade of Baba, the prelinguistic baby, which is also rhymed with 'Raby') is truly possible.[40]

If not—or, in other words, if the masculine progress through the world by the processes of maternal domination, father-imaging and consequent splitting I have been trying to describe is the only available option—then indeed castration is not the origin, as Freud would have claimed, but the only possible *consequence*; thus, as D. M. Thomas has noticed in another displacement,[41] we may refer to phallocentric anxiety as prefigurative and linked to the cessation of the 'outer' world if severed from the interior ocean. Juan's fate, of course, is unclear, as we hear in the first canto when the narrator is telling us of Juan's father 'Jóse, who begot our hero, who / Begot—but that's to come' (I: 9)—or not, we might say. A second 'stab' at Juan's progenitive future occurs towards the end of the first canto, with the reference—unlikely as it comes to seem—to his 'last elopement with the devil' (I: 203). A third is perhaps more elliptical, but connects back to the severance from homeland: it is, the narrator assures us,

```
                                        … an awkward sight
          To see one's native land receding through
The growing waters; it unmans one quite,
```

(II: 12)

Fourth, perhaps, come Haidée's eyes, which are 'black as death' (II: 117), the opposite to Byron's beautiful hymn to the sleep of the beloved later in the second canto:

For there it lies so tranquil, so beloved,
          All that it hath of life with us is living;
So gentle, stirless, helpless, and unmoved,
          And all unconscious of the joy 'tis giving;
All it hath felt, inflicted, pass'd, and proved,
          Hush'd into depths beyond the watcher's diving;
There lies the thing we love with all its errors
And all its charms, like death without its terrors.

(II: 197)

These instances, however, lie very much near the beginning of the poem, and the doubts they set in play are lulled in much the same way as the sleeping infant is lulled away from the terror of the night by story, romance, narrative, eventually the recounting of action which stills the fear of consequence. To my mind the theme returns to the surface, but in an interestingly displaced form, only at the beginning of the final, incomplete canto, which begins, 'The world is full of orphans' (XVII: 1) and seems, although the matter is undeveloped, to start an argument about natural and unnatural parenting—one which is thus recapitulated from the very *fons et origens* of the poem as also of the Juan character himself.

At all events, orphanage is a kind of execution—a cutting off of the head, the headwaters—and, as McGann has pointed out, it is in *Don Juan* as if 'its literal "execution" on the page involved an "execution", in both senses, of the preliminary design' (McGann 1976: 34). Completion involves, therefore, castration;[42] but only if the desired form of completion is unmanned. By a circuitous route, therefore, I return to Rank's hypothesis about the suppressed importance of mother-imago; and add to this the importance, in the original tales, of father and son going down to hell together, leaving, as it were, the surface of the ocean undisturbed. Beyond that, there is only the ending which is not an ending; the abandonment of shaping by outward pressure which allows, at length, the skiff to lie at anchor; or us to recognize the eventual swallowing of any poem by the rich engulfing void of language.

III

The problem with the psychoanalytic,
          As also with the fate of all Don Juans,
Is endings; may the Devil take the critic
          Who ravels all old mythemes into new ones.
Yet cocksure rules, like old c—ks, wax arthritic
          And make us recollect, when in the pew once,
How ends and means seemed, in the main, harmonious;
Yet naught shall make old Reason sound euphonious.

'Tis time now to allude to bronze Hephaestos
          Limping and forging, e'er beset by age;
Each theory overwrought has long outpriced us
          (New battles for the regimented sage).
Let virtue now regret—we all know vice does—
          Perfection, for the 'symptomale' 's the rage.
Iron grieves are best when slow legs have a pair on,
Tho writing lingers 'fore the touch of Charon.

False nerves, old dreads, parcels of fools anointed,
          On the consulting couch display their wares;
Dudù was there at half past ten appointed—
          Her sleep disarms the fatherhood of cares.
To publish or to analyse: a coin! Dead
          Wrong or bang to rights, conclusion's scarce:
And so we settle for the comic manner;
I've killed ma; and now let the critics pan 'er!

Notes

1. For a simple but useful approach to the relations between body and mind in classical psychoanalysis, see Karen Horney, *New Ways in Psychoanalysis* (1939), pp. 17-59.
2. What I am polemically describing here as a kind of mentalistic imperialism, based in a recuperative language, would of course be described by others as a necessary deconstruction of Freud's own concerns; see, for example John Forrester, *Language and the Origins of Psychoanalysis* (1980).
3. See 'The Hunting of the Snark' (1876), Fit II, stanzas 2-4, in Carroll 1965: 738.
4. The reader new to Lacan should read Lacan and his *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis,* trans. Alan Sheridan (1977). I mention Sharpe in this context partly because, as well as being a pioneer analyst, she was an English teacher: see for example her 'Psycho-physical processes revealed in language: an examination of metaphor', *International Journal of Psychoanalysis,* 21 (1940), 201-13; or in general her *Collected Papers on Psychoanalysis,* ed. M. Brierley (1950).
5. I presume here that the *definition* of humanity by reason has persisted since the time of Plato: see, for example, Brand Blanchard, *Reason and Analysis* (1962), pp. 50-92.
6. Following very much from Freud's own models in *Leonardo da Vinci and a Memory of his Childhood* (1910), *Dostoevsky and Parricide* (1928) and, to an extent, *The Moses of Michelangelo* (1914); see Freud 1953-74 XI: 57-137, XXI: 173-96, XIII: 209-38.
7. See Rank, 74-7. But cf. Paul de Man, 'Autobiography as de-facement', in *The Rhetoric of Romanticism* (New York, 1984), pp. 67-81. On the various complexities of Rank's texts on *Don Juan* and other related motifs, principally the Double, see Winter, in Rank, x-xi.
8. Freud, 'Draft H. Paranoia', *Extracts from the Fliess Papers* (1892-9); 1953-74, I: 209-10. See also, very interestingly, Freud's comment and note on the word '*selig*' in *Psycho-analytic Notes on an Autobiographical Account of a Case of Paranoia [The Case of Schreber]* (1911), in Freud, 1953-74, XII: 30, including a quotation from Da Ponte's libretto for Mozart's *Don Giovanni* (1787).
9. See, for example, Roland Barthes, *Sade/Fourier/Loyola,* trans. R. Miller (1977), p. 167. Sadeian ritual as Barthes describes it (or, we might say, the sadistic component in all ritual, from religious to military) emerges from the repetition compulsion: see Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900), *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious* (1905) and *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), in Freud, IV: 268, VIII: 226-7, XVIII: 35.
10. Taylor Stoehr, 'Introduction', in Goodman 1979: 11.
11. Here summarizing the views of Gregorio Maranon, *Don Juan et le Donjuanisme,* trans. O. Lacombe (Paris, 1958).
12. The temporal nature of neurosis, its eventual subjection to ageing and the pressure of change—in turn a source of despair in certain neuroses—develops from the structure and function of neurosis in infancy: see Melanie Klein, 'Some theoretical conclusions regarding the emotional life of the infant', in *Envy and Gratitude, and Other Works 1946-1963,* introd. H. Segal (1988), pp. 61-93.
13. The history of Rank's changing relationship with psychoanalysis is set out with admirable clarity by Winter, in Rank 1975: 3-34.
14. See Jung, 'Woman in Europe' (1927), *Civilization in Transition,* in Jung 1957-79, X: 120-1; and 'Psychological aspects of the mother archetype' (1954), *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious,* in Jung 1957-79, IX: 1, 85. Jung's brief summary of the mythic backdrop speaks of 'the effects of a mother-complex on the son' as 'self-castration, madness, and early death'.
15. See, for example Smeed 1990: 45-63. The Hoffmann story, which revolutionized the public status of Juan (or, better, registered that revolution), is '*Don Juan. Eine fabelhafte Begebenheit, die sich mit einem reisenden Enthusiasten vorgetragen*' (1813).
16. See James Hillman, *The Dream and the Underworld* (New York, 1979), esp. pp. 23-67 and *Re-Visioning Psychology* (New York, 1975), pp. 1-51.
17. See, for example, 'A contribution to the psychogenesis of manic-depressive states' (1935) and 'Love, guilt and reparation' (1937) in Melanie Klein, *Love, Guilt and Reparation, and Other Works*

1921-1945, introd. H. Segal (1988), pp. 262-89 and 306-43.

18. See Murray Stein, 'Hephaistos: a pattern of introversion', in *Facing the Gods,* ed. James Hillman (Dallas, Tex., 1980), pp. 67-86.
19. See, for example, 'On observing the behaviour of very young infants' (1952) and 'On the sense of loneliness' (1963), in Melanie Klein, *Envy and Gratitude,* pp. 94-121 and 300-13.
20. Stoehr, in Goodman, 14.
21. See, for example, Alfred Adler, *Understanding Human Nature,* trans. W. B. Wolfe (1928), pp. 69-90, and 'Syphilophobia' and 'Myelodysplasia (organ inferiority)', in *The Practice and Theory of Individual Psychology,* trans. P. Radin (1925), pp. 153-62 and 307-16.
22. See Voltaire, *Candide* (1759), in *Candide and Other Stories,* trans. R. Pearson (Oxford, 1990), pp. 1-100.
23. In more orthodox terms, Freud speaks of the way in which 'the subject suddenly hypercathects his super-ego and then, proceeding from it, alters the reactions of the ego' ('Humour' (1927), in Freud 1953-74, XXI: 165). The analytic term 'cathexis' is most usefully glossed in J. Laplanche and J.-B. Pontalis, *The Language of Psychoanalysis,* trans. D. Nicholson-Smith (1980), pp. 62-5.
24. See my *The Romantic Unconscious: A Study in Narcissism and Patriarchy* (1989), e.g. pp. 88-9.
25. See John Milton, *Paradise Lost,* Book IV, ll. 505ff., in *Poetical Works,* ed. D. Bush (1966), p. 287.
26. N. Dorimon, *Le Festin du Pierre ou le fils criminel* (Paris 1658); Claude Deschamps, Sieur de Villiers, *Le Festin du Pierre ou le fils criminel* (Paris 1659).
27. Boyd paraphrases Coleridge's comments on Shadwell's *The Libertine* in Coleridge (1817), Chapter XXIII—comments we know Byron to have read (Boyd, 36).
28. Nigel Wood has drawn my attention here to the relevance of VIII: 18, with its bitter reduction of heroism, to a name misspelt in the *London Gazette.*
29. On 'cathexis', see note 23 above.
30. See, for example, William Blake, *The First Book of Urizen* (1794), in *The Complete Writings of William Blake,* ed. G. Keynes (1966), pp. 222-37; and, on the connection between the net and the sea, *Vala, or, The Four Zoas* (1795-1804), 'Night the First', lines 47-82, in *Complete Writings,* pp. 265-6.
31. See *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage,* IV: 178-86, in McGann 1980-92, II: 184-6, and *Manfred,* III.i, 125-35 in 1980-92, IV: 92; also Manning 1990: 76.
32. Stoehr, in Goodman 1979: 13-14.
33. See the various comments on the Name-of-the-Father in Lacan, conveniently listed in J.-A. Miller's 'Classified index of the major concepts' (Lacan 1977: 328).
34. The key text here is Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology,* trans. G. C. Spivak (Baltimore, Md., 1976); but see also Derrida, *Positions,* trans. A. Bass (1981).
35. See Bruno Bettelheim, *The Empty Fortress: Infantile Autism and the Birth of the Self* (New York, 1967), esp. pp. 14ff., 386-405.
36. See James Hillman, *Anima: An Anatomy of a Personified Notion* (Dallas, Tex., 1985), esp. pp. 147-67.
37. Eduard Duller, 'Juan' (*c.* 1835), in Duller 1845: 151-52; this is the translation by Smeed 1990: 46.
38. I am thinking, of course, of the figure of 'maternal imprisonment' in Ken Kesey, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (1962).
39. See note 42 below.
40. See Jung, 'A Psychological approach to the dogma of the Trinity' (1948), *Psychology and Religion: West and East,* in Jung 1957-79, XI, 148-63.
41. See D. M. Thomas, *The White Hotel* (London, 1981).
42. Which brings us, by a circuitous route, to the decapitation of Juan; see the letter to John Murray (16 February 1821), in Byron 1973-82, VIII: 78, which is itself a circuitous and evasive description. To pursue the theme further, one would need to look at the remainder of the letter, and particularly at the 'Saracen's head' so closely associated with the cutting of a throat.

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Criticism: David E. Goldweber (essay date spring 1997)

SOURCE: Goldweber, David E. "Byron, Catholicism, and Don Juan XVII." *Renascence* 49 (spring 1997): 175-89.

[*In the following essay, Goldweber analyzes the Biblical overtones in* Don Juan.]

Many literary critics continue to cast Lord Byron as a deviant and a miscreant who was contemptuous, or at least suspicious, of all that Western culture and Western religion revere.[1] Indeed, as a young man who denied nothing but doubted everything, Byron explored superstition, deism, and skepticism on the mental side of things; drinking, gambling, whoring, homosexuality, and incest on the physical side.[2] The early cantos of Byron's first masterpiece, *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage,* are pessimistic and nihilistic, depicting the poet's hopeless journey through the ruined and war-torn remnants of once proud European nations. As he journeys, the young poet declares that even when "A thousand years scarce serve to form a state" still "An hour may lay

it in the dust" (II.84).[3] Surely, this disillusioned and impetuous rascal would be vigorously averse to Christianity, and even more so to its strictest and most traditional branch, Catholicism?

But, in fact, Byron wrote dozens of poems and plays based upon Biblical subject matter including *Hebrew Melodies* (1815), *Cain* (1821), and *Heaven and Earth* (1823), all of which appropriate and reinterpret scripture, but, as Wolf Z. Hirst demonstrates, never attempt to revise or subvert it. Byron's most affirming verses on religion appear in his greatest poem, *Don Juan.* Like Bernard Beatty (see esp. 70-84), I see Don Juan progressing not toward despairing skepticism but toward optimistic, albeit cautionary, faithfulness. And while Byron is not explicit, he does hint in the final cantos of the poem that this faithfulness is a Catholic Christian one. The protagonist, true to his namesake, misses out on the goodness that he encounters. But the narrator, through references to Catholicism and through deployment of a prominent Catholic character named Aurora, makes clear the manifest presence in our world of genuine miracles and redemptive ideals that are available for those who trust them. In Byron's own words:

```
Some people would impose now with authority,
Turpin's or Monmouth Geoffry's Chronicle;
Men whose historical superiority
Is always greatest at a miracle.
But Saint Augustine has the great priority,
Who bids all men believe the impossible,
Because 'tis so. Who nibble, scribble, quibble, he
Quiets at once with 'quia impossibile'.
And therefore, mortals, cavil not at all;
Believe:—if 'tis improbable, you must;
And if it is impossible, you shall:
'Tis always best to take things upon trust.
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(*DJ* XVI.5-6)[4]

I suggest that in his mature shift away from doubting and towards trusting, Byron not only used Don Juan to depict Catholicism as the highest and best faith, but was himself very close to converting.

Always happy to meet a true believer, Byron even called himself a Christian numerous times (see below, Kennedy 201, or *HVSV* 210), and occasionally wondered if he might one day "turn devout" (*BLJ* 5:208). And while Byron acted respectfully to Christianity as a whole, he acted even more so to Catholicism in particular. During his tenure in the House of Lords, Byron consistently voted in favor of Catholic relief (see *BLJ* 6:172 for his pride in doing so), and devoted one of his three parliamentary speeches to supporting the 1812 Catholic Claims Bill. Byron's favorite poet was the Catholic Alexander Pope, whose works to Byron were "what I firmly believe in as the Christianity of English Poetry" (Prose 106). In fact, late in life Byron not only stated that he inclined "very much to the Catholic doctrines" (*BLJ* 9:119) and that he has "often wished I had been born a Catholic" (Medwin 80)—but even that he believed Catholicism to be nothing less than "the best religion" (*BLJ* 8:98).

Also worth mentioning is a facetious letter to John Cam Hobhouse, Byron's best friend, in which Byron pretends to be his own valet, William Fletcher. In this letter, writing from Italy, Byron has 'Fletcher' tell Hobhouse not only that Byron has died, but that before he passed away he converted to Catholicism (in Fletcher's imperfect verbiage Byron "died a Papish" [*BLJ* 6:44]). While this letter is a joke, it is a well-crafted and convincing one. Byron would not have portrayed himself as a convert unless he thought Hobhouse might believe it. Indeed, considering the copious attention that Byron throughout his life paid to Christianity and to Catholicism, we may perceive Byron as a man who himself could neither completely nor consistently adhere to Christian tenets, but who increasingly came to recognize the strength and value of these tenets, praising them and those who followed them in his conversations, his letters, and his poetry.

There are, certainly, moments of jest and moments of doubt.[5] Critics and biographers do have reason to be suspicious about Byron's Christian musings, including his Catholic ones. Some see Byron's religious side only as an anomalous aberration, with Catholicism appealing to him because of the physical elegance and "sensuality" of its "tangible" worshipping rituals (Calvert 7, McGann 253). The evidence, writes one critic, "is such as to remain fairly open ended," but Byron most probably had only a limited and "secular Catholicism" (Donnelly 49). Another critic maintains that the chapter on Byron's respect for religion in the biography written by Countess Teresa Guiccioli (the poet's Italian lover) is to be considered unreliable, lopsided, and biased by "her own convictions" (Lovell's note, *HVSV* 633). A major critic suggests that Byron praised Catholicism only to "bait" his English Protestant friends (Marchand's introduction, *BLJ* 1:14).

But Byron never once makes a genuinely disparaging remark about Christianity or Catholicism. On the contrary, he professes sincere admiration for Christians and for Christian doctrine, especially late in life, seeing Christ as "the source of virtue and felicity" (Kennedy 203), Christ's teachings as "no doubt … conducive to the happiness of the world" (*HVSV* 569), Christianity as "the purest and most liberal religion in the world" (*HVSV* 585). Byron's most skeptical letter admits Christ's "heroism" (*BLJ* 2:97), and within a year of admitting this, Byron declares that "I believe doubtless in God" (*BLJ* 3:120). When Shelley argued for Plato's three classes of men and three faculties of the soul, Byron countered by arguing for the holy Trinity, adding, "I don't know why I am considered an enemy to religion, and an unbeliever" (Medwin 80). By his bedside, Byron kept a Bible that had been given to him by his sister, reading from it "every day" until his death (Kennedy 140, cf. *HVSV* 569). And, as G. Wilson Knight reminds us, Byron throughout his life was honest and trustworthy, kind to animals, and charitable to both friends and strangers alike in the Christian social tradition.

Whereas much of Byron's religious poetry takes the Old Testament as its inspiration, some of Byron's most powerful poetic passages are Christian ones. An Abbot who was gruff in an early draft of *Manfred* is reworked and rewritten so as to be made kindly in the final draft; this good Abbot entreats the unchristian Manfred to seek "the path from sin / To higher hope and better thoughts" (III.i.61-62) and assures him that "all our church can teach thee shall be taught; / And all we can absolve thee, shall be pardon'd" (III.i.86-87). The Vision of Judgment plays with but affirms the "beautiful and mighty" archangel Michael who shines "Radiant with glory, like a banner streaming / Victorious from some world-o'erthrowing fight" and who is "A goodly work of him from whom all glory / And good arise" (st. 28-30). Even *Childe Harold,* which had begun in sorrow and denial, concludes with Byron's marveling at St. Peter's Basilica, "Worthiest of God, the holy and the true … Majesty, / Power, glory, Strength, and Beauty, all are aisled / In this eternal ark of worship undefiled" (*CHP* IV.154). This great cathedral, Byron tells us, imparts "glory," "wonder," "awe," "praise," "sublimity," and "great conceptions" to those who meditate within it (IV.157-59). There is joy here, and genuine admiration. It seems to be no accident that, along with the 'Ave Maria' stanzas of *Don Juan,* these reverent Roman verses are among the most inspiring Byron ever wrote. In the later poem, Byron celebrates the "rosy flood of twilight's sky" and exclaims:

```
Ave Maria! o'er the earth and sea,
That heavenliest hour of Heaven is worthiest thee!
Ave Maria! blessed be the hour!
The time, the clime, the spot, where I so oft
Have felt that moment in its fullest power
Sink o'er the earth so beautiful and soft,
While swung the deep bell in the distant tower,
Or the faint dying day-hymn stole aloft,
And not a breath crept through the rosy air,
And yet the forest leaves seem'd stirr'd with prayer.
Ave Maria! 'tis the hour of prayer!
Ave Maria! 'tis the hour of love!
Ave Maria! may our spirits dare
Look up to thine and to thy Son's above!
Ave Maria! oh that face so fair!
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Those downcast eyes beneath the Almighty dove—
What though 'tis but a pictured image strike—
That painting is no idol, 'tis too like.
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(III.101-3)

Here, apparently looking at a painting of the Immaculate Conception (the absence of Gabriel seems to rule out the Annunciation and the downcast eyes make the Assumption unlikely), Byron celebrates religion's harmony with the works of nature and mankind alike. Declaring the painting to be “no idol,” Byron here does something quite unique in his corpus: he celebrates the human potential to capture and to communicate an apprehension of true and deep spirituality. In *Childe Harold,* man's inability to touch or to experience divinity is repeatedly bemoaned (see II.87; III.14, 62, and 108; IV.126), but here, an opposing viewpoint is presented. It seems that a questing and querying individual can discover real power not through despairing and scoffing but through engaging the brave artists and thinkers who “dare” to envisage Christianity.

Byron became increasingly religious-minded as he matured, and increasingly Catholic-minded after 1819 when he arrived in Italy, the nation that is “Parent of our Religion!” (*CHP* IV.47). As he tells Countess Guiccioli:

> Time and reflection have changed my mind upon these [religious] subjects, and I consider Atheism as a folly. As for Catholicism, so little is it objectionable to me, that I wish my daughter to be brought up in that religion, and some day to marry a Catholic. If Catholicism, after all, suggests difficulties of a nature which it is difficult for reason to get over, are these less great than those which Protestantism creates? Are not all the mysteries common to both creeds? Catholicism at least offers the consolation of Purgatory, of the Sacraments, of absolution and forgiveness; whereas Protestantism is barren of consolation for the soul.

(Guiccioli I:165)

Byron's remarks concerning his young daughter were genuine. When little Allegra was old enough to be separated from her maniacal mother, Claire Clairemont, and from her benign but unchristian guardians, Percy and Mary Shelley, Byron insisted she be sent to Italy, not only to be by his side, but to be educated in a convent and “to become a good Catholic—& (it may be) a Nun” (*BLJ* 5:228). As Byron informs his friend Richard Hoppner in April 1820, he fears not only for his daughter's physical but for her spiritual well-being: “the Child shall not quit me again [to join Claire, the Godwins, and the Shelleys]—to perish of starvation, and green fruit—or be taught to believe that there is no Deity” (*BLJ* 7:80). And, in fact, Byron had Allegra placed, shortly after her arrival in Italy, in the Convent of the Capuchin Nuns of St. John the Baptist, in Bagnacavallo, near Venice. This is hardly what anyone would do only to “bait” one's friends.

It seems to me that Catholicism appealed to Byron for three reasons. First, it satisfied his lifelong love of tradition. He calls Catholicism “the best religion” because “it is assuredly the oldest of the various branches of Christianity” (*BLJ* 8:98) and because it is “the most ancient of worships” (Guiccioli I:202). As was the case for Edmund Burke, ideas and modes were to Byron proven and affirmed by their endurance through time, by their having imbued themselves long enough and deeply enough in a society to become genuine traditions. The longer we find a practice is followed, the more reason there would be to assume there is virtue in it. The longer an idea endures, the more reason there will be to believe this idea to be true. And while Byron detested sycophants such as “turncoat Southey” (*DJ* XI.56), who shift and re-shift their views according to fashion, Byron adored men “of principle” such as Burke (*BLJ* 6:48), who stick with their convictions through tough times. In *Don Juan,* Byron's ideal Catholic, Aurora Raby, is a model of courageous resilience.

The second reason for Catholicism's appeal to Byron is the fact that its doctrines bring manifest functional boons to its practitioners. Unlike mere “Cant religious” and “Cant moral” which are “without the smallest influence upon human actions” (Prose 128), and unlike “drowsy frowzy” mystic speculation which diffuses itself in useless abstraction rather than in “The public mind” (*DJ* III.94-95), Catholicism's teachings actually do something real in the real human world. As Byron writes (to Thomas Moore, in March 1822): Catholicism

> is by far the most elegant worship, hardly excepting the Greek mythology. What with incense, pictures, statues, altars, shrines, relics, and the real presence, confession, absolution,—there is something sensible to grasp at. Besides, it leaves no possibility of doubt; for those who swallow their Deity, really and truly, in transubstantiation, can hardly find any thing else otherwise than easy of digestion.

(*BLJ* 9:123)

Sensing that he sounds sarcastic here, Byron quickly adds:

> I am afraid that this sounds flippant, but I don't mean it to be so; only my turn of mind is so given to taking things in the absurd point of view, that it breaks out in spite of me every now and then. Still, I do assure you that I am a very good Christian. Whether you will believe me in this, I do not know.

(*BLJ* 9:123)

The tone of this letter is quiet and sincere. There is a reverence not merely for beautiful altars and shrines but for the creeds which have inspired the creation of these objects and for the practices which employ them. Material elements are an appeal, but they are to Byron a means; they are what helps the religion work. And the fact that it works is, of course, the whole point. Altars, shrines, and transubstantiation may be “elegant”; but, more importantly, they give us “something sensible to grasp at” in real life, and they leave us with “no possibility of doubt.” Guiccioli confirms that, because Byron was never swayed merely by his imagination and could not help exercising his reason, it was not “the poetry” or the “pomps and gorgeous ceremonies” of Catholicism that appealed to him, but, rather, the religion's genuine effectiveness (I.202). Thus, says Byron, “That Purgatory of theirs is a comfortable doctrine,” much more so than the transmigration of souls taught by Shelley's “wiseacre philosophers” (Medwin 80). Again, it is the functionality of the doctrine that makes it praiseworthy. Like the relics in the Catholic churches, concepts such as Purgatory are strong not because they are poetic or pretty, not because they are efficient or scientific, not because they hold together abstractly in themselves, but—rather—because they have worked and continue to work for real people, because they consistently provide the comfort and the inspiration that a religion is supposed to provide.

Third—and this reason depends upon the second—it seems to me that Catholicism to the later Byron quite often appeared to be right. Before instantly brushing this contention off, let us first remember Byron's empirical mind-set. He sought truth by virtue of effect, trusting not information that satisfied a priori logic but that which subsisted manifestly in the human world. He thus praised and advocated learning that comes through “experience not Books” (*BLJ* 1:173), through “history” (*BLJ* 3:218, 8:240), and through the “due precision” of “experience” and “tradition” (*DJ* V.115). As we have seen above, Byron liked Catholicism because it was “sensible” and because it actually produced manifest goodness for humans, here, on earth. And while there is no record of Byron's ever attending Mass, it was reported by Fletcher (who had been Byron's valet for twenty years) that the poet would “repeatedly, on meeting or passing any religious ceremonies which the Roman Catholics have in their frequent processions … dismount his horse and fall on his knees, and remain in that posture till the procession had passed” (*HVSV* 210). Byron himself, it seems, felt firsthand the power of the ceremonies he adored. Catholicism worked not only for the Italians but for Byron as well.

For more evidence of Byron's genuine belief in Catholicism, let us return to the poetry, in particular to the character of Aurora, an orphan and a Catholic, who emerges in the fifteenth canto of *Don Juan,* during a dinner at Norman Abbey.[6] Aurora is introduced not merely to be a potential wife for the poem's maturing protagonist but as a symbol of ideal tradition and ideal faith. Among many guests at the Abbey,

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          there was
Indeed a certain fair and fairy one,
Of the best class, and better than her class,—
Aurora Raby, a young star who shone
O'er life, too sweet an image for such glass,
A lovely being, scarcely form'd or moulded,
A Rose with all its sweetest leaves yet folded;
Rich, noble, but an orphan; left an only
Child to the care of guardians good and kind;
But still her aspect had an air so lonely!
Early in years, and yet more infantine
In figure, she had something of the sublime
In eyes which sadly shone, as seraphs' shine.
All youth—but with an aspect beyond time;
Radiant and grave—as pitying man's decline;
Mournful—but mournful of another's crime,
She look'd as if she sat by Eden's door,
And grieved for those who could return no more.
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(XV.43-5)

Aurora's essence is dual: both “fair” and “fairy”—a convergence of what is ideal on earth (“Of the best class, and better than her class”) and in the heavens (“a young star who shone / O'er life, too sweet an image for such glass”). The “sublime” of her eyes is the Burkean sublime, an unfathomable and beautiful vastness and greatness. She rises beyond “time” that is historical. Yet while transcending human time in her closeness to eternity and to the Edenic past, she is simultaneously associated with civilization, and she thus brings spiritual ideals to real life on earth. Her reach is wide as well as far.

Beatty (152ff.) associates Aurora with authentic religious understanding and with an ideal spiritual life that includes sexuality as well as thoughtfulness, strength, and purity. He notes that Aurora is the true heir to Norman Abbey since she is the only Catholic within it, the only person associated with its original monastic purposes; its windows are as “seraph's wings” (XIII.62) while her eyes are as “seraphs' shine” (XV.45). Aurora alone can restore prelapsarian ideals and “connect Juan and the poem trustingly to their existence” (Beatty 198-99). I agree with Beatty, but I think Aurora idealizes not only spirituality in general but Catholicism in particular; the specificity of her religion is not accessory but essential. As Byron informs us:

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She was a Catholic too, sincere, austere,
As far as her own gentle heart allow'd,
And deem'd that fallen worship far more dear
Perhaps because 'twas fallen: her sires were proud
Of deeds and days when they had fill'd the ear
Of nations, and had never bent or bow'd
To novel power; and as she was the last,
She held their old faith and old feelings fast.
Her spirit seem'd as seated on a throne
Apart from the surrounding world, and strong
In its own strength—most strange in one so young!
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(XV.46-7)

Catholicism is “fallen” in Protestant England, where Aurora resides. England seems the worse for this, since Aurora, even at her young age, shines far above both the foolish people and foolish practices of her “surrounding world” as a beacon of principle and forbearance. Thus, Norman Abbey's other lady-visitors are caricatured as “Miss Raw, Miss Flaw, Miss Showman, and Miss Knowman [and] Miss Audacia Shoestring” (XV.40-42); their society is like a “masquerade” in which “The guests were placed according to their roll” (XV. 74). Aurora is “purer than the rest” (XV.55), maintaining “self-possession” amidst the fakery of the dinner's hot “tumult of fish, flesh, and fowl” (XV.74).

Lady Adeline, the matchmaker-matron of Norman Abbey, might have encouraged Juan to speak with Aurora, but Adeline sees the young woman as “prim, silent, cold” (XV.49) due to what the narrator tells us is an inappropriate and inexplicable “prejudice … against a creature / As pure as sanctity itself from vice” (XV.52). Aurora is in fact silent, but, as Byron tells us, this silence is “Shakespearian” in that “There was a depth of feeling to embrace / Thoughts, boundless, deep, but silent too as Space” (XVI.48). Happily, Juan sees a richness in Aurora's quiet propriety. To him, Aurora is “a Catholic, / And therefore fittest [to be his wife]” (XV.50). He senses this fittingness when he realizes that Aurora is the opposite of Haidee, the primitive pagan island-girl whom Juan once loved (see cantos II-IV). As we learn, “the difference” between Haidee and Aurora “Was such as lies between a flower and a gem” (XV.59). Aurora is thus “High” in birth, unlike “lost Haidee … Nature's all” (XV.58). Aurora is like a work of art rather than nature, and this is, says Byron, a “sublime comparison” (XV.59). Aurora does not spring quickly up from the ground only to perish in one season; her essence endures, admired through ages.

Yet as faith must not be easy, Aurora herself is elusive, and she “scarcely look'd aside” when Juan attempts to flirt (XV.78). But, after concentrated effort on Juan's part, she at last begins “once or twice to smile, if not to listen” (XV.80), and then “she began to question” (XV.81), joining into conversation. Through Juan's ability to tame his presumptuousness and act humbly, Aurora shows her virtues. Whereas Haidee spoke an indecipherable foreign tongue, Aurora proves to be easily understood, graceful and versatile in public rapport. She begins to display less “indifference” to Juan (XV.83), responding now to his “deference,” to his “delicate dissent,” and even to his “good looks” although she “look'd more on books than faces” (83-85). We learn that the appeal of her conversation does not fade when we find Juan, alone that night, unable to forget that Aurora's eyes were “more bright / Than Adeline (such is advice) advised” (XVI.12). After this, “He sighed;—the next resource is the full moon, / Where all sighs are deposited; and now / It happened luckily, the chaste orb shone / As clear as such a climate will allow” (XVI.13). The Catholic Aurora, then, represents a beautiful and spiritual purity accessible within real human life.

But Juan will not explore his spiritual longings. Fickle, he wanders from his room late at night where he encounters what appears to be a ghost of one of the Abbey's long-dead monks. This encounter startles Juan, pushing him figuratively away from Christianity and literally away from Aurora. Even when, during the next morning's breakfast, Juan “caught Aurora's eye on his, / And something like a smile upon her cheek” (XVI.92), Juan is flustered rather than gratified. As a result of Aurora's glance Juan “grew carnation with vexation, / Which was not very wise and still less witty” but “his senses / By last night's ghost [had] been driven from their defences” (XVI.93). Had he tried again to make conversation with Aurora he might have regained his voice, but fearful instead, he let the ghost-sighting render him “as silent as a ghost” (XVI.107).

Byron makes sure that we regard Juan's unwillingness to speak with Aurora as a bad thing. As Byron tells us,

          Aurora had renewed
In him some feelings he had lately lost
Or hardened; feelings which, perhaps ideal,
Are so divine, that I must deem them real:—
The love of higher things and better days;
The unbounded hope, and heavenly ignorance
Of what is called the world, and the world's ways;

```
The moments when we gather from a glance
More joy than from all future pride or praise …
```

(XVI.107-8)

Anyone "That hath a memory, or that had a heart" would be filled with happiness at this but Juan, "apprehensive of his spectral guest … sate, with feelings awkward to express" (XVI.109, 111). Unable or unwilling to cast off his awkwardness, Juan seeks the ghost a second time and, upon encountering it, finds it to be another of the guests, the Duchess Fitz-Fulke, in disguise. This Duchess is "voluptuous" and "frolic" (XVI.123), of all the Abbey's guests the most earthly and "graceless" (XVI.49). Byron would "rather not say what might be related / Of her exploits" but informs us that these exploits were most "ticklish" (XIV.42). Alas, the irresolute Juan forgoes the chaste Aurora and consents to lascivious Fitz-Fulke's advances. When we meet him again, in his last appearance in the poem, Juan is no longer animated and gentlemanly but "wan and worn, with eyes that hardly brooked / The light, that through the Gothic windows shone" (XVII.14). It may be because of Juan's abandonment of the spirituality represented by Aurora that Byron intended to ultimately bring Juan to an ignoble demise (see *BLJ* 8:68 and Medwin 165), guillotined during the French Revolution.

Byron himself hoped to avoid Juan's mistakes. At the time he wrote the late cantos of *Don Juan,* he was engaging a course of thinking that we may view as the exact opposite of his protagonist's—for it is a course that steers towards Christianity rather than away from it. Byron journeyed to Greece in July of 1823, bringing books with him that show a continuation of the regard and respect for Christianity he demonstrated through his idealized portrait of Aurora. Shortly after arriving in Greece, Byron became fast friends with a Methodist doctor and proselytizer named James Kennedy, with whom he had numerous conversations about religion. Byron saw Kennedy as "a clever but eccentric man" who is "very pious and tries in good earnest to make converts … I like what I have seen of him" (*BLJ* 11:46). Kennedy's records of the conversations overwhelmingly concern his own ideas rather than Byron's, but they do depict Byron's continuing fascination with Christianity and continuing hopes of "believing" and of being "converted" so that he might practice Christianity "in earnest" (see esp. 35, 78, 95, 140, 180, 236).

With the aid of the London Greek Committee, Byron intended to lead the conquered Greeks against the ruling Turks and, if successful, to help establish a proper government for the newly liberated nation. The books Byron had with him at the time (listed in Carlton 43-45) suggest that he was considering spiritual ideals as well as political ones. We might categorize these sixty-odd books under four headings: miscellaneous, history, literature, and religion. The miscellaneous group is the largest, comprising roughly twenty volumes of politics, philosophy, law, science, linguistics, and travel narrative. History and literature come next, with roughly fifteen volumes each; Rome and Greece are best represented under history, Scott's novels and Italian poetry best represented under literature.

The most interesting group of books is the religious one. The largest single category of books after history and literature, it includes a collection of *Discourses & Sermons*; an edition of *French Reflexions sur L'Evidence du Christianisme*; three volumes by the Greek saint Sinaita Anastasius (who in the seventh century wrote sermons, commentaries on Byzantine church doctrines, and a defense of Christianity); a selection of *Matins and Vespers* (1823) compiled by Byron's associate John Bowring; the famous *Call to the Unconverted* (1657) by the Presbyterian minister Richard Baxter; and, most interestingly, another famous work, *The Catholic Doctrine of the Trinity proved from Scripture* (1750) by William Jones of Nayland, the third edition of which included *A Letter to the Common People in Answer to Some Popular Arguments against the Trinity* (1767).

The presence of these books illuminates a conspicuous statement of Byron's that had been made only months after the appearance of Aurora in Don Juan, immediately following one of Byron's conversations with Dr. Kennedy. Dr. Henry Muir, one of Byron's close friends in Greece, recorded the statement in his journal:

> To-day, on visiting Lord B., the first thing he said to me was, "Well, I have had another visit from Dr. Kennedy, and I am going to give in; I believe I shall be converted. The fact is, Kennedy has had a good deal of trouble with us all, and it would be a pity were he to lose his time. And, besides, he says we are all to be Christians one day or other—it is just as well to begin now." Then, clasping his hands and looking upwards, he exclaimed, "Oh, I shall begin the 17th Canto of Don Juan a changed man!" He then went on repeating different portions of the conversations that had taken place between himself and Kennedy.

These words might be hastily chalked up as sarcasm, since Byron had already begun the stipulated canto in Italy three months earlier. Yet Muir does not make light of Byron's remarks, and if we turn to Don Juan XVII's completed verses we will find three items indicating that Byron's "changing" may have already begun.

First, Byron offers humorous remarks on Catholic Italian language and culture (st. 3 and note, where we learn that some Italians refer to orphaned foundlings as 'mules'). These remarks are brief, yet they seem conspicuously and remarkably situated after six entire cantos on English people and English manners. Second, Byron makes a quip against the Protestant Martin Luther, whose statements are seen as "obtuse" and as "a paradox," and because of whom, regrettably, "The Sacraments have been reduced to two" (st. 6-7). Third, Byron's opening digression makes commentary on, above all else, orphans (st. 1-4). There are many types of orphans, we learn, including those who lose "parental tenderness" rather than their actual parents (st. 1), and including not only "half-starved" babies but also wealthy ones (st. 3). And not all orphans are in distress because "Many a lonely tree the loftier grows / Than others crowded in the Forest's maze" (st. 1). The mention of wealth, the positive remarks on an orphan's potential loftiness, even the very presence of this commentary, all seem to indicate that the orphaned Aurora will move into the forefront of *Don Juan*'s narrative. She will evidently become a symbol of the "virtue" abandoned by Juan when he chooses not to seek marriage and commitment but to dilly-dally in "vice" with the fleshly and unspiritual Duchess Fitz-Fulke (st. 12).

It seems apparent that Catholicism was foremost among religions in Byron's mind during the last year of his life. When Byron speaks of "beginning" the seventeenth canto, then, could this mean that he intends to begin making Catholicism its central theme? And when Byron speaks of converting, could it be that he is considering becoming Catholic himself? We know that Byron saw greatness in those who practiced religion; we know that Byron saw bad repercussions for those who rejected it. We have seen that Byron took Catholicism quite seriously for his entire life, and that Byron's late poetry involved Catholic themes and Catholic characters. It seems that Catholicism would be Byron's only real choice if his time to "turn devout" had truly come.

Sadly, Byron was unable to add to the fourteen short stanzas of Don Juan's seventeenth canto that he had written just before he left Italy.[7] In Greece he devoted himself to military and political matters, then sickened, then died, and we can only guess where he would next have taken his poem and his thinking. We might continue to view him as a skeptic scoffer, ever without a compass and ever filled with contempt. But a different picture may be closer to the truth: a man who grew wiser and more disciplined after a reckless youth, a man who would continue to wander both geographically and poetically, but who would do so guided by the principles and traditions of the Catholic faith.

Notes

1. Christensen, most recently, has seen Byron as, culturally, a subverter of English commercial morality and imperialism, and, intellectually, as a postmodern skeptic whose nature it is to have "no position" (218).
2. See Hoagwood, Thorslev, and Marjarum on Byron's skepticism. See Lovell on Byron's Deism. See Marchand and Blessington on the superstitions. On the drinking, gambling, and whoring see Marchand, esp. 102ff.; see also a letter from Byron to Hobhouse where he reports being with Italian

prostitutes—“at least two hundred of one sort or another” (BLJ 6:66). On Byron's homosexuality see Crompton; see also Christensen. On the incest see Maurois and Marchand.

3. Poetry is culled from the McGann edition (*Childe Harold* abbreviated as *CHP* and *Don Juan* abbreviated as *DJ*), letters from the Marchand edition (abbreviated as *BLJ*). Lovell's *His Very Self and Voice* will be abbreviated *HVSV*.
4. Byron's last poem, *The Island* (1823), depicts a more general idealism. Its protagonist, unlike the doomed heroes of the early Byronic Tales (1813-16), manages to survive calamity and hardship to find a spiritual and sensual paradise on earth. See Brewer for recent commentary on how *The Island* stems from a quasi-Shelleyan idealism that arose late in Byron's life. See Lang for a different perspective, where Don Juan heads towards unhappiness and where Aurora is a sham-ideal.
5. There is skepticism in BLJ 2:97-98, and in *CHP* II.3, 7-9, and 44. See also *DJ* II.55 where “It costs three francs for every mass that's said” or *DJ* IV.81 on the lasciviousness of slothful monks. There is a joke about the ephemerality of religions in HVSV 297.
6. Earlier in this canto we are reminded that, although Christ's words have been at times ill-applied by others, his creed is truly “pure” and capable of “Redeeming worlds” (*DJ* XV.18). Byron's note to this stanza informs us that “If ever God was man—or Man God—he was both. I never arraigned his creed, but the use—or abuse—made of it.”
7. In BLJ 10:206 and 10:212 Byron regrets that, dealing with Greek affairs, he has no time to write poetry.

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Criticism: G. K. Rishmawi (essay date summer 1999)

SOURCE: Rishmawi, G. K. "The Muslim East in Byron's *Don Juan.*" *Papers on Language & Literature* 35, no. 3 (summer 1999): 227-43.

[*In the following essay, Rishmawi examines Byron's shifting attitudes toward the East between the Oriental Tales and* Don Juan. *Rishmawi contends that, unlike the passionate, firsthand accounts that appear in Byron's Oriental Tales, the East of* Don Juan *is based on readings and observation and, accordingly, is depicted in a more subtle and satiric manner.*]

The Eastern affinities which Byron developed while he was in Turkey and Greece, and which colored his Oriental Tales (Rishmawi 48-62), are still felt in his later poetry, particularly in his masterpiece. Yet it should be stated that although the East of the Tales is the same East of *Don Juan,* we notice important changes in

Byron's attitude toward it. On the one hand, the East of the Tales offered Byron a perfect setting as well as a strong motive for his hero's involvement with eastern men and women, an involvement in which the Byronic hero indulges himself in violence and revenge, and suffers the subsequent feelings of guilt and remorse. On the other hand, the East of the Tales gave Byron an emotional by-pass which he so badly needed during his hectic years of fame and which prevented him from going mad. The East of *Don Juan* is of quite a different nature. Since Byron's memories of his Eastern experiences had almost faded by the time he wrote *Don Juan,* we notice that the material in it is not the result of first-hand experiences, but rather of Byron's readings and observations of Turkish history and manners. Thus, Byron's attitude toward the East in *Don Juan* is calculated, subtle, and satirical, a far cry from the passionate and obsessive attitude which we have seen in the Tales. Furthermore, Byron no longer needed to go to the East (in his imagination) in search of an emotional outlet, simply because in his later (and more mature) poetry Byron seems to have escaped from the feelings of guilt and remorse which, as Blackstone comments, "have dogged him from his pilgrimage years" (315). This shift in Byron's attitude toward the East coincides favorably with another shift in his poetical career, i.e., the shift from romances to satires in which, as Rutherford believes, Byron found his real voice as a poet (*A Critical Study* 142).

Having established the direction of Byron's approach toward the Eastern material in *Don Juan,* we move into the consideration and analysis of the Eastern elements in his longest poem, which are concentrated in the fifth and sixth cantos and referred to in the seventh and the eighth. One can say that Byron's involvement with the East in *Don Juan* is focused on the seraglio, the symbol of Eastern power and corruption and the most powerful aspect of the Muslim East in the western imagination. Byron's interest in the seraglio is two-fold: social and political. At the social level, Byron exposes the inhabitants of the seraglio—the Sultan, his favorite wife (Sultana Gulbeyaz), his maids and eunuch—and reveals the perverse patterns which characterize the relationships which exist among them, as well as those which they have with the outside world. This perversity is strongly felt in the dramatic encounter between Gulbeyaz and Juan, in the Sultan's attitude toward his wives and many maids, and in the harem, the most secretive wing of the seraglio. At the political level, Byron criticizes the reckless, indifferent, and lustful master of the seraglio, and partially blames him for the catastrophic siege of Ismail which resulted in the death of thousands of innocent people. Moreover, the seraglio helps Byron launch his severest attack against tyranny and tyrants (in this case the Sultan and Gulbeyaz)[1] who abuse the power invested in them by their people. Yet one has to remember that Byron's relentless fight against Turkish tyrants does not prevent him from appreciating the courage and heroism of Turkish soldiers who die in the defense of their homes, and from making Juan, his hero, risk his life for the sake of saving Leila, the orphan Turkish child. In fact, Byron achieves a high level of moral impartiality[2] in his objective attitude toward the siege and the subsequent destruction of the Turkish city of Ismail. It serves as his strongest reason for condemning aimless wars and vain generals.

Before we discuss Byron's exposition of the intricate social life in the seraglio, and his realistic, serio-comic, and psychological analysis of the characters of its inhabitants, it is important to dwell upon the manner in which Juan, Byron's hero, actually enters the seraglio—a place reserved for people of royal background or connections, or to the Sultan's harem and eunchs. This takes us to Istanbul's slave-market in which the Eastern scenario of *Don Juan* begins. There, Juan is displayed and finally sold (with Johnson, an English soldier of fortune) to Baba, the royal eunuch who does not waste much time in carrying his precious cargo to its destination. So, without knowing it, Don Juan finds himself inside the seraglio. As he is shoved from one corner of the palace into another, he begins to realize the degrading job for which Baba bought him. Frightened by Baba's threat of castration, Juan agrees to be dressed as one of the Sultan's maids. In this disguise, Juan escapes the screening eyes of the dwarfs (the gate-keepers of Gulbeyaz's bedroom), and is finally brought into her royal presence. Thus begins the encounter between Gulbeyaz, the despot, and Juan, the young man who insists on the freedom of his will. It is this encounter which exposes the perversity of the social (sexual) patterns of the seraglio.

Ironically, the reason behind this conflict is love, in which both Gulbeyaz and Juan are experts, but each in his own way. Gulbeyaz, who thinks of Juan as her property, orders him to make love to her. “Christian, canst thou love?” But the indignant young man ardently rejects Gulbeyaz's “order,” and insists that love is an act of free will. Moreover, Juan triumphantly asserts that even if tyrants enslave our flesh, our souls will remain free, and that love itself is a gift of freedom:

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Our souls are free, and 'tis in vain
We would against them make the flesh obey—
The spirit in the end will have its way.
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(CV cx)

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Love is for the free!
I am not dazzled by this splendid roof;
Whatever thy power, and great is seems to be,
Heads bow, knees bend, eyes watch around a throne
And hands obey—our hearts are still our own.
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(CV cxxvii)

One can think of at least two ways of interpreting the conflict which arises between Gulbeyaz and Juan when the latter rejects her sexual advances. McGann attributes Juan's moral stand to his innocence, or more accurately to his ignorance of the ways of the world (113). McGann believes that it is only Juan who seems to believe in the genuineness of his motto “Love is for the free” (112). On the one hand, Gulbeyaz is unable to understand it because, all her life, she has been accustomed to being a tyrant heard and obeyed, and, thus, like her husband, she does not really know what freedom is.[3] On the other hand, the cynic narrator, and supposedly the reader, are expected to laugh at Juan's motto and consider it a trite and meaningless cliche:

```
This was a truth to us extremely trite
Not so to her, who ne'er had heard of such things
She deem'd her least command might yield delight
Earth being made for queens and kings.
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(CV cxxviii)

Moreover, Juan himself participates in discrediting his motto. This is reflected in Juan's sudden softening of his moral stand toward Gulbeyaz's crude sensuality. In her first assault, Gulbeyaz orders Juan to make love to her, an order which is strongly contrasted in his mind with the idyllic island experience with his beloved Haidee. Thus, strengthened by his beautiful memories, and tortured by his slavery, Juan cries, and declares that though Gulbeyaz owns his flesh, she will never own his spirit. Though Juan's tears move Gulbeyaz to the extent of moistening her eyes:

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And thus Gulbeyaz, though she knew not why,
Felt an odd glistening moisture in her eye
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(CV cxx)

She is still set on going on with her plans. Consequently, she assaults Juan again, this time by throwing herself desperately on him:

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She rose, and pausing one chaste moment, threw
Herself upon his breast, and there she grew.
```

(CV cxxv)

But Juan is still untouched, and he still believes in the freedom of the heart. Gently, he takes Gulbeyaz off him, and proudly states that he will not become an object of “a sultanas sensual phantasy.”

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The prison'd eagle will not pair, nor I
Serve a Sultana's sensual phantasy.
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(CV cxxvi)

Yet from this moment on, things begin to change. Gulbeyaz, who seems to have lost her charm and her “imperial” strength, finally resorts to tears. Ironically, her tears work miracles; Juan, who had made up his mind:

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To be impaled, or quarter'ed as a dish
For dogs, or to be slain with pangs refined,
Or thrown to lions, or made baits for fish
```

(CV cxli)

could not resist “a woman crying[!]”

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But all his great preparatives for dying
Dissolved like snow before a woman crying
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(CV cxli)

He is now ready to please Gulbeyaz in any way she likes. But, unluckily for Gulbeyaz, the Sultan has to arrive at this very critical moment! Thus one can conclude by saying that Juan's concept of love as an act of the free will, which may look romantic and heroic, can best be understood humorously, if not satirically.

Manning reads Gulbeyaz and Juan's encounter as a battle between the sexes, in which the male represents power and authority, and the female weakness and submissiveness (Manning 49-55). Juan reacts unfavorably to Gulbeyaz's sexual advances, because at that stage of the love-game she is the man and he is the helpless woman: Juanna. It is only when Gulbeyaz wept, i.e., became a woman, that Juan began to relent and to apologize for his uncivilized behavior. And even if the Sultan's sudden appearance prevents Juan from practicing his manhood, he at least regains his confidence in his masculinity, which was severely threatened by his feminine “disguise.”

Perhaps one could come to a better understanding of the sexual conflict between Gulbeyaz and Juan if one sees it within a larger context, in this case a context which includes a similar situation in the Tales, and particularly in *The Corsair.* Placing the sexual conflict in such a context will help broaden our understanding of Byron's attitude toward the plight of powerful Eastern women who happen to fall in love with infidels! Like Gulbeyaz, Gulnare falls in love with Conrad, not because of his features (as in Gulbeyaz's affair with Juan) but because of his kindness and generosity toward her. But, somehow or other, both Gulbeyaz and Gulnare are “spurned” by their Western lovers and are obliged to shrink into the status of helpless and devoted women. Gulnare, frustrated by Seyd's indifference and by her loveless marriage, went to the extreme of killing her husband-master to save her lover. But in so doing, Gulnare seemed to have threatened Conrad's masculinity. That is why he reacted coldly toward all she did to save him. It was only when Gulnare's strength receded and when she asked for Conrad's love and forgiveness that he condescended and rewarded her efforts with a cold kiss!

It is important to mention at this juncture that Gulbeyaz's sexual encounter with Juan is one aspect of her complex character. In fact, it incites the reader to wonder about the authenticity of Byron's characterization of

Gulbeyaz. We say this because we know that Byron did not meet a real Sultana while he was in Turkey, simply because he could not have access to the harem. Consequently, one would expect Byron's description of Gulbeyaz to be far removed from reality and unconvincing. Yet, to offset his lack of personal involvement with a Sultana, Byron fuses his readings on the seraglio's chief inhabitants and their manners with his own experiences with English aristocratic women. Naturally Byron projects his knowledge of the feminine character on the Turkish feminine despot, and that is why Gulbeyaz the woman is more life-like and appealing than Gulbeyaz the tyrant. Moreover, Byron seems to say that, at heart, Gulbeyaz is just like any other woman whose loveless marriage and indifferent husband do not satisfy her emotional and sexual needs. Unfortunately for Gulbeyaz, her latest affair with Juan does not work out in her favor, and his bold rejection of her advances made her realize that she is human too. Byron minutely describes and analyzes the behavior of the spurned woman and the contradictory feelings which go through her mind. These feelings are the result of Gulbeyaz's frustration at not knowing how to cope with the negative end of her affair:

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Her first thought was to cut off Juan's head;
Her second, to cut only his acquaintance;
Her third, to ask him where he had been bred;
Her fourth, to rally him into repentance;
Her fifth, to call her maids and go to bed;
Her sixth, to stab herself; her seventh,
To sentence the lash to Baba: but her grand resource
Was to sit down again, and cry of course.
```

(CV cxxxix)

By making fun of Gulbeyaz's irrational responses to Juan's startling rejection, Byron achieves a high score in attacking Gulbeyaz the despot who thinks that Juan is her property and that love is an order to be obeyed. Byron puts his hand at the heart of Gulbeyaz's problem when he attributes her lack of sympathy and human feelings to the fact that she has never had to share them with anyone. In her royal isolation, Gulbeyaz the despot takes over Gulbeyaz the woman in need of love and directs her behavior:

```
… Having no equals, nothing which had e'er
Infected her with sympathy till now,
And never having dreamt what 'twas to bear
Aught of a serious, sorrowing kind, although
There might arise some pouting petty care
To cross her brow, she wonder'd how so near
Her eyes another's eye could shet a tear.
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(CV cxix)

Another important aspect of Gulbeyaz, the passionate woman, is her rather perverse relationship with her husband, the Sultan. Although she is supposed to be a model to her maids and a symbol of chastity and faithfulness to her husband, Gulbeyaz is just the opposite. She finds in her husband's age, other wives, and many maids a good excuse to satisfy her sexual appetite away from the marital bed. In fact, she violates the Turkish moral code and even risks her life by instructing Baba to buy her male-slaves and to disguise them as maids of the Sultan. Byron depicts Gulbeyaz in one of her most telling moments; unable to enjoy Juan's youth because of the Sultan's sudden arrival, Gulbeyaz lies beside her husband, waiting for the moment to go to her lover:

```
Gulbeyaz and her lord were sleeping, or
At least one of them—Oh, the heavy night
When wicked wives, who love some bachelor
Lie down in a dungeon to sign for the light
Of the grey morning, and look vainly for
Its twinkle through the lattice dusky quite—
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To toss, to tumble, doze, revive, and quake
Lest their too lawful bed-fellow should wake.
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(CVI xxiv)

Finally, one can say that Byron's treatment of Gulbeyaz's complex character is that of the gentle satirist. Although he attacks Gulbeyaz's selfishness, cruelty, and inhumanity, Byron does that gently and even sympathetically! Steffan claims Byron's softening of his attack on Gulbeyaz's tyranny, suggests that Byron is more interested in developing the satiric farce in the seraglio episode than in analyzing "the plight of the oppressed individual" (211).

> In the clash between the Sultana and her slave," Steffan argues, "the dramatic analysis of despotic character accentuates its disagreeable arrogance, jeers at its absurdities, but at the same time refrains from taking too seriously the plight of the oppressed individual. The cause of liberty is maintained and the vices of tyranny reproved, but the main actors and their conflict stay within the confines of satiric farce."

(211)

Byron skillfully uses the Sultan's sudden appearance at Gulbeyaz's bedroom to move Juan (now known as Juanna) into the Oda (where the maids sleep), as well as to ridicule the Sultan himself. In fact, the Sultan is the least engaging among the seraglio's inhabitants, and Byron does not miss a chance to laugh at his stupidity and shallow-mindedness. Steffan aptly describes the Sultan as "a buffo character, too absurd an autocrat to be other than a harmless nincompoop" (214). But it is important to make it clear at this point that Byron's intention in the harem episode as well as in the sixth canto goes beyond the limits of being the "big joke" which Steffan ascribes to it (212). It indicates Byron's sympathetic and psychologically deep understanding of the inhabitants of the secretive wing of the seraglio. And, as in the case of Gulbeyaz, Byron makes up for his lack of first-hand experience in the Oda, by vivid and compelling description of the maids, the caged women of the harem. Byron shrewdly observes the behavior of these women. He very easily discovers their despair, restlessness, and fear of the future. Byron aptly compares the maids to caged birds, but unlike the birds, which beat for air, the maids beat for the love of one man, the insatiable Sultan:

```
Back to their chambers, those long galleries
In the seraglio, where the ladies lay
Their delicate limbs; a thousand bosoms there
Beating for love, as the caged birds for air.
```

(CVI xxvi)

Furthermore, the maids suffer from the repression of their energies, particularly the sexual desires. That is why Katinka, for example, always dreams of men, and sees ghosts of Giaours "upon each of the four posts" of the Oda:

```
… I am sure I see
A phantom upon each of the four posts:
And then I have the worst dreams that can be,
Of Guebres, Giacurs, and Ginns and
Gouls in hosts. …
```

(CVI xlviii)

While Katinka's bad dreams may show that she is still struggling to find her feelings, one gets the impression that the majority of the maids have already lost them. They have become lifeless, and, as Byron observes,

“statue-like”:

```
A Fourth as marble, statue-like and still,
Lay in a breathless, hush'd, and stony sleep;
White, cold, and pure, as looks a frozen rill.
```

(CVI lxviii)

But, let us leave the other maids in their numbness and turn our attention to the silently beautiful Dudu who was asked by the Mother of the maids to share her bed with Juanna. The first thing we realize about Dudu is that she is not another Gulbeyaz; she is not as beautiful nor as resourceful, but she attracts Juan because of her silent beauty and her languishing form which is “adapted to be put to bed”:

```
… while Dudu's form
Look'd more adapted to be put to bed,
Being somewhat large, and languishing, and lazy.
Yet of a beauty that would drive you crazy.
```

(CVI xli)

Dudu's silent beauty, which Byron fondly describes as “a soft landscape of mild earth,” is suddenly marred by her midnight screams which wake up the whole Oda. When questioned as to the reason for her crying, Dudu replies that it is because of a bad dream of being stung by a bee while trying to eat an apple, a dream that represents—as in the case of Katinka—her unconscious and repressed sexual desires. But Byron deliberately chooses not to comment on the explicit sexual implications of Dudu's dream:

```
All that I know is, that the facts I state
Are true as truth has ever been of late.
```

(CVI lxxxv)

But more ironically, Juan—who has evidently regained his masculinity in Dudu's bed—continues to sleep fast and does not seem the least bothered by the commotion:

```
Juanna lay
As fast as ever husband by his mate
In holy matrimony snores away.
```

(CVI lxxiii)

And, when asked if he wanted to sleep somewhere else, Juan insisted on spending the rest of the night with Dudu! Eventually, poor Dudu was rebuked for waking the whole Oda for such a trivial reason and was put to bed.

To conclude this analysis of the maids' behavior and of Dudu's character, we must point to the fact that Dudu, like any other maid, is a property of the Sultan. Thus, she has to wait till his Highness wishes to honor her to be his bed-mate for a night or two. Besides that, she is a passive being, unable to understand herself, her environment, and her real needs. Dudu is, in the final analysis, a natural product of the inhuman establishment of the harem—a beautiful, not so intelligent woman, whom Byron certainly would desire!

One cannot leave the seraglio without dwelling upon the character of Baba, the royal eunuch, and the worst example of the seraglio's perversity: involuntary impotence, or what Byron humorously calls “the third or the neutral sex” (CVI cxvii) We first meet Baba in the slave-market, where we would expect him to be a regular

customer. Yet this time, Baba is running a special errand to please the taste of Gulbeyaz. After a thorough inspection of Juan, the object of his Sultana's last whim, Baba decides that he is worth the money. And after closing the deal with the slave-merchant, Baba swiftly brings his precious merchandise to the royal palace. Although he threatens Juan with castration if he does not put on a maid's dress, we feel that Baba's main concern is to please his Sultana by performing his job to the best of his abilities. He does not hold any grudges against Juan; he may even have pity on him. In general, Baba seems to enjoy his job, except when, as in the case of Juan, the merchandise does not please the palate of the voluptuous Sultana. At these moments, Baba who thanks God for his sexual neutrality, has to put up with his employer's anger, moodiness, and scoldings.

```
Away he went then upon his comission,
Growling and grumbling in good Turkish phrase
Against all women of whate'er condition,
Especially Sultanas and their ways;
Their obstinacy, pride, and indecision,
Their never knowing their own mind two days
The trouble that they gave, their immortality,
Which made him daily bless his own "neutrality."
```

(CVI cxvii)

Although Baba does not appear much in the seraglio scene, Byron has so vividly described his character that we tend to remember his shrewdness and his pragmatism in dealing with his whimsical Sultana. In fact, Baba, besides being an important part of the seraglio episode, is one of the best described secondary characters in *Don Juan.*

As mentioned earlier, Byron's interest in the East in *Don Juan* is not limited to the exposition of the intricate and perverse social/sexual life in the seraglio. The seraglio's influence is felt outside its secret galleries and conspicuously in the battlefield between the Turks and the Russians over the Turkish city of Ismail. In fact, Byron seems to say that it is the seraglio's political corruption which partially causes this war. And although Byron dedicates the eighth canto to attacking aimless wars and vain generals, he involves Juan in a series of generous actions toward Eastern men and women. These actions can be the best evidence of Byron's moral impartiality, referred to earlier. Juan's generosity and impartiality toward the East are shown in two scenes. We see them in Juan's insistence on the safety of the maids and Baba (with whom he was smuggled from the palace and into the Russian camp) and in Juan's risking his life to save Leila, the orphan Turkish girl, in the midst of the war. In the Russian camp, Juan insists that the maids must be brought to safety and shows his willingness to fight for their sake. But more important than Juan's insistence on the maids' safety is his risking his life to save Leila. In the aftermath of the carnage, and amidst

```
Thousands of slaughter'd men, a yet warm group
Of murder'd women, …
—while as beautiful as May,
A female child of ten years tried to stoop
And hide her little palpitating breast
Amidst the bodies lull'd in bloody rest.
```

(CVIII xci)

Upon spotting the helpless orphan, Juan sprang to defend her against two brutal cossacks who wanted to slay her. Juan's action maimed the brutal soldiers and saved Leila. In fact, by saving Leila, Juan demonstrates his courage and humanity which distinguish him from the mainstream of soldiers who fight for pay or glory. In a sense, Leila is a symbol of innocence threatened by the devastating war, and her positive influence on Juan proves that he is not biased against the Turks. Juan is moved by Leila's helplessness, and he vows to shield and protect the orphan child. Furthermore, Leila's pure, transparent, and radiant eyes have a great effect on

Juan who decides not only to risk his life to save her, but also to miss his chance for glory and plunder. Finally, Leila is brought to safety, and Juan is rewarded for his courage.

From another perspective, Leila's rescue in *Don Juan* contrasts sharply with Leila's drowning in *The Giaour.* In fact, Blackstone establishes a significant link between the two episodes. He argues that the “episode is a symbolic reversal of the guilt of *The Giaour*” (315). Leila in *The Giaour,* Blackstone goes on to say, “is murdered and the giaour's remaining years are consumed in grief and guilt. In devising the Leila episode of *Don Juan,* Byron rewrites the drama …, and so purges his own guilt” (315).

Furthermore, Byron's impartiality is reflected in his admiration of the true heroism of the Tartar Khan, who dies in defense of his home, and his disgust at the Turkish Pasha (in charge of the stone bastion) who carelessly smokes his pipe and cowardly surrenders to the Russians. Byron sees the Khan as he is: not “a Priam's, Peleus', or Jove's son,” “but a good plain, old, temperate man who fought with his five children in the van.” (CVI cv). Thus we can see that Byron does not condemn all Turks because of the behavior of the Turkish Pasha. In fact he makes a place for the Tartar Khan among the heroes of classical Western tradition. This is an evidence of Byron's tolerance and understanding of the merits that make cultures equal and his decision not to follow the stereotype of the Muslim East as a place of an inferior culture.

Although the Russian soldiers, with the help of Juan, tried to save his life by urging him to yield, the old Khan vehemently refused to listen. And, as the patience of the Russian soldiers wore out, they moved on and killed the Khan with his five sons. In this instance, Byron seems to say that although the Khan's scorn of death earns him the awe and respect of his enemies, a soldier's ultimate aim is to save his own skin.

```
Tis strange enough—the rough, tough soldiers who
Spared neither sex nor age in their career
Of carnage. When this old man was pierced through
And lay before them with his children near,
Touch'd by the heroism of him they slew,
Were melted for a moment; though no tear
Flow'd from their bloodshot eyes, all red with strife,
They honour'd such determined scorn of life.
```

(CVIII cxix)

It is important to notice that, besides his description of the heroic death of the Tartar Khan, Byron takes his time to analyze the intricate relationship which he has with his sons. To prove his objectivity, Byron laughs at the Khan's shame of his fifth son-begotten by a Christian mother—and at his pride in his eldest who happens to be a staunch believer in the Prophet as well as in the hour. Humorously, Byron says that this faithful son rushes to his death, preferring a heavenly night to four wives on earth.

```
Thus the young Khan, with houris in his sight,
Thought not upon the charms of four young brides
But bravely rush'd on his first heavenly night.
```

(CVIII cxiv)

But it is the Khan's true heroism, on the other hand, that exposes the cowardice and the indifference of the Turkish Pasha—an extension of the Sultan's character—who, instead of defending the bastion, smokes his pipe, and when the city is taken, quietly surrenders.

```
In the mean time, cross-legg'd, with great sang-froid
Among the scorching ruins he sat smoking
Tobacco on a little carpet;—Troy
Saw nothing like the scene around;—yet looking
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With martial stoicism, nought seen'd to annoy
His stern philosophy; but gently stroking
His beard, he puff'd his pipe's ambrosial gales,
As if he had three lives, as well as tails.
```

(CVIII cxxi)

In conclusion, one can say that although many of the Eastern themes in *Don Juan* have already been mentioned in Byron's narrative romances, i.e., polygamy, the harem, and the Pasha's despotism, his serio-comic treatment of these same themes in *Don Juan* undermines the mystery of their Eastern context and presents them in a humorously realistic style. This style must have helped Byron to present a humorous and tolerable image of the East, as it allowed him to view it within a global context in which East and West are subjects for the poet's wit.

Take, for example, Byron's satirical treatment of polygamy and his realistic representation of the harem in *Don Juan.* Besides being the main reason for Gulbeyaz's sexual perversity, polygamy, Byron says is "not only a sin, but also a bore."

```
Gulbeyaz was the fourth, and (as I said)
The favourite; but what's favour amongst four?
Polygamy may well be held in dread,
Not only as a sin, but as a bore:
Most wise men with one moderate woman wed,
Will scarcely find philosophy for more;
And all (except Mahometants) forbear
To make the nuptial couch a 'Bed of Ware.'
```

(CVI xii)

Unlike his incidental mentioning of the harem in the Tales,—i.e., the harem's high walls in *The Bride of Abydos,* and the harem set on fire in *The Corsair,*—Byron in *Don Juan* gives us an inside view of the most secretive wing of the seraglio. And although Steffan claims that Byron's description of the harem is primarily meant as a joke, it would not be far from the truth to say that Byron succeeds in exposing the perverse mentality which justifies the inhumanity of the harem.

Furthermore, one can observe this development in Byron's attitude toward the East in his significant analysis of the complex character of Gulbeyaz. Nowhere in the Tales has Byron so deeply delved in the mind and heart of a powerful Eastern woman and exposed her feminine and contradictory feelings as he did with Gulbeyaz. Gulnare, strong and passionate, is not as appealing as Gulbeyaz, simply because Byron, in describing Gulbeyaz's character, has finally applied the "acid scrutiny of common sense" (Rutherford, *A Critical Study* 45): Gulbeyaz's tears, not Gulnare's killing of her husband, win the heart of the Western lover.

Notes

1. See Rutherford's *Byron: Augustan and Romantic.* Published by Macmillan in association with The British Council, 1990. Note especially the essay by Leslie A. Marchand, "The Quintessential Byron." The following quotation is taken from Marchand's essay: "But two sentiments to which I am constant, a strong love of liberty, and detestation to cant, and neither is calculated to gain me friends" (240).
2. The problem of impartiality is obviously a tricky one. Byron, like many other poets of his day, has been influenced by his readings about the Muslim East, especially as it is described in *The Arabian Nights.* This collection of tales has informed the Western reader about the closed and exclusive society of the Caliphs' harem, especially toward the end of the Abbasid period (from the eighth to the eleventh century).

Many Western readers were either fascinated or disgusted by the apparently licentious nature of the heroes and heroines of such tales. Thus, Muslim characters were easily stereotyped in Western writings and Western paintings. Byron's visit to Turkey and Greece, his tolerant nature, and his open mindedness toward the strange and the unfamiliar have worked together to shape his “impartial” attitude toward the Muslim East. That does not mean that Byron accepts all that he has seen and known about it.

3. See Rutherford's *Byron: Augustan and Romantic,* published by Macmillan in association with the British Council, 1990. Especially note Maccoln Kelsall's essay “Byron and the Romantic Heroine.” “In Byron, Gulbeyaz, matriarch of her society of enslaved women, is as much a tyrant as the Sultan in her realm, and the Sultana's tyranny—just as much as the Sultan's—is motivated by lust; *libido et dominatio*” (57).

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Criticism: Mark Phillipson (essay date summer 2000)

SOURCE: Phillipson, Mark. “Byron's Revisited Haunts.” *Studies in Romanticism* 39, no. 2 (summer 2000): 303-22.

[*In the following essay, Phillipson explores the themes of banishment, dislocation and return in* Don Juan, *contending that Byron's characters often return in ghostly ways to places past and the Byronic hero is “more phantom than man.”*]

Before he left England in a flurry of scandal, and before he created that most disillusioned of expatriates, Childe Harold, Lord Byron was irresistibly drawn to self-exile. In particular he paid close attention to the example of Shakespeare's misanthropic exile, Timon of Athens. Not only did Byron fashion Harold in the mold of Timon, arranging for his character to escape, like the disillusioned Athenian, from the “heartless parasites of present cheer” (Canto I, line 75);[1] three years before the splashy publication of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* Cantos I & II (1812), the young Lord Byron was looking in the mirror and seeing Timon. “Weary of love, of life, devour'd with spleen, / I rest a perfect Timon, not nineteen,”[2] Byron wrote in *Childish Recollections* (1806)—though, perhaps to his credit, he later canceled the line. Thanks to the tumultuous events of his life, Byron, like Timon, indeed became an “archetype of all towering persons whose stature forces a severance from their community.”[3] But years before his actual departure from England, Byron's verse followed Shakespeare's king in discovering, within the process of self-exile, displaced relics of the past.

Timon, digging for roots in the woods, instead unearths gold, which he hails ironically as the "visible god, / That solder'st close impossibilities / And mak'st them kiss" (Timon of Athens IV.iii.391-93). As an improbable reminder of the power and corruption he fled from in Athens, Timon's new gold is a glitteringly paradoxical discovery: a disruptive presence, at once a return of the past and a measure of its displacement. As such, it acts as a ghostly incarnation of Timon's past, a "revenant" as defined by Jacques Derrida in his study of 'hauntology': "There is something disappeared, departed in the apparition itself as reapparition of the departed."[4] Byron's verse likewise embraces departure only to be haunted by ghosts, who recall the past even as they embody its disruption.

At the similarly tender age of twenty, in another poem entitled "To a Lady, on being asked my reasons for quitting England in the spring," Byron set the double movement of banishment—its charged, liminal, past-and-present interchange—into the fundamental terms of Genesis: "When man expell'd from Eden's bowers, / A moment linger'd near the gate, / Each scene recall'd the vanish'd hours. …"[5] Such lingering would actually last much longer than a minute for Byron; one only has to recall the gate-shadowed action of Cain (1821), taking place in "The Land without Paradise," to realize the constancy of this setting in his canon—after thirteen years still giving rise to "melancholy yearnings o'er the past," (III.i.36) still prompting spectral walk-ons. Cain's lingering by "the inhibited walls" (I.i.80) of Eden attracts Lucifer, the slippery "Master of Spirits," (I.i.98) whose proud alienation ("I dwell apart; but I am great" [I.i.308]) evokes a long line of scowling and once wildly popular Byronic heroes. Such figures, whose impact had faded to cliché long before Cain, nonetheless prove surprisingly trenchant haunters of Byron's later verse, liable at any time to come back from the world of spirits. Selim, doomed hero of *The Bride of Abydos* (1813), specifically waits to reemerge on the shoreline of his lover's cypress grove: "And there by night, reclin'd, 'tis said, / Is seen a ghastly turban'd head—/ And hence extended by the billow, / "Tis named the 'Pirate-phantom's pillow'!" (II.725-28).

Even before he was cast aside by his author, left to haunt Byron's later verse as the relic of an abandoned mode, the Byronic hero had been more phantom than man. In the series of narratives often referred to as Byron's Eastern Tales—best-sellers dashed off during his London Years of Fame (1812-1816)—this breed of hero lives and dies amid unsettling recollections of what has vanished; expelled by force or temperament from his homeland, he moves within a purgatory of specters. His world is an uncomfortable blend of spectral disenchantment: Childe Harold's death-in-life Greece ("In all save form alone, how changed!" he observes of a land populated by "Shades of the Helots" (II.711, 726) defines the general climate of the Tales. *The Giaour* (1813), the first Eastern Tale, is set in the same dead Greece ("'T is Greece, but living Greece no more! / So coldly sweet, so deadly fair, / We start, for soul is wanting there" [91-93]); like Childe Harold, the Giaour wends through this wasteland bereft of love, of soul, constantly nostalgic, and doomed by a curse to origin-haunting displacement ("on earth as Vampire sent, / Thy course shall from its tomb be rent: / Then ghastly haunt thy native place, / And suck the blood of all thy race" [755-58]). Byron's later texts, even as they take sharp turns away from the Eastern Tales in format and tone, build on this early obsession with perpetual dislocation and its attendant hauntings; they teem with corrupted settings and uprooted evocations of a figure who, from the beginning, had been presented to the reader as irretrievably alienated.

As such, Byron's canon, however it may seem to repudiate itself, stays faithful to his early insight that the unsettling passage away from the familiar, from a point of origin, gives rise to uncanny emergence of what has been left behind. Stocking his later texts with references to outmoded protagonists, Byron was not mocking his earlier career, or even ironically "exploit[ing] a winning formula."[6] Instead he was preserving a sense of disrupted origins that, ultimately, drives the vast carnival of displacement comprising Don Juan (1818-24): the open-ended unhousing emblematic of what Edward Said has called "interpretive series."[7] The movement of Byron's career is from vortexes of disenchantment into the paradoxical vision that was already apparent to him as a youth on the brink of Eden's bowers: the improbable rise of close impossibilities. In later texts, Byron's exilic haunting gives rise to double visions important and sustaining enough to exemplify what Michael G. Cooke has called "the force of coincidentia oppositorum, an identification or interpresence

between phenomena that seem to deny each other."[8] The awareness of displacement blooms into particularly charged acts of binding in Byron's work as his canon turns back on itself: continual confrontations of the past with what is replacing, even repudiating it.

Paul Elledge has characterized the promiscuity of *Beppo* (1818)—its digressive presentation of an adulterous affair—as "a strategy by which departure need not entail division, or separation necessarily forfeit attachment."[9] We can push that formula further: Byron's embrace of exile was commitment to a strategy of writing whereby departure multiplies possibilities, division leads to unlikely reemergence. The confrontation of a (nostalgic) present with an (uprooted) past is bristling and unpredictable; the anachronism alone (in Derrida's terms, "a dis-located time of the present … the joining of a radically dis-jointed time, without certain conjunction" [17]) is a disruptive challenge to the haunted work. By attuning his later verse to evocations of the Byronic Hero, Byron avidly pursued such disruption—a power beyond control, a roiling adjacency of the past that operates despite and because of banishment.

I emphasize continuity in Byron's poetic career, an essential interactivity between late and early in his canon, in order to counter the standard characterization of Byron's later verse as a revolutionary repudiation of his past work. This late mode of Byron's—sometimes termed the *Don Juan* "manner"[10] or "effect"[11]—is usually said to be test-driven by the playful *Beppo,* which anticipates *Don Juan*'s ottava rima form, insouciant narrator, and digressive tendencies. Jerome McGann's commentary to *CPW* stands as the authoritative characterization of a crucial turn in Byron's poetry:

> *Beppo* is one of the most important poems in the canon because it inaugurates the verse project which was to reach fulfillment in *Don Juan.* Like the latter, *Beppo* was written in conscious reaction to the 'monotony and mannerism' (*BLJ* vi.25) of his own earlier Romantic work, and to the 'wrong revolutionary poetical system—or systems' of the entire Romantic Movement.

(*BLJ* v.265-66)[12]

McGann thus follows a long tradition that reads the conversational, digressive, satirical ottava rima stanzas of *Beppo* and *Don Juan* as not only turning the gloomy vortexes of the Eastern Tales inside out,[13] but also signaling Byron's decisive break with his past success. Despite the fact that the writing of *Beppo* was an extremely brief interlude during the much larger project of finishing *Childe Harold,*[14] this initial forage into the Don Juan manner has come to signal a "process of disengagement"[15] in Byron's canon, a repudiation of pre-exile modes and themes. The division of McGann's influential studies of Byron reflects an abiding fissure: *Don Juan* finds no real place in the fairly comprehensive *Fiery Dust*; it is held apart instead for the later *Don Juan in Context.* Ironically enough, the latter study's valuable insight that "DJ is a poem that is, in fact, always in transition"[16]—shuttling between engagements with biography, history, forms of rhetoric, and its own plot—seems purchased by isolation of the poem from the rest of Byron's canon. It is an isolation that opens up real explanatory gaps in studies that build on McGann's characterization of *Don Juan* as an "assault upon the degenerate poetical manners of his day," an "attack upon [the] reomantic stylistic revolution," and "Byron's practical illustration of the sort of critical stance romantic poetry ought to take toward itself" (McGann, *Don Juan in Context* 63, 73, 107). One sifts in vain through Jerome Christensen's ever-resourceful *Lord Byron's Strength,* for example, to find an indication of exactly why Byron would buck the system that had marketed him so well, why he would launch the "revolutionary text" (215) of *Don Juan*—a postmodern shakeup of "Byronism" and its "cultural monopoly" (220) that appears in Christensen's pages as suddenly as a rock through a shop window.[17]

The division of Byron's work and pre- and post- *Don Juan* is often justified by his letters from Venice, such as the one specifically quoted by McGann, signaling the poet's disengagement from the "wrong revolutionary poetical system." Byron was clearly taken with this disavowal of a past revolution, repeating it several times,

yet doing little to define a new program, a better revolution. In 1818 he would distance himself again from the "wrong poetical system"—a phrase so broad it could refer to the Byronic Hero as well as Wordsworth's Excursion; "I mean all (Lakers included)," Byron wrote to the also-implicated poet Thomas Moore. And yet, as usual, the longer Byron continues his repudiation, the more a complicating nostalgia enters into his writing. "'Us youth' were on the wrong tack," Byron elaborates, "But I never did say that we did not sail well." As Peter Manning has pertinently observed, the buried reference to Falstaff in Byron's letter could easily signal ulterior tactics, and certainly muddles the letter as a statement of intent.[18] The next modulations of the letter to Moore suggest a simultaneous flightiness and persistence:

> The next generation (from the quantity and facility of imitation) will tumble and break their necks off our Pegasus, who runs away with us. … Talking of horses, I not only get a row in my gondola, but a spanking gallop of some mile daily along a firm & solitary beach.

(Feb. 2, 1818; *BLJ* 6.10)

Byron's prose here plunges wildly from the nautical to the equestrian, from post-revolutionary sobriety to nostalgic pride, from poetic manifesto to the merest biographical detail which, nevertheless, refers right back to the entrance of that most hardened of early Byronic heroes, the Giaour:

Who thundering comes on blackest steed, With slacken'd bit and hoof of speed? Beneath the clattering iron's sound The cavern'd echoes wake around In lash for lash, and bound for bound; The foam that streaks the courser's side Seems gather'd from the ocean-tide. Though weary waves are sunk to rest, There's none within his rider's breast; And though to-morrow's tempest lower, 'Tis calmer than thy heart, young Giaour! (180-90) Ultimately, the challenge to Moore and any reader of Byron's "revolutionary" letter of 1818 lies in accounting for its waking echoes, the reemergence of what had seemed to be swept away.

Such evocation at the very moment of renunciation is typical of the way Byron vexes his reader with the interplay of fiction and life; it lures even critics who insist, like T. S. Eliot, that they are "not concerned" with the poet's life into scanning his writing for "honesty" or "genuine self-revelation."[19] It comes as no surprise that Leslie Marchand, still Byron's best biographer, characterizes the revolution of the *Don Juan* manner as a sudden turn to self-representation: "With one stroke he freed himself from the fetters of British propriety and the *Childe Harold* manner, and something of the careless and relaxed realism of his letters invaded his verse. Let the critics cavil; he would be himself" (Marchand 273). But often in Byron's writing—even in supposedly direct self-representations, such as the 1818 letter—the invasion runs just the other way: verse invades his letters, and the originating self is unsettled by the specter of fictional models. The Byronic hero's persistent cameo in the very statement which implies his demise should lead us to regard even the most seemingly direct pronouncement in Byron as stalked by the fiction it supposedly controls.

Manning has led the way in reversing the usual subordination of art to the "real" Byron in Byron studies: "the self acquires its image—not its essence—by telling tales that negotiate or, to use a more Byronic term, navigate impersonal structures" (Manning 148). The emphasis of image over essence is a promising development: it lets go of "sincerity," never a promising quarry in literary study; it honors Byron's deep investment in character as defined by literature; and, most directly for our purposes, it frees us to read him as haunted, even knocked onto new paths, by his own verse. It is still rare to consider how Byron may have manipulated his material circumstances consistently, over the course of a tumultuous life, to play out a basic temperament, a way of generating vision, an artistic habit evident from the start. It is, in short, still unusual to think of Byron's actual exile as an imperative of fiction, one he defined in his earliest verse. By focusing on Byron's life-long interest in the effects of exile, we may be able to discover fundamental continuity, an investment in repudiation that counters—indeed prompts—all talk of revolution. And in particular we may come to regard the Byronic hero, that restless figure put to bed midway into Byron's career, as all the more ready to rise from his phantom-pillow.

As a quick survey of Byron's continuous investment in banishment, the remainder of this essay zeroes in on the repetition of a charged situation in Byron's verse: the haunting of a hero by displaced precedence. This haunting takes on two forms: direct haunting, wherein ancestral ghosts menace the hero; and what could be called meta-haunting, which occurs when this scenario repeats itself down through Byron's career, and his previous stagings of ghostly visitation are evoked. I focus on three interconnecting instances of haunting that span Byron's verse. First, I examine the struggle waged by the prototypical Byronic Hero against smothering ancestral spirits in the tale *Lara* (1814), published two years before the poet's exile. Second, I look at a revisiting of this struggle—the confrontation with ghostly forefathers in the post-exile play Sardanapalus (1821)—in which Lara's alienation is evoked and at the same time countered with new strategies of solace in the foreign, thereby adding to the disruption of exile a certain felicity. Finally, I turn to yet another ghostly confrontation, the entanglement of Juan with the ghost of the Black Friar in the *Regency Cantos of Don Juan* (1823-24), in which the transvestite corruption of a gothic legend recalls and further expels the precedence of both previous narratives. Such repeated exercises in evocation and displacement display the most enduring opposition in Byron's work: an unrelenting though ever-various haunting of precedence.

2

Lara will serve us as both a template of Byronic haunting, and as a measure of stifled expression that revisiting of this template would later amend. Everything is haunted in this tale, overshadowed by mysterious influences from the past. Byron reportedly came to regard this tale as “the most metaphysical of his works,”[20] dismissing it with the same term he later used to describe the blind flightiness of Coleridge in the dedication to *Don Juan* (“… like a hawk encumber'd with his hood,—/ Explaining metaphysics to the nation—/ I wish he would explain his explanation”). Indeed, *Lara* is more than a little hooded: its plot is smothered by the hero's determined blockage of past experience, of future revelation, of causality in general. The tale freezes into tableaus of an alienated hero pacing around the offended home to which he returns from unmentionable activities abroad. The cause of his alienation is eclipsed; we are left with the effects, the lingering representations of something outside the terms of expression.

Lara returns to a gothic residence that shares many attributes with Newstead Abbey, the vast crumbling cradle of Byron's adolescence. As Lara restlessly moves down freshly repossessed halls, his shadow's sweep over faded ancestral portraits represents the tale's general metaphysic of stifling opposition:

> He turned within his solitary hall, And his high shadow shot along the wall: There were the painted forms of other times, 'Twas all they left of virtues or of crimes, Save vague tradition; and the gloomy vaults That hid their dust, their foibles, and their faults; And half a column of the pompous page, That speeds the specious tale from age to age; Where history's pen its praise or blame supplies, And lies like truth, and still most truly lies.

(Canto 1, lines 181-90)

Virtue and crime, praise and blame, truth and lies, presence and absence, and—especially—the living and the dead: these oppositions fall against each other on the pompous page and leave standing nothing more than mystery. It is not even clear whether the portraits are of Lara's direct ancestors, or of the monastic tenants of the Gothic hall who (presumably) preceded them. In any event, Lara's passage casts the painted forms of former times into shadow; yet his obliteration is merely finishing off what time has already rendered practically indistinguishable (virtues, crimes, who can tell). Manning has taken note of the extreme muffling of history in Byron's poem, written at the very moment of Napoleon's fall: “… individualism withdraws the Byronic hero from any concerted political involvement … Politics retreats before psychology. The reader's attention is fixed on the hero, who exists in maginificent isolation” (Manning 211). Even so, Byron's individualistic hero is well aware that his transgression prompts a reactive, if silent, hostility—an involvement with progenitors that qualifies his isolation after all. The tradition-laden wall, vague as it may be, gives no

quarter: it stifles Lara—a smothering reproach, perhaps, to his debasement of heritage and country.[21] Perhaps that debasement involves a crime committed in the land across the "bounding main" (i.12) from which he has recently returned. Perhaps: mystery envelops the text. It is appropriately midnight as Lara paces and muses in front of these recriminatory portraits; when the lone light dims "as loth to break the night," we note its double reflection of Lara: the flame's solitude as well as its vulnerability to an aggressively engulfing darkness.

But the night is broken, suddenly, by "A sound—a voice—a shriek—a fearful call! / A long, loud shriek—and silence"; the "frantic echo" wakes up the servants, who rush in to find their master in a dead faint (I.204-6). Lara in all likelihood has been the one to scream, but we have no exact idea why. Something he has confronted in the hall has caused him to half-draw his saber, to half-form a threat, to assume the satanic position of "despairing pride," and to faint away "in horrible repose"—but our hero, reviving, offers no clarification (I.220, 224). Instead, he babbles "In terms that seem not of his native tongue," "meant to meet an ear / That hears him not—alas! that cannot hear!" (I.234). This adventure in obscurity predicts this tale's ultimate degeneration into baffled mystery. A mysterious challenge to Lara's honor, launched by one Lord Ezzelin and based on yet another unexplained episode of the past, is followed by the mysterious disappearance of that provocateur; suspicious raised by this disappearance end up sweeping Lara into a popular uprising for which he feels nothing but indifference. Struck by an arrow in that fight, the hero speaks muffled words to his page Kaled, "Their import those who heard could judge alone"; "from [Lara's] visage little could we guess," and his last gesture is cryptic: pointing to the East (II.455, 462).

All quite mysterious, but this we know: a sense of outside, even otherworldly influence is impinging on present existence. Ezzelin's accusation is based on far away transgression; Lara is haunted by a suspiciously oriental event; and most fundamentally, he dies a mystery. Nobody gets the answers to questions that swirl around since his return home: "What had he been? what was he, thus unknown, / Who walk'd their world, his lineage only known?" (I.295-96). Lineage fixes Lara's position, but it is also beside the point: this hero, like all of his predecessors in Byron's narrative poetry—whether it be melancholy Harold, or his more adventurous cousins, the Giaour, Selim, or Conrad—is burdened with a mysterious identity that sets him apart from paternal and patriotic allegiance. As Leslie Brisman has written of such characters, "[t]he fatherland seems less one's own than some other land one has made one's own, for natural and spiritual paternities seldom correspond."[22] Lara paces under the frowning portraits of his ancestral home with a burden of self formed far away; conflicting claims of the native and the alien thus overshadow each other, and the result is introversion, solitude, and estrangement from the most basic activities of life. "He stood a stranger in this breathing world," we're told of Lara, "An erring spirit from another hurled" (I.315-16): whatever and wherever that other world is, its formidable claims bring it into irreconcilable competition with this one. Exile, as prefigured by Milton's headlong-hurled Satan, readily offers itself as the standard metaphor for such psychological alienation, as character and setting inevitably reject each other[23]—and even within themselves, characters fail to find a sense of unity that does not degenerate into the devastating struggle of oppositions.

On every level here, dualities block each other out, or, to cite Frederick Garber's useful characterization of the process, feed into a deadly "recoil": "that which is wonderfully consonant is also that which locks one in, which causes the bitterest sort of entrapment."[24] And this entrapment, we might add, ensures a failure of expression. This is true about Lara wherever one looks at dualities: the disastrous confrontation of Ezzelin and Lara, for example (Ezzelin introduces himself to Lara as "one, who, wert thou noble, were thy peer" [I.450]; both die and with them the explanation of that taunt), or the smothered love of Kaled for Lara (the late revelation of Kaled as a woman is made only after Lara's death—"What now to her was Womanhood?"—and at the tale's conclusion "she lies by him she lov'd; / Her tale untold—her truth too dearly prov'd" [II.626-27]). Nothing escapes the vortex of negation and, finally, silence. Even the setting of the tale, the "wide domain" to which "the long self-exiled chieftain" returns (I.1, 4), gets caught up in his alienation: presided over and ignored by that "Lord of himself … / That fearful empire which the human breast / But holds to rob the heart within of rest!" (I.15-16), it similarly collapses into a troubled, mysterious, and finally placeless place.[25]

One way to understand the progression of Byron's work after his actual exile in 1816 is as the aversion from such constant devastation: paradoxically enough, a physical rejection of England imbued his narratives with a revisionary toleration—if not real reconciliation—of self and ancestry, past and present, body and spirit. This impulse led him to revisit previously portrayed situations, in simultaneous displays of contradiction and continuity. Lara's strange encounter with the ghosts of the past, for example, is echoed in the opening of Act IV of Sardanapalus, in which the heretofore passive king dreams a nightmare encounter with bloody progenitors whose line, through a spectacular and enfeebling indulgence in pleasures, he has betrayed.[26] We find out much more about this dream than about Lara's midnight vigil, yet the similarities are notable: the two dreamers similarly cry out, react with some kind of defiance, and confide their experience to foreign women. Sardanapalus' cry, on first waking, has in it a satanically charged rejection of heritage that marks him as a direct descendent of earlier Byronic heroes: “Not so—although ye multiplied the stars, / And gave them to me as a realm to share / From you and with you! I would not so purchase / The empire of eternity” (IV.i.24-27). Sardanapalus will not give in to his ancestors, not for all the empire of eternity: the 1821 drama sounds the metaphysical alienation of the 1814 tale.

In contrast to Lara's frenzied, involuntary, and muffled relation of his dream to Kaled, however, Sardanapalus gives a deliberate, explicit description of his own nightmare to his attendant lover, the exiled slave Myrrha. The content of this nightmare also stands apart from Lara's in two notable ways. Lara's dream, as we noted, is never divulged to the reader, but the unresolved fashion in which it haunts him suggests that he is never able to face his tormentors with the spontaneous aplomb with which Sardanapalus counters his ghosts. “A desperate courage crept through every limb,” Sardanapalus tells Myrrha, “And at the last I fear'd them not, but laugh'd / Full in their phantom faces” (IV.i.140-42). If Sardanapalus is able to modulate horror with this laughter, the world of spirits is no less able to come up with a modified threat, the second major distinction of this dream from Lara's: a sexual, indeed incestuous, embrace. Directly after Sardanapalus' laugh, which dispels the ghost of his paternal ancestors, the remaining maternal figure “flew upon me, / And burnt my lips up with her noisome kisses” (IV.i.149-50). Sardanapalus in turn repels this incestuous assault by waking up to the foreign Myrrha. This dream, then, becomes the site of a succession of negotiations with intrusive ancestry, and Sardanapalus' defensive strategies—disruptive laughter, taking deliberate solace in the foreign—display, in a way that Lara's more suicidal “seeming of forgetfulness” (I.269) never does—the oppositional innovations of Byron's post-exile period.

Sardanapalus' words to Myrrha, after he concludes the description to her of his dream, are balanced and resolute: “Now that I see thee once more, what was seen / Seems nothing” (IV.i.172-73). The comforting of an Assyrian king by an Ionian slave is reflected by the otherwise odd distortions of homonyms and typographical fluctuations: illustrations of the adjacency of what is nonetheless different. The lurking pun of the foreign Myrrha's name is much to the point here. The use of the phrase “once more” is suggestive as well: it occurs, in the slightly modified forms “Once more” and “once more,” at the very start of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* Canto III (1816), when the poet awakes “with a start” to find himself sailing away from his native shore (III.10).[27] The once-more evocation of a scene from Lara in Sardanapalus both underscores continuity in Byron's career and marks important points of departure.[28] The unfortunate Kaled, for example, is evoked by the similarly foreign and illicitly amorous Myrrha, and at the same time isolated (or made “once”) even more by the erotic and mutual death that Myrrha enjoys with her lover.

Sardanapalus, like Lara, does not survive the end of his drama; yet if Lara “sleeps not where his fathers sleep” (II.520), Sardanapalus fully expects to rejoin his fathers, after sacrificing himself in the face of treason. “I have not kept your inheritance / As ye bequeath'd it,” he admits to these fathers, yet the sacrificial fire he builds will carry the “bright part” of that inheritance to them anyway:

> Your treasure, your abode, your sacred relics Of arms, and records, monuments, and spoils, In which they would have revell'd, I bear with me To you in that absorbing element, Which most personifies the soul as leaving The least of matter unconsumed before Its fiery workings. …

(V.i.428-36)

The paradoxical “consummation” (V.i.449) of this ending is an intricate balancing of destruction and preservation, made even more resonant by Myrrha's co-participation in this death. If Myrrha's erotic consolations have provided a bulwark against the stony and horrible demands of ancestry, her joining of Sardanapalus' suicide (“'Tis fired! I come” [V.i.498]) matches his paradoxical gesture of faithful abandon. Throughout the play she has urged on the king greater attention to omens and self-preservation and revenge, even as she must embody, as his mistress, the ideal of pleasure that acts as distraction to the bloody preservation of rule. Lighting the pyre of Nimrod's line, she confirms her oxymoronic function as the faithful foreigner; her love is as all-consuming as Sardanapalus' attempts to preserve the line on his own terms, loyal to the very material it destroys.

Sardanapalus' consummation, then, can be read simultaneously as disaster and triumph, a creative act of destruction and fidelity that operates even more powerfully when we recognize its revisionary mirroring of previous moments in the Byronic canon. The fertility of such an act stems from the finally unresolved property of such climactic moments.[29] Lara's mysterious eclipses swallow up expression; Sardanapalus' paradoxical mirrorings sustain commentary and comparison. When Lara dies, his contradictory characteristics, having warred against each other, die with him; “all unknown [are] his glory and his guilt” (II.546). Sardanapalus, in defining his sacrificial pyre as “a light / To lesson ages, rebel nations, and / Voluptuous princes” (V.i.440-42), offers up the ambiguities of his relationship with the past to posthumous appraisal. The unresolved devotion of his life to the unknown realm of the future resonates with his concurrent decision to die in the arms of a foreign woman: in both cases a full interplay of disruption and integrity is thrown open to the outside.[30] Sardanapalus dies with the knowledge that his peculiar struggle with integration will in turn be integrated into other contexts, other stories and other historical vantages, and that knowledge counters his suicide.

In *Don Juan,* Byron's most sustained effort to define an exiled voice, it is hardly surprising to find, yet once more, a hero negotiating with specters. Thanks to teasing echoes of Byron's sensational life, these specters often float over from the author's legend; many a critic, responding to Byron's prompts, has for example traced the attributes of Juan's mother, Donna Inez, back to Lady Byron, and evaluated his depiction of Inez, the “walking calculation” (*Don Juan* Canto I, line 121), accordingly. However, as Manning does well to remind us, the free play of this legend puts it to the service not of self-representation but revision: “Liberated from any fidelity to autobiographical actuality, Byron's past becomes the stuff for endless fictional revision.”[31] A less slippery way of measuring the full flowering of Byron's revisionary impulses, one that avoids the biographical pitfalls of determining how sincerely Byron treated his life, is to track evocation in his canon of itself. To do so is not to insist that “the poetry operates in a space of disinterestedness and autonomy,” the way of reading that Jerome McGann finds “intolerable”; it is merely to measure Byron's allusive irony—the same treatment his epic brings to bear on his public persona as well as the “social and institutional resources of the day”—on a delimited field, the self-mutating ground of his poetic oeuvre.[32] Whether we talk of *Don Juan*'s retrieval of Byron's legend or of its hearkening back to previous narrative situations in his poetry (not to mention its often distorting allusions to other poems), we can see at work Byron's abiding awareness that, in the words of Edward Said, “what is taken from a place ultimately violates its habitual way of being: there is constant transposition” (Said 8). The repeated engagement with actual ghosts in Byron's work, the oft-invoked affect of haunting violation or betrayal, shows a full understanding of such transposition. It is a process of uprooting, in which a defamiliarized engagement with precedence launches (to lift another phrase from Said) an “invitation to unforeseen estrangements from the habitual” (9). In the end, *Don Juan* relies on ghosts of the past in order to attack calcifications such as habit and cant. The Regency England it heads back to in its final cantos seems so spectral, it's hardly surprising that Byron accidentally dated the manuscript of Canto XIV “1814” instead of “1823.”[33]

By the time Juan meets the ghost of the Black Friar in Canto XVI (1824), this familiar Byronic confrontation is informed by an almost overwhelming blend of invocation and recombination. Juan's sojourn in Norman Abbey, yet another "Gothic Babel of a thousand years" (XIII.396), gives rise to yet another negotiation with the imposing past. Restlessly pacing late at night, Juan finds himself treading in Lara's footsteps: "… he threw / His chamber door wide open—and went forth / Into a gallery, of a somber hue, / Long, furnished with old pictures of great worth …" (XVI.129-32). This time it is the narrative echo, not any direct ancestral claim, that lends the scene an uneasy tension: when the foreign and practically naked Juan walks down this hall, he both embodies and displaces the psychological alienation of Lara. The intricacies multiply: now our hero is alienated from a heritage of alienation—the cult-like and aging ancestry of the Byronic hero. This dual treatment of Lara's precedence invokes it all the more furiously, as Juan takes on the role at the same time as he opposes it. We balance the contention that "A picture is the past; even ere its frame / Be gilt, who sate hath ceased to be the same" (XVI.151-52) with the suggestions that, by pacing restlessly down a gothic hall, Juan has stepped into Lara's guilty frame. Thus the paradox is in place: "As Juan mused on mutability" (XVI.153), he is startled by an apparition of the past—a creature who, most like Lara, "sweeps along in his dusky pall" (XVI.363) and "still retains his sway" (XVI.354).

The preternatural synchronicity of change and reoccurrence is reinforced the next morning, when Byron leaves it to Lady Adeline to explain the legend of the Black Friar. Adeline is the most spectacularly ambiguous of Byron's heroines, the mistress of "mobility" whose skillful negotiation of affect often suggests she represents nothing less than irony personified (Garber 191). When Adeline "in a careless way" (XVI.377) sings of the Black Friar—"Say nought to him as he walks the hall, / And he'll say nought to you" (XVI.361-62)—she is not only reversing the pattern we've traced of the hero confiding his experience to the sympathetic foreign woman; the sheer indeterminacy of her motive ("'Twere difficult to say what was the object / Of Adeline … [XVI.449-50]) upends the general framework of real and unreal. It is not long after the song that Juan starts to regard the skeptical Adeline as herself some kind of specter:

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

(XVI.810-16)

If Adeline dances on the verge of the unreal, the Black Friar in due time reveals itself to be a lot more real than might be seemly. "The ghost, if ghost it were" turns out to be nothing more or less than the "full, voluptuous" and amorous Lady Fitz-Fulke on the prowl (XVI.1025, 1032), and demystification melts what had seemed just a moment ago—when the narrator had wondered, "what is substance to a Spirit?" (XVI.975)—to be a fundamental dichotomy. The revision of horror with eroticism, so operative in Saradanapalus' own confrontation with the unknown, evolves here into sheer fecundity: "Wonder upon wonder!" (XVI.1018). Fitz-Fulke's Black Friar is an erring spirit that evokes and replaces erring spirits, just as she is a woman in the form of a man; and while she too breathes in a transposed realm, like Lara, the breath is "remarkably sweet breath" (XVI.1012). A Christabel-like ornamentation of this ghost's carnality, complete with the moon peeping from behind clouds and the prudish interjection of a narrative "alas!" in the midst of disrobing, broadens the parodic corruption of precedence, heightens the distortion of what turns out to be yet one more instance of innocent ravishing for Don Juan.[34]

Yet an ominous note of enervation creeps into the final written scene of Byron's epic, suggesting that, despite all comedic revision of Lara's condition, and despite an echoing of Sardanapalus' sexual consummation, Don Juan is heading to new confrontations, if not with Lara's brooding spirit, then with the erotic transgression that

has exiled that spirit to the province of legend and lampoon. Any work, after all, whose rallying cry is “I was born for opposition” (XV.176) will not resolve for long. The two lovers, in the light of day, take on a ghostliness that brings them closer in line to Adeline:

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Which best is to encounter—Ghost, or none,
          'Twere difficult to say—but Juan looked
As if he had combated with more than one,
          Being wan and worn, with eyes that hardly brooked
The light, that through the Gothic windows shone:
          Her Grace, too, had a sort of air rebuked—
Seemed pale and shivered, as if she had kept
A vigil, or dreamt rather more than slept.
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(XVII.105-12)

This delicately phrased hint of ghostly reemergence, very end of *Don Juan,* is the poem's final revisionary haunting. The indeterminate Adeline haunts the restless Fitz-Fulke; the over-experienced Lara haunts the light-shy Juan; enervating demystification haunts Sardanapalus' ghost-banishing pleasure; Christabel haunts Don Juan; and life, however free and various, does not escape the ever-present past. The inexorable movement of Don Juan towards the starting point of Childe Harold's Pilgrimage—the “vast and venerable pile” (*Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* 1.56) of a gothic ancestral house, from whence Harold twice departs—displays the enduring magnetism of opposition in Byron's post-exile work: in the end is its beginning.[35]

Unrelenting impositions of the past in *Don Juan* do not stifle; they liberate, as is made quite clear in a passage of Byron's epic where the narrator celebrates the existence of ghostly settings:

```
Ye glorious Gothic scenes! how much ye strike
          All phantasies, not even excepting mine:
A grey wall, a green ruin, rusty pike,
          Make my soul pass the equinoctial line
Between the present and past worlds, and hover
Upon their airy confine, half-seas-over.
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(X.483-88)

An overriding paradox that attends Byron's post-exile development of romance stands out here: the insistence on simultaneous confinement and freedom, rendered in the oxymoronic phrase “airy confine.” The wall that so oppressed Lara here “make[s] my soul pass,” not simply into a different time, but into a different land as well, vaguely designated as “half-seasover.” The displaced revisitation of place, thanks to exile, leads into new transpositions of the past and the present—“change appears as a consequence of exile and seeks to revise the terms that gave rise to separation.”[36] A fundamental conflation of temporal and spatial revisitation, endemic to exiled nostalgia, ensures that the Byronic canon will constantly cite and resituate itself: old tropes and settings will be transported, trailing roots of origination, into new realms.

The “rusty pike” is a case in point; not only is this image a color-contrast example of green ruin, it also recalls, especially to those familiar with *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* Canto III, the good old Byronic hero—those self-tortured wretches who, like Napoleon or Lara or Harold, “aspire / Beyond the fitting medium of desire” (III.374), only to consume themselves like “a sword laid by / Which eats into itself, and rusts ingloriously” (III.395-96).[37] The reemployment of rust in *Don Juan* is thus a displacement giving rise to a host of revisionary negotiations with the past, none of them definitive. The rusty pike, propped up against a wall, remains as ruined as Lara ever was, as cast aside as Lara was fated to be; its current appearance does not redeem or transform it, so much as imbue it with the hovering energies of revision. The pike's evocation of

bygone days is overlaid by surface rust, which does not tarnish the pike's already spoiled glory so much as it charges Byron's lines into unresolved shuttling between the past and its current distortion.

It seems no accident that Don Juan's pike stands like a signpost on the hero's road back to England. Its location in the Rhine, “Which Drachenfels frowns over like a spectre / Of the good feudal times for ever gone” (x.490-91), situates it within the poem on the brink of England, the narrator's land of birth, a similarly outmoded land for which he feels “a mixed regret and veneration / For its decaying fame and former worth” (x.524-25). More suggestively, in terms of the Byronic canon, the rusty gothic image carries with it a “transient trace” (*Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* III.468) of Childe Harold, who had been ditched by his narrator in the Rhineland, among the same “grey but leafy walls, where Ruin greenly dwells” (III.414). The song Harold sings, when the earlier poem abandons him, is a solipsistic and terminally sentimental hymn to the setting's “proud decay” (III.512), yet it haunts any subsequent traveler through what Harold had termed “a scene, which I should see / With double joy wert thou with me!” (III.504-5). The initially innocent Juan, “seasoned as he well might be / By former voyages” (*DJ* x.510-11), and on his way towards a rendezvous with a displaced specter of the Byronic hero at the site of its origin, must, in suitably reverse order, first pass through that figure's point of demise—the Harold-haunted landscape.

It is a passage that seems at once liberating and claustrophobic. The succession of displacement and revisitation, which could be another way of describing Don Juan's famous “mobility,” is heady business that nevertheless always involves a price, an unsettling negotiation with unsettled sources and precedents. Juan speeds back to Byron's homeland, and his narrator observes, with an allusion to Book IV of Lucretius' De Rerum Natura, “What a delightful thing's a turnpike road! / … but onward as we roll, / ‘Surgit amari aliquid’—the toll!” (x.623-24). Byron's allusion to something bitter rising up, something unsettled, is itself displaced from a previous quotation in his canon: self-exiled Harold had thought it in translation in the beginning of Byron's career, pondering the inevitable collapse of love: “Full from the fount of Joy's delicious springs / Some bitter o'er the flowers its bubbling venom flings” (*Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* 1.817-18). In the process of exiled revision, it would seem, consistency lies in displaced resonance, and even Lucretius, that most adamant of materialists, lends himself to the haunting persistence of the Byronic Hero.

Notes

1. Quotations of Byron's poetry in this article are taken from *Lord Byron: The Complete Poetical Works,* ed. Jerome J. McGann., 7 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1980-93), henceforth abbreviated as CPW.
2. These discarded lines are reprinted in CPW 1.158.
3. G. Wilson Knight, *Byron and Shakespeare* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966) 198.
4. Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International,* trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York and London: Routledge, 1994) 6. Derrida, later in this study, follows Marx in focusing on Timon's gold as “the bodiless body of money … a life without personal life or individual property” (42).
5. From “The Farewell to a Lady,” originally contained in an 1808 letter to Francis Hodgson. Included in CPW 1.225-26.
6. Zachary Leader, *Revision and Romantic Authorship* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1996) 79.
7. Edward Said, *Beginnings: Intention and Method,* 2nd ed. (New York: Columbia UP, 1985) 175. Said's exploration of the modern text as self-consciously affiliative, rather than fathered by pure intention, resonates with the self-conscious disruptions of the past played out in Byronic haunting. Said bolsters his theory with Freud's redefinition of the analyst as “brother, interlocutor, discursive partner” (174): the Freudian transfiguration of “vocation” into the “career” of constant reinterpretation (176). Beginnings does not take up Byron's work, but it is fertile theoretical ground for framing the poet's interest in displacement as motivation of poetic career. Byron's linkage of exile with supernatural visitation specifically anticipated Freud's definition of “unheimlich,” the uncanny, as meaning literally “unhoused.”

8. *Acts of Inclusion: Studies Bearing on an Elementary Theory of Romanticism* (New Haven and London: Yale UP, 1979) xii-xiii.
9. W. Paul Elledge, "Divorce Italian Style: Byron's *Beppo,*" *Modern Language Quarterly* 46 (March 1985): 40. See also Elledge's article "Parting Shots: Byron Ending Don Juan 1," *Studies in Romanticism* 27.4 (Winter 1988): 563-77, for an exploration of Don Juan's strategy for "clutch[ing] the subject to which it bids farewell" (564). Elledge's identification of "the equivocation symptomatic of Byron's disjunctive moments," wherein "his dissociative gestures almost always activate his impulses to connect, his embraces those to disengage" (566) resonates with my emphasis on Byron's exiled revisions.
10. Jerome McGann, *Fiery Dust: Byron's Poetic Development* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1968), 280.
11. Jerome Christensen, *Lord Byron's Strength: Romantic Writing and Commercial Society* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993) 214.
12. CPW 4.485. McGann follows the usual custom in this quote of using BLJ to refer to *Byron's Letters & Journals,* ed. Leslie Marchand, 12 vols. (London: John Murray, 1973-82).
13. A seminal observation by M. K. Joseph in *Byron The Poet* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1964) 135.
14. *Beppo* was probably written in two nights (McGann deduces October 9 & 10, 1817) and published in February 1818. Byron finished *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* in January 1818. See CPW 4.482-83, 493, and Marchand, *Byron: A Portrait* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1970) 276.
15. Hermann Fischer, *Romantic Verse Narrative: The History of a Genre,* trans. Sue Bollans (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1991) 159.
16. Jerome McGann, Don Juan *in Context* (Chicago and London: U of Chicago P, 1976) 95.
17. Christensen 215, 220. Though he maintains that the disruptive "tactics" of Juan are evident in "spasms" of work that preceded it, Christensen still leaves in doubt what might have prompted the poet to explicitly launch an ethical challenge to the marketing that had packaged his best-selling Tales.
18. In Manning's words: "A manifesto that alludes to the ceaselessly devious Falstaff does not so much clarify as fruitfully mystify Byron's poetic program." Manning's reading of pseudo-repudiation here resonates with my own. "The new Byron to succeed the repudiated one," he continues, "would be not the true voice of feeling so much as it was another modulation in the relations existing between the historical Byron, his reading, his publisher, and the audience and critics of this and his prior texts." *Reading Romantics: Texts and Contexts* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1990) 147-48.
19. T. S. Eliot, *On Poetry and Poets* (London: Faber and Faber, 1957) 206, 202, 203. Such biographical reading leads Eliot to dismiss an Eastern Tale like Lara "as a masterpiece of self-analysis, but of a self that is largely a deliberate fabrication"; and valorize Don Juan on the grounds that the young hero "exhibits a kind of physical courage and capacity for heroism which we are quite willing to attribute to Byron himself" (203). The subordination of Byron's verse to his life is a remarkably persistent note in Byronic criticism: thirty years later, Jerome McGann is still able to maintain, "He wrote about himself, and … his books, like God's human creatures, are all made in his image and likeness" ("The Book of Byron and the Book of a World," in *The Beauty of Inflections: Literary Investigations in Historical Method and Theory,* ed. Jerome McGann [Oxford: Clarendon, 1985] 264, 257).
20. According to Lord Lovelace, quoted in *His Very Self and Voice: Collected Conversations of Lord Byron,* ed. Ernest J. Lovell Jr. (New York: Macmillan, 1954) 112. Byron's distaste for metaphysics is continually on evidence in *Don Juan,* not only in the attacks on Coleridge, but also in passages such as IX.41 when the narrator rebukes himself for being "apt to grow too metaphysical" and swears off "deviat [ing] into matters rather dry." Dismissals of overarching system can be also found in work more contemporaneous with *Lara,* such as in the *Hebrew Melody,* "When Coldness Wraps This Suffering Clay" (1815; CPW 3.301-2), a meditation on the fate of the soul once "sun is quench'd or system breaks." That poem's interest in broken system signals Byron's concern and interest in afterlife, however dry the construct may have been. Consider too, in this light, the parody of young Juan's first bout of love in *Don Juan* I.91: "And turn'd, without perceiving his condition, / Like

Coleridge, into a metaphysician."

21. The Newstead Abbey poems in the *Hours of Idleness* collection (1808) offer a telling contrast to such implicit reproach. "On Leaving Newstead Abbey" has the speaker vowing:

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Though a tear dim his eye at this sad separation,
          'Tis nature, not fear, that excites his regret;
Far distant he goes, with the same emulation,
          The fame of his fathers he ne'er can forget.
That fame, and that memory, still will he cherish;
          He vows that he ne'er will disgrace your renown;
Like you will he live, or like you will he perish;
          When decay'd, may he mingle his dust with your own!
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The 1806 "Elegy on Newstead Abbey" confers onto the Abbey itself some intimation of the Byronic hero: "Proudly majestic frowns thy vaulted hall, / Scowling defiance on the blasts of fate"—but it is made clear that the hall epitomizes piety and innocence, defiled by the "lawless plunder" of tyrants and the "slow decay" of time. The poem closes with another vow of the poet's fidelity to the past: "Pride, hope, and love forbid him to forget, / But warm his bosom with impassion'd glow."

22. Leslie Brisman, "Byron: Troubled Stream from a Pure Source," in *English Romantic Poets,* ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House, 1986) 232.
23. For a pertinent discussion of Lara's "separation from tradition," see Frederick Shilstone, *Byron and the Myth of Tradition* (Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1988) 85-88.
24. Frederick Garber, *Self, Text, and Romantic Irony* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1988) 48.
25. Here is a measure of the evolution of Byron's Eastern Tales, which, with *The Giaour,* had started out brimming with exotic place names and explanatory footnotes. *Lara,* Byron insisted in letters, was written with "no country whatever in my view" (BLJ 4.143); or, in another formulation, "the country is not Spain but the Moon" (BLJ 4.146).
26. For a resourceful discussion of this dream, centered around a reading of Sardanapalus as defending his highly idealistic conception of pleasure against, and ultimately with, the grim bloody necessities of his ancestry, see Lynn Byrd, "Old Myths for the New Age," in *History and Myth: Essays on English Romantic Literature,* ed. Stephen C. Behrendt (Detroit: Wayne State UP, 1990) 166-87.
27. Milton's famous employment of this phrase at the beginning of "Lycidas" would not be lost on Byron. The watery regeneration of that lyric is a convenient trope for a poet who, thanks to geographical circumstances, would regard a move to the adjacent foreign as a passage over water. For a contrasting treatment of Byron's "once more" beginnings as "the repression of repetitiveness as a dynamic independent of conscious control," see Christensen 153.
28. A similar tactic can be found in Byron's stodgy use of classical dramatic unities—his choice of "the more regular formation of a structure, however feeble, to an entire abandonment of all rules whatsoever" (Preface to the play, CPW 6.16)—to present the life of a king who admires Bacchus and terms himself "the very slave of circumstance / and impulse" (IV.330-31). Here and so often in Byronic texts, stylistic counterpoint offers a silent ironic cross-current to the subject at hand.
29. Emphasized, with correlations to Schlegelean theory, in Anne K. Mellor, *English Romantic Poetry* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1980) 4-24.
30. For an application of this openness to the gloss of the future to Dante, in many ways Byron's model in poetical exile, see Giuseppe Mazzotta, "Dante and the Virtues of Exile" in *Exile in Literature,* ed. Maria-Ines Lagos-Pope (London and Toronto: Associated UP, 1988) 51 ff.
31. Peter Manning, "Don Juan and the Revisionary Self," in *Romantic Revisions,* Robert Brinkley and Keith Hanley, eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1992) 218.
32. Jerome McGann, "Byron and 'The Truth in Masquerade,'" in *Romantic Revisions* 200.
33. Lord Byron, Volume X: *'Don Juan' Cantos XIV and XV,* ed. Andrew Nicholson (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1995) 2.

34. For an indication of how much Coleridge's *Christabel* (1816) was on Byron's mind as the latter left England, see Leslie A. Marchand, *Byron: A Biography,* 3 vols. (New York: Knopf, 1957) 629, which details the famous ghost story session at the Villa Diodati with the Shelleys in the dark summer of 1816. Once the group "really began to talk ghostly," in the words of Dr. Polidori, Byron recited Christabel by heart—to such effect that Percy Shelley ran screaming from the room.
35. For an emphasis of *Don Juan* as a reversal of the movement of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage,* see Bernard Blackstone, *Byron: A Survey* (London: Longman, 1975) 278, 293.
36. See Robert Edwards, "Exile, Self, and Society," in *Exile in Literature* 23.
37. Byron's "Ode to Napoleon Buonaparte" (1814) contains the same rhetoric of mortification, as the poet addresses the "The Desolator desolate! / The Victor overthrown!" (37-38), now exiled on "thy sullen Isle" (118): "thou must eat thy heart away!" (54).

Don Juan, Lord Byron: Further Reading

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Analysis: The Poem

When Don Juan is a small boy, his father dies, leaving the boy in the care of his mother, Donna Inez. Donna Inez is a righteous woman who made her husband's life miserable. She has her son tutored in the arts of fencing, riding, and shooting, and she attempts to rear him in a moral manner. The young Don Juan reads widely in the sermons and lives of the saints, but he does not seem to absorb from his studies the qualities his mother thinks essential.

At sixteen, he is a handsome lad much admired by his mother's friends. Donna Julia, in particular, often looks pensively at the youth. Donna Julia is just twenty-three and married to a man of fifty. Although she loves her husband, or so she tells herself, she thinks often of young Don Juan. One day, finding herself alone with him, she gives herself to the young man. The young lovers spend long hours together during the summer, and it is not until November that Don Alfonso, her husband, discovers their intrigue. When Don Alfonso finds Don Juan in his wife's bedroom, he tries to throttle him. Don Juan overcomes Don Alfonso and flees, first to his mother's home for clothes and money. Then Donna Inez sends him to Cadiz, there to begin a tour of Europe. The good lady prays that the trip will mend his morals.

Before his ship reaches Leghorn, a storm breaks it apart. Don Juan spends many days in a lifeboat without food or water. At last the boat is washed ashore, and Don Juan falls exhausted on the beach and sleeps. When he awakens, he sees bending over him a beautiful girl, who tells him that she is called Haidée and that she is the daughter of the ruler of the island, one of the Cyclades. Her father, Lambro, is a pirate, dealing in jewels and slaves. She knows her father will sell Don Juan to the first trader who comes by, so Haidée hides Don Juan in a cave and sends her maids to wait on him.

When Lambro leaves on another expedition, Haidée takes Don Juan from the cave and they roam together over the island. Haidée gives jewels, fine foods, and wines to Don Juan, for he is the first man she ever knew except for her father and for her servants. Although Don Juan still tries to think of Donna Julia, he cannot resist Haidée. A child of nature and passion, she gives herself to him with complete freedom. Don Juan and Haidée live an idyllic existence until Haidée's father returns unexpectedly. Don Juan again fights gallantly, but at last he is overcome by the old man's servants and put aboard a slave ship bound for a distant market. He never sees Haidée again, and he never knows that she dies without giving birth to his child.

The slave ship takes Don Juan to a Turkish market, where he and another prisoner are purchased by a black eunuch and taken to the palace of a sultan. There Don Juan is made to dress as a dancing maiden and present himself to the sultana, the fourth and favorite wife of the sultan. She passed by the slave market and saw Don Juan and wants him for a lover. In order to conceal his sex from the sultan, she forces the disguise on Don Juan. Even at the threat of death, however, Don Juan will not become her lover, for he still yearns for Haidée. His constancy might have wavered if the sultana was not an infidel, for she is young and beautiful.

Eventually Don Juan escapes from the palace and joins the army of Catherine of Russia. The Russians are at war with the sultan from whose palace Don Juan fled. Don Juan is such a valiant soldier that he is sent to St. Petersburg to carry the news of a Russian victory to Empress Catherine. Catherine also casts longing eyes on the handsome stranger, and her approval soon makes Don Juan the toast of her capital. In the midst of his luxury and good fortune, Don Juan grows ill. Hoping that a change of climate will help her favorite, Catherine resolves to send him on a mission to England. When he reaches London he is well received, for he is a polished young man, well versed in fashionable etiquette. His mornings are spent in business, but his afternoons and evenings are devoted to lavish entertainment. He conducts himself with such decorum, however, that he is much sought after by proper young ladies and much advised by older ones. Lady Adeline Amundeville makes him her protégé and advises him freely on affairs of the heart. Another, the duchess of Fitz-Fulke, advises him, too, but her suggestions are of a more personal nature and seem to demand a secluded

spot where there is no danger from intruders. As a result of the duchess of Fitz-Fulke's attentions to Don Juan, Lady Adeline begins to talk to him about selecting a bride from the chaste and suitable young ladies attentive to him.

Don Juan thinks of marriage, but his interest is stirred by a girl not on Lady Adeline's list. Aurora Raby is a plain young lady, prim, dull, and seemingly unaware of Don Juan's presence. Her lack of interest serves to spur him on to greater efforts, but a smile is his only reward from the cold maiden.

His attention is diverted from Aurora by the appearance of the ghost of the Black Friar, who once lived in the house of Lady Adeline, where Don Juan is a guest. The ghost is a legendary figure reported to appear before births, deaths, or marriages. To Don Juan, the ghost is an evil omen, and he cannot laugh off the tightness about his heart. Lady Adeline and her husband seem to consider the ghost a great joke. Aurora appears to be a little sympathetic with Don Juan, but the duchess of Fitz-Fulke merely laughs at his discomfiture.

The second time the ghost appears, Don Juan follows it out of the house and into the garden. It seems to float before him, always just out of his reach. Once he thinks he grasped it, but his fingers touch only a cold wall. Then he seizes it firmly and finds that the ghost has a sweet breath and full, red lips. When the monk's cowl falls back, the duchess of Fitz-Fulke is revealed. On the morning after, Don Juan appears at breakfast wan and tired. Whether he overcame more than the ghost, no one will ever know. The duchess, too, comes down, seeming to have the air of one who was rebuked.

Analysis: Places Discussed

***Seville**

*Seville. City in southwestern Spain. Calling it "a pleasant city,/ Famous for oranges and women," Byron sets the tone and theme for his treatment of place. The poet is deliberately light-hearted about his legendary hero, pointing out how the provinciality of the city and of his upbringing makes him ignorant of sex and therefore susceptible to the charms of beautiful women. The restrictions of place stimulate the hero to seek a larger world of experience.

Greek island

Greek island. Exiled from Seville, where he has been caught making love to another man's wife, the hero falls in love with the ruler's daughter in a setting that resembles an erotic paradise. Because Haidee's father is away, the lovers are free to indulge themselves—although Don Juan finds himself exiled again when the father returns. The Greek island becomes another example of the world as a place that conspires against lovers.

***Constantinople**

*Constantinople. Turkish capital to which Don Juan is taken by sailors who rescue him after he is abandoned at sea. There he becomes a subject of the Ottoman rulers and continues to attract the amorous attentions of noble women. Byron uses Constantinople to place his hero at the crossroads of the Christian and Turkish empires, demonstrating that for all the differences in customs between East and West, his hero's desire to keep his dignity intact while enjoying himself never slackens. Places threaten to change the hero, but his spirit proves remarkably resistant to the coercions of environment.

***Russia**

*Russia. Even after Don Juan is captured by Russians besieging the Turkish city of Ismail and he becomes a lover of Russia's ruler, Catherine the Great, he remains stubbornly his own person and not merely the plaything of Russia's great autocrat.

***England**

*England. Sent to England as part of a diplomatic entourage, Don Juan becomes a fixture of English society, fending off women who look upon marriage as a career. Byron provides many satirical descriptions of his superficial native land, admirably summing up Don Juan's journey from "lands and scenes romantic," where lives are risked for passion, to a "country where 'tis half a fashion."

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Quotes: "A Finished Gentleman From Top To Toe"

Context: The parts of Don Juan appeared at intervals. Canto I was written in September, 1818 and published with Canto II in 1819; III, IV, and V were printed in 1821; the next nine appeared in groups of three in 1823; XV and XVI were published in March, 1824, and the unfinished Canto XVII, that went to Greece with Byron, was not printed until 1903. After a love affair with the married Donna Julia, a young friend of his mother, Don

Juan is sent on a tour of Europe in search of an education in morals. Shipwrecked, he is found by Haidée, the lovely daughter of a pirate and slave-dealer (instead of by the fisherman's daughter as in Don Juan Tenorio, a Spanish version). After an amorous interlude, her father ships him to a slave market, and Haidée dies of grief. Sold to the Sultana, the youthful Don Juan is compelled to dress as a dancing maiden to conceal his sex from the Sultan. However, remembering his former sweetheart, Juan refuses to become the Sultana's lover. He escapes, when the armies of Catherine of Russia beseige Ismail. His general bravery and his deed in saving a ten-year-old girl from slaughter by the Cossacks (an actual event of the seige but performed by the Duc de Richelieu), give Don Juan such a reputation that he is chosen to carry news of the victory to the Empress in Russia. In St. Petersburg, with new worlds to conquer, Don Juan quickly becomes a favorite of the Empress. When he is taken ill, Catherine sends him on a diplomatic mission to England which opens another area to the satirical shafts of the poet. As a young, unmarried man, polished and knowledgeable about fashionable etiquette, Juan becomes very popular. Many English ladies make love to him. He is shown the sights of London and introduced to the social world. He also meets "a Prince," actually the Prince Regent, afterward George IV, and about him writes the laudatory stanza quoted below. So slight a thread cannot fill the many stanzas of the long poem. Byron often digresses. He commends Wellington (called Villainton by the French); he excoriates the ministers of England, except Canning; he is ironic about the chastity of English women; he attacks the holiness of the Holy Roman Empire, and criticizes the poetry of numerous contemporaries. As narrator, he introduces many of his own personal likes and dislikes. He even devotes one stanza, number 41 of Canto X, to a rhymed pharmaceutical prescription. But though there are many pages in the poem, there is hardly a dull one.

> There, too he saw (whate'er he may be now)A Prince, the prince of princes at the time,With fascination in his very bow,And full of promise, as the spring of prime.Though royalty was written on his brow,He had then the grace, too, rare in every clime,Of being, without alloy of fop or beau,A finish'd gentleman from top to toe.

Quotes: "A Lady In The Case"

Context: While supposedly writing the epic of Don Juan, Byron uses his vehicle for all sorts of digressions, personal reminiscences, tirades against England, and side-slaps at poets. For instance, in Canto IV, commenting on criticisms against licentiousness in his earlier cantos, he says he will skip over certain episodes and "leave them to the purer pages of Smollett, Prior, Ariosto, Fielding." The poem's slender plot follows the adventures of Don Juan, sent by his bluestocking mother on a tour of Europe following discovery of his affair with one of her young married friends, Donna Julia. Sailing from Cadiz to Italy, Juan's ship is wrecked in a storm. After days in a lifeboat without food or water, the young man is washed ashore almost unconscious. He finds a lovely girl bending over him, Haidée, daughter of the island's ruler, the pirate Lambro. Knowing that her father will sell him as a slave, she hides Juan in a cave. Then when Lambro leaves on an expedition, she brings him to her home, lavishes food on him, loads him with jewels, and as a passionate child of Nature, unacquainted with men, gives herself utterly to him. Though trying to think of Donna Julia, he cannot resist Haidée. Interrupting the story for an apostrophe to Greece and a consideration of fame, along with further insults to the Lake Poets, such as a comment that perhaps Homer sometimes nods, but Wordsworth sometimes awakens, Byron returns to the idyl of Juan and Haidée. It is interrupted by the return of her father, the pirate. He discovers Juan, who is wounded resisting capture. As he is taken aboard ship, Haidée loses her mind in grief at her lover's capture, and in the often quoted line, "Whom the gods love, die young," she leaves the story, and Juan never sees her again or knows that she died giving birth to his child. Juan is shipped off to a slave market along with Circassian beauties, Nubians, and others. Byron ends the fourth canto without telling of Juan's fate, "because the Canto has become too long." After a digression about the poet's "passion for the name of Mary," Byron gets back to the slave market where the youthful Juan and a thirty-year-old Englishman are sold to a eunuch from the sultana's palace. She, wanting Juan for a lover, compels him to dress as a dancing maiden, to conceal his sex from the sultan. In a conversation with the

Englishman, Juan learns that the man's first wife died, his second one abandoned him, and he ran away from the third. Seeing Juan's pale and melancholic looks, his friend asks about his experiences. Juan replies that he is not deploring his present lot as a slave, for he has borne hardships "which have the hardiest overworn. . . .

> On the rough deep. But this last blow–" and hereHe stopp'd again, and turn'd away his face."Ay," quoth his friend, "I thought it would appearThat there had been a lady in the case;And these are things which ask a tender tear,Such as I, too, would shed if in your place;I cried upon my first wife's dying day,And also when my second ran away."

Quotes: "A Remnant Of Our Spartan Dead"

Context: In Venice, in the summer of 1818, Byron started what he intended to be an epic poem. Instead of the Spenserian stanzas of his earlier Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, he chose the Italian meter called ottava rima, the meter in which Ludovico Ariosto (1474–1533) wrote the highest literary achievement of the Italian Renaissance, Orlando Furioso. Perhaps its reputation as the greatest of poetic romances influenced the British poet to select its eight-line, ten-syllable stanza for what turned out to be his own masterpiece. The Italian romance, however, is a serious work, while Don Juan sounds at times like a jest, often rising to great heights of poetic inspiration, only to poke fun at the reader for taking it seriously. There is as much satire in it as romance, beginning with the dedication that insults Southey, the Poet Laureate of the time, and criticizes Wordsworth and Coleridge, along with other contemporary writers, as the work progresses. Don Juan Tenorio was a famous character of Spanish romanticism, based on a Golden Age original, but he has little relationship to the title character of this poem, except as both were persistent pursuers of women. The English poem begins with the childhood of the hero, brought up by his mother, an intellectual, and getting his first knowledge of love-making through an affair with his mother's friend Donna Julia, the twenty-three-year-old wife of elderly Don Alfonso. From June until November they carry on their affair undiscovered; then Don Alfonso learns of the intrigue. Juan's mother decides to send the young man on a tour of Europe to improve his morals, and the first canto ends with the statement by the poet that whether he continues with Don Juan's adventures depends on how well the public buys the first sample. Despite the storm of protests rising because of Byron's voluptuousness that came when an anonymous publisher issued the anonymous first and second cantos published together, in July, 1819, Byron was encouraged to continue with Canto III which, like Canto III of Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, is the most admired of them all. It expresses his devotion to Greece. In it, asked to sing at a party, Don Juan obliges. Having traveled much, he is able to fit his theme to the nationality of his audience, and so, following the 86th stanza, are inserted sixteen stanzas of his song, beginning with one of Byron's most quoted lines: "The isles of Greece, the Isles of Greece,/ Where burning Sappho loved and sung." The lover of liberty wonders, as he sings of the greatness of Greece, whether the present generation is content merely to blush when earlier Greeks bled for their land. The reference is to the 300 Spartans under Leonidas who held back the Persians under Xerxes in 480 B.C. at the Pass of Thermopylae for three days until the forces of Greece could gather to oppose him.

> Must we but weep o'er days more blest?Must we but blush?–Our fathers bled.Earth! render back from out thy breastA remnant of our Spartan dead!Of the three hundred grant but three,To make a new Thermopylae.

Quotes: "A Sadness Sweeter Than A Smile"

Context: Don Jóse has died leaving his son and heir, Don Juan, in the hands of the child's mother, "Sagest of women, even of widows, . . ." This learned and virtuous lady has long since decided that her son shall be molded by her into a paragon worthy of the noble line from which he springs. All the accomplishments of chivalry plus the erudition for which she is so justly famous shall be his, but beyond these, Donna Inez (remembering her late lord's frailties) desires for him an education strictly moral with ". . . not a page of

anything that's loose,/ Or hints continuation of the species, . . ." With his tutors, his confessor, and his mother his every-day companions, the child grows in beauty, charm, and grace. The only other female he ever sees except the household's ancient maids is the lovely young Donna Julia, his mother's friend, who ". . . saw, and, as a pretty child,/ Caress'd him often–. . .", a thing quite innocent when she was twenty and he thirteen. But now she is twenty-three and he sixteen, and suddenly there is a subtle change, the reason for which is all too apparent to the married Donna Julia though lost on the long-sequestered Juan.

> Whate'er the cause might be, they had becomeChanged; for the dame grew distant, the youth shy,Their looks cast down, their greetings almost dumb,And much embarrassment in either eye;There surely will be little doubt with someThat Donna Julia knew the reason why,But as for Juan, he had no more notionThan he who never saw the sea of ocean.. . .And if she met him, though she smiled no more,She look'd a sadness sweeter than her smile,As if her heart had deeper thoughts in storeShe must not own, but cherish'd more the whileFor that compression in its burning core;Even innocence itself has many a wile,And will not dare to trust itself with truth,And love is taught hypocrisy from youth.

Quotes: "All Comedies Are Ended By A Marriage"

Context: Don Juan is a long poem in sixteen cantos and an unfinished seventeenth, written in ottava rima, and loosely held together by a chronological narrative of Don Juan's travels and adventures. The narrative, however, is insignificant in comparison with the numerous satiric digressions on all aspects of life and literature (see "Nor at the years/ Which certain people call 'a certain age'"). Cantos II-IV concern Juan's idyllic love affair with Haidée, daughter of a Greek pirate, after his shipwreck in Canto II. The romance ends tragically in Canto IV when Juan is sold into slavery and Haidée dies with her unborn child. Canto III begins with a commentary on woman's first love, and on the inevitable failure of marriage. In Stanza 5 are the lines: "'Tis melancholy, and a fearful sign/ Of human frailty, folly, also crime,/ That love and marriage rarely can combine." Byron's frequent strictures on marriage are an outcome of his own unsuccessful marriage with Anne Isabella Milbanke on January 2, 1815. The marriage ended on April 21, 1816, and Byron left England forever on April 25. In context, the quotation reads:

> All tragedies are finish'd by a death,All comedies are ended by a marriage;The future states of both are left to faith.. . .

Quotes: "Begin With The Beginning"

Context: In the literary world, the Spanish Don Juan Tenorio is the symbol of the great lover, the profligate libertine, with feudal power but without feudal obligation. One is not sure how much Byron knew of the Spanish play that introduced this character to the literary world, the Golden Age El Burlador de Sevilla (The Mocker of Seville) by Tirso de Molina (1584?–1648). Don Juan Tenorio (1844) by the romantic dramatist José Zorrilla (1817–1893) did not appear until later. Certainly Byron did not know how to pronounce the Spaniard's name, for instead of Don Hwahn (to rhyme with "John"), he rhymed it with "ruin." But then, he rhymed Cádiz with "ladies" and the three-syllable "capote" with "boat." Nor did he follow the story line of the Spanish original. Started out like a bedroom farce, it let him indulge his talent for insults and ridicule. Its dedication insults Wordsworth, Coleridge, and "Sir Laureate" Robert Southey, who lives to sing about kings "very ill." About Coleridge, Byron remarks that the poet explained metaphysics to the nation, then adds: "I wish he would explain his explanation." Wisely, the publisher, Murray, who published Cantos I and II in July, 1819, and Cantos III, IV, and V in August, 1821, issued them without mentioning either his name or the name of the author. Of course the authorship was quickly guessed, and upon Byron fell a storm of obloquy for their voluptuousness and skepticism. Consequently Murray refused to publish any later cantos. They were printed in sets of three by John Hunt in 1823 and 1824. Byron was writing Canto XVII when he died of a fever in

Greece. Byron announced that he intended to write an epic of modern life; however, the poem fails to follow the epic tradition, since the poet departs from the story with frequent digressions, as he does in Childe Harold's Pilgrimage. He refers to many people and things, as well as indulging in bitter tirades against England, society, wealth, and power. So the adventures of the Don are incidental to a satire that is, in the opinion of many critics, the greatest in English, as well as the poem above all others of his pen into which are gathered the most outstanding traits of his genius. It is written largely in ottava rima, an Italian meter: eight lines of ten syllables with the first six rhyming alternately, and a rhymed couplet at the end. As an example, see the stanza quoted here. In the opening lines of the first canto, Byron remarks: "I want a hero," and therefore he takes Don Juan, familiar as a figure in the pantomime, sent to the devil before his time. Then the author digresses to list some of the heroes of the present and past, all of whom he finds unfit for his poem. He also comments on the usual way of plunging somewhere into the middle of the action in an attempt to seize attention at once. But as he comments:

> That is the usual method, but not mine–My way is to begin with the beginning;The regularity of my designForbids all wandering as the worst of sinning,And therefore I shall open with a line(Although it cost me half an hour in spinning)Narrating somewhat of Don Juan's father,And also of his mother, if you'd rather.

Quotes: "Cervantes Smiled Spain's Chivalry Away"

Context: In Canto XIII, Byron's fictitious hero, Juan, has settled in London as ambassador of Catherine the Great of Russia, but, as usual, the plot of the poem is secondary to the digressions (See "All comedies are ended by a marriage"). In Stanza 11, Byron alludes to Cervantes' destruction of the chivalry of Spain as a distinct "harm" which has "led to his land's perdition." Cervantes (1547-1616) was the author of Don Quixote de la Mancha (1605, 1615), a novel which burlesqued the romances of chivalry in vogue in the sixteenth century. The comic adventures of Don Quixote and his squire, Sancho Panza, made the medieval cult of chivalry so ridiculous that it was practically annihilated, not only in Spain, but in other countries of the civilized world. In context, Byron's lines read:

> Cervantes smil'd Spain's chivalry away;A single laugh demolish'd the right armOf his own country;–seldom since that dayHas Spain had heroes.

Quotes: "Dead Scandals Form Good Subjects For Dissection"

Context: Don Jóse and Donna Inez, proud parents of Don Juan, young hero of Lord Byron's satiric epic, have quarrelled–precisely why no one can guess "Though several thousand people chose to try." They live respectably as man and wife while showing to the world a well-bred calm, until at last pent-up anger flares and leaves the world in no doubt as to the true state of affairs between them. Donna Inez tries first to prove that Don Jóse is mad; failing this, that he is merely bad. When asked on what evidence she is moved to treat him so, she replies only that her conduct is required by her duty to God and man; and, while hinting that she has journals, books and letters which could be used should occasion demand, she falls serenely and magnanimously silent. "And then she had all Seville for abettors,/ The hearers of her case became repeaters." Old gossip is dredged up, old rumors brought to life; to the amusement of some, the requital of others, the entertainment of all.

> And then this best and meekest woman boreWith such serenity her husband's woes,Just as the Spartan ladies did of yore,Who saw their spouses kill'd, and nobly choseNever to say a word about them more–Calmly she heard each calumny that rose,And saw his agonies with such

> sublimity,That all the world exclaim'd, "What magnanimity!". . .And if our quarrels should rip up old stories,And help them with a lie or two additional,I'm not to blame, as you well know–no more isAny one else–they were become traditional;Besides, their resurrection aids our gloriesBy contrast, which is what we just were wishing all:And science profits by this resurrection–Dead scandals form good subjects for dissection.

Quotes: "Fans Turn Into Falchions In Fair Hands"

Context: Lord Byron, after selecting "our ancient friend Don Juan" as the protagonist for his satiric epic poem, "begin[s] with the beginning" and goes on to describe the young hero's parents, Don Jóse and Donna Inez, true Gothic aristocrats of Spain without tint of alien blood. Though the learned and witty Donna Inez is virtuous beyond comparison with the saints, she is insipid (as all such perfection must be) as was the garden before the fall, and Don Jóse, a true son of Eve and "a mortal of the careless kind" goes straying after other fruits, never dreaming that she cares. But Donna Inez, for all her merits, has "a devil of a spirit" and repays neglect (the sin to try even a saint!) by getting her lord into many a scrape. And

> This was an easy matter with a manOft in the wrong, and never on his guard;And even the wisest, do the best they can,Have moments, hours, and days, so unprepared,That you might "brain them with their lady's fan;"And sometimes ladies hit exceeding hard,And fans turn into falchions in fair handsAnd why and wherefore no one understands.'Tis pity learned virgins ever wedWith persons of no sort of education,Or gentlemen, who, though well born and bred,Grow tired of scientific conversation;I don't choose to say much upon this head,I'm a plain man, and in a single station,But–Oh! ye lords of ladies intellectual,Inform us truly, have they not hen-peck'd you all?

Quotes: "Man Is A Carnivorous Production"

Context: Don Juan, at sixteen, has succeeded in causing a divorce and one of the liveliest scandals in all Spain. As a remedy for his waywardness, the precocious offender has been packed off to sea "As if a Spanish ship were Noah's ark,/ To wean him from the wickedness of earth,/ And send him like a dove of promise forth." The repentent exile stands on the deck of the departing vessel, his eyes overflowing with tears as the shoreline of his homeland recedes into the distance, and the memory of his mother and his forbidden love weighs heavily on his heart. But both love and country are soon forgotten as the young hero is assailed by the pangs of seasickness, and, later, by the great storm that batters vessel and crew until the ship founders and sinks. With it go two hundred souls, leaving thirty survivors, including Don Juan, afloat in the long-boat. As the storm continues to rage, the castaways, for love of life ". . . stand like rocks the tempest's wear and tear;" but, alas! hunger proves stronger than fortitude and leads to deadly folly, for

> . . . man is a carnivorous production,And must have meals, at least one meal a day;He cannot live, like woodcocks upon suction,But, like the shark and tiger, must have prey;Although his anatomical constructionBears vegetables, in a grumbling way,Your labouring people think beyond all questionBeef, veal, and mutton, better for digestion.And thus it was with this our hapless crew;For on the third day there came on a calm,And though at first their strength it might renew,And lying on their weariness like balm,Lull'd them like turtles sleeping on the blueOf ocean, when they woke they felt a qualm,And fell all ravenously on their provision,Instead of hording it with due precision.

Quotes: "No Sterner Moralist Than Pleasure"

Context: The youthful Don Juan, banished from Spain and packed off to sea as discipline for an amorous scrape, ends his voyage as a castaway on an island shore. The beautiful Haidée, daughter of the pirate Lambro who has made her "the greatest heiress of the Eastern Isles," finds the half-drowned youth lying emaciated and unconscious on the sand. She and her maid carry him to a cave and, for fear that her father will return from the sea, find the lad, and sell him into slavery, secretly nurse him back to life and health. Inevitably the two young people fall in love and live together hidden from the world until rumors of Lambro's death send them to claim Haidée's inheritance and install themselves as master and mistress of her father's domains. The lovers, happy in each other, decree that revelry shall be the order of the days and nights and open the doors of the palace to all comers. The poet describes a dinner at which the "lady and her lover [sit] . . . in their beauty and their pride" as they preside over their guests and the feast of a hundred dishes with which they are served. Of the wall coverings in the great dining hall, he says:

> The hangings of the room were tapestry, madeOf velvet panels, each of different hue,And thick with damask flowers of silk inlaid;And round them ran a yellow border too;The upper border, richly wrought, display'd,Embroider'd delicately o'er with blue,Soft Persian sentences, in lilac letters,From poets, or the moralists their betters.These Oriental writings on the wall,Quite common in those countries, are a kindOf monitors adapted to recall,Like skulls at Memphian banquets, to the mindThe words which shook Belshazzar in his hall,And took his kingdom from him: You will find,Though sages may pour out their wisdom's treasure,There is no sterner moralist than Pleasure.

Quotes: "Put Himself Upon His Good Behavior"

Context: Don Juan is a long, digressive, and satiric poem about the adventures of a young libertine, Juan, whom readers and critics alike persist in identifying as Lord Byron. In Canto V, Juan and an Englishman named Johnson are sold as slaves to the Sultana Gulbeyaz. While they are being led by a black eunuch to the Sultan's palace, Juan suggests to his friend that they knock the slave on the head and escape. However, both are hungry, and when they smell food cooking, they decide to defer their plans for liberty. The line quoted refers to Juan's conduct when he smells food, but readers of the poem were prone to think of Byron himself and wonder if he was ever on "his good behaviour." Byron's old publisher, Murray, brought out the first five cantos of the poem anonymously, but he was so shocked by its contents that he refused to publish any more, and the remaining cantos were published by John Hunt. In context, the line reads:

> And nearer as they came, a genial savourOf certain stews, and roast-meats, and pilaus,Things which in hungry mortals' eyes find favour,Made Juan in his harsh intentions pause,And put himself upon his good behaviour.

Quotes: "Sermons And Soda-water"

Context: Lord Byron's precocious hero, Don Juan, has already, at sixteen, succeeded in causing a divorce and one of the most notorious scandals in all Spain. For his waywardness he has been banished from his homeland and packed off to sea accompanied by his mother's expectations that the salt air will wean him from the ways–especially amorous–of the world and restore his lost innocence. Alas! for this moral lady's hopes, a great storm comes up and dashes to destruction the ship and its company, all except for Juan, whom it deposits half-drowned on an island shore. Along the beach, with her maid, comes the beautiful Haidée, "The greatest heiress of the Eastern Isles." The two ladies find the battered castaway unconscious on the sand, place him in a cave, and nurse him back to health. Inevitably the handsome youth and his lovely rescuer fall in love.

The poet describes the "wild and breaker-beaten coast" along which the lovers walk, and then pauses to digress a bit. (Sermons and Soda-water has been used as the title for a volume of short stories by the contemporary John O'Hara.)

> It was a wild and breaker-beaten coast,With cliffs above, and a broad sandy shoreGuarded by shoals and rocks as by an host,With here and there a creek, whose aspect woreA better welcome to the tempest-tost;And rarely ceased the haughty billow's roar,Save on the dead long summer days, which makeThe outstretch'd ocean glitter like a lake.And the small ripple spilt upon the beachScarcely o'erpassed the cream of your champagne,When o'er the brim the sparkling bumpers reach,That spring-dew of the spirit! the heart's rain!Few things surpass old wine; and they may preachWho please,–the more because they preach in vain,–Let us have wine and women, mirth and laughter,Sermons and soda-water the day after.

Quotes: "She Looked A Lecture"

Context: Byron, preparing to write a satiric epic, looks about for an appropriate hero for his poem. Failing to find "in the present age" a fitting protagonist, he looks to the heroes of the past and chooses from among them "our ancient friend Don Juan." Most epic poets, says Byron, start their poems in the middle of things from which point the reader is brought up to date by a series of recollections delivered by the hero to a circle of friends after dinner or to his mistress in a tavern or a bower. But with Don Juan, "My way is to begin with the beginning; . . ./ Narrating somewhat of Don Juan's father,/ And also of his mother, if you'd rather." If the father, Don Jóse, was a true aristocrat of Spain, his wife, Donna Inez, was all of this and much more. She was, indeed, a lady learned in the sciences and in mathematics, with virtues equalled only by her wit, before whom even the cleverest people quailed, and the best of them were put into the shade. In short, she was perfection beyond parallel. Of this formidable lady, a satiric portrait of Lady Byron, who had left her husband three years before the publication of the first canto of Don Juan, the poet writes that while

> Some women use their tongues–she look'd a lecture,Each eye a sermon, and her brow a homily,An all-in-all sufficient self-director,Like the lamented late Sir Samuel Romilly,The Law's expounder, and the State's corrector,Whose suicide was almost an anomaly–One sad example more, that "All is vanity,"–(The jury brought their verdict in "Insanity.")In short, she was a walking calculation,Miss Edgeworth's novels stepping from their covers,Or Mrs. Trimmer's books on education,Or "Coelebs' Wife" set out in quest of lovers,Morality's grim personification,In which not Envy's self a flaw discovers;To others' share let "female errors fall,"For she had not even one–the worst of all.

Quotes: "Squandered A Whole Summer While 'twas May"

Context: Lord Byron, after bringing to its tempestuous and unseemly end the young Don Juan's first amorous scrape, sets to musing. The future of his projected poem, he says, will depend on the public's reaction to its hero's first adventure. The work is to be an epic, he assures his readers, with the epic's requisite number of books, loves, wars, gales, lists, and episodes, after the style of Virgil and Homer but with–at least–one advantage over his great forebears who ". . . so embellish, that 'tis quite a bore/ Their labyrinth of fables to thread through,/ Whereas this story's actually true." And should any reader assume that this tale will not be moral, he begs that he not cry out before he's hurt. After all, in Canto XII, doesn't he intend to "show the very place where wicked people go?" Nor should the public fail to take his word about the matter rather than listen to the opinions of the hostile Edinburgh Review and The Quarterly, both of which had attacked his early poetry, and both of which, he in turn, had attacked in English Bards and Scotch Reviewers (1809).

> But now at thirty years my hair is grey–(I wonder what it will be like at forty?I thought of a peruke the other day–)My heart is not much greener; and, in short, IHave squander'd my whole summer while 'twas May,And feel no more spirit to retort; IHave spent my life, both interest and principal,And deem not, what I deem'd, my soul invincible.No more–no more–Oh! never more on meThe freshness of the heart can fall like dew,Which out of all the lovely things we seeExtracts emotions beautiful and new;Hived in our bosoms like the bag o' the bee.Think'st thou the honey with those objects grew?Alas! 'twas not in them, but in thy powerTo double even the sweetness of a flower.

Quotes: "Surely Nothing Dies But Something Mourns"

Context: Don Juan is a long narrative poem with more digressions than narrative (see "All comedies are ended by a marriage"). The quoted line is part of one of these digressions. Here, Byron, speaking in his own person and forgetting the libertine Juan, devotes five stanzas to praising the "Sweet hour of twilight." He describes his evening rides through the pine forests of Ravenna–"haunted ground" (105), where the strident voices of the cicadas and the tolling of the vesper bell "Were the sole echoes, save my steed's and mine" (106). He apostrophizes Hesperus (Venus, the Evening Star) as bringing "all good things" to birds, beasts, and human beings (107). In Stanza 108, he describes twilight as "Soft hour! which wakes the wish and melts the heart/ Of those who sail the seas. . . ." or which "fills with love the pilgrim on his way. . . ." The vesper bell seems to mourn the dying day. The stanza ends with the lines:

> Is this a fancy which our reason scorns?Ah! surely nothing dies but something mourns!

Quotes: "Sweet Is Revenge–especially To Women"

Context: This quotation is similar to our common saying, "Revenge is sweet." It is also similar to Satan's comment, enviously thinking of Adam and Eve, "Revenge, at first though sweet,/ Bitter ere long back on itself recoils," in Book IX of Milton's Paradise Lost. In Don Juan the quotation in question is part of a series of statements, taking up several stanzas, about things that one can consider "sweet": a miser's gold to him, the hum of bees, the voices of young girls, the birth of one's first son, the taste of new vintage wine, and many more. None be so sweet, however, concludes the poet, as "first and passionate love–it stands alone,/ Like Adam's recollection of his fall." Such love is worth the sum of all the other "sweets," says Lord Byron, that he can name. The lines about the sweetness of revenge appear in the following context:

> Sweet is the vintage, when the showering grapesIn Bacchanal profusion reel to earth,Purple and gushing; sweet are our escapesFrom civic revelry to rural mirth;Sweet to the miser are his glittering heaps,Sweet to the father is his first-born's birth,Sweet is revenge–especially to women,Pillage to soldiers, prize-money to seamen.

Quotes: "The Best Of Life Is But Intoxication"

Context: The young Don Juan, as punishment for an amorous scrape that has resulted in a divorce and a scandal which has all Spain talking, has been banished from his homeland and packed off to sea on his pious mother's assumption that the salt air will somehow bring about a change of heart and a return to innocence. Who knows but that her scheme might have worked had not a great storm come up, battering the ship to pieces, killing all of Juan's fellow voyagers, and depositing him, half-drowned, on an island coast. Two ladies, the beautiful Haidée, "The greatest heiress of the Eastern Isles," and her companion, find the unconscious and emaciated youth lying on the sand, carry him to a cave, and nurse him back to health and alas! to love. As the lovely Haidée accompanies the handsome Juan on his first venture from the cave since his rescue, the poet

describes the "wild and breaker-beaten coast" along which the lovers stroll. He then digresses a bit and speaks up in favor of old wine!

> And the small ripple spilt upon the beachScarcely o'erpassed the cream of your champagne,When o'er the brim the sparkling bumpers reach,That spring-dew of the spirit! the heart's rain!Few things surpass old wine; and they may preachWho please,–the more because they preach in vain,–Let us have wine and women, mirth and laughter,Sermons and soda-water the day after.Man, being reasonable, must get drunk;The best of life is but intoxication:Glory, the grape, love, gold, in these are sunkThe hopes of all men, and of every nation;Without their sap, how branchless were the trunkOf life's strange tree, so fruitful on occasion!But to return,–Get very drunk; and whenYou wake with headache, you shall see what then.

Quotes: "The Devil's In The Moon For Mischief"

Context: Don Juan, now growing up, is "Tall, handsome, slender, but well knit: . . ." Since his father's death he has been in the charge of his mother, who, remembering her late lord's frailties, has provided, as his sole companions, the households ancient maids, his tutors and confessor, and, (alas! for ". . . a breeding . . . strictly moral") her lovely friend, Donna Julia, a young wife of twenty-three, who, when Juan was younger ". . . saw, and, as a pretty child,/ Caress'd him often– . . ." But now the pretty child is suddenly sixteen, and a subtle change takes place. Donna Julia is blushingly selfconscious, while Juan broods in the "lonely wood,/ Tormented with a wound he [cannot] know, . . ." One summer's day toward evening, the two find themselves together in a sequestered bower, Donna Julia full of honor, virtue, and resolve never to disgrace the marriage ring she wears; Juan, as is love's way when it is new, tremblingly fearful lest he do wrong as in gratitude he kisses the little hand so carelessly placed on his. And then the moon comes up.

> The sun set, and up rose the yellow moon:The devil's in the moon for mischief; theyWho call'd her CHASTE, methinks, began too soonTheir nomenclature; there is not a day,The longest, not the twenty-first of June,Sees half the business in a wicked way,On which three single hours of moonshine smile–On them she looks so modest all the while.There is a dangerous silence in that hour,A stillness, which leaves room for the full soulTo open all itself, without the powerOf calling wholly back its self-control;The silver light which, hallowing tree and tower,Sheds beauty and deep softness o'er the whole,Breathes also to the heart, and o'er it throwsA loving languor, which is not repose.

Quotes: "The Loudest Wit I Ever Was Deafened With"

Context: Between 1818 and 1824, the year of his death, Byron was busy with an epic poem about the great Spanish lover, Don Juan. The plot is slender. Juan, after an affair with one of his mother's friends, is sent on a tour of Europe. A shipwreck during the first stage involves him in a passionate affair with the beautiful daughter of a slave-trader who sells him to a sultana. The attack upon her palace by Russian forces lets him escape her clutches, but he is sent to carry news to the Empress Catherine of Russia, who also wants him for a lover. Because of his illness, she sends him on a diplomatic mission to England. Here his charm and polish bring many opportunities for marriage, with Lady Adeline to point out the advantages of the various ladies. The only one to interest him is prim, melancholic Aurora Raby. Her indifference to him, as she sits beside him at a banquet in Lady Adeline's house, piques him. That evening he sees the ghost of the Black Friar, who had once lived in that house. Thomas Moore, the Irish poet and friend of Byron, in his life of the poet, asserts that Byron himself during a visit to Newstand Abbey in 1814 fancied he saw the ghost of the Black Friar who had haunted the place since the time of the dissolution of the monasteries. The ghost's appearance was supposed to presage a death, a wedding, or a birth. The next morning the guests talk of the ghost, and Adeline sings a song

about the Black Friar and warns them all to beware of him. However, that night Juan forgets the warning. When seeing a shadowy figure, he pursues it and discovers "beneath the sable frock and dreary cowl," the voluptuous figure of one of the guests, the Duchess of Fitz-Fulke. This incident ends the narrative. Before Byron could conclude the next canto, he died in Greece, encouraging the Greeks to fight for their independence. In the 1903 edition of Byron's poems, fourteen stanzas of Canto XVII were included, printed from a manuscript in the possession of the family of a close friend, John Hobhouse, to whom the fourth canto of Childe Harold's Pilgrimage and The Siege of Corinth were dedicated. The final stanza takes up the narrative and reports the appearance next morning of a wan and weary Juan, looking as if he had struggled with ghosts, and of a pale Duchess. How could this slight narrative occupy seventeen cantos, some with more than a hundred stanzas? It could do so because of the constant digressions, flippant comments, ironical opinions about people and history, satire of many great men of the past, and invectives against leading figures of Byron's time. One example comes in the midst of the Black Friar episode. Speaking of the country acres of Lady Adeline Amundeville and Lord Henry, Byron interjects a personal note about his preference for city life over country life, scoffing at those whose choice lies in the other direction. Someone has guessed that this invective is directed against the Reverend Sydney Smith (1771–1845), whose Peter Pymley Letters was published in 1807. It takes place during an election banquet given by Sir Henry, with lords and ladies from the city, and also guests from the rural regions.

> There were some country wags too–and, alas!Some exiles from the town, who had been drivenTo gaze, instead of pavements, upon grass,And rise at nine in lieu of long eleven.And lo! upon that day it came to passI sat next that o'erwhelming son of heaven,The very powerful parson, Peter Pith,The loudest wit I e'er was deafen'd with.

Quotes: "Truth Is Stranger Than Fiction"

Context: In Canto XIV, Byron's hero is a guest at a house party in England (see "Cervantes smil'd Spain's chivalry away"). Juan's hostess, Lady Adeline, attempts to rescue him from an intrigue. Byron hints, however, that something may develop between Adeline and Juan: "It is not clear that Adeline and Juan/ Will fall; but if they do, 'twill be their ruin" (Stanza 99). In the next stanza he observes that a "sentimental situation" can bring "man and woman to the brink/ Of ruin." It is evidently this "truth" that is referred to in the quotation. Byron's persistent linking of love and ruin doubtless stems from his own disastrous experience with marriage. Other authors have voiced similar opinions about truth: "Truth may sometimes be improbable."–Boileau (1636-1711): The Art of Poetry, III, 50; "There is nothing so powerful as truth, and often nothing so strange."–Daniel Webster (1782-1852): "Argument on the Murder of Captain White" (April 6, 1830); "Truth is stranger than fiction, but not so popular."–Author unknown. Stanza 101 of Don Juan begins:

> 'Tis strange,–but true; for truth is always strange;Stranger than fiction: if it could be told,How much would novels gain by the exchange!How differently the world would men behold!

Quotes: "Where Burning Sappho Loved And Sung"

Context: This lyric poem, a lament for the present slavery of Greece, is inserted bodily between Stanzas 86 and 87 of Don Juan, Canto III. It purports to be the song of a poet who is entertaining Juan and Haidée in the absence of the latter's pirate father. The poet is a clever fellow who can suit his song to any audience: "In France, for instance, he would write a chanson;/ In England a six canto quarto tale;/ In Spain he'd make a ballad or romance . . ./ In Greece, he'd sing some sort of hymn like this . . . (Stanza 86). Sappho (fl. about 600 B.C.) was a native of Lesbos, an island of Greece. Only a few fragments of her poetry survive, but these are marked by great beauty and passion, the kind of poetry that would appeal to Byron. The first stanza of the poem is as follows:

The isles of Greece, the isles of Greece!Where burning Sappho loved and sung,Where grew the arts of war and peace,Where Delos rose, and Phoebus sprung!Eternal summer gilds them yet,But all, except their sun, is set.

Quotes: "Whispering "I Will Never Consent,"–consented"

Context: Instead of following the usual custom of starting to tell a story "in medias res," that is, in the middle of exciting events, Byron decided to start with the childhood of his hero. He tells of young Juan's boyhood beside the waters of the Guadalquivir (which he rhymes with "river"). The Spanish original introduces its anti-hero in an inn of Seville after his year of roistering, love-making, and dueling in Italy. Chiefly, however, the first canto of Byron's poem pokes ridicule at the feminine cult of knowledge, since Juan's mother, Inez, seeks to know everything. Her perfection makes her insipid; so her husband, Don Jóse, goes "plucking various fruit without her leave," until he dies. Juan's mother takes over his education with books "expurgated by learned men," who leave out all the grosser parts but collect them into an appendix. Told in the first person by the narrator, the beginning informs the reader of Juan's training in fencing, riding, and shooting. But the boy does not need training when he finds himself alone one day with his mother's young friend, Donna Julia, married to an elderly husband. In a flippant style, the poet recounts Juan's growing realization of Julia's charms. The boy is described wandering in self-communion, like Wordsworth beside "glassy brooks," and turning like Coleridge into a metaphysician, staying away from home so long that he misses his dinner. Finally on the sixth of June ("I like to be particular in dates"), at about six-thirty, he and Julia are sitting in her bower. Perhaps she meant to "clasp his fingers in a pure Platonic squeeze," as she thinks about her husband Don Alfonso's fifty years, and resolves to remain true to him. The poet pauses to devote a stanza to the "confounded fantasies" of Plato, and his responsibility for more immoral conduct than all the poets and romancers. Julia protests, but perhaps, as in Act III of Hamlet, "The lady doth protest too much, methinks." And as Byron goes on:

And Julia's voice was lost, except in sighs,Until too late for useful conversation;The tears were gushing from her gentle eyes,I wish, indeed, they had not had occasion;But who, alas! can love, and then be wise?Not that remorse did not oppose temptation;A little still she strove, and much repented,And whispering, "I will ne'er consent"–consented.

Quotes: "Who, Alas! Can Love, And Then Be Wise?"

Context: The lovely Donna Julia is twenty-three and married to a man of fifty. In a household dedicated to the young Don Juan's moral education, she is, besides his mother and the ancient household servants, the only female the youth has ever known. She has watched him grow, and ". . . as a pretty child,/ Caress'd him often–. . ." Now, no longer a "child," he is sixteen: she is tremulous and shy, while he broods in solitude, "Tormented with a wound he [can] not know." All these signs Donna Julia sees and recognizes for what they are. She vows to herself she never will disgrace the marriage ring she wears, while "Love, then, within its proper limits/ Was Julia's innocent determination." One day in June, toward evening, she finds herself and Juan alone in a sequestered bower. "One hand on Juan's carelessly was thrown,/ Quite by mistake–she thought it was her own; . . ./ Yet there's no doubt she only meant to clasp/ His fingers with a pure Platonic squeeze." And then the moon comes up and sheds the "loving languor" that spells the end of all her resolution.

Oh Plato! Plato! you have paved the way,With your confounded fantasies, to moreImmoral conduct by the fancied swayYour system feigns o'er the controlless coreOf human hearts, than all the long arrayOf poets and romancers:–You're a bore,A charlatan, a coxcomb–and have been,At best, no better than a go-between. And Julia's voice was lost, except in sighs,Until too late for useful conversation;The tears were gushing from her gentle eyes,I wish, indeed, they had not had occasion;But who, alas! can love, and then be wise?Not that

remorse did not oppose temptation;A little still she strove, and much repented,And whispering "I will ne'er consent"–consented.