

) "ADVENTUROUS AND CONTEMPLATIVE"

A READING OF BYRON'S *DON JUAN*

by

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## ABSTRACT

This dissertation on Byron's *Don Juan* begins with a history and analysis of the stanza form. Since *ottava rima* is a two-fold structure, comprising an alternately rhyming sestet followed by an independent couplet, it encourages the expression of dialectical ideas. Byron's prosodic virtuosity uses this potential to create a multivalent tissue of tones which is essentially—and almost infinitely—ironic. A view of prosody is developed here which is unique in its perception of the poem's existence in terms of a reading that unfolds in "real time." For various reasons, "reader-response" critics have not yet taken much cognizance of prosody. *Don Juan* is a good testing-ground for their approach because its narrator constantly addresses his reader, insisting on a present time which actively accumulates a past and projects a future, as a reader's consciousness moves sequentially forward through the text. The present time of the verse rhythms is the present time of the discourse, which is often most self-reflexive in the famous "digressions." Some of these begin with an epic simile whose vehicle grows out of proportion to its tenor; others are triggered by an interruption of the story, as the narrator—like a Renaissance improviser in *ottava rima*—suddenly addresses his audience directly. Still other digressions are not metaleptic leaps from a fictional to a "real" world, or from one fictional world to another, however; they are the result of the narrator's tendency to linger too long in one world, elaborating descriptions until his story is forgotten. Despite the poem's many-voiced, digressive insouciance, an investigation of its moral and metaphysical components reveals that its irony has limits. *Maugre* those critics who would claim *Don Juan* as the paradigmatic work of unlimited, infinitely regressive Romantic irony, the issue of political liberty is not to be joked about, unlike the problem of erotic love. At this stable point in an otherwise absurd universe, Byron reveals a non-ironic self under the ironic mask. More effectively than traditional autobiography, because it is enacted rather than reported, this poem recreates its author dramatically, in terms of a shifting triangular relationship between narrator, protagonist and reader. The temporal locus of this relationship is a fictional present tense grounded in the "real" present time of a reading of the poem.

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## INTRODUCTION

Structuralist approaches to literary and non-literary texts, as well as to other artefacts, institutions and natural phenomena have characterized much academic research and thinking in the second half of the twentieth century. Their world geometry projects a binary system as the prototype of structure, which may have become popular because it is the basic principle of the computer. Clearly, a system which simplifies the multiple and labyrinthine complexities of artistic construction to a series of comprehensible either-or categories is an extremely useful tool. What I, like many of the recent reader-response critics, feel to be frequently lacking, however, is a follow-up to the idealizing activity of structuralist approaches—a kind of return to the thing itself, after directions, positions and place-names have been studied on the map. This is not to advocate a romantic recapturing of primitive experience. Instead, I suggest a return which is not a regression, but a going back armed with as much knowledge and theory as possible—which is a return only insofar as it is a movement toward a closer observation of experience and the experiencing consciousness's acceptance or rejection of learned models. The binary system, or the world-as-exclusive-choices, has a simplicity of form which is favoured by human perception, but a point exists at which only the most stolid or brain-washed consciousness will not reject its limitations in the face of sheer diversity and complexity of phenomena.

Byron's *Don Juan* has been most usefully divided by critics into two modes of utterance: narrative and digression. The poem appears to have two "protagonists": the hero and the narrator, who are the principal subjects of the narrative and the digressive modes respectively. *Ottava rima*, the stanza form Byron employs, falls into two parts: an alternately rhyming sestet and a couplet

which does not rhyme with any line of the sestet. Clearly, the sestet lends itself to the forward-leaning movement of a story, whereas the couplet tends to produce more epigrammatic, less narrative utterances. The stanza allows this regular pulsation of narration and digression a formal metrical container with two differently shaped compartments in which the two separate utterances can be held.

This structure, or critical outline, is a good one for a reading of *Don Juan*. An "innocent" reader will probably not make much sense of the poem until he or she has constructed something like the above, either consciously or unconsciously. However, no good reading will sustain these particular dichotomies all the time throughout its passage through the text. A reader will encounter not merely an occasional exception to the rule, or Barthes' tissue of conflicting patterns of unruliness, but recurring episodes of rule-breaking which contradict the rule in consistent ways and which demand, in fact, a change in the rule which makes it less simple and prescriptive and more complex and descriptive. Most informed readers' experience of *Don Juan*—and, naturally, of many other texts as well—occurs somewhere in between chaos and binary mathematical order. Without trying to dislodge or undermine what are, in pre-critical readings of the poem (Frye's term), such useful structures, this dissertation is an attempt to account for a critical reading of *Don Juan* in some, at least, of its complexity, and to provide from this account certain amendments to structural models which make them indeed less elegant, but perhaps more finely adjusted to their environment and uses.

In order to keep critical attention on the continuous present time of a sequential reading instead of on the fragmented atemporal experiences of a critic

with the text in hand, I create a fictional reader who performs and perceives the text in a fictional present tense. A narration of this reader's critical reading of *Don Juan*, as a single, finite event, is the basis of the dissertation—though, of course, following Byron's example, much digression and commentary is also included. Close observation and detailed description of the perceptual and active choices of a reader possessing the credibility of a "living fiction" reveals many shortcomings, or insufficiencies of detail, in theories of prosody, irony and narrative.

Among the phenomena which elude the current structure's confines are narrative and digression. They are experienced by the reader as neither single nor mutually exclusive in *Don Juan*, since narration is frequently "digressive" and digressions sometimes narrative. Also, the hero and the narrator are not the only "protagonists," even excluding the other characters in the poem: the reader is frequently co-opted to play a part in the unfolding drama of the dialogue. And the three-fold structure of hero, narrator and reader is unstable, because all three of its members are protean and many-faced. The narrative—or, at least, the main story—is not the exclusive domain of the hero, Juan, for the narrator transgressively enters this story on occasion; the digressions, conversely, do not exclude Juan, but often comprise relevant discussion of him and his story, sometimes taking the form of over-elaboration of the narration.

Byron's *ottava rima* does indeed generally divide into two along the line of its change in rhyme-scheme (between lines 6 and 7); but the divided sections are not necessarily a narrative sestet and a digressive couplet. At times, whole blocks of stanzas, including couplets, narrate or digress; furthermore, the stanzaic turn is used for widely various purposes. This turn can also be—at least,

partly—overridden by other effects. Predictably, the couplet is often used for irony of tone, but irony is not confined to couplets and much of the poem's irony is not tonal at all, but more subtle and comprehensive Romantic irony. Passages occur which are not ironic at all, and these, intoned in the vatic, single voice of the visionary lyric, are perhaps the most disturbing, when the reader considers them in context with the profound and cosmic ironies manifested elsewhere. These contradictions have led critics such as Mellor and Thorslev to regard *Don Juan* as an extreme example of Romantic irony: its antitheses are perceived as eternally unresolved, its ironies infinitely regressive. However, limits to *Don Juan*'s irony do occur, though not, perhaps, in the realms of erotic love or human glory. Byron passionately advocates political liberty and rejects hypocrisy in this poem as in his own life; and these two stable points steady and order *Don Juan*'s moral universe, just as its stanza form orders the texture of its discourse.

I do not try to avoid binary structures in this dissertation; in fact, I use them wherever possible, because of their simplicity and strength. However, an encounter with this "versified Aurora Borealis" in all its "nondescript and ever-varying" multiplicity (VII, 2) acts as a prism on the light of simple logic, producing a spectrum of contrasting possibilities much more complex than the simple opposition of white and black. *Don Juan* can be better understood in terms of a matrix of combinations than by means of a dual set of exclusive categories; its relationships are more perceptively envisaged as a triangle of changeful, Tritonic figures than as a duality of narrator and protagonist; its texture is better illustrated as a finely adjustable system of foregrounding and backgrounding which may throw into relief many effects or just one, than by a

set of antithetical devices which may be switched only on or off. These are the metaphors or models to which I have resorted, and if they do not command the rhetoric of simplicity, they may possess an arabesque complexity which is compelling precisely because it is asymmetrical.

## CHAPTER I

### OTTAVA RIMA: A SURVEY

*Don Juan* occurs, to the unfocused eye, as a series of opaque rectangular blocks on a page. Briefly, before the reading process begins, this visual impression may occupy the centre of consciousness. Then, as the eye focuses and starts to flick across line after line of print, other impressions take the foreground, one after another. The ease with which the reader forgets or backgrounds the poem's visual shape may puzzle a phenomenological critic at first, especially in the study of a text which refers to itself as often as this one. However, the two reasons for it are not hard to find. Firstly, as Roland Barthes claims, the "Text," unlike what he calls the "work," is not statically spatial but dynamic: it is "experienced only in an activity of production."<sup>1</sup> What is produced by this activity when a narrative text is "set . . . going"<sup>2</sup> is a story whose fictional space and time usually—though not always—occupy the reader's attention during reading. If, due to prompting by the text, the reader should become aware of this text's sensory surface instead of the story, the surface will no longer be constituted by the statically spatial or visual. Reading is essentially active; its principal dimension is not space, but time.<sup>3</sup> Gérard Genette claims that the written narrative "can only be 'consumed,' and therefore

actualized, in a *time* that is obviously reading time." This time, according to Genette, is a basis for all the other times—fictional times, or "pseudo-time"—inherent in the narrative.<sup>4</sup> Reading, being essentially bound into motion along printed lines, will reduce visual awareness into a sort of kinaesthetic sense: a consciousness of linear motion in which a stanza is eight straight lines to be travelled over, not a rectangular shape. Secondly, *Don Juan* is not a prose narrative but a poem with a highly organized rhythm and rhyme scheme. Hegel is not the only theorist to claim that versification, whose art is to make "concrete" what in ordinary language is merely "abstract," does this through its taking up of time in "actual sound," which "must receive a definite configuration," as music does.<sup>5</sup> Metrical poetry, with its rises and falls, its measured intervals, its chimes and its discords, subsists rather in the time-dominated sense of hearing than in the space-orientated sense of sight. "One cannot respond to the meter of a poem," writes Barbara Herrnstein Smith, "without hearing it performed, either by another reader or by one's self, vocally or subvocally."<sup>6</sup>

This dissertation will not begin to examine an actual reading of *Don Juan* until Chapter II. The present chapter is an attempt to freeze the moment before reading—the perception of the spatial—and to anatomise the shape perceived in terms of its construction out of language. As the mind contemplating a static object will soon follow a train of thoughts with no obviously visual foundation, so the discussion will move on to the intellectual paradigm which produced this stanzaic shape, and from thence to a brief history of both the stanza before it was discovered by Byron and of Byron's poetic development up to its discovery. Since the body of the discussion, in later chapters, will focus on the present

time of the reading experience—and the other fictional present times this generates—the first chapter must be conceived as existing largely in a kind of past tense. The author's intention is not to place a teleological model on the past: *ottava rima* was not born and raised for its use in *Don Juan*; *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* was not merely a warm-up exercise for the *magnum opus* to follow. Nevertheless, since the central concern of this dissertation is the “now” of a reading—and, as Chapter VI will explain, of the writing—of *Don Juan*, other, previously written—and read—works will take on that past-tense perspective of “leading up to” the work in hand, however the author may protest. Teleology is a persistent side-effect of phenomenology.

In modern English, many short poems, but only relatively few long ones, occur, like *Don Juan*, as squarish opaque blocks on a page. Stanzaic forms are mainly limited to the lyric, in which briefness, density and closure work with absence or backgrounding of narrative, to produce a single, complex impression in which space is at least as important a dimension as time. In a short work lacking the “and then...and then” structure of narrative, the linear concept of time may be suppressed and the reader may have a sense of simultaneity, of being highly conscious of beginning, end and body, even while the metered, time-dominated activity of reading is taking place. However, in a narrative, the reader usually needs to have a sense of an advancing, linear present time, to the detriment, more or less, of the sense of simultaneity, which conceives of the whole work as a unit. Natural forgetfulness works in favour of this time consciousness. In a long work, even a reader with an excellent memory on a tenth reading will not achieve a sense of all the words and fluctuations at the same time. They must unscroll successively; they cannot all be *seen* at once.



Observing *Don Juan* from the ceiling, as it were, a reader is signally aware of the structural principle that distinguishes it from nearly all other printed narratives in English: it is organized into stanzas. Most other narratives are written in prose, which covers the whole printable space and is usually justified at both margins; prose divides horizontally into paragraphs whose size varies arbitrarily. Many long poems, which may be narrative to varying degrees, are in blank verse, which is a continuous column with a ragged right edge. Paragraphing, if it is marked, is, as with prose, fairly arbitrary. Now blank verse, because it utilizes the same metrical line as Byron's stanza, can be seen as one step nearer to Byron's verse than prose in stylization. Each stylizing step will place more restrictions on what can be said, owing to the necessities of rhythm and rhyme. This will be particularly evident to anyone who has ever attempted metrical composition. A certain amount of skill is needed to limit one's utterances in English to iambic pentameter, but most people, after a little practice, find that they can produce some regular lines by dint of reduction of unstresses and rearrangement of syntax, doggerel though it be:

Small skill you need to write iambic metre;  
The trick is cutting down on parts of speech  
And rearranging syntax, so that now  
It makes a sense you did not first intend.

Greater skill would even make the sense you did intend—at least, up to a point. How far this point varies from the point offered by prose, or by written prose, or by a particular style of written prose, are questions whose answers can only be estimated. In this discussion they will be largely evaded, though they remain implicit in analyses of the kinds of utterance made possible by a specific kind of verse. Questions like these assuredly plague students of literature in an age in

which criticism shows a marked tendency to equate thought with language. "Which language is the language of thought?" we ask; and our answer, if we find one, is extremely unlikely to be anything like "organized metrical form" or "*ottava rima*."

For the moment, the important thing is to note that English is not squeezed with exceeding difficulty into the blank verse mold, even if the metrical liberties which many lengthy writers in this medium have allowed themselves are not taken. Breaking a continuous column of these lines into paragraphs can occur as "naturally" and as irregularly as it does in prose, and the point at which one idea is relinquished and another taken up can be understood as a paragraph division even if the column is not visibly broken. Sentence length and type will to some extent be governed by the form, but this form includes no regularly occurring encouragement to start a new idea or to end one.

However, once a rhyme-scheme is added to the strictures to which a writer submits himself, the situation is substantially altered. To claim that speaking—or even writing—in rhymed verse in any language is "easy" or "natural" is probably ridiculous. In English, simply too few rhymes are available to make the form anything but highly artificial—and highly formulaic, as Byron's mocking chimes of "love" and "dove" (IX, 74), "bliss" and "kiss" (VI, 59) suggest.<sup>7</sup> As David Lodge points out, those who have tried to write rhymed verse know how difficult it is to say anything like what they mean;<sup>8</sup> the chances are that "just as the stanza likes to make it / It needs must be," with or without the help of "Walker's Lexicon":<sup>9</sup>

The syllable with which we end our line  
 Comes back to roost, a spiteful incubus,  
 Subverting every sensible design,  
 And on absurd goose-chases sending us,  
 By way of Hesperus and Appenine,  
 When all we want to do is to discuss  
 The task of making any statement seem a  
 Spontaneous thought in good *ottava rima*.

The sheer degree of difficulty involved in writing rhymed verse should not be forgotten by a critic of it. Most of the prose writer's problems must be solved by the writer of a verse narrative too; but the poet has in addition to these a highly stylized form and an increasingly determined diction and syntax to deal with. He must cope not only with the necessity for aptness of diction and metaphor, for variety in style and story, but he must contend as well with much harder questions of plausibility, of how to make any sentence, under these restrictions, sound as if it could ever have been uttered—even when he is not composing direct dialogue. The diction must be chosen in terms of an extremely artificial rhyme pattern,<sup>10</sup> as well as the slightly unnatural arrangement of stresses, and yet the whole utterance must seem to flow through its transitions as though it were the most simple and appropriate mode of expression.

In a poem of two thousand-odd *ottava rima* stanzas, the difficulty of finding adequate rhymes in the language is compounded. Also, rhyme and metre are not the only restricting influences on the stanzaic poet's ability to express himself. He is forced, every eight lines, unless he very ruthlessly overrides the effects of the stanza, to make a new start. Over the eighty or so syllables of a single stanza, a kind of unity is imposed—even if this is merely the result of the surrounding white space. Obviously, human thought, however verbal and organized it may be as it reaches consciousness, does not "naturally" take on

this shape. Even if one thinks in such organized units as sentences or paragraphs, these will not all be of the same length. Both prose and blank verse have an ability to project a "natural" variability in the duration of ideas, which stanzaic verse strongly attempts to inhibit.

*Ottava rima* is not the most difficult of the English stanzas to write: the sonnet and the Spenserian stanza are clearly more complex. However, W. H. Auden claimed he would "come a cropper" in it, choosing for his "Letter to Lord Byron" rhyme-royal instead.<sup>11</sup> The traditional English narrative stanzas, such as ballad measure, are relatively undemanding, being full of thorn lines and conventional rhymes. Like all the more elaborate forms, *ottava rima* has several implications apart from the simple bracketting together of eight pentameter lines and the less simple enforcement of certain syllable ends to these lines. The *pattern* of the rhymes is the stanza's exclusive signature. The first six lines have two rhymes, occurring alternately: *ababab*. The stanza is completed by a rhyming couplet which does not rhyme with any earlier line: *cc*. Thus, the most obvious structural feature is a break in continuity between lines 6 and 7. What one can further deduce from this bare skeleton is that the opening sestet will have a certain progressive facility which the couplet will tend to halt and break into. Alternate rhyming causes an onward-pouring effect; each line leans forward not onto the next successive line but onto the one after that. This effect will obviously be greater in six lines than in its minimum unit of four: each concluding syllable, *a* or *b*, is not merely echoed once but reinforced twice. The couplet rhyme, *cc*, will enter this pattern as a total alien, unlike the concluding couplet of a Spenserian stanza, which rhymes with the sixth line as well as within itself and gives the whole a more interlaced effect. The rhyming of a line

with its next neighbour binds the two very closely together, and points the rhyme itself more strongly than when the chime is postponed. The rhymed syllables are closer in time to the ear and closer in space to the eye; they tend to make the eye and memory circle around them, rather to the detriment of forward progression.<sup>12</sup> The effect of this stanza on the flow of thought will most likely be to allow a rush of narrative or description which is broken in on by a shorter, more epigrammatic utterance, whose tone is as different as the couplet is from the quatrains in an English sonnet. The form would lend itself to a contrapuntal discourse, an interplay of two voices, one expansive and the other more terse and reductive.

Byron did not invent this stanza. The shape has held a great deal of content not at all like his. *Ottava rima* is, obviously, an Italian form; it was the stanza most commonly used for narrative poetry in Italy during the Renaissance. Although the earliest existing poem in this form is Boccaccio's *Filostrato* (1340),<sup>13</sup> the stanza had almost certainly been used by minstrels as far back as the thirteenth century for both lyrical songs and narratives.<sup>14</sup> It was used, after Boccaccio, by Pulci, Boiardo, Ariosto, Tasso and a host of others for long written narratives and it was imported, with the sonnet and *terza rima*, into England by Wyatt and Surrey during the early part of the English Renaissance.<sup>15</sup> However, the eight-line stanza has been used surprisingly little in this language. George Saintsbury, in his *History of English Prosody*, finds "noteworthy" the fact that "Chaucer, and still more Spenser, with the vast amount of *ottava* before them, used this actual form so little."<sup>16</sup> Milton uses the form only for the last eight lines of *Lycidas*;<sup>17</sup> apart from Byron's three masterpieces in the measure, its more modern occurrences have been sparing too. Perhaps the most memorable

are Keats's troubling "Isabella" (based on a prose story from Boccaccio)<sup>18</sup> and the renunciatory lyric, "Sailing to Byzantium," by W. B. Yeats.<sup>19</sup>

Saintsbury's vague sense that this stanza's rareness is due to a foreign and slightly uneasy quality in the English octave is inadequate as an explanation.<sup>20</sup> However, the *ottava's* neglect is not easy to account for and must be ascribed to a number of factors spread over several centuries. The first is Chaucer and his invention, in the face of Boccaccio's octave, of his beloved and influential rhyme-royal. This seven-line measure resembles *ottava rima* in its alternating beginning and its couplet ending, but, having two couplets, the first of which is immovably fixed to the alternating quatrain, it exhibits a rather more gradual and organic transformation than does the octave. The second is Spenser, whose unique and stately *neuvain* offers another, more dignified example of the large narrative stanza for emulation by the English poets. And almost contemporaneously with *The Faerie Queene*, another obstacle appeared in the potential career of the English octave. A translation by Edward Fairfax of Tasso's *Gerusalemme liberata* was printed in 1600—in English *ottava rima*, to be sure—but it probably set back the stanza more than better poems in other measures. Fairfax's talent was for couplets, not octaves. His habit of isolating and pointing the last two lines of his stanzas fell, like a new tune, according to Saintsbury, "on ears, which, as we see from the result, were ready to hear."<sup>21</sup> This result was, of course, the extraordinary growth and popularity of the closed couplet, which dominated English poetry for nearly two hundred years, to the detriment of all the stanza forms. The Romantic revival revived these forms and multiplied them; discovering and re-energising *ottava rima* was Byron's main contribution to this process. For the first time in English, the octave was

inspired with a real passion which demanded and was reciprocally formed by the stanza's distinctive and actual shape. But Byron's virtuosity did not popularize *ottava rima* with other poets. In the age that followed *Don Juan*, poetry—except, perhaps, in the hands of Robert Browning—was to become increasingly serious, decorous and lyrical. The *ottava* had by now too much the stamp of a single personality and of his outrageous reputation; also, it was a form which had become firmly affixed to a (rather digressive) narrative mode in English, and narrative poetry was becoming less and less prolific. Although it can be used successfully for lyrical verse,<sup>22</sup> the octave is perhaps too antithetical a form for the enchanted melancholies of Victorian poetry. But most importantly, *Don Juan's* strongest influence was not on poetry at all, but on the novel.<sup>23</sup> This genre, with rare exceptions such as *Eugene Onegin*, is a prose form which, in the nineteenth century, increasingly appropriated the comic and narrative impulses of the age. Though a scrupulous analysis of certain prose paragraphs may yield some patterns that hark back to the *ottava rima* counterpoint, the formal prosodic basis of Byron's narrative insouciance and ironic subversiveness left almost no observable trace on the literature.

The history of *ottava rima* is hence largely an Italian history. But owing to differences between the two languages, the stanza is not quite the same in Italian as it is in English. The Italian form is based on a syllabic line of eleven units and a feminine rhyme scheme. Because the ear does not distinguish eleven syllables as easily as the five stress-units of English iambic pentameter, rhyme in Italian (as in other Romance languages, especially French) has a much more important function in the prosody. It acts as a major structural feature, punctuating and distinguishing the lines as units. Significantly, the better an

English poet mimics the Italian form, the more comic and conversational his poetry is likely to become. Feminine rhyme—and even triple rhyme—is not *per se* comic in Italian; in English it very nearly is.<sup>24</sup> The Italian hendecasyllabic line usually contains five stresses, but the formal pattern is not violated by four or some other number, and the arrangement of these stresses does not have to be regular. If the wonderful “singing” fluency of the Italian language is ignored—as it must be, being inimitable—an English poet may suggest the Italian line by using very loose iambic pentameter, without strong regard for the placement or number of the stresses. This style lends itself to imitation, in verse, of the relaxed cadences of spoken prose, at least it does against the background of strict decasyllables which Byron had in the preceding two centuries of prosodic tradition. Clearly, an imitation in English of Italian *ottava rima* would be an even more “novelistic” form than the Italian, according to M. M. Bakhtin’s conception of the novel. Feminine rhyme would make the verse potentially more comic, parodic, ironic;<sup>25</sup> the colloquial rhythms of the lines would allow it to contain “the low language of contemporaneity”<sup>26</sup> more-or-less as it is spoken.

Nevertheless, *ottava rima* serves very nicely as a novelistic medium without any of the stylizing elements added when English emulates Italian. The pattern of rhymes alone—alternating progression followed by couplet closure—is sufficient for the dialogic imagination, as some of the Italian masters of this stanza demonstrate. Pio Rajna, writing on Ariosto, claims that “*l’ottava*” is a “coat cut on [the Italian narrative’s] back,” and that precisely because it fits so well, it translates uneasily into other languages.<sup>27</sup> Byron’s achievement in English may be a refutation of the latter part of this claim; however, the first part deserves attention.



A brief scrutiny of Italian narrative reveals that the octave is a stretchy garment. These poems, like *Don Juan*, seem able to contain almost anything. "It's what one has looked for in vain," writes Virginia Woolf of *Don Juan*'s style, a little enviously: "an elastic shape which will hold whatever you choose to put in it."<sup>28</sup> *Ottava rima* has been employed for everything from the serious epic intentions of Tasso to Pulci's at times hilarious, Rabelaisian humour, apart from its non-narrative employment in the Tuscan version of the *strambotto*, known as the *rispetto*. Also, the range of modes and tones—sentimental, ironic, comic, tragic—that can be contained in one poem (for example, *Orlando furioso*), is remarkable. The Italian medley poem, or romance epic, is not an epic by Bakhtin's standards because of this very variety.<sup>29</sup> Even when this type of poem is serious, as it is for example in Ariosto's story of Isabella and her ill-fated love,<sup>30</sup> it is characteristically serious only for a time, provisionally, as if seriousness were only one among many other responses to the world, tragedy only one among infinite patterns of events, which will be, in the multivalency of plot and character, forgotten—at least, in its first poignancy—by reader and mourner alike. These poems partake of that "novelization" process Bakhtin describes thus:

They become more free and flexible, their language renews itself by incorporating extraliterary heteroglossia and the "novelistic" layers of literary language, they become dialogized, permeated with laughter, irony, humor, elements of self-parody and finally—this is the most important thing—the novel inserts into [them] an indeterminacy, a certain semantic openendedness, a living contact with unfinished, still-evolving contemporary reality (the openended present).<sup>31</sup>

That the stanza is an important factor in this process can be demonstrated by looking first at its usage by the one poet in the tradition who

desired most passionately to write a true epic: Torquato Tasso. Now the antithetical structure of *ottava rima* lends itself to a more self-reflexive stance than might be desirable in high epic, whose language, according to Bakhtin, "is not separable from its subject."<sup>32</sup> Perhaps Dante recognized this when, instead of taking up the octave for his *Commedia*, he invented the continuous *terza rima*. Certainly Tasso's own uneasiness with his work reflects a consciousness that it was dialogic rather than monolithic.<sup>33</sup> As Robert M. Durling argues, this inability to assert the "unity" he desired over the "multiplicity" he feared was a projection of Tasso's "innermost difficulties": Tasso's struggle for the "unity of his own psyche."<sup>34</sup> The second voice brought in by the couplet of *ottava rima* cannot be completely overridden throughout the course of an epic-length poem.<sup>35</sup> Fairfax did not distort the stanza of *Gerusalemme liberata* out of all recognition in his translation: the couplet is characteristically set a little apart from the sestet in Tasso, and it only too often brings in a consciousness of craftsmanship even when it is not used directly for commentary:

Ei ch'al cimiero ed al dipinto scudo  
 non badò prima, or lei veggend impietra;  
 ella quanto può meglio il capo ignudo  
 si ricopre, e l'assale; ed ei s'arretra.  
 Va contra gli altri, a rota il ferro crudo;  
 ma però da lei pace non impetra,  
 che minacciosa il segue, e "Volgi" grida;  
 e di due morti in uno punto lo sfida.<sup>36</sup>

The prince well knew her, though her painted shield  
 And golden hair he had not marked before;  
 She sav'd her head and with her axe, well steel'd,  
 Assail'd the knight: but her the knight forbore;  
 'Gainst other foes he prov'd him through the field,  
 Yet she for that refrained ne'er the more,  
 But following, Turn thee, cried in ireful wise  
 And so at once she threats to kill him twice.<sup>37</sup>

Here, as elsewhere, Tasso reserves for the couplet his play of verbal wit. The "prince" (Tancredi) is falling in love with Clorinda, the beautiful paynim with whom he is at war; hence, in Petrarchan terms, she is assailing him with two kinds of weapon at once. Wordplay accentuates the effect that the movement of the couplet so often has in any case: a circling back over previously travelled ground, a differing tempo, a crescendo whose quality is slightly different from the impetus which carried it there. If, in the epic world, "it is impossible to change, to rethink, to re-evaluate anything in it,"<sup>38</sup> this stanza is clearly not the ideal form for epic.

Tasso comes late in the tradition, and he resists as far as possible the comic potential of the stanza. He must be regarded, for all his mellifluousness, as something of an oddity. His poem has been and will continue to be read for its romantic and pathetic passages, not for the high seriousness of its ideals or of the war that embodies them. The *ottava rima* tradition has from its naïve beginnings, it seems, contained strong comic and parodic elements. In the early songs of the *cantastories*, according to R. D. Waller,

The world of chivalry was vulgarized, reduced to the level of the bourgeois imagination. Charles the Great becomes a credulous simpleton. Rinaldo is the favourite hero, his valour being accompanied by a boisterous unruliness which appealed much more directly to the popular taste than the always grave conduct of Orlando. Fixed in tradition too became the character of Astolfo, the English knight, feather-brained, boastful and maladroit. Through all the stories runs not only that unconscious humour which results from the incongruity of matter and treatment, but a vein of deliberate fun which crops up here and there in the form of plain buffoonery. The knights are but artisans in armour; there is very little magic; prodigious deeds are performed by very ordinary men. Of the splendid old stories of Charlemagne and Roland there is little left but the names.<sup>39</sup>

"Novelization" of this kind was possible, and the changes rapid, because the

*cantastories'* performance was essentially, like the *commedia dell'arte*, an improvised medium. Although the bare stories were conventional and large portions learned by rote, the treatment was continually altered to suit individual audiences. Also, the poems contained addresses to the audience by *convention*, especially at the ends of cantos, where the crowd was often exhorted to return next day for the sequel.<sup>40</sup> This device need not be comic exactly, but it does point up the fictiveness of the narrative and is an example of the self-reflexiveness which would in later works be called Romantic irony.

Luigi Pulci, the Florentine who took up and transformed the minstrel stanza in the fifteenth century, is perhaps the most comic poet in the tradition, and this may be why, as an extreme, he was a revelation to Frere and Byron. Using and exaggerating the buffoonery of subject-matter already in the tradition, he was, unlike his predecessors, a written poet as well as a performer, and his works were printed and published.<sup>41</sup> His ironic humour extends to his use of the *ottava rima*, though this is not not as skilful as that of his great Ferrarese successor, Ludovico Ariosto. In Pulci's long poem, *Morgante*, many stanzas occur in which the joke is made or clinched in the couplet. I choose to quote one of these from the first canto because this was all that Byron translated and his translation is worth using. However, in this particular example, Byron's stanza is less true to type than Pulci's, for it enjambs line 6, denying his couplet quite the discreteness it has in the Italian:

Disse il gigante:—Io il porterò ben io,  
 da poi che portar me non ha voluto  
 per render ben per mal, come far Iddio;  
 ma vo' ch'a porlo adosso mi dia aiuto.—  
 Orlando gli dicea:—Morgante mio,  
 s'al mio consiglio ti sarai attenuto,  
 questo caval tu non vel porteresti,  
 ché ti farà come tu a lui facesti.<sup>42</sup>

The giant said, "Then carry him I will,  
 Since that to carry me he was so slack—  
 To render, as the gods do, good for ill;  
 But lend a hand to place him on my back."  
 Orlando answer'd, "If my counsel still  
 May weigh, Morgante, do not undertake  
 To lift or carry this dead courser, who  
 As you have done to him, will do to you."<sup>43</sup>

(The giant, Morgante, has just broken the horse's back by riding on it.) Pulci's humour is, however, frequently more dependent on his fantastic subject-matter and its slapstick behaviour than on the structure of his stanza.

Ariosto, writing somewhat later, in the early sixteenth century, is the Italian *maestro* of this style. Using the enchanted landscape and unfinished story bequeathed him by Boiardo in *Orlando innamorato*, Ariosto provides them not so much with comic incidents (though he does use these) as with a carefully crafted double consciousness—a quietly ironic voice which comments on the narrative, points up its incongruities, apologises for lapses in taste, explains its reasons for moving from one thread of story to another at certain times and exposes characters' inner motives, which the bare narrative does not perhaps immediately demonstrate. For his dialogic imagination, the octave stanza is the ideal medium. *Orlando furioso* is a masterpiece because at all levels of its composition, matter and form, structure and sentiment are perfectly suited one to another. A critic does not have to search very far to come up with a stanza like the following:

—Astolfo, re de'Langobardi, quello  
 a cui lasciò il fratel monaco il regno,  
 fu ne la giovinezza sua sì bello,  
 che mai poch'altri giunsero a quel segno.  
 N'avria a fatica un tal fatto a penello  
 Apelle, o Zeusi, o se v'è alcun più degno.  
 Bello era, et a ciuscun così pareva:  
 ma di molto egli ancor più si tenea.—<sup>44</sup>

'Astolfo, of the Lombard kingdom heir,  
 After the monk, his elder brother, died,  
 Was in his youth so handsome and so fair  
 That few with him in beauty could have vied;  
 Not Zeuxis nor Apelles could compare  
 With all their art, however hard they tried.  
 Handsome he was and so by all was deemed,  
 But he more highly yet himself esteemed.'<sup>45</sup>

This is in several ways typical of Ariosto. The most distinctive structural feature of his stanza is the most obvious characteristic of the bare paradigm: the change in tone in lines 7 and 8, where the new couplet rhyme brings in the author's comment, with its sly joke at the protagonist's expense. However, another, more minor division occurs in the middle of the stanza, which seems to be Ariosto's private signature, appearing with high frequency in the stanzas at the ends of cantos in which the authorial voice is most in evidence. What this feature does is to bring a subtle tone of irony into the last two lines of the narrative sestet, in order perhaps to make the tone of the couplet, with its strong irony and alien rhyme, less disjunct from what goes before. (Byron does this occasionally in *Don Juan*, but the device is not with him, as with Ariosto, characteristic.)<sup>46</sup>

When Byron first read *Orlando furioso* is not known.<sup>47</sup> It was probably an early and important experience, for Ariosto's name crops up casually from the beginning of his private writings, though representing more a significant type

than a poet who invited imitation.<sup>48</sup> When the eighteen-year-old Byron flippantly describes his mother, in a letter to a friend, as "Mrs. Byron furiosa," and soliloquizes: "Oh! for the pen of an Ariosto to rehearse in Epic, the scolding of that *momentous Eve*,"<sup>49</sup> his desire must be taken as unconsciously prophetic, not directly intentional. Despite the urbane and witty humour Byron's letters demonstrate from the beginning, his early forays into the realm of comic poetry are rather narrowly and spitefully satirical, betraying nowhere that essential tolerance and ability to laugh with folly which are at the heart of Italian comic verse. Many years were to pass before his more generous sense of humour would find a poetic form that suited it.

However, Byron's attempts at neo-classical satire in imitation of his idol, Pope, do demonstrate a certain facility with the closed couplet, which was later to stand him in good stead in the clinching of the octave stanza. A couplet like the following would not have shamed an Augustan poet:

Shall gentle Coleridge pass unnoticed here,  
To turgid ode and tumid stanza dear?<sup>50</sup>

But the somewhat stagey rhetoric of these lines, with their limited narrative capability, their carefully pointed parallelisms ("turgid . . . tumid") and their over-used inversions ("To turgid ode . . . dear")<sup>51</sup> were not likely to lead a young writer toward the discovery of a new and vital poetic voice. Byron was more innovative with the more "open" version of the couplet which William Bowman Piper calls the "Romance couplet." In Byron's hands this form often gains its forward momentum not so much from strong enjambment or the rhyming of lexically weak words<sup>52</sup> as from the sheer excitement of the situation, which forces the reader to utter the lines with great speed. Byron's rhymes are

almost always strong and most commonly involve important words such as verbs and nouns. The dramatic—perhaps melodramatic—intensity of the following poetry is what overrides the limiting effect of the two-line segments of which it is composed and encourages the passage, as Auden notes of all Byron's verse, to be "read very rapidly, as if the words were single frames in a movie film."<sup>53</sup> (I need to quote at some length to demonstrate the effect.)

Cold as the marble where his length was laid,  
 Pale as the beam that o'er his features play'd  
 Was Lara stretch'd; his half-drawn sabre near,  
 Dropp'd it should seem in more than nature's fear;  
 Yet he was firm, or had been firm till now,  
 And still defiance knit his gather'd brow;  
 Though mix'd with terror, senseless as he lay,  
 There lived upon his lip the wish to slay;  
 Some half-form'd threat in utterance there had died,  
 Some imprecation of despairing pride;  
 His eye was almost seal'd, but not forsook,  
 Even in its trance, the gladiator's look,  
 That oft awake his aspect could disclose,  
 And now was fix'd in horrible repose.<sup>54</sup>

Byron's narration was more successful with tetrameter than with these pentameter couplets, mainly because the immense and tumbling speed of the terrific tales which, with *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, made him so popular, could more easily be represented by shorter lines whose rhymes follow more breathlessly one after another. Like Scott, from whom he borrowed it,<sup>55</sup> Byron varies the tetrameter couplet with triplets, alternate rhymes, thorn lines and, occasionally, even pentameter couplets.<sup>56</sup> The "latitude" of this style, which appealed to Scott,<sup>57</sup> lends itself admirably to Byron's requirements, even to the most volcanic of his moods:



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 laid to rest,  
 There's none within his rider's breast;  
 And though tomorrow's tempest lower,  
 'Tis calmer than thy heart, young Giaour!<sup>58</sup>

These lines represent an impasse into which Byron wrote himself and from which the discovery—or rediscovery—of the Italian masters was to liberate him. They exhibit a primary virtuosity, in the sense that it is prior to the variety discussed by Peter Conrad in *Shandyism*.<sup>59</sup> They are not self-reflexive; they do not contain a narrative voice which says clearly and analytically: "See what I am doing?—it is difficult!"; but they are rhapsodic and their reader experiences a sense of being "carried away" by a poetic utterance whose exhilaration is highly dependant on strong rhyme and on a rhythm which strenuously conforms to the metre. The four-beat line offers little room for grammatical superfluities: metrical stresses strike lexical stresses in words whose structural importance in a line is marked. Rhyme, which increases stress anyway, falls on words whose influence on the sentence is formative. Byron's impasse was this poetic brilliance. His sentences are utterly lucid; he shies away from symbolism and verbal ambiguity. His most memorable utterances are categorical statements, his plots, tales of extremity. Seldom in blank verse do his lines acquire the inspired beauty of his rhymed verse,<sup>60</sup> in which all the structures of prosody are foregrounded and all work in the same direction. No development would be possible in this mode, no complexity, only endless repetition. The "Turkish tales," *Manfred*, *Cain*—most of Byron's romantic

narratives—all tell fundamentally the same story: The Doom of the Dark Outsider. The escape was to be not so much into a different story as into a metalanguage which drew attention to the speaker and his relationship, firstly, to his protagonist and, later, to his reader and the act of composition itself. This escape was made possible, at least partly, by Byron's discovery of new verse forms.

*Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* is a significant work for this discussion because its composition spanned the period of impasse and changed in its progress over it. Byron's Spenserian stanzas have been slighted by critics who prefer *Don Juan* to *Childe Harold*;<sup>61</sup> and yet this form, more interlaced and elaborate than *ottava rima*, is admirably suited to—perhaps is formative of—a poem whose narrator and protagonist are not definitively separated. *Childe Harold* is, of course, different in its two halves, the first being less self-reflexive; the earlier part is an attempt at a kind of anachronistic mediaevalism, in which an older narrator, using words such as “wight” and “Whilome”<sup>62</sup> traces, with some disapproval, the travels and sorrows of a young ex-debauchee. Byron's mastery of the closed couplet causes ironies like the following to break through even the “arabesque decoration”<sup>63</sup> of the Spenserian's final hexameter:

Deep in yon cave Honorius long did dwell,  
In hope to merit Heaven by making life a hell.<sup>64</sup>

However, Spenser's adaptation of the octave seems to have been made partly in order to remove the jarring ironic note of unconnected couplets. He made similar adjustments to the English sonnet, though not to connect up the couplet in this case, but to twine together the three otherwise disjunct quatrains.<sup>65</sup> In *The Faerie Queene* stanza, the rhyme scheme, *ababbcbcc*, clearly allows local affinities

between lines to take on the appearance of couplets, quatrains, *terza rima* segments, etc., according to their sense; but the overriding pattern denies total discreteness to any of these units.<sup>66</sup> Hence, the epigrammatic irony displayed above is seldom possible. Stanzas need to be quoted in their entirety to give even local effect:

Childe Harold sail'd, and pass'd the barren spot,  
Where sad Penelope o'erlook'd the wave;  
And onward view'd the mount, not yet forgot,  
The lover's refuge, and the Lesbian's grave.  
Dark Sappho! could not verse immortal save  
That breast imbued with such immortal fire?  
Could she not live who life eternal gave?  
If life eternal may await the lyre,  
That only Heaven to which earth's children may aspire.<sup>67</sup>

The main semantic division in this stanza occurs between lines 4 and 5, where the couplet rhyme ("grave . . . save") heals up the hiatus created by the full stop. Thus the *neuvain* operates very much as a unit, wandering down from the factual first line, through historical objectivity and speculation, to the highly metaphysical hexameter which closes it. Somehow, in this lingering progress, with its pauses for apostrophe and rhetorical question, a shift occurs, not merely of focus—from Harold to Sappho—but of subjectivity. To begin with, the Childe is the agent who "sail'd," "pass'd" and "view'd the mount"; at first blush, recognition of the "lover's refuge and the Lesbian's grave" appears to belong to him as well. However, the increasing absorption of the discourse in Sappho's elegiac significance, and also the categorical generalization of the last line, convey a more authoritative voice than Harold, with his posturing, can command in this poem. The contrast between the rhyming words "grave" and "save" hints at the relationship between Harold's and the narrator's view. The authorial second half

of the stanza, more deeply involved with Sappho's dilemma than the first, suggests, in its rhyme words, a resurrection about which the overt rhetoric is ambiguous: "save . . . fire . . . gave . . . lyre . . . aspire." The final line is, as Byron almost always employs it, heavily climactic, underpinning with sheer weight the hopes of immortality implied by these rhyme words and the cumulative progression of sentences.

Six years separate the first two cantos of *Childe Harold* from the second two, and Byron continued writing the last after he had read "Whistlecraft" and while he was composing *Beppo*. The far higher quality of the poetry in these last two cantos is marked simultaneously by the frequent appearance of a highly personal "I" speaker and by an increasingly individual use of the Spenserian stanza. The long nine-line unit of thought asks for elaboration and digression—movement up to and away from an idea—as the meandering of the last-quoted stanza demonstrates. In the later cantos, Byron takes far greater liberties with enjambment, mid-line pauses, even run-on stanzas, and he completes his transformation of the final hexameter into a climax towards which the whole stanza moves—be it a ponderous crescendo or a long trailing elegiac train of thought. At the same time, he more frequently and cavalierly overrides the internal tightening or circling of the stanza's middle couplet, removing thereby the stately stand-and-turn routine of the Spenserian dance, and drawing the sense more strongly downward into the concluding alexandrine. The following two stanzas on St. Peter's Cathedral are run together syntactically so that the first hexameter is merely a provisional climax, while the second takes the pressure of a full eighteen lines. The middle couplets of both are overruled by being on the one hand enjambed at both ends and on the other formed by a rhyme of a

lexically stressed with a lexically unstressed syllable ("this . . . edifice"):

Thou see'st 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 elegant 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.<sup>68</sup>

At the climax of the poem, narrator and reader, sharing the dilation of spirit that this stanza signifies, become one in the plural pronoun, "our."

This poetry is far from comic: its tone and subject-matter approach the sublime. Even the isolated ironies which mark some couplets in the earlier cantos have gone. The speaker has dispensed with a protagonist and identifies so closely with his utterance that the poetry has become its own subject-matter; the grandeur of the verse itself is what expands our "spirits to the size of that they contemplate." St. Peter's dome is a metaphor for the power of this inspired poetry rather than vice-versa. No room remains for humour here: the speaker is too closely bound into his own speech. And yet, for all this, the tone of the last cantos of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* is closer to that of *Don Juan* than to any note struck by the earlier tales. The stanzas above brood upon their own structure instead of galloping along transparently parallel to the galloping tale

that they tell. With only a little "opening up" of the distances between narrator and protagonist, between narrative and ironic structures in the stanza chosen, Byron changed from the poet of the brooding Childe to the poet of the life-affirming Don.

On September 15, 1817, Byron wrote irritably to his publisher from Venice and brought to a head the dissatisfaction evident in many earlier letters. He feels that he has written enough—nay, too much—and that this is the end for him poetically (perhaps):

—The other day I wrote to convey my proposition with regard to the 4th & concluding Canto [of *Childe Harold*—I have gone over—& extended it to one hundred and fifty stanzas which is almost as long as the first two were originally—& longer by itself—than any of the smaller poems except the "Corsair"—Mr. Hobhouse has made some very valuable & accurate notes of considerable length—& you may be sure I will do for the text all that I can to finish with decency.—I look upon C[hild]e Harold as my best—and as I began—I think of concluding with it—but I make no resolutions on that head—as I broke my former intention with regard to "the Corsair"—however—I fear that I shall never do better—& yet—not being thirty years of age for some moons to come—one ought to be progressive as far as Intellect goes for many a good year—but I have had a devilish deal of wear & tear of mind and body—in my time—besides having published too often & much already. God grant me some judgement! to do what may be most fitting in that & everything else—for I doubt my own exceedingly.—<sup>69</sup>

In the same letter, he asserts:

With regard to poetry in general I am convinced the more I think of it—that he [Leigh Hunt] and *all* of us—Scott—Southey—Wordsworth—Moore—Campbell—I—are all in the wrong—one as much as another—that we are upon a wrong revolutionary poetical system—or systems—not worth a damn in itself.<sup>70</sup>

Only a month later, after a visit from his friend Douglas Kinnaird, who, although he did not bring tooth-powder as requested,<sup>71</sup> did bring the first two

cantos of the newly published "Whistlecraft" poem, Byron writes:

I have . . . written a poem (of 84 octave stanzas) humourous, in or after the excellent manner of Mr. Whistlecraft (whom I take to be Frere), on a Venetian anecdote—which amused me—but till I have your answer—I can say nothing more about it.—Mr. Hobhouse does not return to England in Novr. as he intended, but will perhaps winter here—and as he is to convey the poem or poems—for there may perhaps be more than the two mentioned . . . I shall not be able to publish so soon—<sup>72</sup>

The octave poem to which he refers is, of course, *Beppo*, whose ease of composition and immediate success in England led soon after to the commencement of *Don Juan*, which, though it grew in the writing, was begun in much the same spirit and remains in many ways very similar. These two poems, with *The Vision of Judgement* which was written in 1821 while he was working on Cantos III, IV and V of *Don Juan*, constitute Byron's canon of "half-serious" (IV, 6) *ottava rima* poetry. Many critics consider these three poems to represent his greatest poetic achievement.

Surprising, in the light of Byron's distinct "discovery" of this stanza, is the fact that he had, in fact, used it before.<sup>73</sup> In 1816, in Switzerland, when he had only just left England amid the storms of his nuptial separation and its accompanying scandal, Byron wrote one of his rare personal-confessional lyrics ("Stanzas to the Po" is another) in the form of a letter to his half-sister, Augusta Leigh—and its stanza was *ottava rima*. He may have stumbled on this verse-form by mistake, being in the habit at this stage of writing eight-line stanzas. However, his favoured octaves normally had tetrameter lines and the rhyme-scheme *ababedcd*.<sup>74</sup> Non-narrative and contemplative, the "Epistle to Augusta" does not betray any obvious influence of Ariosto or Tasso, whom Byron knew by this time.<sup>75</sup> Though much more subdued in tone, the "Epistle" resembles

*Childe Harold* in the later cantos more than anything else, for it displays the same kinds of freedom with enjambment and caesurae, and the narrator uses a highly personal "I" form of address. However, the more clearly defined writer-reader relationship apparent in the epistolary mode allows Byron here a kind of confessional self-irony that *Childe Harold's* narrator never achieves. (He can ironize Harold, but not himself.) The true couplet at the end of the stanza accommodates and encourages this tone:

If my inheritance of storms hath been  
 In other elements, and on the rocks  
 Of perils, overlook'd and unforeseen,  
 I have sustain'd my share of worldly shocks,  
 The fault was mine; nor do I seek to screen  
 My errors with defensive paradox;  
 I have been cunning in my overthrow,  
 The careful pilot of my proper woe.<sup>76</sup>

Not all the stanzas of the "Epistle" are pointed as distinctly in the last two lines as this one, but this is a good example, being an extreme, of how the couplet can work, in the very clarifying of an idea, essentially against that idea. Throwing it into sharp relief rather than simply summarizing, bringing in a different, circling movement and an alien rhyme, this couplet is a new and incisive vision of what the sestet slowly and regretfully develops. The effect is far more contrapuntal than the Spenserian stanza; two voices are audible here, even though the poem is both serious and meditative.

The poem which Byron correctly ascribed to John Hookham Frere was entitled *Prospectus and Specimen of an Intended National Work*, and its authorship was claimed by William and Robert Whistlecraft of Stow-Market in Suffolk, Harness and Collar-Makers. Further, it "Intended to Comprise the Most Interesting Particulars Relating to *King Arthur and His Round Table*."<sup>77</sup> Not



surprisingly, the new work acquired nicknames almost at once, and is now published under one of them, *The Monks and the Giants*. This poem, as a twentieth-century editor, R. D. Waller explains, takes its inspiration directly from the Italian comic poets, in particular, from Pulci. "Perhaps the most remarkable of Frere's gifts," writes Waller, "was his extraordinary talent for reproducing in English the spirit of other literatures."<sup>8</sup> The poem was a revelation to Byron; he adopted at once so many aspects of "Whistlecraft"'s style and execution that he actually became embarrassed by them. Waller claims: "As time went on Byron began to depreciate more and more the immediate source of his style in *Beppo*";<sup>9</sup> ascribing it instead to "Whistlecraft"'s own source, Pulci, whom he read in the original only after the jolt of consciousness had been administered by Frere. Nearly all the characteristic features of *The Monks and the Giants*—its stanza, its conversational familiarity, its digressiveness, its frequent use of comic and feminine rhyme—at once became Byron's own, though, indisputably, everything Frere did, Byron did better—and took to extremes which Frere would never have ventured. Also, Byron's prior knowledge of Ariosto, his highly developed sense of literary decorum, his practised instinct for the uses and possibilities of stanza form and the urbane, irreverent, digressive wit that his letters prove to be essentially his own, contribute at least equally with the discovery of "Whistlecraft" to his mastery of this style. *The Monks and the Giants* was a catalyst at an important moment in Byron's career. A stanza like the following will demonstrate to anyone familiar with *Beppo* or *Don Juan* the extent of Byron's debt. Nevertheless, this verse is an extreme example for Frere, the lines being less strongly end-stopped and containing more parentheses than usual, whereas it would be rather a stiff and decorous stanza for Byron:

I think that Poets (whether Whig or Tory)  
 (Whether they go to meeting or to church)  
 Should study to promote their country's glory  
 With patriotic, diligent research;  
 That children yet unborn may learn the story,  
 With grammars, dictionaries, canes and birch:  
 It stands to reason—This was Homer's plan,  
 And we must do—like him—the best we can.<sup>80</sup>

That the new idea—Homer—enters the stanza with perfect appropriateness to its structure, in the couplet, could not have escaped Byron's classical eye. The comparison in which Homer is allowed to make his appearance is so inflated that it explodes the whole verse, whose overencoded meticulousness has up to now been generating humour by the opposite sort of distortion. Comically elaborate, the feminine rhyme "Tory . . . glory" was borrowed (with adjustments) by Byron for use in one of the more successful couplets of *Beppo*:

And greatly venerate our recent glories,  
 And wish they were not owing to the Tories.<sup>81</sup>

With careful attention to the formal paradigm, Frere's sestet moves one way, his couplet another; and yet a sleight of hand, "It stands to reason," keeps expectation riveted, during the first part of the couplet, on the sestet's mode of diminution. And so the Homeric hyperbole is planted under cover, going off with pleasing unexpectedness for the reader.

Of course, there are many aspects of Frere's style which are not dependent on the stanza *per se*. Like Pulci, he creates an unruly and rumbustious story whose developments are largely independent of the stanza it is narrated with. He is more digressive than his Italian models and this tendency is indeed encouraged by the dialogic stanza (digressiveness being a larger

development of the couplet's capacity for commentary). However, his digressions mainly occur at the beginnings and ends of cantos and seem to derive from the conventions of hail and farewell which go with oral poetry. Scott, mimicking a different oral tradition, uses similar conventions in a very different verse form and story.<sup>82</sup> *Ottava rima* is also much more versatile than Frere was to realize; its lyric, elegiac and satiric potentialities he hardly tapped at all, despite the examples of Tasso, Boiardo and even Ariosto. What Frere did for Byron was to *caricature* the Italian masters: to take the most eccentric, slapstick and vulgar of their canon—all that was least like the poetic models normally available to Byron—and translate it into English verse that contained many of the ingredients of Byron's own epistolary style: an easy colloquial familiarity, a digressiveness and a self-irony for which there were but few literary examples in the English tradition. He opened a window for Byron into a tradition which contains more complex and versatile poets than Pulci. Byron, who already knew some of the best of these without desiring to emulate them, was not slow to draw himself into the tradition by means of its extreme case, and then, by rapid experimentation with its subtler harmonies, to establish himself in it as its greatest English proponent and innovator. In *Don Juan* he draws out all the stops on his instrument, using it seriously as well as humorously and varying its tone perhaps more often than any previous performer. According to Swinburne, who uses a more warlike metaphor than I do and who may be a trifle partial,

It is mere folly to seek in English or Italian verse a precedent or a parallel. The scheme of metre is Byron's alone; no weaker hand could ever bend that bow, or ever will. Even the Italian poets, working in a language more flexible and ductile than ours, could never turn their native metre to such uses, could never handle their national weapon

with such grace and strength. The *terza rima* remains their own, after all our efforts to adapt it; it bears here only forced flowers and crude fruits; but the *ottava rima* Byron has fairly conquered and wrested from them.<sup>3</sup>

## NOTES TO CHAPTER I

<sup>1</sup>Roland Barthes calls the "work" a "fragment of substance occupying a part of the space of books (in a library for example)." The "Text" he calls a "methodological field" and a "process of demonstration"; it is "held in language" and "only exists in the movement of discourse." "From Work to Text," *Image-Music-Text* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977) 156-57.

<sup>2</sup>Barthes 163.

<sup>3</sup>See Gerald Prince, *Narratology* (Berlin: Mouton, 1982) 32: "It is practically impossible to narrate a series of events without establishing a set of temporal or temporally bound relationships between narration and narrated . . . . On the other hand, it is quite possible to narrate without specifying any relationship between the space of the narration and the space of the narrated." Prince is, of course, referring to the narrator and the narrative, rather than to the reader here.

<sup>4</sup>Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1980) 34.

<sup>5</sup>G. W. F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of Fine Art*, IV (London: Bell and Sons, 1920). In the section entitled "The Expression of Poetry," Hegel claims that poetry, unlike other fine arts, is composed of material which, in its normal usage, is incorporeal, "an abstract sign simply" (56). The nature and genius of poetry—as of other arts—is to make the observer aware simultaneously of the truth being told and of the material employed in the imparting of this truth. Hegel decides that poetry has more in common with music than with the visual arts. It must, through stylization of its *sound*, foreground its form: "the sounding word, which in its temporal duration no less than its actual sound, must receive a definite configuration, one that implies the presence of time-measure, rhythm, melodious sound and rhyme" (57).

Also, René Wellek and Austin Warren, *Theory of Literature* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1949) 159; Barbara Herrnstein Smith, *Poetic Closure* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1968) 8-14; Donald Wesling, *The Chances of Rhyme* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1980) 54.

<sup>6</sup>Herrnstein Smith 10.

<sup>7</sup>Canto and stanza of *Don Juan* will be noted in the text throughout this dissertation. The edition used is *Byron's Don Juan: A Variorum Edition*, eds. Truman Guy Steffan and Willis W. Pratt (Austin: U of Texas P, 1957).

<sup>8</sup>David Lodge, *The Modes of Modern Writing* (London: Edward Arnold, 1977) 89. Lodge goes on to claim that the power of metre and rhyme to make a poet "say something that he would not otherwise have thought of saying" is "rarely admitted, as though there were something shameful about it."

<sup>9</sup>*Beppo* lxiii, lii, *The Poetical Works of Lord Byron* (London: Oxford UP, 1926) 620, 619.

<sup>10</sup>Wesling writes: "As the reader gets further into the sequence, more and more elements of the discourse become determined" (71). The artificiality of rhymed verse seems to him most evident in the fact that "we positively avoid rhyme in ordinary speaking and practical writing" (28).

<sup>11</sup>W. H. Auden, "Epistle to Lord Byron," *Letters from Iceland* (London: Faber, 1937) 22.

<sup>12</sup>See Herrnstein Smith: "There is good reason to believe that a rhymed couplet, when it corresponds to a syntactically complete utterance, is, in itself, an effectively closed form" (51). See also Wesling 77, and this dissertation, chapter II, note 18.

<sup>13</sup>See Ernest Hatch Wilkins, *A History of Italian Literature* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1974) 102, 104. *Filostrato* tells the story of Troilus and Cressida, which is largely Boccaccio's invention (103).

<sup>14</sup>At a conference in Montreal on "*I Cantari*" (March, 1981), both Domenico De Robertis ("*Nascita, tradizione e ventura del cantare in ottava rima*") and Armando Balduino ("*Le misteriose origine dell'ottava rima*") made strong claims against the theory that Boccaccio invented it, arguing that *ottava rima* had been in existence in the oral tradition long before Boccaccio. M. Picone and M. Bendinelli Predelli, eds., *I Cantari: Struttura e tradizione* (Firenze: Leo S. Olschki, 1984) 9-47.

Wilkins, in his chapter on folk literature, writes: "The most frequent type of folk lyric is a single-stanza octave, with eleven-syllable lines, which is commonly called the *strambotto*, or, in its Tuscan varieties, the *rispetto*. Of the early history of the *strambotto* we have no certain knowledge; but there is some basis for the opinion that it existed in Sicily early in the thirteenth century, and in Tuscany before the end of the century." The *rispetto*, though it consisted of only one stanza, had the *ottava rima* rhyme-scheme *abababcc* (9-10). It was, of course, a non-narrative form.

<sup>15</sup>Both Wyatt and Surrey tend to emulate the lyrical *rispetto* (or *strambotto*), not the narrative version of the stanza. Thus, *ottava rima* usually appears singly in their work, as in such one-stanza poems as "Desire, alas, my master and my foe" (Wyatt 58) and "When reckless youth in quiet breast" (Surrey 74). Wyatt sometimes uses several octaves in one poem, such as the

complaint to his bed, "The restful place, Revyver of my smarte" (105), but he nevertheless does not put them to narrative use; he merely over-encodes the antithetical spirit of his own elegiac lyricism. When he does need a more narrative style (*Satires* 185-93), he turns to Dante's continuous *terza rima*. *Collected Poems of Sir Thomas Wyatt* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1960). Henry Howard, *Earl of Surrey: Selected Poems* (Manchester: Carcanet, 1985).

<sup>16</sup>George Saintsbury, *A History of English Prosody* I (New York: Russell and Russell, 1961) 408. Chaucer's use of the octave is a slight variation on the Italian model, rhyming *ababbcbc* and hence having a couplet in the middle, not at the end. See the "Monkes Tale," *Canterbury Tales* (New York: Henry Holt, 1950) 441-42. Spenser, who used the Italian *ottava rima* for *Virgil's Gnat* (*Spenser's Minor Poems* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1910) 172-94), was probably influenced by Chaucer's octave when he invented his own *neuvain*, which consists of a Monk's Tale stanza plus a final alexandrine rhyming with the eighth line.

<sup>17</sup>John Milton, *Poetical Works* (London: Oxford UP, 1973) 147.

<sup>18</sup>John Keats, *Poetical Works* (London: Oxford UP, 1967) 179-94.

<sup>19</sup>W. B. Yeats, *The Collected Poems* (London: MacMillan, 1952) 217-18.

<sup>20</sup>Saintsbury I, 408.

<sup>21</sup>Saintsbury II, 277.

<sup>22</sup>The single-stanza *rispetto*, like the *strambotto*, is a sung lyric. See note 14.

<sup>23</sup>Karl Kroeber claims that *Don Juan* "anticipates later novels rather than reworks earlier models." He goes on: "Russian literature provides evidence of this. The most significant poetic successor to *Don Juan* in European literature is Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin* [which is not in octaves], and *Onegin* becomes the starting point for the magnificent florescence of nineteenth-century Russian prose fiction." *Romantic Narrative Art* (Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1960) 149.

Philip Hobsbaum writes: "Byron was not only the greatest exponent of the subversive mode in verse; he was the last. A greater degree of flexibility even than he could encompass was on the way; but it was to transpire in the form not of verse but of prose. *Don Juan's* true successor is *Martin Chuzzlewit*." "Byron and the English Tradition," *Byron: Wrath and Rhyme*, ed. Alan Bold (New Jersey: Barnes and Noble, 1983) 51.

<sup>24</sup>Saintsbury III, 100.

<sup>25</sup>M. M. Bakhtin, "Epic and Novel," *The Dialogic Imagination* (Austin: U of Texas P, 1986) 7.

<sup>26</sup>Bakhtin 21.

<sup>27</sup>Pio Rajna, *Le Fonti dell'Orlando furioso* (Firenze: Sansoni, 1876) 17. I

translate and summarize: "l'ottava è la forma narrativa più felice delle literature moderne . . . . E un abito fatto sul nostro dorso, e giusto perchè a noi sta benissimo, fa le grinze o stringe troppo se altri l'indossa. Succede anche all'ottava ciò che accade ai metri greci, costretti a parlar tedesco."

<sup>28</sup>Virginia Woolf, *A Writer's Diary* (London: Hogarth P, 1959) 3.

<sup>29</sup>Rajna, refuting earlier claims for the epic status of these poems ("è ridicolo parlare di epopea"), defines them instead as novels, which have as much in common with the *Iliad* as an aerostat with a bird ("hanno tanto che fare coll'Iliade, quanto un aerostato con un uccello") (16).

<sup>30</sup>Ludovico Ariosto, *Orlando furioso* (Milano: Riccardo Ricciardi, 1954) 24, lxxvii-xcii, 621-25; 29, i-xxx, 753-60.

<sup>31</sup>Bakhtin 7.

<sup>32</sup>Bakhtin 17.

<sup>33</sup>Tasso wrote a defence of his poem, called "*Apologia in difesa della Gerusalemme liberata*" in 1579, and in 1593 he rewrote the epic completely, publishing it under the new title *Gerusalemme conquistata*. In his prose writings, he often discusses the relation between unity and diversity in epic poetry. He claims, in his second discourse (of *Discorsi dell'arte poetica e in particolare sopra il poema eroica*), that although both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* possess epic unity, the former exhibits "simple unity," while the latter, less obviously unified, possesses "compound unity" ("*composta unità*") (390). In the *Apologia*, he writes: "*Le più fila non impediscono l'unità della favola, ma sì bene le più tela*" (438). (Many threads do not affect the unity of the story, but many separate fabrics indeed do. My translation.) Torquato Tasso, *Prose* (Milano: Riccardo Ricciardi, n.d.)

<sup>34</sup>Robert M. Durling, *The Figure of the Poet in Renaissance Epic* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1965) 201, 208.

<sup>35</sup>Significantly, after the disappointment of *Gerusalemme conquistata*, Tasso's final attempt at epic, *Il mondo creato*, was written in blank verse.

<sup>36</sup>Torquato Tasso, *Gerusalemme liberata* III, 23, *Opere*, I (Napoli: Fulvio Rossi, 1970) 128.

<sup>37</sup>Torquato Tasso, *Jerusalem Delivered*, trans. Edward Fairfax (New York: Capricorn, 1963) 49.

<sup>38</sup>Bakhtin 17.

<sup>39</sup>R. D. Waller, introduction, *The Monks and the Giants*, by John Hookham Frere (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1926) 3.

<sup>40</sup>See Jefferson Butler Fletcher, *Literature of the Italian Renaissance* (New

York: MacMillan, 1934) 144: "Always at a moment of suspense, he [the *cantastorie*] would break off abruptly, announcing continuation in his next, and specifying place and time:

'For your return on Wednesday let me pray,  
Which is—to speak precisely—All Saints Day.'"

<sup>41</sup>According to Fletcher, the final version of Pulci's *Morgante* was published in 1483 (143).

<sup>42</sup>Luigi Pulci, *Morgante* I, 71 (Milano: Riccardo Ricciardi, 1955) 26.

<sup>43</sup>"Morgante Maggiore," *Poetical Works* 377.

<sup>44</sup>Ariosto, *Orlando furioso* 28, iv, 728.

<sup>45</sup>Ariosto, *Orlando furioso* (*The Fury of Orlando*) II, trans. Barbara Reynolds (Great Britain: Penguin Books, 1977) 154.

<sup>46</sup>See, for example, Canto I, 104.

<sup>47</sup>See Peter Vassalo, *Byron: The Italian Literary Influence* (London: Macmillan, 1984) 1-2.

<sup>48</sup>See, for example, the letter to William Miller dated July 30, 1811, and the journal entry of November 24, 1813. *Byron's Letters and Journals*, (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1974) II, 63; III, 221.

<sup>49</sup>*Letters and Journals* I, 93-94.

<sup>50</sup>"English Bards and Scotch Reviewers," *Poetical Works* 114.

<sup>51</sup>See William Bowman Piper, *The Heroic Couplet* (Cleveland: Case Western UP, 1969) 13.

<sup>52</sup>Piper 50, 52.

<sup>53</sup>Auden, "Don Juan," *The Dyer's Hand and Other Essays* (New York: Random House, 1962) 405.

<sup>54</sup>Lara, *Poetical Works* 296.

<sup>55</sup>Nearly all of Sir Walter Scott's long narrative poems, including *Marmion*, *The Lady of the Lake*, *Rokeby* and *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*, are written in this form.

<sup>56</sup>Among Byron's narrative poems, *The Giaour*, *The Bride of Abydos*, *The Siege of Corinth*, *Parisina*, *The Prisoner of Chillon* and *Mazeppa* are in this measure.

<sup>57</sup>See Scott's prose epigraph to *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*, *Poetical*



*Works* (London: Oxford UP, 1967) 1.

<sup>58</sup>*The Giaour, Poetical Works* 247.

<sup>59</sup>In *Shandyism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1978), Peter Conrad writes: "The virtuoso . . . exists by self-indulgently taking liberties with artistic shape and moral precept, and he incites a rebellion of form against content" (49). This statement may have some application to the narrative aspect of *Don Juan*, but to Byron's earlier works it bears no relevance at all. These poems demonstrate an over-appropriateness—and, perhaps, simplicity—of form and content, and they have a studied unselfconsciousness which avoids the reflexive demand that the reader take note of form *per se*.

<sup>60</sup>Byron's plays, including *Manfred* and *Cain*, are in blank verse. The interest of these works is often more psychological than stylistic: few of their lines are as memorable or as musical as lines from even the early couplet tales.

<sup>61</sup>Paul West says of the Spenserian as used in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*: "the dreamy, flatulent stanza looks and sounds unapt. What might have been crisp reporting declines into a languid pageant." *Byron and the Spoiler's Art* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1960) 53. Saintsbury complains of Byron's "vulgarity" in *Childe Harold* and his inability to find the "right line" for the Spenserian stanza (III, 98).

<sup>62</sup>*Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* I, ii, *Poetical Works* 176.

<sup>63</sup>G. K. Hunter, "Amoretti and the English Sonnet," *A Theatre for Spenserians*, eds. Judith M. Kennedy and James A. Reither (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1973) 135.

<sup>64</sup>*Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* I, xx, *Poetical Works* 179.

<sup>65</sup>Spenser's sonnets usually rhyme *ababbcbccdcdee*, allowing, as in the Italian sonnet, an ambiguity between alternating and couplet structure. Although his final couplet is formally as disjunct as that of a normal English sonnet, Spenser seldom makes it semantically disjunct or ironic: it is usually a summary or development of what went before. According to Hunter, "Spenser's couplet does not move us into a new plane of sharp relationship between the elements that have appeared. It restates the mood that the situation of the octave has already created. It does not define with sharp finality, but leads us back into the poem, smoothing and further interrelating the connections that already exist" (135).

<sup>66</sup>See William Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1947) 33–34.

<sup>67</sup>*Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* II, xxxix, *Poetical Works* 195.

<sup>68</sup>*Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* IV, clvii–clviii, *Poetical Works* 240.

<sup>69</sup>*Letters and Journals* V, 264–65.

<sup>70</sup>*Letters and Journals* V, 265. Byron goes on to compare himself and these others unfavourably with Pope.

<sup>71</sup>Byron complains in the same letter in which he acknowledges Whistlecraft's "excellent manner" that "all [Murray's] missives came except the tooth-powder—of which I request further supplies at all convenient opportunities—as also of Magnesia & Soda-powders—both great luxuries here—& neither to be had good—or indeed hardly at all of the natives." *Letters and Journals* V, 267.

<sup>72</sup>*Letters and Journals* V, 267–68.

<sup>73</sup>Vassallo argues that "fragments" of some "experimental verses" in *ottava rima* "ridiculing Southey's rise to the Laureateship" are to be found in the John Murray Archives, London, dating from as early as 1814 (141, 176).

<sup>74</sup>See, for example, "Translation from the Medea of Euripides" (*Poetical Works* 24), "I Would I Were a Careless Child" (43), "Away, Away, Ye Notes of Woe" (62–63), "If Sometimes in the Haunts of Men" (64–65). Other tetrameter octaves have patterns such as *aabcbddd* ("Translation from Horace" (5)), *aaabcccb* ("Translation from Catullus" (5)), *ababbcbc* ("My Soul is Dark" (78)).

<sup>75</sup>Vassallo claims that Byron had read Ariosto, Dante and Tasso in Italian by 1816 (2).

<sup>76</sup>"Epistle to Augusta," *Poetical Works* 89.

<sup>77</sup>Frere 63.

<sup>78</sup>Frere 36.

<sup>79</sup>Frere 49.

<sup>80</sup>"Proem" vii, Frere 66.

<sup>81</sup>*Beppo* lxxix, *Poetical Works* 619.

<sup>82</sup>See Scott, *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* 1–48.

<sup>83</sup>Algernon Charles Swinburne, *Essays and Studies* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1875) 251–52.

## CHAPTER II

### OTTAVA RIMA IN *DON JUAN*

A critic or prosodist tends to go about his business with a work of literature like a government inspector. Pencil in hand, he bustles erratically through the work, weighing and measuring, testing passages for qualities he wants to discuss, jumping forward and back, looking for examples, searching out key terms, marking up the print and avidly writing notes in the margin. An event, or series of events, this may be; a reading it is not. Losing what Genette calls the essential "sequentiality" of a text,<sup>1</sup> the critic loses the text itself. Without its crucial time dimension, the text becomes spatialized, "fixed," objectified: its dynamism, its tissue of uncertainties, what Barthes describes as "an immense *fading* that assures both overlapping and loss of messages,"<sup>2</sup> are all sacrificed to a clarity that comes from the visual sense of an object "all there," spread open with the leaves of a book, able to be ravished or possessed.

The theorist has, of course, read the text. However, he has almost certainly vitiated his reading by subsequently consuming a number of critical and theoretical works which he feels will react with his impressions and precipitate from them an argument. When he sits down, a blank page before him, to write his own prose, he is probably surrounded by books with markers in them, while

the "primary text" lies open at hand, ready to be flipped through and scanned for effects and examples at any moment. This situation, or event, being that most immediately juxtaposed to his writing, will most probably comprise the subject-matter of his critical discourse—which is a pity, because impressions received from scanning a text are often very different from the experience of a reading, and a reading, complete and sequential, must be valued above a fragmentary and disordered survey. The trouble is that the critic often appears unaware that he is writing about an "event" at all. Perceiving the visual-spatial dimension instead of the auditory-temporal, he may use a plastic metaphor for his process of observation. The text, like a sculpture, stays still and unchanging for his examination, and he may accumulate impressions arithmetically, looking from any angle he chooses, and in any order. However, a musical metaphor, as Hegel and Barthes agree,<sup>3</sup> is a better one for a literary text, which comes into being only in a performance or reading and alters in every playing of it. A critical scanning is inadequate as a playing, although were it to trigger more complete memories of an earlier reading, it would not be a purposeless exercise. The critic ought to acknowledge a hierarchy of events and try, at least, to recreate the serial impressions of a good reading rather than to record the atemporal fragments of his own immediate experience.

Unfortunately, the sculptural model for poetry appeals to the "despotism of the eye"<sup>4</sup>—the dominance that vision can assert over the other senses. A critic may need the reification of visual-spatial perception in order to be "objective"—perhaps admirably—in the moral as well as the perceptual sense. He may even, like Wimsatt and Beardsley, lose his ontological security at the suggestion that a work of literature exist only contingently, and declare with

them that "a performance is an event, but the poem, if there is any poem, must be some kind of enduring object."<sup>5</sup> Enduring objects and things in themselves have proved, alas, notoriously resistant to human knowledge so far. But recognizing this does not necessarily entail despair; indeed, it can bring a sense of release from the totalitarian laws of "objectivity." It can give the critic a more open *gestalt*, allow him to examine phenomena and impressions of which he might, "objectively," have been suspicious or ashamed. Liberated from the demands of accuracy and facticity, he becomes free to *perform* the text and *play* with it as an active participant, not a mere consumer or observer.<sup>6</sup> Observing will nevertheless remain for him an important aspect of performance, rather in the way Barthes nostalgically conceives music once to have existed: when "playing" and "listening" formed a scarcely differentiated activity." A good reading will fuse the two roles of performing and perceiving and will keep open the organs of perception even to visual phenomena—such as they are.

However, the critic's dilemma is only made brutally conscious to him by this change of focus, not solved. It is impossible to read and write at the same time. He must accept this shortcoming and realize that, apart from giving up writing critical papers altogether, he will find no "real" solution to his problem. The temporal can be known only in the fleeting contingency of time; as soon as it is viewed retrospectively, it is foreshortened, made episodic, spatialized. To retain the time dimension even in events of the critic's life as he casually reviews them is difficult; a collage of "stills" is often how they appear in memory, duration becoming instantaneous.

And yet writers of fiction manage to suggest the passage of time in the lives of characters, even when narration is scanty or non-existent. Lived time is

apparently capable of representation; and in this capacity lies a clue for the critic's dilemma. If he can find no "real" solution to his problem, perhaps he can create a fictional one. His work of criticism could become—at least partially—a work of fiction, whose protagonist is a reader of the text he proposes to discuss and whose plot is the movement of this reader through the text, in order, from beginning to end. Of course, the critic's *narration* does not have to go in this order; nor does he have to narrate all of his reader's progress in detail—he can merely announce that this occurs.<sup>8</sup>

Having his reader in front of him, as it were under construction, the critic will realize that he can manipulate this reader's responses and tendencies in various ways for particular effects, polemical or aesthetic. Close on this realization will come the recognition that he has, in fact, always done this kind of manipulation, even when he was striving for truth and objectivity. Lines which he has privately read with reverence he has sneered at in print, for the sake of consistency or politics. His actual experience of a text has often been very different from the more intelligent one he has written about. Previously he was guilty of bad faith; now he can lie cheerfully and with a quiet conscience.

Although the critic-author can know the inner responses of his reader-character in ways in which, in "real life," he can know only his own, this reader can—and indeed, being a created fiction, *must*—be a different character from himself. The critic has been a reader before being a critic, and this experience may provide him with the raw material for creating his fiction; but still, being represented in his text, this reader is by nature a fictional other. The reader can be worse, or better, than the critic-author as a reader. Being totally obedient and completely determined, he may be made to take a very

narrow view of the text for the critic's polemical purposes. He may misunderstand certain aspects of it, or he may have a very strange, or lunatic slant on it in order to bring up a particular effect—much as a limited narrator operates in a novel. Conversely, like the one I have chosen for this dissertation, the created reader may be idealized, approaching more closely the perfect “implied reader”<sup>9</sup> than the critic does in any single reading of the text. She may be constructed to read with consistent concentration, to take breaks only at the ends of passages (or not at all); she can be manipulated so that she never loses interest or misses a joke or an irony which the critic has ever understood; she can be made tolerant and even-tempered, never suffering from the perverse moods and known prejudices which alienate the critic on occasion from the “implied author.”<sup>10</sup> A fictional reading may transcend the “real”—though perhaps not the possible or plausible—even while it retains, as an *a priori*, the fact that it is a *finite* reading, limited by personality, knowledge, space and time.

And so, for the purposes of this dissertation, *Don Juan* must be seen as existing in “real time.” A reader must be imagined, who makes her way through the text at something like the speed of speech; the phenomenon which she experiences is both visual and auditory. Although the time-measuring, auditory factor is more important, she is aware of the spatial, visual aspect, at least periodically. Thus, even though she knows certain parts of the poem by heart, she has a book open in front of her so that she can see the shape of line and stanza and the printed signs for the words. Also, the movement of her eyes' focus across line after line physically marks her progress through the text, though the sound—or the imagined sound, if she is not reading aloud—is what monitors the speed with which this visual focus can move. Words have a

particular shape in time; they cannot be endlessly drawn out or infinitesimally compressed. Their possible length of pronunciation has limits which may vary more from person to person than within one person's repertoire; however, textual factors will cause enunciation to become faster or slower at times. The priority of the auditory over the visual is demonstrated by the fact that the eye will often, in its finer movements, rush ahead of the mental performance, or "silent voice," which is the actual moving focus of the reader's attention, just as it does when its owner is reading aloud. Peripheral consciousness must find out how the sentence ends in order that central consciousness may shape the intonation and stress contours of the words through which it moves. Intonation and stress are auditory phenomena; in shaping them the reader "makes sense" of the written word. Central consciousness—whatever memory or the subconscious may be doing—moves in a temporal, auditorily monitored continuum through the lines of the work. Probably the reader is commanded to read in this way in the following, surely the silliest of Byron's octaves:

Oh reader! If that thou canst read,—and know,  
 'Tis 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 least with the beginning. (XIII, 73)

My reader has, of course, read *Don Juan* before. Memory of previous readings allows her better anticipations and a more consistent style than she had in a first reading. However, as Herrnstein Smith points out, "the more general of our responses must be described as remarkably similar from one reading or hearing to the next." She continues:



We might say that one tends to suppress what one knows for the pleasure of not knowing. It is also likely that the specific knowledge of any particular work can never be secure or complete enough to overcome the systems of expectation created by the structure of that work.<sup>11</sup>

Thus, my reader is capable of suspense, surprise, relief and all the feelings contingent on moving serially through time with the ever-approaching future as yet unknown.

Clearly, this model, positing as it does a singular, finite event, solves many problems for both the narratologist and the prosodist. For the former, the "real reader" is no longer a multiple and infinitely variable uncertainty but a known and controllable fiction. For the latter, the text is not a score but a performance, whose rhythms are the result of particular choices; they are singular, definable and linear, not a matrix of unrealized possibilities.<sup>12</sup> Keeping the reader's psychology in mind, the critic may to some extent suggest the multivalency of the text in terms of choices she is conscious of making. The reader is often aware of alternative possibilities even while her own reading is quite decisive; this gives them a place in the very reading that excludes them. My reader's choices must be judged finally by the reader of this dissertation, in the light of internal consistency and—because it is my reader's stated aim—of inclusiveness of interpretation. Her reading must be seen to be all of a piece; she must not intone this line as regular iambic pentameter:

Yǒu'll par|dǒn tó | mǔ mǔse | ǎ féw | shǒrt náps (V, 159)

and then read the following with a spondee in the penultimate position:

Thě án|tǐque Per|siǎns taught | threé úse|fǔl thǐngs. (XVI, 1)

A mind and voice that read the latter line in this way must choose to produce the former thus:

Yǒu'll par|dǒn tó | mǚ Múse | ǎ féw | shórt náps.

Also, as a good director of Shakespeare may, having no pressure of consistency upon him at that particular moment, choose "sullied" over "solid" in the line "O that this too too solid/sullied flesh would melt"<sup>13</sup> because it seems to *include* the more predictable "solid" where the converse would not hold, so my reader will tend, wherever possible, to make the inclusive choice, as long as this does not interfere with her consistency of style. For example, she will attempt throughout her reading what Reuven Tsur describes as a "rhythmical delivery style, which strikes an acceptable balance between prose rhythm and metre (which accommodates, somehow, both pattern of stress and of metre)."<sup>14</sup> Hence, in the line "You'll pardon to my Muse a few short naps"—as in a myriad similar lines—she will impose perceptible stress on the preposition because of the metre, but not enough for it to contend in significance with the lexical words of the sentence and thus make nonsense of the prose sense of the line.<sup>15</sup> She will be prepared as well to do a certain amount of damage to normal pronunciation for the sake of rhyme, though not so much that the distorted words be unrecognizable. In the fifth line of the following, she will read "this I call" very fast and she will soften its sibilant almost to a "z" in order to give effect to the comic rhyme:

But I am apt to grow too metaphysical:  
 "The time is out of joint,"—and so am I;  
 I quite forget this poem's merely quizzical,  
 And deviate into matters rather dry.  
 I ne'er decide what I shall say, and this I call  
 Much too poetical. (IX, 41)

However, she will not tamper with the diphthong vowel "I" and so the tension of the imperfect rhyme, which brings a sense of clever similarity, but not of identity, remains.

The most important reason for my elaborate fictionalization of the reader remains the simple necessity of keeping the focus of this text and of its author's mental eye on a reading. The critical activity of collecting, collating and listing remains the same, of course, both before and during writing, no matter what metaphor or myth is evoked for the critic's approach in the text. Yet the fiction used here enforces on the critic a certain angle of approach—from which I may, indeed, digress—but to whose slant I must re-orientate time and again, preventing thereby the valorizing of immediate experience over previous—and possible future—readings. My reader is a mnemonic device which forces me to imagine a reading and its contingent present time even while I am writing in another present time. Her usefulness will perhaps become more obvious in the course of this dissertation.

To return to *Don Juan*. The stanza has been examined as an out-of-focus phenomenon (as if from the ceiling); as an intellectual paradigm, Platonically emptied of content; as an historical development, filled up with content other than Byron's. It is high time for the fixed eye to unfreeze, the mind's digressions to cease and the reading of *Don Juan* to begin.

In Byron's *ottava rima*, the most immediate feature for the reader is the

most obvious characteristic of the bare stanza: a change occurring between lines 6 and 7. Frequently, and as is common in Ariosto, this change is from a narrative to an ironic mode, though it is here more often violent than in any of the Italian poets discussed. It characteristically takes the form of a sudden comic "sabotage" (West's word)<sup>16</sup> of a serious theme developed in the sestet:

Rose the Sultana from a bed of splendour,  
 Softer than the soft Sybarite's, who cried  
 Aloud because his feelings were too tender  
 To brook a ruffled rose-leaf by his side,—  
 So beautiful that art could little mend her,  
 Though pale with conflicts between love and pride:—  
 So agitated was she with her error,  
 She did not even look into the mirror. (VI, 89)

Expanding on West's observation, Anne K. Mellor and Jerome J. McGann both note that the change can be in the opposite direction,<sup>17</sup> as in the following stanza in which the couplet signals for the reader a sudden chastening into seriousness of a flippant theme begun in the sestet:

Each aunt, each cousin hath her speculation;  
 Nay, married dames will now and then discover  
 Such pure disinterestedness of passion,  
 I've known them court an heiress for their lover.  
 "Tantaene!" Such the virtues of high station!  
 Even in the hopeful Isle, whose outlet's "Dover":  
 While the poor rich wretch, object of these cares,  
 Has cause to wish her sire had had male heirs. (XII, 33)

But the serious-comic dichotomy does not adequately account for the ironies at play in *Don Juan*. Many of them, as in Ariosto, are not actually funny, but have to do with a shift of the reader's consciousness from the narrative to the narrator:

Then shrieking, she arose, and shrieking fell,  
 With joy and sorrow, hope and fear, to see  
 Him whom she deem'd a habitant where dwell  
 The ocean-buried, risen from death, to be  
 Perchance the death of one she loved too well:  
 Dear as her father had been to Haidée,  
 It was a moment of that awful kind—  
 I have seen such—but must not call to mind. (IV, 36)

The use of the first-person pronoun, as in this couplet, is not essential for the shift of consciousness to occur; in fact, being itself a reflexive device, it tends to blur for the reader the couplet's own formal predisposition to self-reflexiveness. The new circling movement in the final two lines causes a tightening up on the semantic level, which lends itself to epigram and oracle, being a gesture of a more memorable shape than the longer and more meandering sestet.<sup>18</sup>

In the following stanza, for example, the natural compactness of the couplet is perfectly suited to the subtle rhetoric it carries:

Within a niche, nigh to its pinnacle,  
 Twelve saints had once stood sanctified in stone;  
 But these had fallen, not when the friars fell,  
 But in the war which struck Charles from his throne,  
 When each house was a fortalice—as tell  
 The annals of full many a line undone,—  
 The gallant Cavaliers, who fought in vain  
 For those who knew not to resign or reign. (XIII, 60)

The verbal play of "reign" against both "resign" and "vain" by means of rhyme and alliteration is just enough to give the reader a sense of technique and construction, to make her conscious of craftsmanship and hence of the craftsman, whose opinions are not quite concealed in this couplet, though they are in the sestet.

Stanzaic poetry, with its necessity of "starting anew" at the beginning of each formal repetition, asks for utterances of a particular length, in *ottava rima*

the demand being for the rather cumbersome sentence of eight pentameter lines. Byron tends to use a loosely constructed sentence, containing less subordination than coordination and—his signature device—many parentheses; but the couplet almost invariably counters the tendency to wander and accumulate. It takes the form very often of the sentence's major turn or the most important formulation, and it is frequently signalled in the grammar by a disjunctive such as "but," "yet" or "however," which sets it into opposition to the entire preceding sestet:

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. (V, 141)

The couplet's position—last—in the stanza is a significant factor in its valorization. In some cases, this placing allows it to be used as a revelation whose startling effect is anticipated by various devices of suspense through the sestet, as in the tantalizing final stanza of Canto XVI:

The ghost, if ghost it were, seemed a sweet soul  
 As ever lurked beneath a holy hood:  
 A dimpled chin, a neck of ivory, stole  
 Forth into something much like flesh and blood;  
 Back fell the sable frock and dreary cowl,  
 And they revealed—alas! that ere they should!  
 In full, voluptuous, but *not o'ergrown* bulk,  
 The phantom of her frolic Grace—Fitz-Fulke! (XVI, 123)

*Don Juan* is perceived by the reader early on as synecdochic at several levels of technique. The dialogic stanza is a building-block for a long dialogic poem. By means of sentences which are mostly compound and appositional rather

than complex, a story unfolds in which events are serially joined one to another, not subordinated as parts of a unity consisting of beginning, middle and end. Preferring simile to metaphor, Byron produces a highly realistic fiction in which he constantly reminds his reader of its fictiveness and continually displays to her view the process of its construction. However, she soon discovers that the relation of parts to whole is not simple. Although the sestet-couplet dichotomy resembles the poem's larger dichotomy between narrative and digression or commentary, narration is quite clearly not limited to sestets, nor commentary to couplets.<sup>19</sup> Only about two-thirds of the poem can be classed even loosely as narrative,<sup>20</sup> and whole blocks of stanzas—sometimes nearly all of a book, as in Canto XII—are devoted to authorial comments of various kinds. Nevertheless, the stanza is the smallest unit in which the tendency to pulsate between these two levels can regularly be felt, and even within the larger categories it influences the form of utterance. For example, although the following stanza is, like most of the stanzas quoted previously, narrative, it "lets through" the narrator's voice or opinion by means of a pointing device in the couplet:

The second motive was to profit by  
 The moment of the general consternation,  
 To attack the Turk's flotilla, which lay nigh  
 Extremely tranquil, anchored at its station:  
 But a third motive was as probably  
 To frighten them into capitulation;  
 A phantasy which sometimes seizes warriors,  
 Unless they are game as Bull-dogs and Fox-terriers. (VII, 24)

In this case the emphasis is achieved by means of generalization rather than by climax or disjunction.

The following stanza of commentary creates a very similar effect, using summary instead of generalization:

That is, we cannot pardon their bad taste,  
 For so it seems to lovers swift or slow,  
 Who fain would have a mutual flame confest,  
 And see a sentimental passion glow,  
 Even were St. Francis' paramour their guest,  
 In his Monastic Concubine of Snow;—  
 In short, the maxim for the amorous tribe is  
 Horatian, "Medio tu tutissimus ibis." (VI, 17)

By collecting and sharpening the narrator's somewhat wayward eye, the couplet tolls the reader back from the realm of erotic speculation to that of poetic technique, which is an area of greater self-reflexiveness.

Greater self-reflexiveness in the couplet is perceived in the following stanza because of a sudden ironical twist in the authorial position, a finger pointing dramatically out of the poem at "you," the reader, who up to this point has been innocently eavesdropping, unaware that the voyeuristic narrator has his eye on her as well as Juan:

In thoughts like these true wisdom may discern  
 Longings sublime, and aspirations high,  
 Which some are born with, but the most part learn  
 To plague themselves withal, they know not why:  
 'Twas strange that one so young should thus concern  
 His brain about the action of the sky;  
 If *you* think 'twas philosophy that this did,  
 I can't help thinking puberty assisted. (I, 93)

Authorial posturing in the sestet can be punctured by a couplet in which the bathos is contained in metacomment, again a more self-reflexive mode than what goes before:



"Go, little book, from this my solitude!  
 I cast thee on the waters, go thy ways!  
 And if, as I believe, thy vein be good,  
 The world will find thee after many days."  
 When Southey's read, and Wordsworth understood,  
 I can't help putting in my claim to praise—  
 The first four rhymes are Southey's, every line:  
 For God's sake, reader! take them not for mine. (I, 222)

Among the variations on this stanza, the reader will occasionally—though rarely—come upon a specimen like the following, which exactly reverses her expectation by using the sestet for commentary and the couplet for narration:

Ah! what is man? what perils still environ  
 The happiest mortals even after dinner—  
 A day of gold from out an age of iron  
 Is all that life allows the luckiest sinner;  
 Pleasure (whene'er she sings, at least) 's a siren,  
 That lures to flay alive the young beginner;  
 Lambro's reception at his people's banquet  
 Was such as fire accords to a wet blanket. (III, 36)

To her surprise, the effect is not of jarring novelty. The couplet still calls attention to itself, both stylistically and thematically. The closeness of "banquet" to its defuser, "blanket," gives the reader that heightened consciousness of craftsmanship which is in the nature of paired as against alternating structures. Perhaps the turn itself, not the nature of the material before or after it, is what gives the point to the final shorter utterance. The narrator's pulling himself up and getting on with his story—even though he does not, as he often does, tell his reader that he is doing it—makes the reader once again aware not merely of the the story's events, but that a story is being told: the reflexive consciousness.

All the examples cited so far display the same dialogic tendency in the *ottava rima* stanza. In the previous chapter, I argued that this tendency is

"already there" in the form before any content is "put into" it. In other words, the most noticeable stylistic habit in *Don Juan* is the exaggeration, by semantic or prosodic devices, of an effect for which a strong formal disposition exists anyway. And yet the reader does not find this poem as similar to any of the Italian medley poems in *ottava rima* as she might have expected. What she finds different, apart from the inherent variations between the two languages and the types of story to be told, is the enormous spectrum of moods on the tonal palette used here. Byron's narrator is much more excitable and mobile, much less dignified than Ariosto's: melancholy, indignation, vulgarity, blitheness, iconoclasm, familiarity, tragic sympathy and hilarious leg-pulling follow each other with a more bewildering variety and speed here than in any of the Renaissance epics. *Maugre* Barthes, the illusion of the "Author"'s presence is strong enough in this poem to give the reader a continual consciousness of an individual voice speaking to her.<sup>21</sup> Even Ariosto is in comparison almost effaced, declaring himself only here and there or "showing through" his narrative's texture in relatively subtle reminders.

Clearly, to a greater extent than any of his predecessors in this form, Byron is a virtuoso. The reader may be led to expect this by what she knows about the nineteenth-century cult of personality. However, something distinctly classical in Byron's approach, if not in its results, causes her to perceive his virtuosity not as Peter Conrad does, in the breaking or "subduing" of forms and formal expectations,<sup>22</sup> but more in the over-using of them, in the taking of the form's own varieties and possibilities to their natural extreme. Byron's most distinctive stylistic habit is the form's own major feature—a feature which even Ariosto softens and blurs a little, for example by introducing an ironic tone

subtly into line 5 as a prelude to the stronger subversive turn in line 7.<sup>23</sup> What appears to be rebellion against form in *Don Juan* is often merely rebellion against conventional usage. No formal necessity exists to set the stanza up exactly the way Ariosto and the other Italians usually have it, with the narrative on top and the narrator's reflection below. It can be turned upside-down; ergo, Byron does this.<sup>24</sup> A long poem does not have to be mostly narrative, intermittently sprinkled with commentary; Byron makes about half his poem commentary, and this of varying kinds, so that within the stanza ironies can come upon ironies, irrelevancies upon necessities, the tragic upon the flippant, bravado upon humility, and vice versa, and so on. Transparent narrative is relatively rare in this poem because of the almost continual presence of an identifiable speaking voice; this voice changes its tone with a breathtaking frequency to which the periodic structure of stanzaic poetry *per se* and the contrapuntal possibilities of this particular stanza are admirably suited.

A few exceptions to the six-two rule of stanza division can be found, as George M. Ridenour has noted.<sup>25</sup> The reader occasionally comes across stanzas in which the illusion of another, or no, verse form persists. Grammatical force can divide the lines into couplets, despite the fact that only the final one rhymes as such:

The column ordered on the assault scarce passed  
 Beyond the Russian batteries a few toises,  
 When up the bristling Moslem rose at last,  
 Answering the Christian thunders with like voices;  
 Then one vast fire, air, earth and stream embraced,  
 Which rocked as 'twere beneath the mighty noises;  
 While the whole rampart blazed like Etna, when  
 The restless Titan hiccups in his den. (VIII, 7)

Alternatively, two quatrains can be created:

That on a sudden, when she had least hope,  
 It fell down of its own accord, before  
 Her feet; that her first movement was to stoop  
 And pick it up, and bite it to the core;  
 That just as her young lip began to ope  
 Upon the golden fruit the vision bore,  
 A bee flew out and stung her to the heart,  
 And so—she woke with a great scream and start. (VI, 77)

But the reader readily observes in each of these examples that the final unit is more heavily weighted than the earlier ones, owing to the greater power of closure found in the couplet rhyme. The virtuoso performer makes his saxophone sing like a flute without tampering with its construction. A sense of the performer's cleverness is experienced by the listener because of her knowledge that he is playing the other instrument; she hears the six-two structure in the background of other patterns.

Much more subversive is the undermining of the iambic pentameter's integrity by enjambment and caesurae. Both of these devices are, of course, extremely common in English poetry and they are not considered fundamentally detrimental to the metre.<sup>26</sup> However, Byron uses them occasionally in such high concentration that a statistical analysis of their occurrence in *Don Juan* would not indicate their intense—though periodic—anarchical power. They occur most commonly in the more conversational or colloquial stanzas, where an illusion of speech is strongest, either in dialogue among characters or when the narrator's voice is most in evidence. The reason for this concurrence is obvious: units of utterance are irregular in length, even if they are basically iambic (which recent research suggests that they generally are).<sup>27</sup>

Both enjambment and midline pauses are variable devices which can be

strong or weak depending on sentence structure, speed and style of reading, type of phoneme and other contextual factors. Only the strongest and least disputable cases will be discussed here. Of the two devices, midline pauses on their own usually affect the stanza less. As long as strong pauses also punctuate the ends of lines where the rhymes occur, choppiness of rhythm is felt to be under control:

"My third—"—"Your third!" quoth Juan, turning round;  
 "You scarcely can be thirty: have you three?"  
 "No—only two at present above ground:  
 Surely 'tis nothing wonderful to see  
 One person thrice in holy wedlock bound!"  
 "Well then, your third," said Juan; "what did she?  
 She did not run away, too, did she sir?"  
 "No, faith."—"What then?"—"I ran away from her." (V, 20)

When enjambment is the more important device, it can have the effect of unifying, smoothing and speeding up the stanza, creating a tightly-knit verse paragraph rather than the less hierarchical compound form favoured by Byron:

But "en avant!" The light loves languish o'er  
 Long banquets and too many guests, although  
 A slight repast makes people love much more,  
 Bacchus and Ceres being, as we know,  
 Even from our grammar upwards, friends of yore  
 With vivifying Venus, who doth owe  
 To these the invention of champagne and truffles:  
 Temperance delights her, but long fasting ruffles. (XVI, 86)<sup>28</sup>

However, when strong enjambment coincides with strong caesurae, the verse becomes a good deal more precarious:

I won't describe—that is, if I can help  
 Description; and I won't reflect—that is,  
 If I can stave off thought, which, as a whelp  
 Clings to its teat, sticks to me through the abyss  
 Of this odd labyrinth; or as the kelp  
 Holds by the rock; or as a lover's kiss  
 Drains its first draught of lips:—but, as I said,  
 I *won't* philosophize, and *will* be read. (X, 28)

An oral rendering of this by someone else could conceivably obscure the stanza altogether for a listener. However, my reader is both performer and listener and, as performer, she chooses to enunciate lines in such a way as to make their endings evident by very slight pauses after the rhyme-words, even when they are heavily enjambed. Thus she manages to sound a “metrical” rhythm as well as what metrists call “prose rhythm”<sup>29</sup>—a stress pattern that makes sense of a spoken sentence. Also, as performer, my reader has the “score” of the stanza visible before her; she can see the rhymes and the line-endings and is hence aware that as far as stress-count and rhyme go, this is regular *ottava rima*. Even the couplet is used in a conventional manner, if she take it to be a little foreshortened, its different, more authoritarian utterance beginning after the last dash. She is conscious that what Byron is doing here with these straddled lines and disjunct phrases is once more playing the virtuoso with his instrument. “Listen!—it sounds like prose—and yet, look again, reader!—I put not a foot out of place; I break not one of the rules of strict poetic decorum!” He tends to work his stanza very hard, not merely for the dialogic effects discussed earlier, but also for the unity and structure it imposes on his extraordinarily various and incongruent ideas, moods, themes and even rhythms. The daring of his virtuosity would be perceptible only within a difficult and strict verse form. In prose a passage like the stanza above would be unremarkable; in *ottava rima* it

is a surprising technical achievement. In prose, *Don Juan* might well appear an extremely uneven and flighty work, but as it is the reader's eyes move smoothly down the page from rectangular block to rectangular block of print, while her intellect and inner ear are continually reassured by the paradigm: two sets of three alternately rhyming, one set of two in a couplet completion, on and on, over pages and pages. This hypnotism is one of the most important sources of unity in *Don Juan*.

Another source is the reader's growing sense of the narrator's—or author's—presence as she becomes increasingly immersed in this poem. Chapter VI contains a detailed discussion of how the narrator appears to dominate the reader, but I must mention here that the measured time of the rhythm is *his* time. It is the time of his (fictionally) enunciating the words whose relation to himself and whose character as artifacts he so constantly mentions that the reader is continually conscious of them, him and his activity of generating them. Thus, in the end, two scenarios, not one, demand attention from the phenomenological critic of *Don Juan*. One is of the reader perusing a copy of the poem; the other, recreated vividly in the mind of this reader, is of the narrator, composing and performing the text at the rate she moves through it.

Many critics have claimed what this chapter proposes and what may be a trivially self-evident observation in the end: namely, that the stanza is one of the most important structural units in *Don Juan*.<sup>30</sup> However, a stanza is not in itself unitary and can be critically anatomized. I have examined so far a number of ways in which the reader experiences the whole stanza. She is conscious also of the poetic line.

Due to eccentric and frequent punctuation (particularly parentheses of

various kinds), the line can appear to the eye more irregular metrically than it really is. Each line almost invariably contains five viable feet; most inversions into the trochee occur in the first position; trisyllabic variations are not especially common.<sup>31</sup> The most most frequent irregularity is the combination consisting of a pyhrric followed by a spondee known as the ionic or double foot.<sup>32</sup> It is to be found in all of the four possible positions:

*F*ör *h*is *ó*wn *p*árt,| hě *ré*al|*ŷ* should | *ř*ějoice (V, 70);

Yielded | *t*ō *th*ē *d*ēep *tw*í|*l*ight's *p*urp|*l*ē charm (II, 184);

*T*ō *vir*|*t*ue *p*róp|*ř*, *ř* *g*ood *éd*|*ŷ*ca|*t*ion (XIII, 31);

Which scarce|*ŷ* *r*ose | *m*uch *h*igh|*ř* *th*ān *gr*ass *bl*ades  
(VIII, 47) (My emphasis.)

Ionics are very common in English iambic pentameter,<sup>33</sup> though in few poems are they encountered as often as in *Don Juan*. The reader does not experience them as major disruptions of the rhythm—except perhaps in the sensitive last position—because they keep decorum in terms of numbers despite the introduction into the line of the dreaded spondee. Derek Attridge, who sees them as evidence of syllable-counting within the accentual-syllabic frame, claims that syllabic rhythm “can be more subtle in its reflection of speech” than stress-timed rhythms.<sup>34</sup> In a language containing many important monosyllabic words, the occasional juxtaposition of stresses must naturally occur; ionics attempt to represent these juxtapositions within the iambic scheme. They also make English pentameters sound more like Italian hendecasyllabics, in which the metrical rule governs number of syllables only, allowing stresses to fall less regularly than in the



strict English metres.

However, more violent eruptions than these break into Byron's iambic pentameter. The reader encounters at times the spondee on its own without the accompanying pyrrhic to give it respectability. A line with six stresses, three of them contiguous, is not only a contradiction of the five-beat expectation, but it also interferes with the stress-contours of normal pronunciation which, being periodic, strive for a demotion of the middle stress.<sup>35</sup> Pauses between these stressed syllables and a marked slowing of the reader's pace are essential; otherwise her voice will perform the demotion, as can be demonstrated by several experimental readings of the following line from Wordsworth:

Thě still,| *săd* mú|sic óf | hŭmán|ity.<sup>36</sup> (My emphasis.)

The slower she reads and the more the reader separates words, the more likely spondees are to occur.<sup>37</sup> Regional accent is also important. My reader, having a clipped and emphatic pronunciation, unlike the extended vowels and softened consonants of North America, is particularly prone to spondaic readings.

That stress, in English, is associated with emotional intensity, is perhaps a literary and linguistic commonplace. At times of high excitement—as long as suspense, the need to narrate or explain, or any other speeding-up device is not operative—language becomes more marked and emphatic, and the inclination to demote important syllables decreases. For spondees to occur in poetry, certain kinds of emotional pressure must be high and the poet's diction must concurrently tend towards monosyllabic words. These conditions frequently coincide because the short, uninflected Anglo-Saxon forms embody our most effective vocabulary of passion. In Byron as in Wordsworth, spondees can be scanned at

moments of particular fervour:

Tò this,| mŷ plain,| swòrn, dówn|right dé|těstá|tìõ. (IX, 24)

In *Don Juan* the reader finds herself reading spondees with high frequency in another context not necessarily associated with emotional intensity. This context is one of its uniquely typical rhetorical devices: the list. "It always suited Byron to play collector with things and people," writes West of this device and,<sup>38</sup> indeed, its relationship is synecdochic to *Don Juan's* narrative structure, whose keynote is "accretion" rather than organicism.<sup>39</sup> Lists balance things and people equally against one another, offering no preferences, and Byron's genius for incongruous or ironic juxtaposition puts them among his best vehicles of humour and holism. If the metre is disrupted at these points, then so are hierarchy and cosmology; thus, what seems to be metrical irresponsibility is, in fact, careful poetic decorum. Lines serious or ironic like the following are legion:

Ěxcépt | tò búll-|fights, máss,| play, róut | ănd rév|ěl (I, 148);

Thrónes, wórlds,| ět cět|ěră, árē | sŏ óft | ůpsét (IV, 4);

Ín líke | churč bĕlls,| wĭth sígh,| hówl, groán,| yĕll, prayér  
(VIII, 58)

Drést, vót|ěd, shóne,| ănd, may|bě, sóme|thĭng móre (XIV, 18).  
(My emphasis.)

Of course, the rhythmically registered phenomenon is only one example—the most miniature and compressed—of the list. Even elements signified by monosyllables can be rendered metrically inoffensive by the addition of "and" or "or" between them:

Ǻnd guáreds,| Ǻnd bóltz,| Ǻnd wálls,| Ǻnd nów | Ǻnd thén (VI, 32);  
Thát shé | wás fáir,| Ǻr dárk,| Ǻr shórt,| Ǻr táll (VI, 54).

And the poem contains many lists whose elements are signified by units larger than a single word. These vary from phrases to whole stanzas, a good example of the latter being the “*ubi sunt?*” suite in Canto XI (76–80). A Don Juan story *per se*—especially one truncated before any infernal retribution can take place—is, like Leporello’s aria in *Don Giovanni*, a kind of catalogue of love affairs, a list of disparate events which bear no structural relationship one to another apart from sequence.

The examples of lines given so far have highlighted only the poem’s rhythmic irregularities. Demonstrating its much more common regularity is harder to do by example; and still harder is the task of showing in a work like this the fact that metre is not usually a very noticeable device in *Don Juan* at all. A critic, searching pen in hand for a metrically perfect stanza, might come up with the following as his paradigm:

’Tis tíme | wě should | prőcéed | wíth óur | gőod póǺm,—  
Főr Í | mǺintáin | thát ít | ís réalǺly gőod,  
NǺt ónǺly ín | thě bódǺly, búť | thě próǺm,—  
HőwévǺr lítǺtlě bóth | Ǻre únǺděrstood  
Júst nów,|—bűť bý | Ǻnd bý | thě Trúth | wíll shów | ’em  
HěrselǺ | ín hěr | sűblímǺest átǺtítűde:  
Ǻnd tíll | shě dóth | Ĩ fáin | műst bé | cǺntént  
TǺ shǺre | hěr BeáuǺtű Ǻnd | hěr BǺnǺishmént. (IX, 22)

The only irregularity—which is always entailed by feminine rhyme—in this

scansion is the extra unstressed syllable at the end of lines 1, 3, and 5. The reader reads line 2 as above because, although the alternative,

For I maintain that it *is* really good,

would point up the repetition of "good" and defend it, she finds that the metrical expectation and her own modern habit of using the word "really" for colloquial emphasis militate against this reading.

Thus, an almost perfectly regular scansion does chart a possible reading of the quoted stanza. And yet this regularity is quite clearly the critic's judgement, not the reader's; her experience of this stanza is as something very different from a classic example of iambic pentameter. The enjambments and caesurae are too strong; and more important than these are effects contributed by the speaking voice. A good rendering of this passage demands great variability in speed, in pitch and in emphasis and has the effect of masking the "metrical" rhythm without necessarily contradicting it. Byron strove continually, according to W. B. Yeats, for "the syntax and vocabulary of common personal speech";<sup>40</sup> stanzas like this one, with their colloquialisms, repetitions, dashes, uses of the first person and (often) italics and exclamation marks are inadequately described by a scansion which points up only local stresses and unstresses on a scale of two. Isochrony is at a minimum here; what a reader hears is not so much the five-beat pulse of the metre as the rushing and emphatic pausing, the slurring and ironic pointing which a good performance would deliver. The defiance of line 2 is contingent almost entirely on its one major stress—that on "really" (or "is," in the alternative reading). The other stresses are hardly heard at all as the voice speeds through them to make its point. Line 6 requires a fairly

strong stress on the second syllable of "Herself" (being the deferred object of the enjambed previous line), but its real fulcrum is the middle syllable of the inflated superlative "sublimest," which requires that sort of hanging sarcasm, the curl of the lip which only the true Limey can do, looking down his nostrils at the hireling crew avidly writing their odes to Truth.

This is a poetry of posture and performance, the effect of spontaneity and improvisation given here, as so often, by making the whole stanza one sentence—and a sentence consisting almost entirely of parentheses, so that clauses are not fully subordinated one to another, but tacked together and included in each other as the thought runs through them. The metre is not what reminds the reader of the intricacy of form, for the rhythms flow off the tongue with the "naturalness" of speech; however, she is conscious, to some extent, of form. It is the rhyme that does it.

The rhyme is what steadies and braces the stanza and what, by giving the lines their sense of an ending, creates and sustains their integrity as lines. The last syllable of "understood" clicks neatly into place under "good," the strong stress and the perfect masculine rhyme setting up a powerful opposition to the subversive effect of enjambment. Rhyming (perfectly) two different grammatical forms, as here an adjective and a past participle, is more satisfactory prosodically than a grammatical repetition, giving the reader a better sense of completion precisely because it is less monotonous and predictable.<sup>41</sup> "Poem . . . proem" is a weaker rhyme since the similarity is too close, both grammatically and audibly; but here the reader is being "set up" for the trick rhyme "show 'em"; and, in any case, both the "poem" and the "proem" lines are end-stopped by dashes and do not so much require extra tagging. "Show 'em" is a joke, a

especially manufactured rhyme which forces a pause, if not of the voice, at least of the reader's attention, and it also works for the stanza against the anarchic effect of enjambment. "Attitude" is an imperfect rhyme, but the stanza can afford this at the end of the sestet on a line end-stopped with the powerful pause signified by a colon. The couplet here is unusual, being clinched by a light rhyme (the rhyming of a lexically stressed with a lexically unstressed syllable).<sup>42</sup> However, "content" has the effect of lengthening and strengthening the normal pronunciation of "Banishment," valorizing it by making it more sonorous and a fitting polysyllabic capping of "Beauty," against which it is balanced by alliteration and grammar. This is a point at which the use and perception of form become circular as it were—or inductive as well as deductive. After setting up many stanzas with strong rhymes to clinch and point their couplets, Byron has established a pattern of expectation in his reader, which he can use to highlight and strengthen particular types of utterance. His "Banishment," like Truth's, is a far from shameful condition.

Although rhyme is nearly always the structural support of stanza and line in *Don Juan*, the poem is very variable. Just as rhyme is sometimes backgrounded, so also, in certain types of stanza, is metre foregrounded. This foregrounding is not usually achieved, as the critic might expect, by means of fewer substitutions, but in terms of a more isochronous rhythm, which makes conscious to the reader a regularly occurring pattern of pulses. Occasionally, the rhythm is quite childishly emphatic, its nursery-rhyme cadences giving rather gruesome content the kind of deadly contrast to be found elsewhere, for example in the simile which envisages the Russian grenadiers mounting a wall "Cheerful as children climb the breasts of mothers" (VIII, 15). The following stanza alludes

to the atavistic innocence of childhood through its smug, easily-recited beat-rhythm:

Ā sād | mīscā|cūlā|tīōn ā|bōut dīs|tānce  
 Māde āll | thēir nā|vāl māt|tērs īn|cōrrēct  
 Thēē fīre|shīps lōst | thēir ā|miāblē | ěxis|tēnce  
 Bēfōre | thēy reāched | ā spōt | tō tāke | ěffēct:  
 Thē mātch | wās līt | tōō sōōn,| ānd nō | āssīs|tānce  
 Cōuld rē|mēdy | thīs lūb|bērly | dēfēct;  
 Thēy blēw | ūp īn | thē mīd|dlē ōf | thē rīv|ēr,  
 Whīle, thōugh | 'twās dāwn,| thē Turks | slēpt fāst | ās ēv|ēr.  
 (VII, 28)

The above scansion is regular, to the detriment of pronunciation and sense, but this is how my reader speaks these lines, with great up-and-down emphasis and almost no attempt to assert "prose rhythm" over metre. This primitive rhythm is the result of a diction containing too many monosyllables placed regularly according to the metre ("The match was lit too soon") with no spondaic juxtapositions or passionate outcries to break into the pattern. Also, when polysyllabic words occur, they do not supply extra syllables and hence give the running rhythm of anapaests to the line, but are essential in making up the five iambs, often with their secondary syllables in stressed positions. The up-and-down rhythm set up by the monosyllables forces the polysyllables into a similar beat—one which ignores the four-fold distinctions of normally pronounced word stress and allows only a binary stress-unstress scale.<sup>43</sup> The effect suggests the non-comprehending, regular pronunciation of a child's recitation.

More often, stanzas in which the reader is conscious of metre chart areas

of mood or thought which are conventionally "poetic" in the sense that they have been expressed before in poetry—English poetry, specifically—rather than in prose. Rhythmic allusions to other poet's cadences, however general and non-specific, form part of the sense of the lines. Poetic decorum may be a matter of arbitrary tradition, or it may be a habitual wedding together of intrinsic affinities in form and content, but, whatever its ontology, it is a conscious factor for the reader, to an almost classic degree, at certain times during her perusal of *Don Juan*. Usually, poetic decorum is evident as much in rhythm as in diction and sentence structure. The passages in which it is most in evidence can be divided roughly into "Romantic" and "Augustan" modes, though this is for convenience only, and the inaccuracy of the two terms is acknowledged.

The Romantic type takes the form, rare in *Don Juan*, of stanzas which are lyrical, serious and meditative, and which, confronting a cosmos for a moment unified and at peace, express, in an elegiac or celebrational mood, wonder. This is the Wordsworthian vision for which Byron was accused so bitterly by Wordsworth for borrowing.<sup>44</sup>



Sweet hóur | óf twi|lǐght!—ín | the sól|ítude  
 Óf the pine for|est, and | the sí|lǐent shóre  
 Which bounds | Rǎvén|ná's im|mémó|riál wóod,  
 Rootéd | whére ónce | the Á|dríān wáve | flów'd ó'er,  
 Tó whére | the lást | César|íān fort|rǐss stóod,  
 Évēr|grǐeen for|est! which | Bóccác|cio's lóre  
 Ānd Drý|dǐn's láy | mǎde haúnt|ǐd gróund | tó mé,  
 Hów hǎve | Ī lóved | the twi|lǐght hóur | ānd theé! (III, 105)

This scansion shows eight substitutions, though none of them is uncommon or "unmetrical";<sup>45</sup> without slurring there would be ten. However, my reader, who is sensitive to rhythm, does not have a pencil in her hand with which to chart and deface her text as above; she is not primarily a metrist and hence she hears these lines as a slowly paced and lingering melody, much of whose beauty comes from onomatopoeic effects (for example, the counterpoint of "n"s, "m"s and "d"s in line 3), but whose base rhythm of five beats in the line is the dynamo on which the other pleasures turn. This was not the case in "'Tis time we should return . . . "; the pleasure of that came from quite other effects, and my reader would need her pencil to discover the rhythmic "regularity" there.

In the stanza above, the rhyme, consistently conventional and masculine though it is, appears only as part of the rhythm, just tipping the ends of the lines as it were, and giving a slightly greater emphasis to their final syllable. Despite a rhetorical counterpoint of "thee" and "me," even the couplet is almost overridden here, only the last line being separated at all and "thee" at the end of it swinging back decisively to the initial phrase for which it substitutes: "Sweet hour of twilight." The stanza is thus united in a curve of completion not

easy to achieve in *ottava rima*. The *maestro* here moves into an adagio passage which makes his listener forget for the moment his technical dexterity and tricky personality; she becomes caught up by the entranced cadences of a music which seems to speak for humanity itself.

The Augustan mode is more common and can be discovered with high frequency at the ends of stanzas which, however capriciously they may gallop or saunter through their sestet, end with primness and decorum in that snug little package, the heroic couplet:

The reason's obvious: if there's an eclât,  
 They lose their caste at once, as do the Parias;  
 And when the delicacies of the law  
 Have filled their papers with their comments various,  
 Society, that china without flaw,  
 (The hypocrite!) will banish them like Marius,  
 To sit amidst the ruins of their guilt:  
 For Fame's a Carthage not so soon rebuilt. (XII, 78)

The neatness with which the compromised ladies are disposed of is, however, only partly dependent on the metrical regularity of the final lines; a witty play of "guilt" against "rebuilt" is a more obvious feature of the couplet's self-conscious closure.

The reader encounters whole stanzas of the Augustan type in which metre is foregrounded for satiric effect. A block of these occurs in the Dedication, where Byron for a while, according to George M. Ridenour and others, resorts to the high style.<sup>46</sup> The savage indignation of these stanzas is kept in check by a strongly foregrounded rhythm which beats out its invective against the hated Castlereagh with the relentlessness of the engine of torture it describes:

Ān ór|átor | ǒf súch | sét trášh | ǒf phráse  
 Īnéff|fably |—lēgít|imate|ly vile,  
 Thát év|en ĭts grós|sēst flat|tērers dāre | nǒt prāise,  
 Nǒr fōes |—āll ná|tions—cón|dēscēnd | tǒ smīle,—  
 Nǒt év|en ā sprīght|ly blun|dēr's spark | cān blāze  
 Fróm thát | Īxi|on grīnd|stone's ceāse|lēss toil,  
 Thát túrns | ānd túrns | tǒ gíve | thē wǒrld | ā nót|tion  
 Ōf énd|lēss tor|mēnts ānd | pērpēt|uāl mó|tion. (Ded., 13)

This is not very "regular," though a fast reading would demote the first syllable of each of the two spondees I have scanned (in lines 1 and 4). However, the reader is thoroughly conscious of rhythm throughout the stanza, even before the overt reference to the grindstone whose cruel rotation the last four lines strive to imitate. The stresses are mostly weighted very heavily against the unstresses by means of hard consonants, often in difficult combinations, on the downbeats. Line 2 displays a rather different technique. Instead of utilizing strong words to load the rhythm, it uses the metre itself to weight its words. The polysyllabic adverbs, "Ineffably" and "legitimately," are stretched and stressed out of their normal pronunciation by a "rhythmical reading"<sup>47</sup> in order to fulfil the pentameter's formal demands. The reader finds herself unable to avoid spitting on the dentals as she pronounces "legitimately" to fit the rhythm. This accentuates the word's fierce irony and forces her to recollect Edmund's subversion of the concept of legitimacy in *King Lear*.<sup>48</sup>

Although this stanza contains an imperfect rhyme ("smile . . . toil"), it demonstrates as well a very pointed example of Augustan rhyme, "vile . . . smile." This is Augustan, or classical, in the same sense that the metre of line

2 is: because it uses the device not merely for poetic euphony, but for witty rhetorical effect. The two words, "vile" and "smile," are put into parallel not by any semantic or syntactic machinery, but by their employment as rhyme, which pairs them artificially for ironic purposes. A smile evoked by Castlereagh's Congress System would indeed be vile.

The rhyme of "notion" with "motion" in the couplet has another sort of effect. Although both words are abstract nouns, their rhyme is more noticeable than that of "phrase" and "praise" above. The difference is mainly that inherent between feminine and masculine rhyme. In English the former is almost always more marked. This type of rhyme cannot by any means be called Augustan, because the eighteenth-century classical poets in England avoided it as much as possible.<sup>49</sup> However, like the witty Augustan clash of "vile" and "smile," this polysyllabic matching is self-reflexive, calling attention to itself above and beyond the signified meaning toward which it points.

The last-quoted stanza registers both its rhythm and its rhyme as important features in the mind of the reader. Many others in *Don Juan* register only rhyme as a formal device. René Wellek and Austin Warren, in their influential *Theory of Literature*, define three functions of rhyme: its "mere euphonious function," its "metrical function" and its function in the "meaning" of a poem.<sup>50</sup> The latter, which is more-or-less what I have discussed as Augustan usage, is for them the most important. Their attitude to the former is very like Andrew Marvell's when he sneers at "tinkling rhyme" in his defence of *Paradise Lost*;<sup>51</sup> the rhymes of the Romantic stanza quoted earlier perform this function most melodiously. Wellek's and Warren's middle function of rhyme is the one which is of most interest here. The "metrical function" they describe as

"signalling the conclusion of a line of verse, or as the organizer, sometimes the sole organizer, of stanzaic patterns."<sup>52</sup> In Byron's *ottava rima*, almost to the same extent as in that of the Italians, rhyme is what holds the stanza together. Of course, from one point of view, the rhyme pattern *is* the stanza: the metrical line of *ottava rima* in both English and Italian is the commonplace heroic line of the language. When the reader becomes aware of a distinctive poetic form while reading *Don Juan*, rhyme is almost always the device that gives her the cue. If the virtuoso wants to manipulate his audience into awareness of his technical skill without interrupting the passage with a digression, he will usually stylize and elaborate the rhyme. "Byron," suggests Karl Kroeber, "identifies his stanzaic form with his own personality. The presence of the *ottava rima* recalls him even in passages of objective narration."<sup>53</sup> This is true only up to a point; Byron can turn even *ottava rima* into transparent narrative at times. But in a moment he can make it opaque again with a surprise rhyme which instantly recalls the reader's attention to the stanza. This subtle foregrounding of the artifact *as artifact* by means of structural elaboration, not overt rhetoric, is perhaps the most microscopic and fundamental manifestation of Romantic irony in this poem.

For the reader then, the metrical function of rhyme is a variable. It can be backgrounded by fast-moving stanzas of transparent narration—reduced to a visual phenomenon at the edge of consciousness—or it can, by taking extremely unusual or unexpected shape, step into the foreground, pushing the story into a peripheral part of her attention. Degrees of backgrounding and foregrounding will depend partly on textual factors and partly on the reader's mental set and level of concentration at a given moment. My reader is not perfect, but she is relatively attentive and she has a fairly open *gestalt*. Nevertheless, many rhymes

in a poem as long as *Don Juan* pass her by as unremarkable. She is not—usually—to be judged a bad reader for this. The poem contains many conventional rhymes: rhymes so common in English poetry that they are prosodic clichés. “Wild . . . child” is an example mentioned by West;<sup>54</sup> it can be found in *Don Juan* (VIII, 92), along with “heart . . . part” (XII, 22) and “tears . . . fears” (IV, 43), which are Wellek’s and Warren’s examples.<sup>55</sup> Another category which includes most of these is what Wimsatt calls “tame rhymes.” In these, “the same parts of speech are used in closely parallel function.”<sup>56</sup> Nouns are the most common rhyme words; if both in a pair are concrete, say, as well as both being plural, then the rhyme’s effect is reduced:

to watch the skiffs  
Which pass’d, or catch the first glimpse of the cliffs. (X, 64)

The same rule applies to verbs, the next most common parts of speech used for rhyme. If they are not only in the same tense and mood, but also signify the same sort of action, their influence is small:

still she gazed and grasp’d,  
And ran, but it escaped her as she clasp’d. (IV, 32)

The reader does not exactly start with surprise at any of these. They are used mostly as fillers, something for which a poet may be forgiven in a lengthy poem written in a language rather resistant to rhyme. An eight-line stanza may be made to sparkle by just one or two good rhymes. On the other hand, conventional and tame rhymes can be put to use. A stanza composed entirely with these is well suited to transparent narration, especially when the story is particularly eventful and the narrator is allowing the reader to be

caught up in it, drawing her attention for the moment away from himself and his technique. This is the upbeat of the poem's pulsation in and out of self-reflexiveness:

The door flew wide, not swiftly—but, as fly  
 The sea-gulls, with a steady, sober flight—  
 And then swung back; nor close—but stood awry,  
 Half letting in long shadows on the light,  
 Which still in Juan's candlesticks burned high,  
 For he had two, both tolerably bright,  
 And in the door-way, darkening Darkness, stood  
 The sable Friar in his solemn hood. (XVI, 117)

Rich rhymes (rhyming of identical phonemes<sup>57</sup>) and imperfect rhymes can be used in this kind of context to similar effect. The end syllables will pass muster—just—but not so well as to call attention to themselves. Byron often places imperfect rhymes in one or both of the last two lines of the sestet. By this time the alternating pattern has been established for the reader and she is less likely to notice inadequacies:

Her eyelashes, though dark as night, were tinged  
 (It is the country's custom), but in vain;  
 For those large black eyes were so blackly fringed,  
 The glossy rebels mock'd the jetty stain,  
 And in their native beauty stood avenged:  
 Her nails were touch'd with henna; but again  
 The power of art was turn'd to nothing, for  
 They could not look more rosy than before. (III, 75)

The imperfect rhyme, "avenged," in line 5, keeps the stanza intact, but only just, so that neither the cleverness of its clinching nor the bathos of its contradiction registers in the reader's consciousness. "For . . . before" in the couplet is a rich rhyme, whose effect would be anticlimactic were it not highlighted and bolstered by the additional rhyme with "more" in the middle of

the last line.

But imperfect rhyme can be—and very frequently in this poem, is—used for quite the opposite effect. In the following stanza, the reader must make the last two syllables of the word “vocabulary” rhyme with “merry.” She is forced to wrench and distort the pronunciation of the longer word in a way that wryly imitates what the narrator claims to be doing with his diction:

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. (IV, 5)

The comic effect at once calls attention to itself, to the poet's “vocabulary,” to the difficulty of finding rhyming words within this, to the bad rhyme with “merry,” etc.

This disyllabic rhyme brings me to another important point. Feminine rhymes between English words are much rarer than masculine ones and are hence much more difficult to discover and use plausibly. Without any of the authorial prompting evident in the stanza above, the reader, coming upon even a perfect and conventional feminine or multiple rhyme, has a greater sense of the difficulty of the achievement than she does with most masculine rhymes. Both of the following two stanzas, for example, perform the function of signing off with authorial farewells toward the end of a canto, and yet the second is far more self-reflexive:



He paused—and so will I; as doth a crew  
 Before they give their broadside. By and bye,  
 My gentle countrymen, we will renew  
 Our old acquaintance: and at least I'll try  
 To tell you truths *you* will not take as true,  
 Because they are so:—a male Mrs. Fry,  
 With a soft besom will I sweep your halls,  
 And brush a web or two from off the walls. (X, 84)

And here I leave them at their preparation  
 For the Imperial presence, wherein whether  
 Gulbeyaz shewed them both commiseration,  
 Or got rid of the parties altogether,  
 Like other angry ladies of her nation,—  
 Are things the turning of a hair or feather  
 May settle; but far be't from me to anticipate  
 In what way feminine Caprice may dissipate. (VI, 119)

Both stanzas demonstrate the use of the first-person pronoun—an “I” who actually takes the role of composer of these lines and who speaks directly in an aside to the reader. Both exhibit the “talking” effect achieved by the single sentence compounded with parentheses, and also by the use of mid-line pauses, enjambment and frequent rises and changes of pitch. For example, my reader reads the pronoun “me” in line 7 of the second stanza on as high a note and with as much emphasis as she does the italicized “*you*” in line 5 of the first.

But the first stanza, at least until the couplet, where the close proximity of the rhyme “halls . . . walls” gives a certain emphasis, requires visual scrutiny for full apprehension of its structure, whereas the second would establish itself quite clearly for a listener in a purely auditory rendering, because the rhymes, being polysyllabic, are that much more elaborate. “Feminine Caprice” is essentially self-reflexive. The rhymes in this second stanza are not at all surprising or unconventional; some of them, such as “anticipate . . . dissipate,” are, in fact, tame rhymes<sup>58</sup> (except that the term does not seem as appropriate

when more than one syllable is involved). A sense of stylization and ornateness accompanies English feminine rhyme, irrespective of diction and context. According to West, over three-quarters of the couplet rhymes of *Don Juan* are feminine;<sup>59</sup> clearly a high proportion of the sestet rhymes are as well. This is a remarkable achievement in the English language and must be considered one of the poem's most important characteristics. Certainly it accounts in a large part for the way in which the stanza registers itself continually as a conscious factor for the reader, above and beyond the way stanzaic poetry usually asserts itself.

Multiple rhymes are often regarded as essentially comic in English usage.<sup>60</sup> This is not quite accurate; *Hudibras* contains many, but Pope, a far greater master of the comic mood than Butler, hardly uses them. They can be employed for superbly serious effect, as they are by Wordsworth in the well-known lines from his "Ode":

And by the vision splendid  
Is on his way attended.<sup>61</sup>

But Byron, significantly, almost never uses them in serious contexts in *Don Juan*.<sup>62</sup> A few, of course, are to be found, but they are usually tame and conventional. A couplet like the following among the serious and elegiac stanzas that describe the love of Juan and Haidée must be searched for by the critic; it does not strike the reader as memorable or characteristic:

And knew such brightness was but the reflection  
Of their exchanging glances of affection. (IV, 13)

Likewise, among those stanzas that ring with the sincerity of *saeva indignatio*, this sort of thing is surprisingly rare:

Read your own hearts and Ireland's present story,  
Then feed her famine fat with Wellesley's glory. (VIII, 125)

Byron's sense of poetic decorum, despite the apparent rattling irresponsibility of this poem, is a powerful and consistent force for order.

When the reader is unsure, in the narrator's maze of ironies, whether to take him seriously or not, her most immediate clue lies in the rhyme. No feminine rhyme occurs at all in the sixteen stanzas of the Greek poet's stirring hymn, "The Isles of Greece,"<sup>63</sup> though the poet himself is pilloried before and after in masses of multiple rhymes. Poets and poetry are the objects of Byron's satire here, not the revolutionary call to arms and liberty that the song contains. Stanzas with no feminine rhymes occur in significant places in *Don Juan*, for example, a whole block describing the death of the old Khan of Ismail (VIII, 115-20); some on George Washington and Daniel Boone (VIII, 5, 63); on Juan's and Haidée's doomed but ideal love (II, 184-91); on Haidée's tragic death (IV, 55-63, 69-72); on Aurora Raby (XV, 45-47); the "Ave Maria" passage at the conclusion of Canto III (105-09); a section on Norman Abbey (XIII, 59-61); certain stanzas on death (IX, 11-12; V, 36, 39); and a few on the transience of youth and love and life's inexplicability (IV, 15-17; V, 98; IX, 19; XIV, 94; XV, 19). In these places, the subject is serious, the narrator for the moment sincere and the beauty of the verse, if it is noticeable at all, is of a sparer and less irrelevantly ornate kind than is normal in *Don Juan*. When the narrator claims:

I wish men to be free  
As much from mobs as kings—from you as me (IX, 25),

the reader is sure that he is not pulling her leg, and this is not merely

because she knows Byron's biography or is sensitive to the tone of emphatic repetition here; it is also because the rhyme is masculine.

Many of the narrative stanzas use masculine rhymes too, for reasons which I have already indicated. But only the wholly narrative stanzas, which are relatively rare, use masculine rhymes throughout. In those which follow what I have called Ariosto's pattern, the following type of rhyme scheme is very common:

The shore look'd wild, without a trace of man,  
 And girt by formidable waves; but they  
 Were mad for land, and thus their course they ran,  
 Though right ahead the roaring breakers lay:  
 A reef between them also now began  
 To show its boiling surf and bounding spray,  
 But finding no place for their landing better,  
 They ran the boat for shore, and upset her. (II, 104)

The couplet's rueful irony is almost completely dependent on its rhyme—a rhyme which is feminine, broken, imperfect and surprising after a sestet which follows a conventional masculine pattern. The question, "Will he bring it off?" closely followed by the answer, "Yes; but only just," is the mental set of the audience of a virtuoso, or an acrobat. This slight tension in the reader is what the Romantic ironist strives for; it is what reminds the reader, even in the midst of story-centred narration, of the presence of a narrator, juggling with words. The label, "transparent narration," which I have used for stanzas with wholly masculine rhyme-schemes, does not quite fit the stanza above, though the verse's self-reflexiveness is subtle, being covertly embedded in a slight exaggeration and imperfection of form rather than overtly announced, as in many other stanzas, by the strident use of the narrative "I."

Multiple rhymes, like masculine ones, exhibit degrees of self-reflexiveness,

from the more tame and conventional to the startling and unorthodox. The most self-reflexive are usually broken rhymes: rhymes made up of more than one word or of fragments of words.<sup>64</sup> West writes:

"Wild" and "child" rhyming together merely create a framework; and to our awareness of the similarity we add little care for the conjoined ideas. But if "Adorer" elicits "there before her," our sense of a framework is flooded with a sense of something on the level of thought.<sup>65</sup>

These rhymes do not give the reader the sense of being already "there" in the language, but of being specially manufactured for the occasion. They are not to be found in the rhyming dictionary; nor can the most astonishing ever be used twice, so well do they establish themselves in the reader's memory. The most famous of Byron's comic broken rhymes is probably the following:

But—Oh! ye lords of ladies intellectual,  
Inform us truly, have they not hen-pecked you all? (I, 22)

However, many others are equally clever, for example:

Through needles' eyes it easier for the camel is  
To pass, than those two cantos into families (IV, 97);

There's not a sea the passenger e'er pukes in,  
Turns up more dangerous breakers than the Euxine. (V, 5)

These are extreme examples of a tendency within rhyme to enforce connections between concepts which may not be logical but which are at least as persuasive as logic.<sup>66</sup> The kind of parallelism evident in the rhyme "intellectual . . . hen-pecked you all" is the soul of conversational wit: it makes the epigrammatic utterance whose formal fitting together will not allow it to be

gainsaid, unless capped by another, even wittier saying.<sup>67</sup> Playing with his reader, Byron attempts to throw her off the scent at times by claiming for rhyme the euphonic function alone:

Besides Platonic love, besides the love  
 Of God, the love of Sentiment, the loving  
 Of faithful pairs—(I needs must rhyme with dove,  
 That good old steamboat which keeps verses moving  
 'Gainst Reason—Reason ne'er was hand-and-glove  
 With rhyme, but always leant less to improving  
 The sound than sense)—besides all these pretences  
 To Love, there are those things which Words name Senses. (IX, 74)

Rhyme does not need the aid of Reason; it can be on its own a more effective rhetorical device. Also, "improving / The sound" is not a thing this cynical virtuoso needs any help with. However he may protest incompetence, his reader knows that he is lying. Having pulled out all the stops on his instrument with a masterful agility which is quite unprecedented in the language, he is not expecting to be credited with truth when he claims that he "needs must rhyme with dove." What he is expecting is to make his audience aware of the sheer difficulty of his form, to show her that the sense of effortlessness is the result of extraordinary effort and that the transparent narrative itself is an illusion achieved by mastery of a style. About *Don Juan*, Virginia Woolf has truthfully written: "It doesn't seem an easy example to follow; and indeed like all free and easy things, only the skilled and mature really bring them off successfully."<sup>68</sup>

## NOTES TO CHAPTER II

<sup>1</sup>Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1980) 34.

<sup>2</sup>Roland Barthes, *S/Z* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1970) 27. I translate: "*un fading immense, qui assure à la fois le chevauchement et la perte des messages.*"

<sup>3</sup>For Hegel, see chapter I, note 5. Barthes, in "From Work to Text," compares reading with an activity of "playing the Text in the musical sense of the term." He goes on to claim that the "history of music (as a practice, not as an 'art') does indeed parallel that of the Text fairly closely." *Image-Music-Text* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977) 162.

<sup>4</sup>This is a phrase of Coleridge's from *Biographia Literaria*, where he associates the sense of sight with dead materialism. Throughout his writings, Coleridge expresses an uneasiness with "this strong sensuous influence," which makes human beings "restless because invisible things are not the objects of vision." *The Complete Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* III (New York: Harper, 1884) 226.

<sup>5</sup>W. K. Wimsatt, Jr. and Monroe C. Beardsley, "The Concept of Meter: An Exercise in Abstraction," *PMLA* LXXIV, 1 (1959): 584.

<sup>6</sup>See Barthes, "From Work to Text": "In fact, *reading*, in the sense of consuming, is far from *playing* with the text" (162).

<sup>7</sup>Barthes, "From Work to Text" 162.

<sup>8</sup>The recognition that some works of criticism are not only works of the imagination but also works of fiction is not new. Graham Hough, for example, in *An Essay on Criticism* (New York: Norton, 1966), claims that Northrop Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism* "is itself poetry, one of the cases, not very common, where what sets out to be criticism turns into imaginative literature in its own right" (154).

<sup>9</sup>This term, coined by Seymour Chatman in *Story and Discourse* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1978) as a counterpart to Booth's "implied author" (see next note), signifies the self one becomes when one "enter[s] the fictional contract"—a self which is not one's normal identity, but a fiction generated by the text (150–51).

<sup>10</sup>Wayne Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1983) 70–71. The "implied author" is the "official version" of the author, traces of whom, as distinct from both the "so-called real author" and the narrator, are to be found in his books. See chapter VI for a discussion of the relationship between these three subjects in *Don Juan*.

<sup>11</sup>Barbara Herrnstein Smith, *Poetic Closure* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1968) 55.

<sup>12</sup>Reuven Tsur, in *A Perception-Oriented Theory of Metre* (Tel Aviv: Tel

Aviv UP, 1977), claims that in the case of "metrically complex" lines, "one must *explicitly state* in what specific performance a deviant line is perceived as sufficiently structured." Realizing that metre is dependent on "delivery style," which may vary from a totally prosaic or "divergent" reading to a highly metrical or "convergent" reading, Tsur is unfortunately handicapped by a vagueness contingent on the multiplicity of readings—and hence, scansion— that his system will tolerate (122). However, his perception that metre is (at least, partly) a measure of performance rather than of some abstract rule make this a valuable book.

René Wellek and Austin Warren in *Theory of Literature* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1949) avoid problems of multiplicity by distinguishing "between performance and pattern of sound." Performance, which they interpret as the "reading aloud of a literary work of art" and presumably separate from the audience, they claim to be the "realization of a pattern which adds something individual and personal and, on the other hand, may distort or even entirely ignore the pattern." They conclude that "a real science of rhythmic and metrics cannot be based on the study of individual recitals" (159). Of course, these authors, like Wimsatt and Beardsley (see note 5), believe in the singular, objective existence of the text, independent of the reading mind which must bring it into being. Similar epistemologies are indicated by Roger Fowler, who writes at length about "the inadequacy of a purely phonetic approach for making critical statements about poetic form" ("Prose Rhythm' and Metre," *Essays on Style and Language* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966) 83); by C. S. Lewis, who, with a similarly mechanical view of "phonetics," claims that "when we ask how a line scans we cannot be asking simply for the phonetic facts which occur when it is pronounced" ("Metre," *Review of English Literature* I, i (1960): 45); by Seymour Chatman, who writes that "variations [in delivery styles] imply norms" ("Comparing Metrical Styles," *Style in Language*, ed. Thomas A. Sebeok (Cambridge: M.I.T. P, 1964) 149) and is recorded as asserting that "the meter of a poem must be considered one thing and the performance another" ("Comments to Part Five," Sebeok 200).

<sup>13</sup>Hamlet I, ii, l.129.

<sup>14</sup>Tsur 122.

<sup>15</sup>"Lexical words are nouns, adjectives and some adverbs." Tsur 22. I.e., they are the important semantic elements of a sentence.

<sup>16</sup>Paul West, *Byron and the Spoiler's Art* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1960) 27.

<sup>17</sup>Anne K. Mellor, *English Romantic Irony* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1980) 61; Jerome J. McGann, *Don Juan in Context* (Chicago: Chicago UP, 1976) 96-97.

<sup>18</sup>According to Donald Wesling in *The Chances of Rhyme* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1980), the couplet is "the most memorable rhyme form, because of its maximal closure and its more regular arrangement of words as units of unequal length" (77). See also chapter I note 12.

On the subject of prosodic memorability as it is governed by perception,



Tsur (122-23) quotes Leonard B. Meyer in *Emotion and Meaning in Music* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1956) 86-91, who in turn quotes from Koffka's *Principles of Gestalt Psychology* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1935) 110. The *gestalt* law that they invoke is the "law of Prägnanz," which states that "psychological organization will always be as 'good' as the prevailing conditions allow." "Good" is described in terms of "regularity, symmetry, simplicity and others." According to this law, the mind tends to distort shapes in the direction of completeness, stability, regularity and simplicity. Tsur claims that "the law of Prägnanz governs both memory and expectation." Meyer is more expansive: this law, he says, "functions within the memory process, which tends to complete what was incomplete, to regularize what was irregular, and so forth. Moreover, those shapes which are not well figured and which memory is unable to 'straighten out,' complete, or make symmetrical, will tend to be forgotten."

<sup>19</sup>For further discussion of this duality, see chapter IV.

The sestet-couplet dichotomy bears a relationship to the narrative-digression+commentary dichotomy, which is both synecdochic and metaphoric. The part represents the whole and also resembles it. Here, as throughout this dissertation, I challenge the binary dualism between metaphor and metonymy proposed by Roman Jakobson in "Two Aspects of Language and Two Types of Aphasic Disturbances," *Fundamentals of Language* (The Hague: Mouton, 1980) 90-96, and developed (but not sustained) by David Lodge in *The Modes of Modern Writing* (London: Edward Arnold, 1977) 81. If synecdoche is a type of metonymy (Jakobson 92) or is "closely associated with metonymy" (Lodge 75), it must nevertheless overlap with or be intimately related to metaphor as well. Both metaphor and metonymy are probably better seen as areas of concentration on a continuum than as mutually exclusive closed sets. In chapter III, I characterize symbol both as a synecdochic trope in which an image is presented as part of some more cosmic whole, and as a type of metaphor in which the tenor is omitted, or is suggested in a particularly vague and numinous manner. (A symbol may, of course, be represented by a simile-synecdoche, though its status in the discourse is then usually more tentative or experimental than when it is signified by a metaphor-synecdoche.)

Lodge mysteriously agrees with me on the subject of symbol, calling it at one point "a kind of metaphorical metonymy" (100). At another he distinguishes two different classes of symbol: the "metaphorical" and the "metonymic" (114).

<sup>20</sup>See M. K. Joseph, *Byron the Poet* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1964) 198. Also, chapter IV of this dissertation.

<sup>21</sup>Barthes claims that "the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author" (148). The "Author," who is merely the result of a transcendental belief which suits critics because it allows them the possibility of "explain[ing]" the text (147), is actually "conceived of as the past of his own book . . . . [He] is thought to *nourish* the book, which is to say that he exists before it, suffers, lives for it, is in the same relation to his work as a father to his child" (145). *Don Juan's* author-narrator is conceived of as the *present* of his own book and is hence very problematic if the reader, following Barthes's instructions, tries to read the poem "in such a way that at all levels the author is absent" (145). "The Death of the Author," *Image-Music-Text*.

<sup>22</sup>Peter Conrad, *Shandyism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1978) 49.

<sup>23</sup>See chapter I.

<sup>24</sup>Occasionally, in the introductory stanzas of cantos, Ariosto also turns the canto upside-down, beginning with reflection or invocation and concluding with narrative. However, the process seldom exhibits a sudden change of tone in the couplet; it usually moves gradually from the narrator's comments through the reader's perceptions to a somewhat generalized narrative statement. The following stanza, for example, begins with a rhetorical question: what cannot Love do, if he can make the the great Orlando a traitor? (ll.1-4). This is, of course, an aside between narrator and reader. Then the reader is reminded (factually, but retrospectively) of what Orlando once was: wise, defender of the Church, etc. (ll.5-6). Finally, in a completion of this same sentence, the reader is told—narratively—in the couplet, of Orlando's present neglect of himself, his king and his God:

Che non può far d'un cor ch'abbia soggetto  
questo crudele e taditore Amore,  
poi ch'ad Orlando può levar del petto  
la tanta fé che debbe al suo signore?  
Già savio e piena fu d'ogni rispetto,  
e de la santa Chiesa difensore:  
or per un vano amor, poco del zio  
o di sé poco, e men cura di Dio.

*Orlando furioso* IX, i (Milano: Riccardo Ricciardi, 1954) 172.

<sup>25</sup>George M. Ridenour, *The Style of Don Juan* (USA: Yale UP, 1969) 125-26.

<sup>26</sup>In *The Rhythms of English Poetry* (London: Longman, 1982), Derek Attridge argues that one of the distinguishing features of the five-beat line is that it is easily run on 132-38. Joseph Malof, in *A Manual of English Meters* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1970), claims that "most lines of more than three stresses tend to *break* into sections, usually two" (10).

<sup>27</sup>According to Noam Chomsky and Morris Halle in their seminal work on linguistics, *The Sound Pattern of English* (New York: Harper and Row, 1968), the "Alternating Stress Rule," which demands that every second syllable be stressed, is one of the fundamental rules of English pronunciation (77-79).

<sup>28</sup>This stanza is all of a piece until the last line, which is somewhat separate from the preceding seven. I have found very few stanzas of this type in *Don Juan*—and, indeed, in *ottava rima* anywhere—because the two lines of the couplet have such a strong affinity for each other and such an antipathy for the alternating structures which precede them. However, W. H. Auden gives significant place to this variation of the octave. He writes: "The stanza divides

by rhyme into a group of six lines followed by a coda of two; the poet can either observe this division and use the couplet as an epigrammatic comment on the first part, or he can take seven lines for his theme and use the final one as a punch line." "Don Juan," *The Dyer's Hand and Other Essays* (New York: Random House, 1962) 399.

<sup>29</sup>See Wellek and Warren 165; Fowler 82.

<sup>30</sup>See John Jump, *Byron* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972) 97; Mellor 61; West 62; Alvin Kernan, *The Plot of Satire* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1965) 179; McGann, *Don Juan in Context* 96.

<sup>31</sup>According to Paul Fussell in *Poetic Meter and Poetic Form* (New York: Random House, 1979), "In the first position trochaic substitution is extremely common—indeed, this one variation is the most common in all English poetry" (49). On the other hand, he claims that trisyllabic substitution is the mark of "rejection of strict accentual-syllabism in favour of accentualism" and that it is the "great phenomenon in nineteenth-century English versification": a rebellion against the stricter metres of the preceding century (71).

<sup>32</sup>Malof uses the term "ionic" (36, 69).

<sup>33</sup>See Fussell 44.

<sup>34</sup>Attridge 186. He does not use the term "ionic," but examines the phenomenon in some detail as an example of "pairing" (175-86).

<sup>35</sup>See Attridge 168.

<sup>36</sup>William Wordsworth, "Tintern Abbey" l.191, *Poetical Works* (London: Oxford UP, 1971) 164.

<sup>37</sup>Tsur, in response to a claim by Wimsatt and Beardsley that *only* in an ionic foot may consecutive stresses occur, cites a great quantity of linguistic evidence for the existence of the spondee (132-41). He concludes that "there seems to be no reason why two or three or four heavy stresses, articulated exactly in the same way, shouldn't follow one another." Important conditions "for the listener to *infer*" a spondaic metrical pattern are "slow tempo and careful articulation" on the part of the performer (135). These conditions, by reducing the unit of speech to one syllable, put Chomsky's "Alternating Stress Rule" out of action.

<sup>38</sup>West 63. McGann claims, similarly, that "Byron's use of series [is] one of the poem's staple devices." *Don Juan in Context* 95.

<sup>39</sup>See Truman Guy Steffan, *Byron's Don Juan I: The Making of a Masterpiece* (Austin: U of Texas P, 1957) 63-99. Also, my discussion of Byron's accumulative tendency in chapter IV.

<sup>40</sup>*The Letters of W. B. Yeats* (London: Rupert Hart Davis, 1954) 710.

Ronald Bottrall in "Byron and the Colloquial Tradition in English Poetry" also claims that the "amazing variety of tone and tremendous rhythmic energy of *Don Juan* come from Byron's complete understanding of the spoken language." *English Romantic Poets*, ed. M. H. Abrams (London: Oxford UP, 1971) 221.

<sup>41</sup>W. K. Wimsatt in "One Relation of Rhyme to Reason," claims that "the greater the difference in meaning between rhyme words the more marked and the more appropriate will be the binding effect." *The Verbal Icon* (Kentucky: U of Kentucky P, 1954) 164.

<sup>42</sup>Malof 194. Actually, the last syllable of "Banishment" is not, in comparison with its immediate predecessor, an unstress. On the Trager-Smith scale, "ment" would be classed as a "tertiary" stress, "ish" as "weak" and "Ban," "primary." George L. Trager and Henry Lee Smith, Jr., *An Outline of English Structure* (Washington: American Council of Learned Societies, 1966) 35-39.

<sup>43</sup>Trager and Smith (35-39) claim four levels of stress in English pronunciation. However, this has been disputed, for example, by Wimsatt, who claimed (in oral debate) that "in English there is a kind of continuum of stresses." Sebeok, "Comments to Part Five" 204.

<sup>44</sup>Thomas Moore writes in his journal on October 27, 1820: "Wordsworth came at half-past eight, and stopped to breakfast. Talked a good deal. Spoke of Byron's plagiarisms from him; the whole third canto of 'Childe Harold' founded on his style and sentiments. The feeling of natural objects which is there expressed, not caught by B. from nature herself, but from him (Wordsworth), and spoiled in the transmission. 'Tintern Abbey' the source of it all; from which same poem too the celebrated passage about Solitude, in the first canto of 'Childe Harold', is (he said) taken, with this difference, that what is naturally expressed by him, has been worked by Byron into a laboured and antithetical sort of declamation." *The Journal of Thomas Moore* (London: Batsford, 1964) 53-54.

<sup>45</sup>The three anapaests I have scanned in lines 1, 3 and 5 could all be reduced to iambs by a pronunciation with a marked "y-glide": "immemor-*yal*," "Adr-*yan*," "Cesar-*yan*." In my reader's rendering they are a little more distinct than diphthong vowels. In line 2, I have scanned an ionic in the first position, which, as mentioned previously, is a respectable double substitution. The initial trochee, which I mark in lines 4, 6 and 8, is perhaps the most "acceptable" substitution of all. (See Wimsatt in Sebeok, "Comments to Part Five" 206.)

<sup>46</sup>Ridenour offers a fine stylistic analysis of *Don Juan*'s Dedication in the first chapter of *The Style of Don Juan* (1-18), in which he claims that some of these stanzas are in the heroic style of Juvenal. This claim is supported by McGann (*Don Juan in Context* 68-99) and by Mellor (63).

<sup>47</sup>Tsur 122.

<sup>48</sup>*King Lear* I, ii, ll.15-22.

<sup>49</sup>George Saintsbury, in *A History of English Prosody* II (New York: Russell and Russell, 1961), claims that in the heroic couplet "not to make too great a breach, too great a rupture of smoothness, between the lines, the rhymes are chosen with as little echo and depth in them as possible: and even the words within the lines themselves avoid thunderous and longdrawn sound" (282).

<sup>50</sup>Wellek and Warren 161.

<sup>51</sup>Andrew Marvell, "On Paradise Lost," *Milton: Poetical Works* (London: Oxford UP, 1973) 210.

<sup>52</sup>Wellek and Warren 161.

<sup>53</sup>Karl Kroeber, *Romantic Narrative Art* (Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1960) 147.

<sup>54</sup>West 60.

<sup>55</sup>Wellek and Warren 162.

<sup>56</sup>Wimsatt, "One Relation of Rhyme to Reason" 160.

<sup>57</sup>Malof 193.

<sup>58</sup>"Anticipate . . . dissipate" is actually a rich rhyme as well as a tame rhyme.

<sup>59</sup>West 68.

<sup>60</sup>Jump claims that "our comic poetry seems to accommodate multiple rhymes more readily than does our serious poetry" (99). See also Saintsbury III, 100.

<sup>61</sup>Wordsworth, "Ode," *Poetical Works* 460. The rhyme "splendid . . . attended" is slightly imperfect in most pronunciations.

<sup>62</sup>Jump notes this (131).

<sup>63</sup>Canto III, between octaves 86 and 87.

<sup>64</sup>Malof 195. Byron's most spectacularly unconventional rhyme is "broken" in another way:

She cannot step as does an Arab barb,  
 Or Andalusian girl from mass returning,  
 Nor wear as gracefully as Gauls her garb,  
 Nor in her eye Ausonia's glance is burning;  
 Her voice, though sweet, is not so fit to warb-  
 le those bravuras (which I still am learning  
 To like, though I have been seven years in Italy,  
 And have, or had, an ear that served me prettily). (XII, 75)

This fragmenting of "warble" marks one of the rare occasions in *Don Juan* when a line begins half-way through a word. Another example of this occurs at I, 120, where "henceforward" is broken into its components by a line-ending. This example is much less startling for the reader because both elements, "hence" and "forward," are normally complete words.

<sup>65</sup>West 60. His example ("Adorer . . . there before her") is from *Beppo* lxxxvii, *The Poetical Works of Lord Byron* (London: Oxford UP, 1926) 623.

<sup>66</sup>Wesling calls rhyme "the boldest form of rhetoric" (5) and he wonders whether rhyming words might "be related, somehow, in convergent meaning as well as similar sound" (39).

<sup>67</sup>A good example of this kind of wit is quoted by Byron in a footnote to the eleventh stanza of *Don Juan's* Dedication. Challenged to find a rhyming riposte to:

I, John Sylvester,  
 Lay with your Sister,

Ben Jonson answered: "I, Ben Jonson, lay with your wife." When Sylvester protested that that was not *rhyme*, Jonson answered: "No; but it is *true*." *Poetical Works* 894.

<sup>68</sup>Virginia Woolf, *A Writer's Diary* (London: Hogarth, 1959) 4.

## CHAPTER III

### SIMILE

Metre, rhyme and stanza are not the only devices in *Don Juan* which achieve a pulsation between transparent and opaque modes of discourse. Many other stylistic and rhetorical strategies foreground and background the text and its subject-matter, the narrator and the protagonist, the reader and the story. Even such mechanical tools as punctuation can assist in highlighting certain self-conscious effects, as, for example, when brackets are used instead of a more casual pair of parenthetical commas: "Below his window waved (of course) a willow" (XVI, 15). More semantic contrivances, like the second line of the following couplet, refer denotatively to some sensorily apprehended aspect of the text, making it opaque thus: "Bombs, drums, guns, bastions, batteries, bayonets, bullets; / Hard words, which stick in the soft Muses' gullets" (VII, 78).

Somewhere in between the structural or mechanical extreme and the rhetorical or semantic limit, occur the literary tropes, whose definition depends on both their structure and their reference. If the tropes used in a literary text are commonplace, like commonplace rhymes they do not affect the text's transparency. Commonplace tropes, for example the so-called "dead metaphor," eventually lose their concrete quality and join the ranks of atmospheric

abstractions: vague words which tend by convention to be associated with certain ideas or moods. The following is not quite a dead metaphor, but it is a simile which uses a highly conventional image—an image which calls very little attention to itself aside from the human figure in the story which it is employed to illustrate: “And, like a wither’d lily, on the land / His slender frame and pallid aspect lay” (II, 110). However, if a trope is highly unusual, it gives the reader a slight pause and draws her attention to the image (the vehicle), rather than to the thing or concept it illuminates (the tenor); thus it serves as a self-reflexive device.<sup>1</sup> When the narrator envisages the London mail-coaches as “fast flying off like a delusion” (XI, 22), the reader is caught by surprise with “delusion”; it is the artifact of a virtuoso, and she must stop for a moment to admire it. In the following trope, the first vehicle becomes the tenor for a second vehicle: “The gentle Juan flourished, though at times / He felt like other plants called Sensitive, / Which shrink from touch, as monarchs do from rhymes” (X, 37). If the sensitive plants be not enough to startle the reader out of her contemplation of the tenor (Juan), then the sensitive monarchs will surely succeed.

All the tropes quoted in the paragraph above are examples of simile, which is the figure most often foregrounded in *Don Juan*. Simile may occur in miniature, a flash of imagery, sharp or faint, to illustrate some point passed swiftly over, as when the reader is told that the cheeks of certain Greek children are “Crimson as cleft pomegranates” (III, 33), or that Koutousow’s troops “Took like camelions, some slight tinge of fear” (VIII, 73); but it may equally well take on epic proportions and be developed through several stanzas, like the famous bottle of champagne with which Lady Adeline is compared in



Canto XIII (36–41). The shorter similes, like some of Byron's rhymes, have the power to prompt the reader briefly into consciousness of the text; the longer similes are often gateways into realms of speculation on the part of the narrator, trigger-mechanisms that propel him out of absorption in the story into the freer atmosphere of his own discursive world. As an image becomes elaborated and developed, and new images are brought in by association or parallel, so the reader's imagination and memory are lured away from the original tenor of the comparison. But her attention may not always or necessarily be drawn towards the text (reflexively) by this process. She may become absorbed by the images themselves, or by a different world—the narrator's—which bears no obvious relationship to that of the story at this point. Sometimes the return to the story will come as a surprise and hence make the text reflexive, but sometimes there will be no return to the exact jumping-off point in the story, and the excursion will have acted as an excuse for a transition or hiatus in the narrating. Thus, the frozen champagne simile leads to an image of cruising in freezing waters, from there to a more cosmic image of life as a voyage and Time as a pirate with "grey signal-flag," and finally to a metaphysical debate on mortality. The return to the story is not a return to Adeline, but to a transitional resetting of scenery: "The English winter . . . now was done" (XIII, 42).

Several of the major digressions in *Don Juan* begin in this way as similes. For example, in Canto I (122–34), five stanzas are devoted to a series of propositions beginning: "'Tis sweet," followed by one beginning: "But sweeter far . . . is first and passionate love." This comparison of inequality is transformed in its turn by another simile comparing first love with Adam's

remembrance of his Fall, then another, comparing Adam's sin with Prometheus's theft of fire, and then the narrator launches into a meditation of six-and-a-half stanzas on modern scientific discoveries and the strangeness of men and mortality, no longer in the form of simile. When he returns to his story, five months of its time have passed since the sexual encounter between Juan and Julia which generated the initial "first love" comparison. In Canto VI (55-57), the narrator, beginning by telling the reader that Dudù was "kind and gentle as / The Age of Gold," goes on into a stanza and a half of speculation on ages and their appropriate metals. He then spends another six lines apologising and haranguing the reader about his "long parenthesis," before returning to the story. This time, he goes back to where he left the plot and continues narrating, though (because of the parenthesis) the reader finds the story for a while much more opaque than before:

'Tis time we should return to plain narration,  
 And thus my narrative proceeds:—Dudù,  
 With every kindness short of ostentation,  
 Shewed Juan, or Juanna, through and through  
 This labyrinth of females. (VI, 57)

Although the digressions in *Don Juan* vary, they are more frequently reflexive in this way, at their ends, than in their beginnings. The narrator likes to coax his reader by easy stages down the garden path and into the wild wood; only when she is well and truly lost will he suddenly call attention to the geography of the place. Hence, simile is a useful device for him, since by its very nature it intrudes an alien image into the text, which can appear quite innocent and necessary to the story until, by a subtle shifting of emphasis and a small sleight of hand, it replaces the story's landscape with a new and foreign

world.

Simile, as theorists from Aristotle to Ricoeur have noticed, is very closely related to metaphor. However, although simile often takes the form of a metaphor "reduced" or "expanded" (depending on one's prejudices) by the addition of a comparative term, it is not a subclass of metaphor, since some similes are not, and cannot be, "compressed or converted into metaphors."<sup>2</sup> Similes are more explicit, "literal" and discursive than metaphors;<sup>3</sup> also, as Winifred Nowottny claims, they tend to "[suggest] an aspect under which one might temporarily look at a thing or an idea one might toy with but not care fully to assert."<sup>4</sup> The reader easily sees why they suit Byron's purposes in *Don Juan*, for this is a poem which unfolds in the present tense, giving the narrator a time-frame in which he can explain what he is doing while doing it (or just after), create fictions and simultaneously (or subsequently) undermine them, and show the reader the creating process during (or only a little later than) the moment of creation. A simile suggests more of a process than the *fait accompli* presented by most symbols and metaphors. "Where metaphor assumes that the transference is possible or has already taken place," writes Terence Hawkes, "simile *proposes* the transference, and *explains* it by means of terms such as 'like' or 'if.'"<sup>5</sup> This is not to say that Byron avoids the use of metaphor or symbol. The categories of simile, metaphor and symbol all intersect—or are continuous with one another—and he tends to use similes where metaphors would be interchangeable, and to create symbols in the linguistic form of similes. Where another Romantic poet might present a symbol in all its enigmatic mystery and leave it to ferment undissected in a reader's mind, Byron—at least, in *Don Juan*—is more inclined to explain it in terms of a stated analogy.

For example, Coleridge, in "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," invokes the sun in significant and mysterious tones, as if it were the vehicle of a metaphor whose tenor is not immediately given:

All in a hot and copper sky,  
The bloody sun, at noon,  
Right up above the mast did stand,  
No bigger than the moon.<sup>6</sup>

"The bloody sun" is imbued with slightly uncanny qualities and an importance not obviously accounted for by its role in the story. It appears to "stand for" something else, as the vehicle of a metaphor "stands for" its tenor, and indeed it does this, the sense of wonder which surrounds it suggesting that this tenor is greater and more difficult to envisage than the vehicle. Thus the sun image bears a synecdochic relationship as well as a metaphoric relationship to some power, or watchfulness (if one must formulate this), while discursiveness is at a minimum. In *Don Juan*, a similar symbol is made more explicit:

That large black prophet eye seem'd to dilate  
And follow far the disappearing sun,  
As if their last day of a happy date  
With his broad, bright, and dropping orb were gone. (IV, 22)

The fact that the tenor is explicitly suggested ("As if their last day . . . were gone") makes the critic more likely to classify this trope on first examination as a metaphor and, on second examination, after considering the effect of "As if," as a simile. And yet the trope is classifiable as symbol, too, because it does possess some of that numinous quality called by Coleridge "translucence" and because its vehicle exists not in a metaworld but synecdochically, in the same world as the lovers to whom it is symbolically related.<sup>7</sup>

Coleridge tends (in prose) to sneer at "mere *simile*, the work of my own fancy,"<sup>8</sup> and even, on occasion, at metaphor,<sup>9</sup> in the process of his polemical defence of symbol. His conception of symbol as a form of synecdoche, as Paul de Man makes clear, is not borne out by his own, or other Romantics' habitual use of tropes, which is more often analogical than synecdochic.<sup>10</sup> Of the English high Romantics, only Blake in his shorter poems consistently posits a symbol in all its translucent mystery and leaves it at that;<sup>11</sup> the *Symboliste* and symbolist poets of the late nineteenth- and the twentieth century were the writers for whom the trope became really important.<sup>12</sup> The Romantics had a discursive bent which led them all to use similes with frequency, usually for the purpose of elaborating some central symbol or story. Many of these are very familiar: "Like withered leaves to quicken a new birth"; "The City now doth, like a garment, wear / The beauty of the morning"; "As idle as a painted ship / Upon a painted ocean."<sup>13</sup>

However, their most important tendency—which Byron does not share<sup>14</sup>—is not toward either simile or symbol *per se*, but toward a kind of metaphor which makes connections between external and internal worlds, which presents landscapes in terms of spiritual states and spiritual states in terms of natural processes and which intermingles the two by means of deliberate category confusions.<sup>15</sup> Wordsworth demonstrates this in the following extract from *The Prelude*:

Sometimes the ambitious Power of choice, mistaking  
Proud spring-tide swellings for a regular sea,  
Will settle on some British theme, some old  
Romantic tale by Milton left unsung.<sup>16</sup>

Wordsworth's organic interweaving of the sea image with the discourse is rather

different from the method of the following stanza from *Don Juan*, which also deals with the subject of poetic composition:

You know, or don't know, that great Bacon saith,  
 "Fling up a straw, 'twill show which way the wind blows";  
 And such a straw, borne on by human breath,  
 Is Poesy, according as the mind glows;  
 A paper kite, which flies 'twixt life and death,  
 A shadow which the onward Soul behind throws;  
 And mine's a bubble, not blown up for praise,  
 But just to play with, as an infant plays. (XIV, 8)

The narrator of *Don Juan* is an ironist needing a sharper discrimination between things than Wordsworth's type of organicism will allow—at least, most of the time. His penchant is for contrastive parallelism on a highly conscious level, for the finding or forcing of similitudes in an endlessly various universe, and the creation of effects ranging from a sense of monstrous incongruity or hiatus, through the varying surprises of *concordia discors* and *discordia concors* to a heartening though rare perception of the cosmic connectedness of things. Hence, simile is for him a much more fundamental tendency than for most of his contemporaries, since it asserts not identity or interpenetration, but similarity, and similarities can be evanescent and are very various in degree and kind. Simile is an experimental form, one which will allow him to play with possibilities, as he does in the stanza above, in which the game with alternative similes (a "straw," a "paper kite," a "shadow," a "bubble") comes itself under self-reflexive scrutiny in the last line, where the final image of an infant playing is the vehicle of a metaphor for which the tenor is the mode of composition of the stanza—and, by extension, of the whole poem.

This simile, "to play . . . as an infant plays," in which the tenor is the poet's playing and the vehicle is an infant's playing, falls into that section of

simile which overlaps with metaphor or, to quote the *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, can be "compressed or converted into [a metaphor]." In fact, all the images in the stanza exist within this intersection of the two sets. If "such a straw . . . is poesy" be indeed a metaphor and not a simile, it is nonetheless that kind of metaphor, to quote the same source, which "can be expanded into [simile]."<sup>17</sup> Clearly, Wordsworth's metaphor cannot be so easily expanded. The addition of "like" or "as" to his "Proud spring-tide swellings" would be much more complicated because attributions rather than objects are being substituted.

Another aspect of this first trope in Byron's stanza which draws it towards simile and away from metaphor is the specificity of the vehicle. Although what is mentioned is not a particular straw, it is a very special type of straw, the type invoked by Bacon, and no other. The effect of the adjectival addition, "such," to the word "straw" in its second occurrence is rather like that of a demonstrative: *this* straw. It mutes the influence of the indefinite article, "claiming our recognition" and "point[ing]" to the object, characteristics ascribed by G. Rostrevor Hamilton to the definite article.<sup>18</sup> This is worth pursuing in terms of the similes in *Don Juan*. When the narrator tells us that "Strongbow was like a new-tuned harpsichord" (XIII, 93), the two terms of the metaphor-simile exist on totally different levels of generality. "Strongbow," being a proper noun and signifying a minor character in the story, is about as specific as one can get. "A new-tuned harpsichord" signifies not quite *any* harpsichord, thanks to the modifier, but it signifies *any* new-tuned one. "The indefinite article, being singular," writes Hamilton,

announces an individual image (which is so far particular), but

otherwise allows it to retain whatever generality it possesses. A horse is to the imagination any single horse, a roan is any horse of such colour. You can make it more and more particular, but it is still any horse that answers to the description.<sup>19</sup>

Byron's harpsichord is in this sense generic, being taken from a realm of concepts and objects with which the reader, being a user of words and objects with names, is familiar, but which has no context or story of its own. Strongbow, on the other hand, has a specific fictional existence within Juan's world: that is, a highly developed context. Although similitude between the two terms is asserted, commonsense does not give overwhelming assent to it: a harpsichord is not very "like" Strongbow or any other human being at all.<sup>20</sup> The simile is being used wittily to illustrate one very specific characteristic of the man. Its wittiness is contingent on incongruency, surprise and the fact that the tenor and vehicle belong to two quite different semiotic categories. This is the nature of conceit, a figure more common in Renaissance and modern, than in Romantic poetry.

According to Helen Gardner,

A conceit is a comparison whose ingenuity is more striking than its justness, or, at least, is more immediately striking. All comparisons discover likeness in things unlike: a comparison becomes a conceit when we are made to concede likeness while being strongly conscious of unlikeness.<sup>21</sup>

A conceit may take the linguistic form of either simile or metaphor, for it exists in that area of intersection where, with minimal significant change, one may be converted to the other. As Byron's "Strongbow was like a new-tuned harpsichord" can be shortened to "Strongbow was a new-tuned harpsichord" with little alteration, so Donne's "I, like an usurp't town,



to'another due, / Labour to'admit you"<sup>22</sup> can be curtailed to "I, an usurp't town . . . ," with damage done only to the metre. Similarly, Byron's "she was a walking calculation" (I, 16) and Donne's "She'is all States, and all Princes, I,"<sup>23</sup> may be expanded from metaphor to simile.

Byron's use of the conceit is recognized by Ridenour, who claims that the trope is self-reflexive because it is "bright, showy, self-consciously clever."<sup>24</sup> The reader is mildly startled every time she comes across such exhibits as "Juan, like a true-born Andalusian, / Could back a horse, as despots ride a Russian" (XIII, 23); "He hewed away, like doctors of theology" (VIII, 108); "Like a backgammon board the place was dotted / With whites and blacks, in groups on show for sale" (V, 10). The surprise jolts her not only into a sense of the writer's cleverness, but also into a sense of contrariety, a knowledge of a universe in which order and harmony are rare or achieved only with difficulty. This kind of ironic incongruity is used for both scathing satire and hilarious comedy: "that long Spout / Of blood and water, leaden Castlereagh!" (IX, 50); "Indigestion . . . that inward fate / Which makes all Styx through one small liver flow" (IX, 15). Occasionally, a conceit is developed through several lines, using both linguistic forms, metaphor and simile:

Three hundred cannon threw up their emetic,  
And thirty thousand musquets flung their pills,  
Like hail, to make a bloody diuretic.  
Mortality! thou hast thy monthly bills:  
Thy Plagues, thy Famines, thy Physicians, yet tick  
Like the death-watch, within our ears the ills  
Past, present, and to come. (VIII, 12)

However, conceits are seldom developed to the point of irrelevancy and are

almost always short. These jolting little tropes do not, therefore, usually lead to digression. Gardner remarks that in conceit "the poet forces . . . points of likeness upon us"; also that unlike the epic simile, the conceit does not "allow and invite the mind to stray beyond the immediate point of resemblance."<sup>25</sup> The "violence," deplored by Samuel Johnson, with which these "heterogeneous ideas are yoked . . . together,"<sup>26</sup> is essential to the working of a conceit: concord is asserted against odds, appropriateness and analogy declared in the teeth of convention's opposition.

Donald Davidson claims:

The most obvious difference between simile and metaphor is that all similes are true and that most metaphors are false. The earth is like a floor, the Assyrian did come down like a wolf on the fold, because everything is like everything."<sup>27</sup>

Obviously, using the binary value system of pure logic, the truth-value assigned to the simile "Strongbow was like a new-tuned harpsichord" is "true," and that assigned to the metaphor "Strongbow was a new-tuned harpsichord" must be "false" (if the proposition "everything is like everything" is accepted as a premise, about which, according to Ricoeur, there can be some debate).<sup>28</sup> But, as noted, little change is effected in phenomenological terms by the removal of the comparative, and my reader has a strong inclination to assign to the simile, as well as the metaphor, the truth-value "false" (and hence, like Ricoeur, to challenge the premise). For the purposes of a study of the differences between similes, a sliding scale of "truth"—or, perhaps, "ease of assent"—is required, because another kind of simile exists, to which logical assent can much more easily be given. When the reader is told that Juan "shuddered, as no doubt the

bravest cowers / When he can't tell what 'tis that doth appal" (XVI, 120), she has no reason to believe that Juan and "the bravest" are not one and the same; the trope is not a metaphor because its assertion of similitude is not enough of a lie. If metaphor is, as Ricoeur suggests, a "planned category mistake,"<sup>29</sup> then this simile is not a metaphor because it is not a category mistake at all. Juan, the reader knows, belongs to the category "the bravest," with whom he is compared, though of course the apparently trivial distinction drawn here allows a sly ironic twinkle to pass between the two terms.

Similes of this kind are not common among the English Romantics, but they do occur in epic, and also in Chaucer, as W. P. Ker notes.<sup>30</sup> They are most frequent in Dante, for example:

E come quei ch'adopera ed estima,  
che sempre par che 'nnanzi si proveggia,  
così, levando me sù ver' la cima  
d'un ronchione, avisava un'altra scheggia.

And like one who works and reckons,  
always seeming to provide beforehand,  
so, while lifting me upward toward the top  
of one great rock, he was looking out another crag.<sup>31</sup>

Dante's master, Virgil, is not merely "*like* one who works and reckons," he actually *is* one of these. The purpose of this type of simile is, as Ker claims, "[to take] one away from other circumstances and [to concentrate] attention on one aspect particularly desired by the poet";<sup>32</sup> but, more importantly, it serves, like many other types of simile, to give a sense of other parallel worlds. In Dante, the other world evoked is typically the ordinary world of live men and women, against which his great vision is



("Vallombrosa")<sup>35</sup> and to an altogether modern science:

a spot like which perhaps  
Astronomer in the sun's lucent orb  
Through his glazed optic tube yet never saw.<sup>36</sup>

Byron is very given to this kind of scientific allusion:

And though so much inferior, as I know,  
To those who, by the dint of glass and vapour,  
Discover stars, and sail in the wind's eye,  
I wish to do as much by Poesy. (X, 3)

The reader does note in passing, however, a fact which highlights one of Byron's characteristic differences from an epic poet. She observes that this neat little four-line parallel with Milton follows two whole stanzas on Newton which do not appear to have any relevance to the composition of poetry at all, until the narrator suddenly asks himself: "And wherefore this exordium?" The answer to the question is, of course, that "In taking up this paltry sheet of paper," he experienced an exuberance which made him feel kinship with such as Newton; and thus he contrives to tie up what preceded into an epic simile as above. However, no comparative term nor any sense of trope is evident in the earlier stanzas. He is pretending to improvise, and thus he expects an indulgent reader who will forgive his digressiveness and his (apparent) tacking it all together under her eye. This hasty *bricolage* is the opposite of the immovable architectural construction of the epics of Milton, Dante and the ancients.

Nevertheless, Byron learned from them a technique which could be put to more subversive uses. The epic simile is, if not essentially, at least potentially, digressive in nature.<sup>37</sup> Of the epic poets mentioned above, Milton

has come under most critical attack for wandering,<sup>38</sup> because his similes are, as Johnson noted, "more various [ ] than those of his predecessors" and because "he does not confine himself within the limits of rigorous comparison," but "expands the adventitious image beyond the dimensions which the occasion required."<sup>39</sup> Of course, Milton is the closest of the epic poets in both time and culture to Byron and his educated audience; the anxiety of his influence upon Byron as upon all English Romantic—and many other—poets has become a critical commonplace.<sup>40</sup> Perhaps it is inevitable that a deliberately digressive poet should take the potentially digressive devices of his strong Oedipal father as the seed of his own digressive insouciance.<sup>41</sup> Anne Davidson Ferry's illuminating comments on Milton's similes tend to support this view. Analysing Milton's epic in terms of who is narrating at different times and how the style changes with the change of narrator, she remarks:

The similes which we remember from *Paradise Lost*, those which seem to give the poetry its special texture, are all spoken by the narrative voice. They are a distinctive mark of his manner of speaking and of the ways in which his style expresses a vision different from that of his characters. This careful use of similes to distinguish the narrator's style from the speeches of the characters is one of Milton's most elaborate means of transforming the drama of Adam's Fall into a narrative poem whose meaning is expressed in the tone of the speaker.<sup>42</sup>

If simile has been used even by Milton to remind the reader of the presence of the epic speaker, it is no wonder that it is so often used by Byron's narrator as an excuse to move from his story into his own world.

Thus, *Don Juan's* speaker will interrupt himself with a simile in the middle of a long passage of ordinary narrative and thereby change his

mode of discourse altogether. The following stanza is one among several in which the narrator is scarcely visible while the scene is being set for the most romantic passage in the poem:

It was a wild and breaker-beaten coast,  
 With cliffs above, and a broad sandy shore,  
 Guarded by shoals and rocks as by an host,  
 With here and there a creek, whose aspect wore  
 A better welcome to the tempest-tost;  
 And rarely ceased the haughty billow's roar,  
 Save on the dead long summer days, which make  
 The outstretch'd ocean glitter like a lake. (II, 177)<sup>43</sup>

The next stanza, however, launches the reader suddenly and precipitously into the mind and world of the narrator by the detonation of what seems a perfectly harmless comparison:

And the small ripple spilt upon the beach  
 Scarcely o'erpass'd 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 preach  
 Who please,—the more so because they preach in vain,—  
 Let us have wine and woman, 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 sunk  
 The hopes of all men, and of every nation;  
 Without their sap, how branchless were the trunk  
 Of life's strange tree, so fruitful on occasion:  
 But to return,—Get very drunk; and when  
 You wake with head-ache, you shall see what then.

Ring for your valet—bid him quickly bring  
 Some hock and soda-water, then you'll know  
 A pleasure worthy Xerxes the great king;  
 For not the blest sherbert, sublimed with snow,  
 Nor the first sparkle of the desert-spring,  
 Nor Burgundy in all its sunset glow,  
 After long travel, ennui, love or slaughter,  
 Vie with that draught of hock and soda-water. (II, 178-80)

It is far, far too late for the nonchalant "Thus they relate, / Erring"<sup>44</sup> type of drawstring used by Milton when he has let himself be carried away. This narrator is much more self-indulgent than Milton's; he is far too obviously enjoying himself for any kind of belated "making it all relevant" to be plausible here. Starting with a simile ("ripple . . . champagne"), he joyfully deteriorates into free association, no longer bothering himself with the syntactic copulae of comparatives. The game he is playing in this relaxed, talkative tone, which toys with form as well as thematic associations, becomes finally so absorbing that the reader is almost unsurprised when he deals his boldest stroke: "The coast—I think it was the coast that I / Was just describing—Yes, it *was* the coast— / Lay at this period quiet as the sky" (II, 181). Typically, the return to the story is what is jarring here, because the narrator (and perhaps the reader, too) has forgotten where he left off narrating—or, at least, so he pretends. Starting with a simile, which, like Milton, he elaborates, Byron, unlike Milton, allows himself to get lost in one of his other worlds, and the way back is out of the labyrinth.

The "ripple . . . champagne" simile that forms the jumping-off point for this excursion is not as far removed from metaphor or conceit as some in *Don Juan*, although the development of the image of "your champagne"



as the basis for a familiar scenario or context ("When o'er the brim the sparkling bumpers reach") draws it into the domain of pure simile. Many of Byron's similes look like metaphors initially, but turn out later to be rather different. When Juan discovers little Leila in Canto VIII, the reader is told that "she was chill as they" (95), "they" being corpses. Now if these corpses were pointed to with an indefinite, or no, article—if in fact they were *any* dead bodies—the simile would be a metaphor. As it happens, they are very specific bodies, those of her relatives and protectors, newly killed, and the simile cannot by any means be classed as a metaphor. In fact, so "true" is the comparison that the reader is not sure whether it is a trope at all. It compares two things—or qualities of things—which exist in the same world, with equal degrees of specificity. This is the ground state of simile, unremarkable in itself, but illustrative of the fact that the figure will, more in the way of metonymy than of metaphor, allow both terms an equal existence, without having to draw the vehicle from a realm of abstract generality.

Ironic tricks may be played with simile as a result of the facility of the comparative term for changing from "like" to "appearing like" or from "as" to "as if"; and also as a result of the greater particularity of the vehicle here than in metaphor, allowing a more searching examination of the points of coincidence with the tenor. Thus, in Canto I, when the narrator declares that "Julia mistress, and Antonia maid, / Appear'd like two poor harmless women" (I, 141), the figure seems to be a simile of the category-species variety, whose truth-value is of indisputable assent. And certainly the women's *appearance* is of innocence; they are acting a part

for the benefit of the searchers of the bed-chamber. But as the simile (if simile it be) is elaborated, the impression grows that they are over-acting and that the difference between appearance and reality should be becoming evident not only to us (the narrator and reader, who are in on the secret of Julia's infidelity), but also to the deluded men in the story who are observing the women. *Appearance* and the simile's truth-value are not so simple after all:

But Julia mistress, and Antonia maid,  
 Appear'd like two poor harmless women, who  
 Of goblins, but still more of men afraid,  
 Had thought one man might be deterr'd by two,  
 And therefore side by side were gently laid. (I, 141)

This device is used to more tragically ironic effect in Canto II when Juan and Haidée, embracing in the "deep twilight's purple charm" (184), are alone, "As if there were no life beneath the sky / Save theirs, and that their life could never die" (188). Whether they counterpoint appearances and realities, or appearances and appearances, or even realities and realities (after all, the illusion is at this moment "real" to the lovers), these devices awake in the reader the sense of a hiatus between worlds that returns her always to the enigma of fiction itself.

Appearance-reality similes are often more complex than this. When the narrator claims, "I rattle on exactly as I'd talk / With anybody in a ride or walk" (XV, 19), the reader is inclined to give full assent to the trope. Byron's narrator has a specific existence within the poem; his habitual activities include riding ("I canter by the spot each afternoon" (IV, 103)), and certainly the frequently chatty style gives as perfect an illusion

of a witty man's (Byron's) conversation as its formal rigours will allow. To assign to the simile the value "true" and ignore it as trivial would be easy. The man chats on foot and on horseback, just as he is rattling on to his reader now. But on closer scrutiny the reader finds that the simile is not as true as all that. The poet is not actually talking and his receiver is a reader, not a listener. In one sense then, the trope is a metaphor in which the oral situation is the vehicle for the written, and the simile operates as a strategy for creating various levels of diegetic worlds. One of these is a wholly fictional one in which the narrator is, as he mentions a few lines further on, an "Improvvisatore" (XV, 20) to whom the reader, in the fictional garb of a live audience, is listening. This fictional world exists as an ironic counterpart to the "real" one: a printed text from which the poet is absent, with probably a single, silent reader. The reader is made conscious of this "real" world precisely because the simile the narrator uses is so apposite; she is three-quarters of the way to full assent to it when she notices, together with the surprise she feels at the deconstruction of worlds, that it is not true at all. Unless, of course, her solitary reading of a book of print is merely the vehicle of a metaphor whose tenor is an oral performance....

At times, simile can be a kind of cover for a step into the narrator's world which would otherwise seem over-gratuitous. After a disquisition on Lady Adeline's perfect chastity, for which the narrator has himself insinuated a motive ("Perhaps she wish'd an aspirant profounder" (XIV, 57)), the following stanza occurs:

I hate a motive like a lingering bottle  
 With which the landlord makes too long a stand,  
 Leaving all claretless the unmoistened throttle,  
 Especially with politics on hand;  
 I hate it, as I hate a drove of cattle,  
 Who whirl the dust as Simooms whirl the sand;  
 I hate it, as I hate an argument,  
 A Laureate's ode, or servile Peer's "Content." (XIV, 58)

Although the slightly faulty grammar of the first line makes the figure look like a simile-conceit, actually not "motive" and "bottle," but two of the narrator's pet hatreds are being compared. The line ought to follow the syntactic pattern of the other comparisons: "I hate a motive as I hate a lingering bottle"; yet the construction as it stands gives a greater sense of relevancy to the story. Adeline's hypothetical motive only *seems* to be the tenor, for in fact the narrator has leapt out of his story and into his own world. The elaboration of the first simile develops a masculine scenario which could plausibly coexist with Adeline and her aristocratic London life—the ambiance of which has been developed through several cantos already. This is also true of "argument," "ode," and "Content" in the couplet; they could all form part of the experience of a London Dandy with an extensive acquaintance. But—and this is typical of the catalogues in *Don Juan*—the "cattle" are slightly incongruous and the secondary simile, "who whirl the dust as Simooms whirl the sand," belongs, if not to another world, at least to a part of this one so distant and exotic as to threaten a breach in its retaining wall. The reader is not allowed to forget for long that the universe is vast and various.

The narrator often calls attention to his similes in asides: "(This old song and new simile holds good)" (Ded., 2); "(But this last simile is trite

and stupid)" (I, 55); "*That's an appropriate simile, that Jackall*" (IX, 27); "(Start not, kind reader, since great Homer thought / This simile enough for Ajax . . . )" (VIII, 29); and these are perhaps the most obvious examples of self-reflexiveness, particularly when he claims to be having trouble finding the right one: "An Arab horse, a stately stag, a barb / New broke, a camelopard, a gazelle, / No—none of these will do" (II, 6). These devices call attention not only to the diegetic world of the speaker, but to other worlds outside and beyond this, the writer with his pen, generating the fictional speaker, choosing words, and the reader herself, who is exhorted not to "start." Two longer examples invoke the reader in a more active way.

The first of these occurs towards the end of a catalogue of beauties asleep in the harem in which Juan is bedded in female disguise:

A fourth as marble, statue-like and still,  
Lay in a breathless, hushed and stony sleep;  
White, cold, and pure, as looks a frozen rill,  
Or the snow minaret on an Alpine steep,  
Or Lot's wife done in salt,—or what you will;—  
My similes are gather'd in a heap,  
So pick and choose—perhaps you'll be content  
With a carved lady on a monument. (VI, 68)

This stanza heralds a transition from a serious, "Romantic" mood to a more ironic tone, a transition implemented partly because the narrator feels the need here as elsewhere to change a theme which grows too sad. But here, even before the direct address to the reader which comprises the jump into an extradiegetic world, alienation from the subject is taking place by means of images. The whole suite of stanzas, from 64 to 67 and including the first part of this one, has presented the women in terms of

a rather artificial but Edenic garden:

Many and beautiful lay those around,  
 Like flowers of different hue and clime and root,  
 In some exotic garden sometimes found,  
 With cost and care and warmth induced to shoot. (65)

This imagery is strategically relevant to the story because, in Dudù's "dream," her sexual encounter with Juan takes the form of the eating of a fatal fruit—the sexual knowledge and freedom lacking in the harem. But the consistently and carefully developed conventional similes carry the poem into an elegiac mood which must not be sustained if it is shortly to move back into the gleeful prurience of a travelling-salesman joke. The "third" odalisque "betrayed / Through the heaved breast the dream of some far shore," and the simile with which her tears are rendered has a graveyard loveliness: "(As Night Dew on a Cypress glittering, tinges / The black bough)" (67).

With the "fourth," the graveyard imagery reaches its nadir. Even a cypress is more alive than the marble statue with which this woman is compared. But the narrator is not content to stop here; he offers three more similes ("frozen rill," "snow minaret," and "Lot's wife") before returning, rather more tentatively, to a variant on his first: "a carved lady on a monument." Interestingly enough, the three middle similes, though inconsistent with the garden theme, are not wholly irrelevant. The second is a little redundant, as the first has already suggested coldness and isolation, but, on the other hand, "Lot's wife done in salt" is surprisingly apposite, considering that the woman is spiritually dead because her mind has turned back to her home. However, surprise is itself out of place here; the simile

is a conceit placed among quiet conventional images. Also, the word "done," even though it links this simile with the statue simile, is comic because it is too colloquial for the context and because everyone knows that Lot's wife was not sculpted in salt but transformed by God.

The progress of the reader's experience, through a sense of inconsistency and redundancy (which is potentially self-mocking) to surprise and humour, charts a growing awareness of the text caused by the text's apparent shortcomings. Also, as a necessary complement to this awareness, the reading process marks a diminishing involvement and sympathy with the subject of the story. Thus, when she is finally co-opted by the narrator, the reader is already sufficiently conscious of the story's existence as an object to participate in its construction.

A tendency exhibited here, to elaborate illustrative imagery to the point of irrelevancy, is much more evident in my second example. This is a suite of stanzas on the subject of Gulbeyaz's anger at Juan's refusal to make love to her on command (V, 130-33). The stanzas consist of a series of raids on several worlds in order to come up with an appropriate vehicle for a simile; the narrator's sense of the task's impossibility is what keeps him searching and generating new semiotic and diegetic worlds to search. The first stanza is direct address, first to a plural group ("Ye!"), and then, by a subtle transition, to a singular member of this group, the narratee<sup>45</sup> (I must make this distinction between the inscribed receiver and my reader here, because this narratee is clearly male, and a contemporary of the narrator):

Remember, or (if you cannot) imagine,  
 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!  
 Or recollect all that was said or sung  
 On such a subject; then suppose the face  
 Of a young downright beauty in this case. (V, 130)

This is not a metaphor, and it is no ordinary simile either. But if simile be seen as a comparison in which "this specific thing" is likened to "that specific thing," the narrator is demanding that the narratee find "that specific thing" *out of his own experience*, in order to complete the simile. Considering that the receiver's mind is the final arbiter and assigner of meaning for a work of literature, this vehicle, if it is so constructed, reaches the upper limit of specificity. No "real person" recreated by the narrator can have the clarity or singleness of outline possessed by an individual the narratee remembers. Of course, the receiver who cannot "remember" is exhorted to "imagine"—the imagination being here a poor substitute for memory—and perhaps those who did not keep their chastity when young are considered incapable now of the mental fertility demanded. Having acquired an image, the receiver's work does not end there; he has to substitute the face (only the face?) "Of a young downright beauty" for his "desperate dowager"—a rather difficult task, considering the reasons why the dowager is desperate. Realizing this difficulty, the narrator rushes on, this time into the realm of literature:



Suppose, but you already have supposed,  
 The spouse of Potiphar, the Lady Booby,  
 Phedra, and all which story has disclosed  
 Of good examples; pity that so few by  
 Poets and private tutors are exposed,  
 To educate—ye youth of Europe—you by!  
 But when you have supposed the few we know,  
 You can't suppose Gulbeyaz' angry brow. (V, 131)

Although the three examples quoted here from the Bible, Fielding and Euripides are within his own literary experience, the narrator keeps the field of their discovery inside the receiver's mental world. This narratee, whose experience is so like the narrator's (Byron's), is credited with anticipating the narrator's requirements, which suggests that fictional worlds and "real" memories are not very different psychologically—imagination and memory being interrelated. Those who have been exposed by "Poets" or "private tutors" to more numerous literary examples of characters undergoing strong passion will more easily understand—or do the reader's work of recreating—Byron's poem. But nevertheless, the narrator feels that his receiver's experience, even after scouring its fictional knowledge, will be inadequate, and so he goes on:

A tigress robbed of young, a lioness,  
 Or any interesting beast of prey,  
 Are similes at hand for the distress  
 Of ladies who cannot have their own way;  
 But though my turn will not be served with less,  
 These don't express one half what I should say:  
 For what is stealing young ones, few or many,  
 To cutting off their hopes of having any? (V, 132)

He has moved into a different world here, not into the world of natural law, as the first line would suggest, but into the writer's world of literary convention. The "tigress" and the "lioness" are "*similes*," like other

"beasts of prey" established as "interesting" within the literary tradition. However, he rejects the conventional comparisons as being not quite appropriate to the specific instance; Gulbeyaz's ferocity is not, as with the conventional female feline, caused by the loss of "young ones," but by the "cutting short [her] hopes of having any." Among other things, this stanza contains an ironic joke at Byron's own expense. One of the most histrionic uses of the "lioness" occurs in his poem *The Giaour*:

Go, when the hunter's hand hath wrung  
From forest-cave her shrieking young,  
And calm the lonely lioness:  
But soothe not—mock not *my* distress!<sup>46</sup>

(As a matter of fact, he probably has the tigress in mind here, for tigers, unlike lions, are solitaires and live in forests, but he could not resist the alliteration.) Anyway, the narrator has moved away from his receiver in the *Don Juan* stanza. By now the poetry is imbued with a strong sense of the privacy of poetic composition, during which no responsive audience is present: "*my* turn will not be served"; "These don't express one half what *I* should say."

In the next stanza he moves into a more pontificating mood; he is making incontrovertible statements *ex cathedra*, and only in the couplet does he acknowledge his audience once more:

The love of offspring's nature's general law,  
 From tigresses and cubs to ducks and ducklings;  
 There's nothing whets the beak or arms the claw,  
 Like an invasion of their babes and sucklings;  
 And all who have seen a human nursery, saw  
 How mothers love their children's squalls and chucklings:  
 And this extreme effect (to tire no longer  
 Your patience) shows the cause must still be stronger. (V, 133)

The first four lines are not very self-reflexive. These categorical statements really are induced by a natural world in which recurrent patterns, a Logos, or "general law" can be perceived. They point to "tigresses," "ducks," etc., as *objects*, not as part of a grab-bag of literary devices. These are, of course, representative objects, their signifiers lacking articles. The last two lines of the sestet introduce a slight change of tack; the special example of human "mothers" and "children" is placed in a context, a "nursery," and requires perceivers ("all who have seen") for its establishment in the category. However, the perceivers are not identified directly with the poem's narratees, and their perception is set in the past as a finished activity, not as an active process. The effect is rather formal, part of a polished piece of rhetoric in which reference to a common human scenario makes the point more persuasively, but is not a *sine qua non* of the argument culminating in the interrupted cause-and-effect proposition of the last two lines. This interruption, "(to tire no longer / Your patience)" is a sidelong glance at the narratee, who has been given so much of the work of analogy to do in the stanzas preceding. It acknowledges the fact that the narratee has been left out of the process of creating meaning here, and yet it also acknowledges the indispensability of the narratee—or, rather more generally, of a reader. It gives ironic recognition to the fact that the

reader's impatience has the power to destroy the whole structure; if she gets too bored, she will simply stop reading, or skip to something more interesting.

What happens to the similes in this *tour de force* is that they become conjoined first to one and then to another device, and finally they are subjected to a strenuous argument in which what represents the developed term of an epic simile is in fact the most important proposition of a rhetorical enthymeme. The argument in this stanza assumes that causes are greater than effects, proposes an effect of great power, and concludes that the cause must be immense. The proposal of the generality and strength of the attachment of females to their offspring is also the vehicle of a rather unusual simile, whose tenor is the attachment of females to the procreative act. But the simile is not unclassifiably heterodox; comparisons do not have to be comparisons of equality. Milton's similes frequently invoke a Greek myth to show how the biblical truth surpasses it. The existence of a cause-and-effect relationship between the two terms, sexual passion and maternal passion, does not prevent a comparison from being made between them; indeed, this is the basis of the argument.

If these stanzas are digressive, they are not so in the way many others are, in which the poet wanders off into a volley of accusations against some contemporary such as Castlereagh, Wordsworth or Wellington; or narrates some everyday or special event in his private life for its own sake; or debates questions such as religion, mortality or avarice, without relating them directly to the story. Even where he becomes most

metaphysical here ("The love of offspring's nature's general law"), he has his eye on an event in the story which needs accurate representation and must be accounted for. This suite is more self-reflexive than truly digressive. By mediating too obsessively the reader's response, and by discussing in too much detail the mechanics of this mediation, the narrator vitiates the transparency of the story and alienates the reader from too much emotional involvement with the characters. He does not go "off the point" so much as linger too long on it; he continues to ruminate for five more stanzas before developing it to the point of action—an action, incidentally, which is never completed ("Her first thought was to cut off Juan's head" (V, 139)), and hence remains in the realm of speculation. The effect is of "freezing" the action: the narrator's and reader's time flow on through stanza after stanza, while Juan's time stands still, at the point of paroxysm.

Nevertheless, in one sense, self-reflexiveness is a kind of digressiveness, even when it occurs in miniature in some baroque rhyme or conceit, without any rhetorical marker to point to it. What the self-reflexive device does is to take the reader's attention off the story, however briefly, and lift it onto the the surface of the text in an excursion that may not be registered in the rhetoric, but which exists nevertheless as a "digression" from the reader's experience of the story. In the stanzas above, the reader and the narrator take a trip through various worlds in pursuit of an image—a mental journey which, for the reader, breaks into her sense of the story's progressive time-sequence and gives her the experience of a psychological detour, or digression.

Simile is one of several devices in *Don Juan* which are used both on a small scale to control the local degree of transparency of the text, and on a more developed scale, to allow the narrator an escape mechanism from one form of discourse or from one diegetic world into another. Whether only the larger phenomena can be classed as digressions or not, and whether there is any point in talking about digressions at all in so digressive a work, will be considered in the following chapter.

### NOTES TO CHAPTER III

<sup>1</sup>As has become common practice, I use I. A. Richards's nomenclature here for the two elements of a trope. Richards employs them in his analysis of metaphor only, but they are convenient for discussion of other figures of speech as well. *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* (London: Oxford UP, 1979) 96.

<sup>2</sup>See Alex Preminger, ed., *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1974) 767: "Not every simile is a metaphor, though some similes can be compressed or converted into metaphors."

<sup>3</sup>See Paul Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor* (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1977) 27, 197; Terence Hawkes, *Metaphor* (London: Methuen, 1972) 3, 71.

<sup>4</sup>Winnifred Nowotny, *The Language Poets Use* (London: Athlone, 1962) 51.

<sup>5</sup>Terence Hawkes, *Metaphor* (London: Methuen, 1972) 2-3.

<sup>6</sup>Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Poems* (London: Everyman, 1973) 176.

<sup>7</sup>Distinguishing symbol from allegory in *The Statesman's Manual*, Coleridge writes: "On the other hand a symbol . . . is characterized by a translucence of the special in the individual, or of the general in the special, or of the universal in the general; above all by the translucence of the eternal through and in the temporal. It always partakes of the reality which it renders intelligible, and while it enunciates the whole, abides itself as a living part of the unity of which it is the representative." (347-48). See also chapter II, note 19.

<sup>8</sup>Coleridge, *The Statesman's Manual, The Complete Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* I (New York: Harper, 1884) 462.

<sup>9</sup>Coleridge, *The Statesman's Manual* 465. Coleridge here relegates metaphor with allegory to the work of the fancy, a faculty which he considers decidedly inferior to the imagination, which is the domain of symbol.

<sup>10</sup>De Man's essay on "Allegory and Symbol," in *Blindness and Insight* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1983) 187-208, is a sustained critique of the bad faith or "tenacious self-mystification" (208) of Romantic theory from Coleridge to M. H. Abrams. Claiming that Coleridge's definition of symbol (see note 7 above) subsumes a monistic epistemological idealism (191), de Man points out that this idealism is not consistent with the "priority of object over subject that is implicit in an organic conception of language" (197), a conception for which Coleridge is largely responsible.

<sup>11</sup>Poems such as "Ah! Sun-Flower," "The Tyger" and "The Sick Rose," each of which focuses on a single object and meditates in an exclamatory style on its ontological strangeness, are particularly good examples of the symbolic mode. William Blake, *Complete Writings* (London: Oxford UP, 1974) 215, 214, 213.

<sup>12</sup>Although the French *Symbolistes* did use symbols—for example, the swan that occurs in short poems by both Baudelaire and Mallarmé—they were more interested in breaking rules of syntax, sense (synaesthesia), metre, etc., than in symbol *per se*. Charles Baudelaire *Les fleurs du mal* (Paris: Librairie des bibliophiles, n.d.) 184-86; Stéphan Mallarmé, *Oeuvres complètes* (Paris: Librairie Gallimard, 1945) 67-68.

The Imagist movement, on the other hand, even though it tried to suppress the symbolic translucence of the object, drew many English-language poets into that concentrated contemplation of the individual object which leads to symbolic valorization. Hence, W. B. Yeats, D. H. Lawrence, T. S. Eliot, Wallace Stevens and Hart Crane—all of whom were influenced by Imagism—produced such poems as "The Wild Swans at Coole," "Bavarian Gentians," "The Hollow Men," "Anecdote of the Jar" and "The Broken Tower," all of which generate an aura of mysterious and synecdochic significance about a perceived object and which are, in consequence, symbolic. *The Collected Poems of W. B. Yeats* (London: MacMillan, 1952) 147-48; D. H. Lawrence, *Selected Poems* (New York: Viking, 1973) 136-37; T. S. Eliot, *The Complete Poems and Plays: 1909-1950* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1952) 56-59; *The Collected Poems of Hart Crane* (New York: Liveright, 1933) 135-36; *The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens* (New York: Knopf, 1961) 76.

<sup>13</sup>Percy Bysshe Shelley, "Ode to the West Wind," *Poetical Works* (London: Oxford UP, 1968) 579. William Wordsworth, "Composed Upon Westminster Bridge, September, 1808," *Poetical Works* (London: Oxford UP, 1971) 214. Coleridge, "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," *Poems* 176.

<sup>14</sup>Even at his most Wordsworthian moments, Byron is more self-consciously explanatory than Wordsworth. Although he is, in the following passage, *asserting* an organic interpenetration of nature and his soul, he does not recreate this interrelatedness by the use of organic metaphor:

I live not in myself but I become  
 Portion of that around me; and to me  
 High mountains are a feeling, but the hum  
 Of human cities torture: I can see  
 Nothing to loathe in nature, save to be  
 A link reluctant in a fleshly chain,  
 Class'd among creatures, when the soul can flee,  
 And with the sky, the peak, the heaving plain  
 Of ocean, or the stars, mingle, and not in vain.

*Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* III, lxxxii, *Poetical Works* (London: Oxford UP, 1926) 213.

<sup>15</sup>W. K. Wimsatt, in an essay entitled "The Structure of Romantic Nature Imagery," compares a sonnet by William Lisle Bowles ("To the River Itchin") with one by Coleridge ("To the River Otter"), "written in confessed imitation of Bowles" (105-10). The success of Coleridge's poem in comparison with Bowles's is due, according to Wimsatt, to a greater vividness in the realization of the river image and a more subtle, organic creation of trope. Wimsatt comments: "The metaphor in fact is scarcely noticed by the main statement of the poem. Both tenor and vehicle, furthermore, are wrought in a parallel process out of the same material. The river landscape is both the occasion of reminiscence and the source of the metaphors by which reminiscence is described" (109).

Although Wimsatt includes Byron among the Romantic poets who use this type of imagery, he does not examine his Byronic example (an extract from the *Childe Harold* stanza quoted in the previous note) in enough detail to observe that in fact its working is in some ways more like Bowles than Coleridge: it contains "asserted connection" (107) rather than a "design which is latent in the multiform sensuous picture" (110). W. K. Wimsatt, Jr. and Monroe C. Beardsley, *The Verbal Icon* (Kentucky: U of Kentucky P, 1954).

<sup>16</sup>Wordsworth, *The Prelude* I, ll.166-69, 497.

<sup>17</sup>*Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* 767.

<sup>18</sup>G. Rostrevor Hamilton, *The Tell-Tale Article* (New York: Oxford UP, 1950) 14.

<sup>19</sup>Hamilton 12.



<sup>20</sup>Commonsense has a habit of sticking to a very materialistic world-view which is seriously limited by habitual semiotic categories. When Helen Gardner, in her introduction to the poetic anthology, *The Metaphysical Poets* (Great Britain: Oxford UP, 1967), talks of "likeness" and "unlikeness" as if these were self-evident categories, she is guilty of using unexamined commonsense (xxii). Paul Ricoeur, in his account of "resemblance," vigorously defends the commonsense assumption against heavy odds (196-97). See note 28 below.

<sup>21</sup>Gardner xxiii.

<sup>22</sup>"Holy Sonnet," *The Complete Poetry of John Donne* (New York: New York UP, 1968) 344.

<sup>23</sup>Donne, "The Sunne Rising" 94.

<sup>24</sup>George M. Ridenour, *The Style of Don Juan* (USA: Yale UP, 1969) 138.

<sup>25</sup>Gardner xxiv.

<sup>26</sup>Samuel Johnson, "Cowley," *The Lives of the English Poets, The Works of Samuel Johnson* VII (Oxford: Talboys and Wheeler, 1825) 16.

<sup>27</sup>Donald Davidson, "What Metaphors Mean," *Critical Inquiry* 5, 1 (1978): 41.

<sup>28</sup>See the section of Ricoeur's *The Rule of Metaphor* entitled "In Defence of Resemblance" (193-200). He defends the logically weak proposition, "everything resembles everything else...except for a certain difference!" in terms of the necessity, with metaphor, of seeing similarity "despite difference, in spite of contradiction." To Ricoeur, "resemblance can be construed as the site of the clash between sameness and difference," and the realm of resemblance is where the dynamics of metaphor operate (196-97).

The Davidson-Ricoeur duality is perhaps clarified by J. Hillis Miller in *Fiction and Repetition* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1982). Miller quotes a passage from Gilles Deleuze's *Logique du sens* which opposes to each other the two formulations: "only that which resembles itself differs" and "only differences resemble one another" (5). The first of these, Miller calls the basis of a "Platonic" theory of repetitions, one which "is grounded in a solid architectural model which is untouched by the effects of repetition" (6). Of course, the archetype does not have to be Plato's realm of ideas: it can persist in a vigorous materialistic belief in an objective world. The latter belief may underpin Davidson's optimistic assertion of universal similitude. The second formulation subtends what Miller calls a "Nietzschean" theory of repetition, which "posits a world based on difference" (6). (Perhaps the primary representative of this theory in the contemporary world is Jacques Derrida.) Ricoeur clearly attempts a kind of workable synthesis between the two theories, assuming the simultaneous possibility of both similarity and

difference. This dangerous middle ground I too have tried to tread and to chart, asserting that at least for the purposes of this dissertation, similarity must be measured on a calibrated yardstick of truth or "ease of assent." (Interestingly, Tzvetan Todorov, in "Narrative Transformations," *The Poetics of Prose* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1977), claims that *narrative* is also "constituted in the tension of two formal categories, difference and resemblance" (233).)

<sup>29</sup>Ricoeur 197.

<sup>30</sup>W. P. Ker, *Form and Style in Poetry* (London: MacMillan, 1928) 252.

<sup>31</sup>Dante Alighieri, *Inferno* XXIV, ll.25-28, *The Divine Comedy: Italian Text and Translation* I, trans. Charles S. Singleton (Princeton UP, 1970) 248, 249.

<sup>32</sup>Ker 252.

<sup>33</sup>John Milton, *Paradise Lost* I, l.747, *Poetical Works* (London: Oxford UP, 1966) 230.

<sup>34</sup>*Paradise Lost* IV, ll.268-75, 281.

<sup>35</sup>*Paradise Lost* I, ll.301, 219.

<sup>36</sup>*Paradise Lost* III, ll.588-90, 271.

<sup>37</sup>See C. M. Bowra, *Tradition and Design in the Iliad* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1930) 126. Discussing Homer's similes, Bowra claims: "Their aim was not to provide a series of points in which one thing can be compared with another, but to stress a common characteristic. This done, the poet follows his fancy and develops the picture without much care for his reason for using it." The whimsical, gratuitous quality is what is of interest here.

<sup>38</sup>See Christopher Ricks, *Milton's Grand Style* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1963) 118-50, for a summary of the debate about the digressiveness or relevance of Milton's similes.

<sup>39</sup>Johnson, "Milton," *Lives of the English Poets* 132

<sup>40</sup>See Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence* (New York: Oxford UP, 1973): "Milton is the central problem of poetic influence in English" (33). Also, M. H. Abrams, in "English Romanticism: The Spirit of the Age," perceiving Milton as the exemplary visionary poet, details his influence on various Romantic writers. *Romanticism and Consciousness*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Norton, 1970) 102-07. Jerome McGann, in an article entitled "Milton and Byron" (*The Keats-Shelley Memorial Association Bulletin* XXV (1974)), claims that Byron, not Wordsworth nor any other self-styled Miltonist, was Milton's true heir in the Romantic age. "Wordsworth and

Southey may affect the Miltonic style, may wear the trappings of the Muse, but it is Byron in whom Milton's spirit survives" (24).

<sup>41</sup>Bloom sees poetic strength as the ability in later poets "to wrestle with their strong precursors, even to the death" (*The Anxiety of Influence* 5). He envisages this in terms of an Oedipal struggle rather than a Promethean one. "Oedipus, blind, was on the path to oracular godhood, and the strong poets have followed him by transforming their blindness towards their precursors into the revolutionary insights of their own work" (10).

<sup>42</sup>Anne Davidson Ferry, *Milton's Epic Voice* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1963) 69.

<sup>43</sup>The two similes in this stanza, in keeping with the conventionality (in the best sense) of the romance which is unfolding between Juan and Haidée, are too conventional to catalyse any jolt into self-reflexiveness.

<sup>44</sup>*Paradise Lost* I, ll. 756-57, 230.

<sup>45</sup>According to Seymour Chatman, in *Story and Discourse* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1978) 150, this term was first coined by Gerald Prince in "Notes Toward a Categorization of Fictional 'Narratees,'" *Genre* 4 (1971): 100-105, and it signifies a fictional receiver whose "situation . . . is parallel to that of the narrator" (Chatman 151). In my discussion of the reader in chapter VI, I use the word "narratee" synonymously with "inscribed reader" and "inscribed receiver." In its singular form, the word is not especially useful to a discussion of *Don Juan*, since the poem has many inscribed readers, some of whom are clearly "mock readers" and others, real people, alive at the time of the poem's composition. None of these has sufficient consistency or continuity to deserve the singular designation; only the "implied reader" (Chatman, 149) warrants attention as a particular identity throughout a reading of the text. The term "narratee" is useful for the moment here, because this inscribed receiver, a mock reader only to a certain extent, is masculine and a contemporary of Byron's.

<sup>46</sup>*The Giaour, Poetical Works* 256. The "cubless tigress in the jungle raging" occurs seriously in *Don Juan*, too, as an image for Lambro (III, 58). Byron has a habit in this poem of mocking the characteristic imagery of his earlier poetry, even though he also employs it here non-ironically when he needs to. Being on the point of comparing Adeline with a volcano, he rejects the image for that of a frozen bottle of champagne, justifying himself thus:

No

I hate to hunt down a tired metaphor,  
 So let the often-used volcano go.  
 Poor thing! How frequently, by me and others,  
 It hath been stirr'd up till its smoke quite smothers! (XIII, 36)

Of all the English Romantic poets, Byron probably uses the volcano most characteristically. He even employs it as a metaphor for poetry *per se*, which he calls "the lava of the imagination whose eruption prevents an earth-quake" (*Byron's Letters and Journals*, I (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1974) 179). The Giaour sneers at "cold" courtly love, claiming that his blood "was like the lava-flood / That boils in Ætna's breast of flame" (*Poetical Works*, 255). In some of *Don Juan's* "Romantic" moments, the volcano appears unparodied, too. The name of Kościuszko "Might scatter fire through ice, like Hecla's flame" (X, 59).

## CHAPTER IV

### DIGRESSION

Much has been written about Byron's digressions in *Don Juan*. They are seen by most critics as "interruptions of the action"<sup>1</sup> or of the "story"<sup>2</sup> which are "often quite disconnected from [this story's] subject-matter";<sup>3</sup> and while many regard these digressions as the "memorable elements"<sup>4</sup> of the poem, a fairly general consensus holds that Byron "does maintain a clear distinction between the narrative and the digressions."<sup>5</sup> M. K. Joseph, in an appendix to his book *Byron the Poet*, makes a further discrimination between "digression" and "comment" in *Don Juan*, but he does not fundamentally challenge the usual dualistic model because he opposes both these errant categories to that of narrative.<sup>6</sup> Alvin Kernan and Jerome McGann regard the poem's pulsation between narration and digression as diagrammatic of its more profound fluctuations in structure and meaning. Kernan sees the poem as a sort of dynamic serialism, each event subverted and replaced by a "but then" copula; the repeated movement is "upward to a pause, and then a sweep away."<sup>7</sup> McGann finds in the digressions evidence of Byron's discarding of Coleridgean "total form," and claims that the "structure of *Don Juan* is based upon the structure of human talk, which is dialectic without being synthetic."<sup>8</sup> This important insight is basic to both Anne

K. Mellor's and Peter L. Thorslev's readings of *Don Juan* as a paradigmatic work of Romantic irony, in which antithesis without synthesis is the essential mode.<sup>9</sup> Unfortunately, the significance of antithesis seems to have escaped the only scrupulous analyst of *Don Juan*'s narrative structure, William T. Ross. In an unpublished dissertation he observes that:

while it is fairly easy to identify certain digressive passages, it is not easy to to divide the poem into two neat categories, narration and digression. There is simply too much grey matter.<sup>10</sup>

By pointing out that small parts of a stanza can be digressive,<sup>11</sup> and by demonstrating that many stanzas which most readers would take to be narrative are, in fact, "doing the same work as . . . digression,"<sup>12</sup> Ross successfully undermines attempts like Joseph's to count and statistically compare digressive as against narrative stanzas.<sup>13</sup> But because he concentrates too much on the "grey" areas which are his principal discovery, he loses sight of a crucial dialectic and concludes that "the digressions and the narrative have a commonality of purpose which mutes any distinction between them."<sup>14</sup>

*Don Juan* is an essentially dialogic poem, its dialectic evident in its more microscopic as well as in its larger structures. The fact that this consistency in inconsistency imposes on it a kind of paradoxical unity of purpose ought not to blur the reader's eyes into seeing its chiaroscuro as "grey matter." If the contrasts between the various voices of the poem be not all the time as stark as black against white, then the conceit must be made more appropriate by the application of a prism. In this "versified Aurora Borealis" (VII, 2), all the colours of the spectrum strike each other in complement, contrast, discord and relief. When blue lies for a moment beside indigo instead of orange, the effect is

not monochromatic except to an unfocused or colourblind eye; the reader cannot assume a uniform grey for the whole just because she knows it would look that way if it were rotated very fast or observed from another planet.

The study of narrative, or narratology, has taken great strides and become very popular of late, though none of the major theorists in this field, such as Roland Barthes, Seymour Chatman, Gérard Genette, Wayne Booth or Gerald Prince seems to have taken cognizance of Byron's poem. This neglect, no doubt accounted for by the fact that their major preoccupation is the novel or prose story, is a pity, since *Don Juan* falls into that category of "self-conscious narrative"<sup>15</sup> in which they seem particularly interested. The narration of Byron's poem is in many ways more surprising than that of novels such as *Tristram Shandy* and *Jacques le fataliste*, which feature significantly in their canon. The Russian theorist, M. M. Bakhtin, recognizing the dialogic nature of both *Don Juan* and *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, uses them as examples of the "novelization of the epic poem."<sup>16</sup> Unfortunately, he reserves his detailed commentary for the most celebrated example of this type in his own language, Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin*,<sup>17</sup> which is a deliberately Byronic self-reflexive poem.<sup>18</sup> However, Bakhtin's main focus is not on narrative *per se* so much as on the way language patterns reflect other language patterns and engage in dialogue with them.

Byron's digressions, at their extreme, are examples of what Genette in *Narrative Discourse* calls "*narrative metalepsis*";<sup>19</sup> they are "transgressions" of narrative convention occurring in the form of jumps from one diegetic world to another, without this being justified "by the narrating, the act that consists precisely of introducing into one situation, the knowledge of another situation."<sup>20</sup> When, in Canto V (33-39) of *Don Juan*, the narrator launches into the story of

an event that took place "on Friday last" in the street outside his own residence in Ravenna, and this is not related either by self-evident parallel or by narrator's discourse in terms of time, place, diegetic world or theme to the events or telling of Juan's story, which has been left off as the hero is being haggled over in a Constantinople slave market, the term "metalepsis" is clearly appropriate for the leap from the diegetic world of Juan to the extradiegetic world of the narrator's recent experience. The term will also perhaps apply to other instances of narrative leap-frogging: for example, when the narrator tells his reader that he will "make Don Juan leave the ship soon" so that he (Juan) does not get into a compromising situation with the nubile young singer to whom he is chained (IV, 97). The reason the narrator gives for this sudden manipulation of his story is that "several people," including the publisher, have complained that the first two cantos of *Don Juan* are too risqué for general consumption. In another digression, the narrator begins by claiming to chart exactly "What Juan saw and underwent," as if he (the narrator) were a journalistic witness existing within the diegetic world, and then in the same sentence he demands that the reader "recollect the work is only fiction," distancing himself at once into the extradiegetic world of manipulating story-maker (XI, 88).

However, not all digressions in *Don Juan* can be classified as metalepses. Many structurally unnecessary elaborations are to be found within the story's world, whose superfluity is more difficult to demonstrate by isolated quotation than by measurement against accompanying passages which do propel plot and protagonists forward in time. For these, Ross's strategy of regarding narrative technique throughout the poem as "digressive" is a good one;<sup>21</sup> the adjectival



form, like Ross's thesis, suggests a general style which, rather than taking the shortest path to a goal, is more involved in the present time of the wayside, and is marked by elaborations, red herrings, self-indulgences, playfulness and a willingness to be led astray by any interesting distraction which offers itself. Of course, this tendency is very fundamental to narrative literature and perhaps all art—and even to the life of consciousness, according to Freud, who claims that “*the aim of all life is death*,” and that life with its erotic vitality persists by diverging “ever more widely from its original course” and making “ever more complicated *détours* before reaching its aim of death.”<sup>22</sup> In fiction, Todorov's maxim that “narrating equals living” is most clearly illustrated by his example of Scheherazade in the *Arabian Nights*, for whom storytelling is a *détour* which postpones her execution—and finally, prevents it.<sup>23</sup> Perhaps the ending of *Don Juan* due to the death of its author would provide another kind of example. According to Peter Brooks in *Reading for the Plot*, this theory can be illuminatingly generalized and anatomized:

Deviance, detour, an intention that is irritation: these are characteristics of the narratable, of “life” as it is the material of narrative, of *fabula* become *sjuzet*. Plot is a kind of arabesque or squiggle toward the end. It is like that arabesque from *Tristram Shandy*, retraced by Balzac, that suggests the arbitrary, transgressive, gratuitous line of narrative, its deviance from the straight line, the shortest distance between beginning and end—which would be the collapse of one into the other, of life into immediate death.<sup>24</sup>

However, Brooks's use of the word “transgressive” suggests that he includes in this account the metaleptic type of digression, whereas I for the moment am concerned only with digressive movements which do not actually trespass into foreign territory, but describe a path, over permissible terrain, which is longer and more looped than necessary.

Examples of this tendency are scattered throughout Cantos V and VI, in the luxuriating descriptions of the interior decoration of an Oriental palace; in Canto XIII (56-72), where a magnificent set-piece in the manner of Jonson ("Penshurst") and Pope ("Windsor Forest") expends seventeen stanzas on the depiction (after Newstead) of Norman Abbey;<sup>25</sup> in Cantos VII and VIII, where the mechanics and *raison d'être* of a siege in which the hero does not even appear for fifty-five stanzas, and whose causes he probably never understands, are developed in painstaking historical detail; in the last six cantos, in which the habits and follies of English society are pursued far outside the circle of Juan's acquaintance and beyond his capacity for vision; and, perhaps most obviously, in Canto III, during Juan's and Haidée's feast, where, apart from commentary, brief metalepsis, discussion of Lambro's history and feelings, and even portrayal of the Greek poet, who has a certain relevance to several worlds, eighteen stanzas of pure description can be counted (29-34, 67-78). The latter are justified narratively in that the reader acquires from them a sense—here without overt authorial prompting—of a world in which Paradisal innocence (the children with the garlanded ram (32-33), Haidée's native beauty, unimprovable by make-up (75-76)) is shown at the point of decadence, its corruption implicit in the prodigality of the feast and the luxuriousness of the clothes and trappings. The scene is envisaged—at least, at first—through Lambro's fallen and anguished eyes, thereby utilizing Milton's brilliant dramatic device of portraying his Paradise at first through the eyes of its destroyer.<sup>26</sup> But even so—and the reader must read through the whole canto to feel this—a wantonness motivates all this description, an imbalance in terms of classical decorum. The narrator is giving reign to his "Muse, the butterfly" (XIII, 89), letting her alight wherever whimsy or words

take her. Haidée's bracelet, for example, "Lockless—so pliable from the pure gold / That the hand stretch'd and shut it without harm" (71), has a delight all of its own, a cameo part in the poem that seems different from relevance: it is put in, among many other things, more-or-less for its own sake.

The tendency to catalogue items—to make lists which are often subversively inclusive—is registered, as I mention in chapter II, even in the metre of *Don Juan*. Several critics have taken note of this accumulative habit. West calls the poem "a rag-bag of interesting exhibits";<sup>27</sup> Steffan entitles one of his chapters "Accretion" and charts in it a habit of "stuffing a matrix," which he dates in Byron's work from as early as *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*;<sup>28</sup> Kernan's wave metaphor and his account of the "but then" movement of the plot convey the same sort of idea.<sup>29</sup> The tendency is to collect and accumulate rather than to pare down or sketch. A catalogue, like Leporello's aria, appropriates by naming; if it is full of redundancies or irrelevant items, these serve to flesh out a world in which the hero is only one object among many and the story chosen by the narrator as a focus is only one among a myriad other stories in relation to which Juan's adventures are merely digressions. Of course, in one sense, the inclusive tendency works in favour of realism—or, at least, plausibility.<sup>30</sup> Juan's world contains such mundane items as "scissors, paint and tweezers" (V, 80), passports (XI, 41), bills (X, 69), street lamps (XI, 26), housemaids' pails (I, 24) and doctors' prescriptions (X, 41); it also includes human needs and impulses less extreme than lust, heroism or starvation. When Juan is trying to act out his role of grieving and banished lover, he is overcome by seasickness (II, 20); he rides over hounds and gentlemen while hunting (XIV, 33); he almost fails to come up to scratch as the romantic stranger when he

discovers that he does not find Englishwomen attractive (XII, 68). He also encounters people and scenes throughout his story that have no especial relevance to him or his adventures, from Raucocanti and the newly enslaved opera company (IV, 81-96), to "the honourable Mrs. Sleep, / Who looked a white lamb, yet was a black sheep" (XIII, 79).

But this tendency is conducive to realism—or plausibility—only when it is confined to a single world. The "frisking, knotted, virtuous line"<sup>31</sup> of Shandyist narrative—named by Friedrich Schlegel "arabesque"<sup>32</sup>—can, according to Peter Conrad, "lead *inside*, for the rhythm of consciousness is discontinuous, digressive, looping and meandering."<sup>33</sup> And indeed, in *Don Juan*, as in *Tristram Shandy*, the insouciant progress of the discourse through all its "interesting exhibits,"<sup>34</sup> its "world too large in all directions,"<sup>35</sup> its "pattern of shifting designs,"<sup>36</sup> leads the reader with a breathtaking frequency across the chasms that divide worlds. The direction may be the way inward, as Conrad suggests, from an outer world of perceptions to an inner world of pulses of consciousness, of forgetting and remembering (IX, 36), of sudden fits of exhilaration (X, 3) or nostalgia (V, 4); but it may just as easily be a way across from one "outside" world to another, most typically from the world of Juan's perceptions to the world of the narrator's.

Clearly, we have arrived at metalepsis again, which is more subtle on some occasions than on others. One of the most frequent patterns followed by the digressions is a meandering outward journey from the story, begun sometimes, as described in the previous chapter, with a simile whose vehicle outgrows its tenor, and sometimes with a generalization, exclamation or exhortation which is at first directly relevant to the story, but which, by

elaboration and accumulation, grows less and less relevant until the plot and its protagonists are left well behind and the reader's consciousness is thoroughly absorbed by another diegetic world. Only at the point of return, very often, when the narrator pulls himself up and demands: "But I'm digressing; what on earth has Nero / . . . / To do with the transactions of my hero?" (III, 110), does the reader feel any sense of transgression or hiatus.

Thus, metalepsis, blatant or subtle, is frequently—but not always—a feature of the digressions in *Don Juan*. However, the most startling metalepses in the poem are not digressions at all. Twice, the narrator "gets into" his story in the guise of a peripheral witness-character, the first time to have a housemaid's pail emptied over his head by the young Juan on the stairs of Juan's parents' house in Seville (I, 24) and the second time, several years of Juan's time later, to sit next to the "very powerful parson, Peter Pith" at an electioneering banquet in England, attended also by Juan, who is staying at the country house of the candidate (XVI, 81-82). The transgressiveness of these incidents in a story in which narrator and protagonist are deeply and logically divided by the "reality" of the one and the "fictionality" of the other is accentuated by their rareness, their gratuitousness, the fact that no narration explains the narrator's presence in those places at those times, and by the fact that they are mutually contradictory. In the first, the narrator appears to be a resident of Seville, on intimate terms with the local aristocracy, and in the second, he seems to be a British Dandy, an old friend from the "livelier London days" of a country parson. Even though the consistency of the two characters could be achieved, it isn't, at least, not within the poem's discourse. Further confusion, which may affect an anxious reader who would like to "fill in" the

narrator's omissions, is caused by certain personal asides, such as the absurd assertion in Canto II: "Much English I cannot pretend to speak" (165). Although the reader is justified in assuming that Byron changed his mind about his narrator to some extent, modelling him from Canto II onward studiously on himself and appearing to forget about the "Spanish Gentleman" he projected in a cancelled preface to the poem,<sup>37</sup> this assumption does not give her *carte blanche* to disregard the first part of the poem, or to make consistent in her own mind what is clearly and deliberately inconsistent in the poem. If the narrator is the notorious poet, Lord Byron, living in exile in Italy (as by now the reader has been led to believe), how come he turns up in England so unnoticed, to eat his dinner at Norman Abbey and disappear? The logically insoluble problem of metalepsis remains to the end of the poem one of its favourite devices for upsetting the reader's complacency and sense of ontological security. As Genette puts it:

All these games, by the intensity of their effects, demonstrate the importance of the boundary they tax their ingenuity to overstep, in defiance of verisimilitude—a boundary that is *precisely the narrating (or the performance) itself*: a shifting but sacred frontier between two worlds, the world in which one tells, the world of which one tells . . . . The most troubling thing about metalepsis indeed lies in this unacceptable and insistent hypothesis, that the extradiegetic is perhaps always diegetic, and that the narrator and his narratees—you and I—perhaps belong to some fiction.<sup>38</sup>

Clearly, metalepsis would be impossible without the prior establishment of boundaries between worlds, plausibility and solidity within worlds, and a hierarchy in which the fictional is secondary to the "real." When a transgression is committed under these conditions, the reader's sense of reality and solidity crumble quite spectacularly into an instantaneous knowledge that all is fiction and

that all boundaries, worlds and hierarchies are artificial.

Far from being a "grey," or spectral presence, the narrator of *Don Juan* is invested with unusual verisimilitude and solidity. Mellor, among others, perceiving the triviality of a distinction between narrator and author in this poem, asserts that he "is called 'Byron.'"<sup>39</sup> And yet his entry into the fictional world of his own creating suggests that he too is a fiction. However, he does not emerge from his fiction more shadowy than before: he retains his solidity. No compromise or synthesis is offered by the poem; *maugre* Ross, "these games" are made possible only by an impasse, a "sacred frontier," which logically divides "reality" from fiction, or, as the more accurate formulation may be, different fictional worlds from one another. They work on a principal of antithesis, which they do not transcend or unify, they merely "transgress," developing an enigma, not solving it. This is a deliberate strategy of the Romantic ironist, who, according to Mellor, "sees the world as fundamentally chaotic," and who in consequence "deconstructs his own texts in the expectation that such deconstruction is a way of keeping in contact with a greater creative power."<sup>40</sup>

Neither metalepsis nor digression is the fundamental tendency in *Don Juan*. Both are important structures, which overlap and are at times foregrounded, but neither term defines all the dialectics and contrasts in the poem, which are multi-faceted and evident in both micro- and macrostructure. More fruitful perhaps is a vaguer and broader terminology, such as that used by Seymour Chatman in *Story and Discourse*. In his discussion of discourse (the long fourth chapter of the book), Chatman creates a continuum ranging from the "nonnarrated story" through varying degrees of "covert" narration to the discourse of an "overt" narrator.<sup>41</sup> Byron of course never even approaches

Chatman's "minimal case" of a nonnarrated story consisting of a "copied text."<sup>42</sup> In fact, taken as a whole, *Don Juan* exhibits an extremely overt narrator and is unlikely to feature in anyone's theory as an example of either a nonnarrated or a covertly narrated story. But the point is that it fluctuates continually, and its own "minimal case" can be found in stanzas depicting action and dialogue like the following:

Up Juan sprang to Haidée's bitter shriek,  
 And caught her falling, and from off the wall  
 Snatch'd down his sabre, in hot haste to wreak  
 Vengeance on him who was the cause of all:  
 Then Lambro, who till now forebore to speak,  
 Smiled scornfully, and said, "Within my call,  
 A thousand scimitars await the word;  
 Put up, young man, put up your silly sword." (IV, 37)

This is by no means the "bare description of physical action" which Chatman, using Hemingway's *The Killers* as a paradigm, claims can approximate (by convention, at least) that form of nonnarrated action evident in a drama.<sup>43</sup> The stanza contains too many interpretative modifiers, such as "bitter," "in hot haste," "scornfully"; motive is suggested ("to wreak / Vengeance"); also unrealized action ("forebore to speak"); furthermore, some of the verbs are too extreme to sound "objective" ("sprang," "snatch'd," etc.). And, in any case, the prosodic structure of the stanza, in which even the apparently direct quotation of characters' speech is in rhyming iambic pentameter, militates strongly against transparency, or that style in which action is merely reported in as visual and neutral a way as possible. Here, too clear a melody is playing for the words to be ignored or "seen straight through."

However, all this is from the critic's point of view. In fact, the stanza has a context, and one which alters it considerably from the way it appears



indented and alone in the midst of this prose text. Put back where it belongs in the middle of Canto IV of a long *ottava rima* poem, and encountered during the course of an ordered hour or so of reading such stanzas, its prosody will be almost unnoticeable to my reader, accustomed as she is to its tune, for metre is not foregrounded here and all the rhymes are perfect, unexceptional and masculine. She will read the stanza very fast, for to some extent her reading speed is monitored by the speed of the actions apparently taking place, and to a large extent it is modified by the relative excitement, drama and suspense of the story as it unfolds for her. The speed of her reading will take her attention off individual words and local effects. The trauma projected here will attach itself for her to the situation described rather than to the way in which it is described, for she is used to a narrator who periodically comments and intrudes in a most overt manner, and here, relatively speaking, he stands back. Examination of a stanza which occurs a few pages on in the same canto will perhaps offer a foil to this one and by contrast show up its transparency; but I must concede that the tactic is slightly rhetorical, for the two do not actually occur back to back:

But let me change this theme, which grows too sad,  
 And lay this sheet of sorrows on the shelf;  
 I don't much like describing people mad,  
 For fear of seeming rather touch'd myself—  
 Besides I've no more on this head to add;  
 And as my Muse is a capricious elf,  
 We'll put about, and try another tack  
 With Juan, left half-kill'd some stanzas back. (IV, 74)

Now this stanza comprises what Chatman calls "commentary on the discourse" or "'self-conscious' narration," a category which he places at the extreme of "overtiness" on his continuum, even beyond "commentary on the story."<sup>44</sup> The narrator is talking to his reader over the heads of his characters,

getting her assent for his change of "tack." The story itself is the subject of discussion, and its possible effect on the narrator ("seeming rather touch'd"); thus, both story and narrator take clear shape *within* the poem's discourse. The reader too has a shadowy existence here, projected by the subjunctive "let me change," which is almost a plea—a form which demands a respondent—and by the first-person plural, "We." (Elsewhere, of course, the reader is much more clearly inscribed.) The narrator is playing with literary conventions in ways which are not quite consistent with one another. First, he talks of Haidée's story, which has recently come to an end, as a "sheet of sorrows." This objectifies and distances her life into a literary artifact: a manuscript. Then he talks of Juan "left half-kill'd," as though he (the narrator) existed within Juan's world as a friend who has neglected him of late. Finally, he deconstructs this illusion by putting Juan not in a fictional place (e.g., a pirate ship), but in a stanza. The Muse, too, heralds a kind of jump from a "realistic" world to an imaginary one. Starting with quite plausible, writerly excuses for his change (he doesn't like writing about madness and he can't think of anything else to say), he then leaps onto the old literary bandwagon and blames it on the Muse, who is quite simply a personification of his own caprice. She is a scapegoat for his own bad habits, and yet, being the one responsible for lifting the veil (II, 7) and changing tack, etc., she has an existence of a kind, outside both Juan's and the narrator's worlds.

All these ironies contrast the stanza very starkly to the serious, story-centred narration of "Up Juan sprang . . . ," in which the sheer drama of the situation and the speaker's total lack of irony preclude the reader's questioning for a moment the "reality" of the fiction, or its relation to its

writer, or to herself. What Byron achieves by these contrasts is in fact very similar to what Genette claims for the modern French phenomenon of "simultaneous narration." By means of a number of stylistic and narrative devices which make a counterpoint of story and discourse, the "equilibrium" of both are "unbalanced," "allowing the whole narrative to tip, according to the slightest shifting of emphasis, either onto the side of the story or onto the side of the narrating, that is, the discourse."<sup>45</sup>

The subtlest of this "tipping" is achieved, as discussed in earlier chapters, by stylistic devices such as rhyme and conceit. The structure of the stanza, too, is such as to demand a change of tone in its seventh line, and this has the effect of tilting one way or another, either towards or away from self-reflexiveness. Of course, the obvious cue for the narrator's presence is the first-person pronoun, with which this poem is very liberally sprinkled. But the interpreting speaker can make himself "show through" his text in all sorts of other devices, such as summary ("In short, he was a very pretty fellow" (II, 148)), generalization ("The love of offspring's nature's general law" (V, 133)), bathos ("And the Lord Henry was a very great debater, / So that few members kept the house up later" (XIII, 20)), explanation ("The cutting off his head was not the art / Most likely to attain his aim—his heart" (V, 140)), or simply a very witty turn of phrase, capped probably by a witty rhyme ("But Virgil's songs are pure, except that horrid one / Beginning with '*Formosum Pastor Corydon*'" (I, 42)).

A temptation exists for the critical theorist to see the digressions in *Don Juan* as a pulsation from story to speaker at the level of narrative, a large and overt manifestation of what is evident at more microscopic levels of structure. To

some extent, this hypothesis is unavoidable, since certain digressions (though not, perhaps, the longer ones) do serve the purpose of bringing writer, reader and composition into brief confrontation over the heads of characters and story. Between two story-centred stanzas, beginning respectively "With the first ray, or rather grey of morn, / Gulbeyaz rose" and "Rose the sultana from a bed of splendour," for example, occurs the following:

And that's the moral of this composition,  
 If people would but see its real drift;—  
 But *that* they will not do without suspicion,  
 Because all gentle readers have the gift  
 Of closing 'gainst the light their orbs of vision;  
 While gentle writers also love to lift  
 Their voices 'gainst each other, which is natural,  
 The numbers are too great for them to flatter all. (VI, 88)

Now partly because this remark has been prompted by a comment within the story—a judgement on the cause of Gulbeyaz's depression ("headlong passions" (87))—and partly because it is relatively short, the reader gets the impression of leaving the story abruptly for a moment, freezing its time and moving—metaleptically—into another world to comment on it, before descending back into the suspension of disbelief that the fiction demands. Indeed, this digression, like "But let me change this theme . . . ," is a good example of the poem's characteristic pulsation—here at the level of narrator's discourse—from story to story-making. And yet even here digressiveness subtly subverts this neat characterization. A playful redundancy motivates the stanza, leading the speaker somewhat unnecessarily from "gentle readers" to "gentle writers" in a movement that has its own rhythm, much like that famous flourish of Corporal Trim's stick in *Tristram Shandy*.<sup>46</sup> Only a little more of this would cause the reader to forget the exigencies of plot and character and be lured into a more complete

participation in the new dialogue, in which the writer is defending his writing against critics of various kinds and the story is reduced to Exhibit A, a "composition" among other such objects.

This is the problem with digression for the rigorous theorist who would like to see macrostructure exactly reflecting microstructure and perfect synechdochic relationships existing between parts. *Don Juan* is simply not as consistent or predictable as such a theory would have to claim. Its discourse might wander across the boundaries dividing worlds and lead, like a clever rhyme or conceit, to a self-reflexive sense of texts and fictions and such; but then again, it might not. What it might do is merely elaborate and linger too long on the world it is already in, stuffing this world so full of plausible irrelevancies that other worlds and their boundaries are temporarily forgotten.

To complicate things still further, the reader encounters a few digressions which are not essentially meditative, but narrative. Whereas most digressions are the narrator's personal asides and speculations, existing in a hypothetical, timeless inner world, some, like the following anecdote, have objective, singular subject-matter and take up "real," past-tense time. The narration is not very different from that of incidents in which Juan is the protagonist: "And yet last night, being at a masquerade, / I saw the prettiest creature, fresh from Milan, / Which gave me some sensations like a villain" (II, 209). In fact, even transparent narration can occur within a digression: "I had / Him borne into the house and up the stair, / And stripped, and looked to" (V, 34). However, the duration of these passages is usually short and hence the reader does not have as much time to get "lost in the story," forgetting the act of narration, as she does in the longer unmediated sections of Juan's history.

Following this line of argument, the critic or theorist may easily be persuaded to develop a smoothly shaded continuum from the matrix of combinations appearing in *Don Juan*. The reader comes across both transparent narration of the main plot and digressive elaboration of detail within the main plot. She finds on the one hand comments by the narrator which are thoroughly relevant to an understanding of the main plot, such as the asides on British habits in Canto XI (42-45), and she discovers on the other hand many digressions which begin with relevant commentary but then slide off into more generalized speculation or the anecdotes of another world, as when the narrator, explaining somewhat apologetically Juan's initial indifference to English beauty, goes on to a discussion of his own travels, then a generalized portrayal of the English reaction to female adultery and then into a meditation on the impossibility of legislating chastity into existence (XII, 68-80). The reader also encounters digressions which are totally irrelevant to the progress of the story, being attacks on Byron's own contemporaries, personal anecdotes, metacomments on the poem's style or composition, and addresses to readers and critics. Finally, to complete the critic's matrix, the reader comes upon transparent narration within the digressions, a neat complement to the digressive tendency within the narration of the main story.

In the face of this barrage of variants, the older theory of a simple dialectic between narration and digression must obviously be scrapped. In fact, the critic's temptation is to shade out contrast altogether, to blur the points into a continuous grey, and to accept Ross's formula: "the digressions and the narrative have a commonality of purpose which mutes any distinction between them."<sup>47</sup> If change be accepted as the norm rather than as transgression, then

Conrad's adaptation of Sterne's single line may be used for the progress of the narrative, provided that, like Tristram's, it is not a straight line but a "winding, serpentine line [which] can lead inside itself":<sup>48</sup> the arabesque, which can "declare form's romantic liberation from content."<sup>49</sup> If the purpose of the poem were to be to wander, then it would not deviate from this purpose, and it would be, in an equivocal sense, unilinear.

Clearly, this way of thinking can become over-permissive. Byron does not give himself licence to do anything he likes and then do it: he makes rules and breaks them—or, at least, some of them. *Don Juan* as a visual phenomenon resembles the strictly formal *Gerusalemme liberata* more than the relaxed, chaotic *Tristram Shandy* and, even as far as the non-visual aspect of narrative goes, it bears more affinities, as A. B. England notes, to *Tom Jones* than to Sterne's wayward novel. England is wrong about the "clear distinction between the narrative and the digressions" in *Don Juan*, but he makes a valuable comment, quoting from Wayne Booth's *The Rhetoric of Fiction*:

One can say of certain parts of *Tristram Shandy* that the "dramatized narrator has here ceased to be distinguishable from what he narrates." But in *Don Juan* Byron always has a story to tell about events external to himself, which he views objectively, just as Fielding has in *Tom Jones*.<sup>50</sup>

The critic may be able to palm off this story as Ross does when he insists that "the assumption implicit in an ordinary definition of digression that there is a story which is of primary importance will not hold for *Don Juan*."<sup>51</sup> For the reader, however, whether it is of *primary* importance or not, the story remains extremely important and she apprehends it as quite clearly distinct from both abstract speculation and authorial metacomment. And it is also quite different

from any story or stories to be found in *Tristram Shandy*: *Don Juan* contains a hero, who is not the narrator (or his uncle Toby), who experiences a series of exciting adventures and who exists in a fictional world of great size, elaborateness and plausibility. The narrator inhabits another fictional world very similar to his hero's, but extradiegetic in relation to it. Although fictional itself, the narrator's world generates the fiction that is the hero's story. When, on occasion, the narrator enters the fictional world of his hero, the reader feels this at once to be a transgression—and one of a type not found in *Tristram Shandy*. In the latter, time may be juggled to suggest more than one Tristram, but two of them never meet face to face in the same picture.

Conrad's arabesque line can be single, though convoluted, because his theory is in the end monistic: for him only one world exists in Sterne and the Romantics, and it is an inner world. To apply the following remarks too literally to *Don Juan* would be misleading:

In one sense romantic poetry is styleless, because although the poets make language a reflection of personality, they abandon the notion of Reynolds and Johnson that style is a principle of order, in which a periodic syntax bends words into obedience and etymological learning guarantees correctness of usage: romantic syntax slides and rambles, hoping to discover new meanings in the course of its proliferation. But in another sense romantic poetry is entirely self-referring: it is a self-inquisition of language.<sup>52</sup>

True, Byron's syntax often seems to be on the loose, and through apparently casual affinities he seems to make his best verbal discoveries: "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" (IX, 75). But to regard the felicity of "improvements" as fortuitous would be in the end naïve. Byron never consciously abandoned the notions of the neo-classicists<sup>53</sup> and if his syntax is



loose and appositional, it is so because classical decorum demands this within the stanza form he has chosen. The syntax in *ottava rima* tends to wander a little because the stanza asks for an eight-line sentence; the diction falls under the tyrannical exigencies of the rhyme-scheme; and when two words turn up in mid-line which happen to rhyme, no more reason appears for the reader to regard the effect here as accidental than appears in the end-rhymes. The licentious wandering in order to make discoveries which Conrad talks of is probably possible only in a kind of Shandyist prose; these "Calculations which look but casual flesh"<sup>54</sup> have a higher degree of formal difficulty altogether.

More importantly, Conrad's comment is inappropriate in that it claims Romantic poetry to be "entirely self-referring." Perhaps Romantic poetry is generally more self-referential than earlier poetry; perhaps "self-referring" is synonymous with "Romantic." But unless all language is always self-referential, Romantic poetry—even the examples Conrad gives from Keats, Shelley and Wordsworth<sup>55</sup>—cannot be *entirely* "self-referring"; the self continually disappears down an infinite regress, on whose edge the Romantic poet sometimes teeters, but inside which "a voice / Is wanting, the deep truth is imageless."<sup>56</sup> Even though the self-referential aspect of *Don Juan* is important to the reader's understanding of the poem, it does not monopolize her attention all the time. Her experience is of a sporadic consciousness of the text and its creator, not a continuous awareness which would prevent her from being surprised. Perhaps my reader is an ingenue, for she really finds Juan's plot quite entertaining, and does not always feel the narrative sections to be irritating digressions from the more serious business of the poem. This plot, though fictional, is not obviously allegorical, and the language of the narrative is often highly objective, not

self-reflexive at all. Moreover, the narrator's world is not merely an interior landscape of theories and generalities either: it is the Europe of 1820, whose solidity is essential to the efficacy of the satire Byron hammers out upon its kings, poets, statesmen, and political and social abuses. This referentiality and the stringencies of his stanza save Byron from the two pitfalls of solipsism and formlessness which the arabesque virtuositities of certain types of Romanticism can lead to.

Neither a graph of shaded greys nor a single line—however convoluted—will do as a diagram of *Don Juan's* narrative. The unmediated, unforewarned leap from the language to the metalanguage needs to be marked by a hiatus that these schemes cannot describe. After a passage of great plausibility, like the first part of the following stanza, the reader will be propelled suddenly out of her absorption—or suspension—in the diegetic world, into the air above, from which vantage point she can see for a moment its composition:

And if in the mean time her husband died,  
 But Heaven forbid that such a thought should cross  
 Her brain, though in a dream! (and then she sigh'd)  
 Never could she survive that common loss;  
 But just suppose that moment should betide,  
 I only say suppose it—*inter nos*.  
 (This should be *entre nous*, for Julia thought  
 In French, but then the rhyme would go for nought.) (I, 84)

The stanza begins in what Chatman defines as "free indirect style . . . attributable to character."<sup>57</sup> So closely does it follow the diction and sequence of Donna Julia's thoughts that (apart from the parenthesis) the third-person pronoun is the only thing distinguishing it from free direct style. Now, although the narrator has by this stage of Canto I cornered the first-person pronoun for

himself and intruded himself busily into the poem with it on numerous occasions ("I really don't know what, nor Julia neither" (I, 71)), when this pronoun appears in line 6 above, it does not seem intrusive in the same way. The narrator seems to have "got inside" Julia to such an extent that the "I" appears to belong as much to her as to him, for the distance between them has been reduced almost to the extent of fusion. In fact, my reader's impression when she reads line 6 is that the very slight transition from indirect to direct speech has been made, bringing no intrusion of the narrator's personality, only a deeper identification of Julia's. The Latin neologism at the end of the line is insufficiently jarring on its own to break this illusion; it is close enough to the Gallic cliché it imitates to pass muster, especially as the reader has a vague idea that English is masquerading here as Spanish anyway. The couplet comes as a bombshell, detonating not only the interior world of Julia's hesitant bad faith, but the English diction which seemed so characteristic and plausible, the sense of spontaneity which turns out to be sweated *ottava rima* after all, the carefully established relationships between reader, narrator and character, and the living identities of all of these. By calling the Latin into question, the couplet does the same to all the English; by placing one phrase under erasure as it were, it does the same to the whole artifact. It mentions rhyme, giving example of a bad and expedient one, and the verse at once goes opaque for the reader. She can no longer assume the fictional role of eavesdropper on characters' private thoughts, or of (scandalized) receiver of the narrator's gossip; she is exploded suddenly into "reality" as the reader of an English poem pretending to convey the interior monologue of a Spanish lady who thinks in French, and, no doubt, French prose at that. The narrator, stripped of his Spanish cloak, and, at

the same time, of Julia's mantilla which he had been in the act of trying on, is revealed as an English poet with a pen, not a voice, struggling to create a fiction containing people who do not speak English, in a stanza form which does not reflect the spontaneity of thought or speech in any language. Julia is killed by the blast and lies anatomized in the dust, a verbal puppet made of words which no longer cohere; but the words themselves, through their deficiencies and the inexorable demands the stanza makes upon them, take up the role of spectacle now that the puppet-show has been abandoned.

What makes this particular transgression so effective—or disturbing, depending on one's sympathies—is its brevity. It is introduced casually, in parenthesis, and the next stanza at once carries on Julia's monologue, this time using the first-person pronoun that might have been introduced so naturally before. Its suddenness is what makes the digression so essentially metaleptic. Conceivably, a comment of this kind could be fully explained "by the narrating, the act that consists precisely of introducing into one situation, the knowledge of another situation."<sup>58</sup> By telling the reader exactly who he is at this point—as witness and writer—by explaining how he has access to Julia's private thoughts and according to what principle he is translating them into English *ottava rima*, the narrator could bridge the hiatus and make the two worlds continuous. But he does not; the reader is propelled across the inexplicable gap and no sooner has she glimpsed the metadrama of poetic composition than she is flung back into the fluid, crossing the same disturbing boundary as she falls.

This is why many of the narrator's shorter asides feel more transgressive than the longer ones and why a system like Joseph's which counts only whole stanzas of digression or commentary cannot be very useful.<sup>59</sup> Joseph obviously

equates digression with transgression,<sup>60</sup> ignoring those non-transgressive passages which I have called digressive, in which the narrator dallies too long by the wayside. But Joseph also fails to count the most extreme examples of the quality he is interested in, because they are often shorter than a stanza. A transgressive digression will be more shocking if it is short, because both the outward and inward crossings of the hiatus will register in the reader's consciousness at the same time. Also, the reader does not get the chance, as in longer digressions, to settle down again as the receiver of a different kind of discourse after the first transition, her relationship to narrator and story re-established on a new basis. Some digressions may include transparent narration for precisely this reason: as long as the extradiegetic world remains constant, it becomes diegetic in a new sense, and is not necessarily self-reflexive, even if it refers to another part or aspect of the poem.

The point at which the reader experiences the impossible juxtaposition of two mutually contradictory worlds marks the extreme case of self-reflexiveness, or textual opaqueness, in the poem. These metaleptic transitions are not digressions *per se*, but they often introduce and close digressions and they are intimately bound up with the digressive tendency in *Don Juan*. However, this tendency on its own is often associated, as is fast-paced narration of action, with low points in self-reflexiveness. The apparently unnecessary elaboration of detail within one world fills up its space, as concentrated narration of action fills up its time: both work in favour of plausibility, objectivity and the making "real" of the diegetic and fictional. Only at the line of interface between the diegetic and extradiegetic is the "real" seen to be fictional, the objective subjective, and the text's transparency dyed dark with knowledge of its own artificiality.

The frequency—as well as variety—of transgression plays a role in the relative unsettling of the reader. Degrees of “jolt” can even be charted, for some transitions open chasms unexpectedly and blatantly in the middle of fairly homogenous discourse, while others lead the reader scarcely perceptibly down the windings of the garden path, and only on the return journey does she find out that she is in the labyrinth. Still others—and these may be the most frequent—are subtle, embedded in language or style, and the reader may or may not take the instantaneous flashing loop in and out of the extradiegetic world.

Many of the more jolting transitions are heralded by poetic exclamations in which some theme immanent to the story is abstracted and addressed in the vocative, as if the narrator suddenly tires of the self-effacing role of story-maker and sweeps around himself the embroidered cloak of the lyric poet:

And now 'twas done—on the lone shore were plighted  
 Their hearts; the stars, their nuptial torches, shed  
 Beauty upon the beautiful they lighted:

Ocean their witness, and the cave their bed,  
 By their own feelings hallowed and united,  
 Their priest was Solitude, and they were wed:  
 And they were happy, for to their young eyes  
 Each was an angel, and earth paradise.

Oh Love! of whom great Caesar was the suitor,  
 Titus the master, Antony the slave,  
 Horace, Catullus, scholars, Ovid tutor,  
 Sappho the sage blue-stocking, in whose grave  
 All those may leap who rather would be neuter—  
 (Leucadia's rock still overlooks the wave)—  
 Oh Love! thou art the very god of evil,  
 For, after all, we cannot call thee devil. (II, 204–05)

This type of transition is not unprecedented in the vatic tradition, in which the poet in the frenzy of his inspiration is constrained to exclaim a great deal. The invocation, like the epic simile, brings with it a number of syntactic and

semantic changes which may be used to subvert the story's world and establish a new one. For a start, the main verbs associated with the personified quality (here, "Love"), will usually be present tense ("thou art"), in contrast to the past tense of the narrative ("Each was"). Also, the pronouns change from third-person plural ("they") to second-person singular ("thou"). A speaker using a present tense and a second-person pronoun is at once in centre stage: *his* present time and *his* personal pronoun ("I") become the dominant presuppositions of the performance. And the receiver can be actively co-opted by the situation, too. When the narrator uses the first-person pronoun here, he employs not the singular, "I," but the plural, "we," which breaks down to "you and I," and thus pulls the reader out of the pit and onto the stage as well. Although the initial vocative is merely a personified—deified—concept, the mere fact that a vocative is used puts the reader into the position of a potential performer: she could be the next one nominated. And the stage is the narrator's extradiegetic—but still fictional—world. The puppets, Juan and Haidée, do not call out to the audience, but the puppeteer himself opens the floor to dramatic interaction.<sup>61</sup>

This particular invocation continues through two more stanzas: "Thou mak'st the chaste connubial state precarious" (206); "Thou mak'st philosophers" (207). After running its course, it is not followed by a return to the transparent medium of the story, but by a direct question—a device which presupposes a respondent. This question reduces the story to an object, motionless in time, which can be discussed by narrator and reader in a new present opened up by the transgression: "But Juan! had he forgotten Julia?" (208). And so this digression wanders on through the narrator's personal feelings about inconstancy, an anecdote from "last night" which demonstrates these attitudes, an account of

man's "perception of the beautiful," a discussion of the inextricability of all the passions, and finally a farewell to the reader, which comprises the last stanza of this canto (209-216).

Of course, the exclamatory tendency is used not merely to invoke personified abstractions in the high style (or a parody of the high style) as in "Oh Love! O Glory!" (VII, 1), "Oh, Death! thou dunnest of all duns!" (XV, 8), "Oh for a *forty-parson power* to chaunt / Thy praise, Hypocrisy!" (X, 34). It may introduce elegy: "Alas! for Juan and Haidée!" (II, 193), "Alas! Worlds fall" (XIV, 23).<sup>62</sup> And occasionally it will occur as an isolated expletive in the narrative—just enough to remind the reader that a speaker is present: "By Jove! he was a noble fellow, Johnson" (VIII, 39). (Significantly, the latter brief stain on the narrative brings with it no alteration in the pronoun or the tense of the verb: it is not a pretext for an excursion, but a memento from another world.)

Exclamation is also frequently associated with vocative tendencies of other kinds. The narrator might address—in the mock-heroic style—an inanimate object within the story's world: "Hail! Themis, hail!"; and this has the effect of making the story's world for a moment continuous with the speaker's. Obviously, the Thames exists, importantly, for him as well as for Juan and his temporary shifting of Juan's story into the present tense gives Juan's journey a representative generality:

Hail! Themis, hail! Upon thy verge it is  
That Juan's chariot, rolling like a drum  
In thunder, holds the way it can't well miss,  
Through Kennington, and all the other "tons,"  
Which make us wish ourselves in town at once. (XI, 20)

Alternatively, the narrator may address some character in the narrative



("Oh Catherine!" (IX, 65)), some historical figure ("Oh Plato! Plato!" (I, 116)) or a character from another fiction who appears at some point relevant to the story or the discourse ("O Job! you had two friends: one's quite enough" (XIV, 48)). But vocatives are used equally often for more dramatic purposes: to address some living person who may chance to read the poem and actually fulfil the role of receiver: "Oh, Mrs. Fry!" (X, 85); "Oh, Wellington!" (IX, 1); "Cockneys of London!" (VIII, 124). When the narrator addresses his publisher in an aside, it is a foregone conclusion that the sender-receiver relationship will be completed: "(Plain truth, dear Murray, needs few flowers of speech)" (V, 101). This address to a known contemporary has exactly the intimacy of tone to be found in many passages aimed quite clearly at the reader—or at one of the roles she willingly assumes at the text's command. A voice out of the page frequently co-opts her as receiver, by addressing directly whoever it is in any age that happens to be perusing the text at that moment. This voice varies as often as the narrator's moods do, bullying, flattering, teasing and cajoling: "But, reader, thou hast patient been of late" (XIII, 74); "But what's this to the purpose? you will say. / Gent. Reader, nothing; a mere speculation" (XIV, 7); "There is a tide in the affairs of men / Which taken at the flood"—you know the rest" (VI, 1); "Put / A kind constuction upon them and me: / But *that* you won't—then don't—I am not less free" (VI, 57). Whatever the form of the verb in these places—and it is often imperative, or some other non-indicative mood—it charts hypothetically the reader's own present time, and consciousness of this "real" present is for her the most self-reflexive of all perspectives on the poem's fictions.

Changes in verb tense or mood may be introduced by devices other than

exclamations and vocatives. Similes—of the adverbial, not the adjectival type—will often bring about a change to a verb of the simple or habitual present tense: “Gulbeyaz *rose* from restlessness; and pale / As Passion *rises*, with its bosom worn” (italics mine; VI, 87); and so will generalization, when a universal truth is stated: “Love bears within its breast the very germ / Of change” (XIV, 94). As with other devices, this type of transition will depend on context for the intensity of its shock effect. The second stanza quoted below marks a somewhat disquieting transition, partly because the generalization with which it begins follows so transparent a passage of narration:

And then they bound him where he fell, and bore  
 Juan from the apartment: with a sign  
 Old Lambro bade them take him to the shore,  
 Where lay some ships which were to sail at nine.  
 They laid him in a boat, and plied the oar  
 Until they reach'd some galliots, placed in line;  
 On board of one of these, and under hatches,  
 They stowed him, with strict orders to the watches.

The world is full of strange vicissitudes,  
 And here was one exceedingly unpleasant:  
 A gentleman so rich in the world's goods,  
 Handsome and young, enjoying all the present,  
 Just at the very time when he least broods  
 On such a thing is suddenly to sea sent,  
 Wounded and chain'd, so that he cannot move,  
 And all because a lady fell in love. (IV, 50-51)

With the present-tense generalization about the “world,” the story ceases to move, and the verbs, after “was,” become present as well. The story turns into an object for contemplation; time registered by the meditation is now narrative time, or the speaker's present, and when this speaker goes on in the next stanza to act in the present himself, the transition from implicit existence to explicit existence is not as jolting as the initial change of tense and tack:

Here I must leave him, for I grow pathetic,  
 Moved by the Chinese nymph of tears, green tea!  
 Than whom Cassandra was not more prophetic;  
 For if my pure libations exceed three,  
 I feel my heart become so sympathetic,  
 That I must have recourse to black Bohea:  
 'Tis pity wine should be so deleterious,  
 For tea and coffee leave us much more serious,

Unless when qualified with thee, Cogniac!  
 Sweet Naiad of the Phlegethontic rill!  
 Ah! why the liver wilt thou thus attack,  
 And make, like other nymphs, thy lovers ill?  
 I would take refuge in weak punch, but *rack*  
 (In each sense of the word), whene'er I fill  
 My mild and midnight beakers to the brim,  
 Wakes me next morning with its synonym. (IV, 52-53)

Among the verbs in these two stanzas, only one signifies an active—not hypothetical or habitual—present: the verb “grow” in the first line, which would be more naturally rendered in the normal English progressive: “am growing.” The narrator, being a narrator rather than a third-person protagonist, is not able to project himself as actively doing many things in his present, except for saying, writing, thinking, “grow[ing] pathetic” or changing to some other mood.<sup>63</sup> When he does use this tense of the verb, he throws the spotlight onto himself as protagonist. His narrating is shown as a dramatic activity, even though, being an essentially intellectual pursuit, it prevents him from doing very much prancing about under the light. When the digression wanders on into the merits of different beverages, he remains the protagonist as drinker; but the discourse becomes much less reflexive because the verbs are correctly inflected into the simple present, which in English does not normally signify a particular event, but a habitual activity which is probably not taking place at the moment of utterance. Thus, Byron the imbibor of tea and punch is seen through a rather

more general and less present time frame than Byron the experiencer of sympathy.

However, the digression from Juan's story is very successfully sustained. A measure of its success is its ability to entertain—*divert*—the reader, so that she begins to forget the urgency of Juan's situation in her enjoyment of this playful send-up of the heroic mode. A shifting contrast of tones charts reader's and narrator's progressive alienation from Juan and his predicament. Speculating on "vicissitudes" (in general) is not the same as sympathising with an individual suffering from one; talking about "grow[ing] pathetic" creates an ironic perspective on the pathetic sensation, not this sensation itself. By the time the narrator starts his comic eulogies and humorous complaints, the reader is no longer involved with Juan emotionally, and can participate in the game. Her alienation allows the narrator to leave Juan's part of the story "for the present" (54) in order to return to another thread of the narrative: the last part of Haidée's story, which is now separate from Juan's due to their physical separation.

Other devices which quite naturally introduce the present tense in the midst of past-tense narration are exclamations, asides and declarations of authorial hesitancy or ignorance. Like most effects in *Don Juan*, these can cloud briefly the glassy medium of narration:

Then there were billiards; cards, too, but *no* dice;  
     Save in the Clubs no man of honour plays;—  
 Boats when 'twas water, skaiting when 'twas ice (XIII, 106);

It was a spacious chamber (Oda is  
     The Turkish title), and ranged round the wall  
 Were couches, toilets (VI, 51);

All trembling, wondering, without the least notion  
 More than I have myself of what could make  
 The calm Dudù so turbulently wake. (VI, 71)

But they can also be the transgressive triggers for longer excursions, as when the transition from the narrative past ("saw") to the explanatory, general present ("make") takes the discourse into a digression of several stanzas on the subject of the Islamic paradise:

The eldest was a true and tameless Tartar,  
 As great a scorner of the Nazarene  
 As ever Mahomet picked out for a martyr,  
 Who only saw the black-eyed girls in green,  
 Who make the beds of those who won't take quarter  
 On earth, in Paradise (VIII, 111);

or when, after stating declaratively that, "after a good deal of heavy firing, / [Juan] found himself alone, and friends retiring," the narrator goes on to wonder, in his own present:

I don't know how the thing occurred—it might  
 Be that the greater part were killed or wounded,  
 And that the rest had faced unto the right  
 About; a circumstance which has confounded  
 Caesar himself, who in the very sight  
 Of his whole army, which so much abounded  
 In courage, was obliged to snatch a shield  
 And rally back his Romans to the field. (VIII, 28)

All these transgressions and transitions are rendered much less effective when they are embedded in non-narrative or less narrative discourse. For example, in Canto XI, Juan's early days in London are given in terms of habitual past-tense verbs: "His morns he passed in business" (65); "His afternoons he passed in visits, luncheons" (66). The effect is more of description than narration; hence, when a passage is inserted in the habitual present, it is

not felt to be much of a transgression:

Then dress, then dinner, then awakes the world!  
 Then glare the lamps, then whirl the wheels, then roar  
 Through street and square fast flashing chariots, hurled  
 Like harnessed meteors; then along the floor  
 Chalk mimics painting; then festoons are twirl'd;  
 Then roll the brazen thunders of the door,  
 Which opens to the thousand happy few  
 An earthly Paradise of "Or Molu." (XI, 67)

Distinguishing Juan's world from the narrator's is not at this point easy—or important—to achieve. Both characters belong, or have belonged, to the "thousand happy few" and both are, or have been, taken up by the general and ongoing life of the city. A hypothetical guest ("he who, after a survey / Of the good company" (69)), a reader with possible designs on an heiress ("if you can, get next at supper" (72)), well-known and less well-known "real" figures of the period ("Brumel," "Wellesley," "George the Third" (78), "the Lady Carolines and Franceses" (80)), the narrator himself ("I have seen the landholders without a rap" (84)), are all equally part with Juan of this "mighty Babylon" (23): London.

Similarly, in Canto IV, when Juan, himself otherwise preoccupied, is passing the "shores of Ilion" (75) in a pirate ship, and the narrator elaborately describes these shores anyway, the transition to his own experience and the first-person pronoun is not a jolt for the reader two stanzas on: "but where I sought for Ilion's walls, / The quiet sheep feeds, and the tortoise crawls" (77); because she already clearly apprehends that these are not Juan's perceptions. The narrator's younger self is nearly as distant and non-reflexive a device as Juan; he is more meditative a protagonist, perhaps, having travelled as Childe Harold did, a tourist; but he is, like Juan, objectified, the butt of irony

("school-boy feelings" (78)), and he, too, is ascribed actions in the active past tense ("I sought" (77); "I found" (78)).

Many of the longer and more variable digressions occur at the ends and, even more frequently, at the beginnings of cantos. Both these positions help to mute the effect of transgression for the reader, though the initial position does this more effectively because an ending must be predicted or tagged before it occurs, whereas a beginning is self-evident. Reading or reciting a long poem will normally take several sessions; the books or cantos of epics imitate the earlier oral tradition of separate performances of manageable lengths. Pulci, Boiardo and Ariosto stylized into the written tradition the oral *ottava rima* narrative convention of addressing the "real" audience at these points. At the beginning of a canto, the poet "invit[es] his audience to listen and remind[s] them of where he had broken off the last canto." At the end of a canto, the audience is "often asked to return and hear the next canto . . . [and] sometimes a vague prediction of what the next canto will contain is made."<sup>64</sup> Of course, *Don Juan's* beginnings and endings are usually more complex than this, but they do almost always contain an address to readers or a discussion of the text and its progress.<sup>65</sup> Even without the traditional convention to give these passages respectability, however, they would "naturally" seem less transgressive than similar passages occurring in mid-canto. The narrator signals pauses in the otherwise continuous present time of his narrating (and the receiver's reading) at these points: he goes off at the end of Canto IX "to take a quiet ride in some green lane" (85); and at the end of Canto XII he orders the reader to take time out to "read all the National-Debt sinkers" (89). As prelude to and aftermath of these separations of narrator, reader and text, some form of

farewell and some kind of re-assembly of relationships and materials seem natural. Even when the narrator does not begin with some remark about his intentions ("I want a hero" (I, 1); "I now mean to be serious" (XIII, 1)), but launches at once into a speculation on Newton (X), Berkeley (XI) or avarice (XII), these passages are not strictly *transgressive*, since nothing precedes them on the fresh new page for the speaker to transgress. The descent from these speculations into the story is transgressive, but the narrator normally proceeds somewhat gradually, keeping his reader clearly informed about his progress: "And now to business.—Oh, my gentle Juan! / Thou art in London" (XII, 23).

Taking all things into account, I must conclude that digression is a much more complex device in *Don Juan* than most critics have estimated. A better strategy than to regard it as one separate category is to see it as the result of three tendencies on the part of the narrator. Two of these—the accumulative and the "digressive"—are fairly similar; the other—the transgressive—is quite different in nature. The reader recognizes these tendencies in the minute particulars of the poem as well as in the larger structures, and often she discovers their more extreme manifestations in the shorter examples. In the case of transgression, its most shocking effects are to be found in narrative structures which cannot be defined as digressions. Context is extremely important in consideration of all these tendencies, as it may foreground or background them in a great many ways and to very variable degrees. Also, they may be used to manipulate context, rather than vice versa, as when a long transgressive aside is used to distract the reader's attention from a crucial point in the plot, so that the narrator may execute a transition to another thread of narrative, or may suggest time passing within the story. These narrative strategies are employed, subtly,



by most writers of fiction; however, few narrators uncover their strategies as disarmingly, or show the abyss over which they leap as disturbingly—or, indeed, execute these dizzying take-offs into other fictional or diagetic worlds as frequently—as Byron's transgressive narrator in this poem.

#### NOTES TO CHAPTER IV

<sup>1</sup>Edwin Morgan, "Voice, Tone and Transition in *Don Juan*," *Wrath and Rhyme*, ed. Alan Bold (New Jersey: Barnes and Noble, 1983) 70.

<sup>2</sup>John Jump, *Byron* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972) 112.

<sup>3</sup>A. B. England, *Byron's Don Juan and Eighteenth-Century Literature* (Lewisburg: Bucknell UP, 1975) 161. See also T. S. Eliot, who, in his essay on Byron, writes about the earlier poet's "genius for digression, for wandering away from his subject (usually to talk about himself) and then suddenly returning to it." *On Poetry and Poets* (London: Faber, 1957) 202.

<sup>4</sup>Harold Bloom, *The Visionary Company* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1971) 266.

<sup>5</sup>England 161.

<sup>6</sup>M. K. Joseph, *Byron the Poet* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1964) 334.

<sup>7</sup>Alvin B. Kernan, *The Plot of Satire* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1965) 176-79.

<sup>8</sup>Jerome J. McGann, *Don Juan in Context* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1976) 107-14.

<sup>9</sup>See Anne K. Mellor, *English Romantic Irony* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1980) 53, where she writes of the "antithetical voice of the narrator" in the digressions; and Peter L. Thorslev, Jr., *Romantic Contraries* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1984) 173-75, where he examines the way the ironic narrator "undermines" in his asides the love of Haidée and Juan presented in the narrative.

<sup>10</sup>W. T. Ross, "Digressive Narrative and Narrative Technique in Byron's *Don Juan*," diss., U of Virginia, 1970, 109.

<sup>11</sup>"Byron is quite capable of a two-line digression." Ross 108.

<sup>12</sup>Ross 108-09.

<sup>13</sup>Joseph 334.

<sup>14</sup>Ross 110.

<sup>15</sup>Seymour Chatman, *Story and Discourse* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1978) 248.

<sup>16</sup>M. M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, (Austin: U of Texas P, 1981) 5-6.

<sup>17</sup>Bakhtin 43-49.

<sup>18</sup>The narrator in Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin* (New York: Dutton, 1981) frequently compares Eugene with Childe Harold (ch.1, v.38, 22; ch.4, v.44, 107; ch.8, v.8, 198). In Eugene's library there is a portrait of Byron, and, among "Some works" which had been "exempt" from Eugene's "contempt," are those of the "bard of *Don Juan* and *Giaour*" (ch.7, v.19, 173; v.22, 174). But besides these parodic uses and the melodramatic epigraph to chapter 8 (193), the poem has a similar chatty tone and sense of narrator's time to those of *Don Juan*.

<sup>19</sup>Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1980) 235.

<sup>20</sup>Genette 234.

<sup>21</sup>The title of Ross's dissertation includes the term "digressive narrator" and the theme of digressiveness is pursued throughout the work. Unfortunately, Ross's observation that some digressions are the result of this insouciant tendency leads him to assume that they all are, and he does not notice that metalepsis is rather different.

<sup>22</sup>Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. (New York: Liveright, 1961) 32-33.

<sup>23</sup>Tzvetan Todorov, "Narrative-Men," *The Poetics of Prose* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1977) 73.

<sup>24</sup>Peter Brooks, *Reading for the Plot* (New York: Knopf, 1984) 104. This Freudian theory, utilized by Todorov and exploited and developed by Brooks, implicitly contains Roland Barthes' structural analysis of narratives (exhaustively laid out in *Image-Music-Text* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977)) and his strip-tease metaphor for reading (*The Pleasure of the Text* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977) 10-11). The reader longs to tear off the veil faster, and will sometimes "boldly skip (no one is watching) descriptions, explanations, analyses, conversations." However, in doing this the reader deprives him- or herself of the pleasure of the entire process, the "gradual unveiling," which is, in fact, essentially a postponement of the end.

<sup>25</sup>For a discussion of this tradition, see William A. Clung, *The Country House in English Renaissance Poetry* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1977),

especially "Later Estate Poems: Cotton and Pope" (174-80), which includes mention of Byron's Norman Abbey stanzas.

<sup>26</sup>John Milton, *Paradise Lost* IV, from line 285: "where the Fiend / Saw undelighted all delight." *Poetical Works* (London: Oxford UP, 1966) 281.

<sup>27</sup>Paul West, *Byron and the Spoiler's Art* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1960) 63.

<sup>28</sup>Truman Guy Steffan, *Byron's Don Juan I : The Making of a Masterpiece* (Austin: U of Texas P, 1957) 65. Steffan quotes from a letter to John Murray (August 26, 1813) on the subject of the growth of *The Giaour*, in which Byron refers to "this snake of a poem—which has been lengthening its rattles every month" and then uses the same image as a covering metaphor for the growth of *Don Juan* as well. Byron, *Letters and Journals* III (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1974) 100.

<sup>29</sup>Kernan 178, 176-77.

<sup>30</sup>Roland Barthes, who, in his "Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narratives," coins for the more "trivial incidents or descriptions" in a narrative the term "catalysers," claims that these "catalysers" are never "purely redundant." Unlike the "risky," "potentially implausible framework of "nuclei" (the "real hinge-points of the narrative"), "the catalysers lay out areas of safety, rests, luxuries." Also, they "[maintain] the contact between narrator and addressee." *Image-Music-Text* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977) 93-95.

<sup>31</sup>Peter Conrad, *Shandyism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1978) 103.

<sup>32</sup>See Antonio's "Letter About the Novel," Friedrich Schlegel, *Dialogue on Poetry and Literary Aphorisms*, (University Park: The Pennsylvania State UP, 1968) 96.

<sup>33</sup>Conrad 100.

<sup>34</sup>West, *Byron and the Spoiler's Art* 63.

<sup>35</sup>Kernan 174.

<sup>36</sup>McGann, *Don Juan in Context* 104.

<sup>37</sup>This cancelled preface appears in the variorum edition of *Don Juan* used in this dissertation (II, 3-7). It is a parody of Wordsworth's preface to "The Thorn" and was probably abandoned precisely because the narrator became more and more obviously a portrayal of Byron himself as *Don Juan* progressed. After announcing as early as II, 105, that he had swum the Hellespont (a feat of which Byron often boasted), this narrator had already become too central for the pretence that he was entering the scene only as an "English Editor" (6) to be plausible. In any case, the poem, unlike the preface, never gives the reader instructions to regard itself as having dual authorship. The potentially Spanish

persona of the speaker in parts of Canto I is soon subsumed by Byron, who sometimes lies, for example, when he talks of his "grandmother's review—the British" (I, 109), and sometimes tells the truth, as when he mentions his "grand-dad's 'Narrative'" (II, 137).

<sup>38</sup>Genette 263.

<sup>39</sup>Mellor 31. Also, McGann, *Fiery Dust* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1968) 287; Karl Kroeber, *Romantic Narrative Art* (Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1960) 145; Louis Kronenberger, *The Polished Surface* (New York: Knopf, 1969) 153; Jump 140.

<sup>40</sup>Mellor 4, 5.

<sup>41</sup>Chatman 146-264.

<sup>42</sup>Chatman 167.

<sup>43</sup>Chatman 168.

<sup>44</sup>Chatman 248-53. Chatman's distinction between the self-conscious devices of Romantic irony (to be found in *Jacques le fataliste*) and the "deconstructive" devices of certain modern novels and films (Beckett's *Watt* and Vertov's *The Man with the Movie Camera*, for example), seems confusing and inadequately drawn (251). When the narrator in *Don Juan* exclaims: "Much English I cannot pretend to speak" (II, 165), he is surely being as "deconstructive" as Beckett's narrator when he posits a *girl* with haemophilia in *Watt*; and yet *Don Juan* has been claimed as a seminal work of Romantic irony by Mellor, Thorslev, Conrad and R. R. Pemberton ("The Romantic Irony of Lord Byron," diss., U of California, 1974). Mellor's distinction between Romantic irony and later philosophical positions which also conceive the universe as chaos (existentialism, for example), seems more useful. According to her, the later philosopher confronts the same disjointed world as the Romantic ironist; yet his observer experiences not exuberance but *angst*. The true Romantic ironist is exhilarated by the endless abundance of a chaotic universe; Lewis Carroll and the existentialists are terrified by it. Beckett's reaction could perhaps be described as disgust. Mellor 186-89.

<sup>45</sup>Genette 219.

<sup>46</sup>Laurence Sterne, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy Gentleman* (New York: Modern Library, n.d.) 629.

<sup>47</sup>Ross 110.

<sup>48</sup>Conrad 100.

<sup>49</sup>Conrad 104.

<sup>50</sup>England 161.

<sup>51</sup>Ross 110.

<sup>52</sup>Conrad 96.

<sup>53</sup>England examines the influence of the eighteenth-century writers on Byron in some detail. He concludes that "the kinds of rhetorical structure to which Byron in his own rhetoric in *Don Juan* is most closely and most frequently related do not represent those aspects of eighteenth-century literature of which he was most consciously an advocate [i.e., aspects of the style of Pope, in particular]" (148). However, England concedes that Byron did possess some of the characteristics of the earlier period, and these are to be found mostly in the type of control exercised over his subject-matter, a control Byron discovered and admired in Fielding, and which he contrasted favourably with what he called the "vulgarity" of his own contemporaries (149-50). This "vulgarity," whose implications England does not pursue, is obviously to be associated with a setting free of words or subject-matter—of which Conrad would probably approve.

<sup>54</sup>W. B. Yeats, "The Statues," *The Collected Poems* (London: MacMillan, 1952) 375.

<sup>55</sup>Conrad 96.

<sup>56</sup>Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Prometheus Unbound* II, iv, ll.115-16, *Poetical Works* (London: Oxford UP, 1968) 238.

<sup>57</sup>Chatman 203.

<sup>58</sup>Genette 234.

<sup>59</sup>Joseph 334.

<sup>60</sup>Joseph defines "'digression' properly so-called" as "passages in which Byron temporarily takes leave of the story to make some personal aside or general statement, for which there is no immediate basis in the story" (199).

<sup>61</sup>See chapter VI, note 19.

<sup>62</sup>Byron parodies his own frequent use of this expletive at the end of Canto I: "But I, being fond of true philosophy, / Say very often to myself 'Alas!'" (220).

<sup>63</sup>The narrator normally dominates and shares the reader's present, however, as chapter VI demonstrates.

<sup>64</sup>Robert M. Durling, *The Figure of the Poet in Renaissance Epic* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1965) 93-94.

<sup>65</sup>Canto XIII of *Don Juan* is an exception to this rule: it ends with narrative. What makes its conclusion feel final is that all the characters retire to bed at this point. (Of course, Canto XVI, which is the last part of the poem

that Byron sent to his publisher, ends *in media res* rather more spectacularly, but even in the face of the existing fragment of Canto XVII, the reader cannot know for sure that Canto XVI would have ended where it now ends had Byron lived to continue his poem.)

## CHAPTER V

### THE POET AS TRANSGRESSOR

Among the howls of moral outrage with which *Don Juan* was greeted on its first publication were several strongly-worded protests against what was seen as a treacherous inconstancy in its poetic mode. Byron was not to be forgiven by those early readers for "passing at once with a surprising and unaccountable indifference, from images of pathos, beauty, and grandeur, to ludicrous and burlesque similes and expressions."<sup>1</sup> The desire was expressed that "the fine poetry, which almost redeems the third Canto . . . from reprobation, had not been mixed up with very much that is equally frivolous and foolish."<sup>2</sup> William Blackwood, in a private letter, confessed that it "was not the grossness or blackguardism which struck [him], but it was the vile, heartless, and cold-blooded way this fiend attempted to degrade every sacred and tender feeling of the human heart."<sup>3</sup> The most perceptive and ambiguous of these complaints deserves to be quoted at length. William Hazlitt, in a fascinating essay on Byron and Scott which was interrupted and transformed towards the end by the news of Byron's death, writes the following:

The *Don Juan* indeed has great power; but its power is owing to the force of the serious writing, and to the contrast between that and the flashy passages with which it is interlarded. From the sublime to

the ridiculous is but one step. You laugh and are surprised that anyone should turn round and *travestie* himself: the drollery is in the utter discontinuity of ideas and feelings. He makes virtue serve as a foil to vice; *dandyism* is, (for want of any other) a variety of genius. A classical intoxication is followed by the splashing of sodawater, by frothy effusions of ordinary bile. After the lightning and hurricane, we are introduced to the interior of the cabin and the contents of the washhand basins. The solemn hero of tragedy plays *Scrub* in the farce. This is 'very tolerable and not to be endured.'

The noble lord is almost the only writer who has prostituted his talents in this way. He hallows in order to desecrate, takes a pleasure in defacing the images of beauty his hands have wrought, and raises our hopes and our belief in goodness to Heaven only to dash them to earth again and break them in pieces the more effectually from the very height they have fallen. Our enthusiasm for genius or virtue is thus turned into a jest by the very person who has kindled it, and who thus fatally quenches the spark of both. It is not that Lord Byron is sometimes serious and sometimes trifling, sometimes profligate and sometimes moral; but when he is most serious and most moral, he is only preparing to mortify the unsuspecting reader by putting a pitiful *hoax* upon him. This is a most unaccountable anomaly. It is as if the eagle were to build its eyry in a common sewer, or the owl were seen soaring to the mid-day sun. Such a sight might make one laugh, but one would not wish or expect it to occur more than once.<sup>4</sup>

This is not mere "peevish invective";<sup>5</sup> it contains wonderful insights and much unwilling admiration. The age whose cant Byron deplored was becoming over-serious as well as increasingly moralistic. Hazlitt, like so many of his contemporaries, simply could not bear the sublimity of "lightning" and "hurricane" to be juxtaposed to the mundane—the "interior of the cabin"—or the sordid—the "contents of the wash-hand basins." His fastidiousness expresses the time's growing suspicion that dignity is incompatible with the acknowledgement of bodily functions, and that what is sacred must not be ridiculed.

However, despite all this incipient Victorianism, Hazlitt puts his finger unerringly on the pulse of *Don Juan*. The poem works on the reader by "contrast," "discontinuity," "*travestie*," "*hoax*"; she finds its most disturbing characteristic to be its transgressiveness, not so much in the formal and



narrative aspects discussed in previous chapters, as in its moral, sentimental and metaphysical consistencies. *Don Juan* is profoundly ironical, and yet, in tone, it is not ironical all of the time. The reader will probably remember afterwards the bluff humour of the man of the world, the tolerant teasing of the aging roué who, self-mocking but unembittered, has seen through all the deceptions of innocence and hypocrisy without losing his capacity for pity or for admiration. And yet in the actual experience of reading she is conscious of many other notes outside this range and often discordant with it. She hears in "real time" a sequence of melodies on different instruments and in shifting keys which do not always set each other off to best advantage or modulate harmonically from one to another.

Neither discord nor hiatus is a necessary feature of the ironic mode. The narrator of even a long novel can retain a sceptical distance from characters and events, without necessarily undercutting all their aspirations and outcomes. Fielding does this in *Tom Jones*, even at moments of great sentimental importance to his hero and heroine:

Jones, who had hitherto held his lovely burden in his arms, now relinquished his hold; but gave her at the same instant a tender caress, which, had her senses been then perfectly restored, could not have escaped her observation. As she expressed therefore, no displeasure at this freedom, we suppose she was not sufficiently recovered from her swoon at the time.<sup>6</sup>

Passages similar to this do occur in *Don Juan*, at times when the narrator purports to know more than the characters and the reader infers more than he directly tells her, while both narrator and reader retain a humorous affection for the characters, despite the characters' self-deception or blindness:

I cannot know what Juan thought of this,  
 But what he did, is much what you would do;  
 His young lip thank'd it with a grateful kiss,  
 And then, abash'd at its own joy, withdrew  
 In deep despair, lest he had done amiss,  
 Love is so very timid when 'tis new:  
 She blush'd, and frown'd not, but she strove to speak,  
 And held her tongue, her voice was grown so weak. (I, 112)

But then some passages like the following—which deals, significantly, with Juan's affair with Haidée, not Julia—appear to contradict the ironies of the preceding:

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)

This is the lyric impulse run wild; the reader can imagine nothing very like it in prose. As for analysing the passage narratively, she finds extricating the narrator's voice from his empathic enrapture with his characters' feelings almost impossible—at least, until the couplet.<sup>7</sup> This stanza, like many Romantic and visionary poems, creates for the reader the imaginative fulfilment of the author's most fervent wish. His own "broken words" are asked to go beyond language and become invisible signs of the "burning tongues the passions teach." As McGann claims of *The Island*, this vision is "true because it may be true, always."<sup>8</sup>

Writers of novels, except perhaps of the perennial popular romance which thrives on purple passages, usually employ narrative strategies which distance them a little from the most emotional discourse. The commonest of these

strategies is probably to compose the novel in direct speech—dramatic exchanges between characters—so that the implied author is absolved from immediate responsibility for it and, in fact, many ironies of situation can be manipulated to deny his unqualified assent. In the nineteenth-century novel, where narration generally stops short of the bedroom door, love affairs can be suggested very effectively by these dramatic exchanges. The epistolary novel also allows characters to pour out their souls at great length, without forcing the novelist to identify his discourse exactly with theirs. Irony of tone, such as that evident in the extract from Fielding above, is another great standby for protecting the implied author's independence. Sterne's irony is often more subtle and can take the form of a kind of empiricism instead of Fielding's knowing winks. When Tristram is most moved by his uncle Toby's treatment of the fly, he is still anatomising in himself the "vibration of most pleasurable sensations."<sup>9</sup> First-person character narrators, whose perception of events is limited by their involvement in them, also let the implied author off the hook—though to varying degrees, depending on the amount of vision or limitation ascribed to this narrator. Multiple first-person narratives in a novel preclude authoritative vision more effectively, as in that epistolary mode which uses multiple writers. *Wuthering Heights*, with all its poetic determinism, is significantly given through a network of narrators, the "outermost," Lockwood, being in some ways the least reliable.

But even omniscience can be used as a kind of distancing technique. The novelistic author, while depicting characters who are often subject to strong emotions and enthusiasms, may remain himself calm, pretending at least to a god-like serenity and impartiality. George Eliot, with all her sympathy for her characters, is apt to ensconce her narrator on higher ground, thus:

Nor can I suppose that when Mrs. Casaubon is discovered in a fit of weeping six weeks after her wedding, the situation will be regarded as tragic. Some discouragement, some faintness of heart at the new real future which replaces the imaginary, is not unusual, and we do not expect people to be deeply moved by what is not unusual.<sup>10</sup>

Even Dickens, that partial and indignant artist, allows himself outbursts like the following very rarely, and when he does, they come, like Eliot's more subtle effusions, from well above his characters' heads:

The light is come upon the dark benighted way. Dead!  
Dead, your Majesty. Dead, my lords and gentlemen. Dead, Right Reverends and Wrong Reverends of every order. Dead, men and women, born with Heavenly compassion in your hearts. And dying thus around us every day.<sup>11</sup>

But in poetry the exclamatory mode has been well established, at least, in the vatic tradition of hymn, ode, elegy and epic. The *vates irritabilis* may become over-excited by his subject-matter. Shelley in lyrical frenzy writes thus of a situation similar to that of Juan and Haidée:

The Meteor to its far morass returned:  
The beating of our veins one interval  
Made still; and then I felt the blood that burned  
Within her frame, mingle with mine, and fall  
Around my heart like fire; and over all  
A mist was spread, the sickness of a deep  
And speechless swoon of joy, as might befall  
Two disunited spirits when they leap  
In union from this earth's obscure and fading sleep.<sup>12</sup>

However, *The Revolt of Islam*, if it is ironic at all, is so only in the broadest philosophic sense. Its voice, throughout its system of narrators, is one voice; its tone is consistently passionate; no-one would make a case for calling it a novel. *Don Juan*, on the other hand, despite its stanza, has fairly justifiably been taken—or mistaken—for a novel,<sup>13</sup> and indeed, it is one, at least, most of the

time, by any definition that will include formal poetic style within the genre. However, there are some sections of the poem which would strain even the most inclusive definition to breaking point. If a distinction is to be made between the lyric and the novel, then passages like the single-voiced stanza last quoted from *Don Juan* must be better identified by the lyrical—or vatic—definition. Pushkin, writing a much less controversially novelistic poem, *Eugene Onegin*, tends to avoid the vatic stance.<sup>14</sup> When an oracular voice is introduced in prose, it is often in parody, as with Fielding's "A Short Hint of What We Can Do in the Sublime, and a Description of Miss Sophia Western."<sup>15</sup> Herman Melville, in his different, American, mystical kind of prose, still puts his least ironical notes of the sublime into the mouth of a character—Ahab—and in actual dramatic form; they are not direct messages from the implied author:

*The cabin; by the stern windows; Ahab sitting alone, and gazing out.*

I leave a white and turbid wake; pale waters, paler cheeks,  
where'er I sail. The envious billows sidelong swell to overwhelm my track;  
let them; but first I pass.<sup>16</sup>

Significantly, Ahab's words are in iambs. Just as prose becomes more metrical as it becomes more emotional, so the poetic line encourages a more emotional tone than prose. This is because, as discussed in earlier chapters, the demand for stress cuts down the grammatical superfluities of the sentence, paring it to the blatant bone; and because the insistent "beat, upbeat, pause" pattern of expectation creates a discipline of its own, outside the sentence's meaning, which will allow the sentence to say, unsentimentally, things that cannot easily be said without embarrassment in prose. And Byron, playing possibilities on his instrument, plays too upon those strings which vibrate most directly, without syncopation, the strings of the human heart; and then, nonchalantly, without

explanation, he returns to the ironic harmonies of discord which appeal to the brain's distrust of the heart, leaving the hearts of such readers as William Hazlitt feeling betrayed and travestied. If the poem contained no stanzas like the following, perhaps Hazlitt would have approved of *Don Juan* more, but perhaps again he would not have responded to it at all:

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'erlabour'd steer;  
 Whate'er of peace about our hearthstone clings,  
 Whate'er our household gods protect of dear,  
 Are gather'd round us by thy look of rest;  
 Thou bring'st the child, too, to the mother's breast. (III, 107)

This "true voice of feeling"<sup>17</sup> must have touched a chord in Tennyson, for he echoes it in more melancholy tones in *In Memoriam*:

Sad Hesper o'er the buried sun  
 And ready, thou, to die with him,  
 Thou watchest all things ever dim  
 And dimmer, and a glory done:  
  
 The team is loosen'd from the wain,  
 The boat is drawn upon the shore;  
 Thou listenest to the closing door,  
 And life is darkened in the brain.<sup>18</sup>

But a reader may wonder how Tennyson's stomach would have turned at the juxtaposition of the following two stanzas, which grotesquely parody "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" and the Book of Genesis:

About this time a beautiful white bird,  
 Web-footed, not unlike a dove in size  
 And plumage, (probably it might have err'd  
 Upon its course) pass'd oft before their eyes,  
 And tried to perch, although it saw and heard  
 The men within the boat, and in this guise  
 It came and went, and flutter'd round them till  
 Night fell:—this seem'd a better omen still.

But in this case I also must remark,  
 'Twas well this bird of promise did not perch,  
 Because the tackle of our shatter'd bark  
 Was not so safe for roosting as a church;  
 And had it been the dove from Noah's ark,  
 Returning there from her successful search,  
 Which in their way that moment chanced to fall,  
 They would have eat her, olive-branch and all. (II, 94-95)

This passage smacks distinctly of prose rather than poetry. The rhymes are all masculine and unremarkable; also, repeated enjambment forces the stanza into the background (except for the second couplet, which is foregrounded for its "punchline" effect). And the urge to explain, expansively, to determine the reader's response quite consciously rather than by means of the symbol's own inherent mysteriousness, is definitely novelistic. Although the reader is reminded of "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" here, she finds in fact the sparseness of Coleridge's symbolic poetry to be starkly different from the above:

At length did cross an Albatross,  
 Thorough the fog it came;  
 As if it had been a Christian soul,  
 We hailed it in God's name.<sup>19</sup>

In similar contrast is the gnomic simplicity of the King James Bible:

But the dove found no rest for the sole of her foot, and she returned unto him into the ark, for the waters were on the face of the whole earth: then he put forth his hand, and took her, and pulled her in unto him into the ark.<sup>20</sup>

If this is poetic prose, then Byron's passage is very prosaic poetry, and the prose that it imitates is of a type quite familiar to a reader of novels. This reader is used to being teased about being a reader of poetry, and to being shown that the prosaic truth is rather different and less romantic than poetry often suggests. Examples of this tendency are to be found in Fielding,<sup>21</sup> but I prefer to use an anachronistic example from Melville, because the Byronic Platonist is here the parodic victim, and because the parody has such a Byronic flavour:

For nowadays, the whale-fishery furnishes an asylum for many romantic, melancholy, and absent-minded young men, disgusted with the carking care of earth, and seeking sentiment in tar and blubber. Childe Harold not infrequently perches himself upon the mast-head of some luckless disappointed whale-ship, and in moody phrase ejaculates:—

'Roll on, thou deep and dark blue ocean, roll!  
Ten thousand blubber-hunters sweep over thee in vain.'<sup>22</sup>

What infuriated Hazlitt and his contemporaries, though, was not that Byron was writing an ironic, novelistic poem, but that he was compiling a disturbing medley of ironies and sincerities which would not finally precipitate out into the consistency expected by a nineteenth-century reader of either a Romantic poem or an ironic novel. The most upsetting section of *Don Juan* was probably the Haidée episode, for in it occur the most sustained examples of the lyric mode, and, perhaps, the widest discrepancies between styles, between events and voice, and between narrator and characters. Summarizing all the shocks to which the narrator subjects the reader within this long passage is not easy. Some of the transitions are into digressions which are largely irrelevant, such as the one triggered by the simile: "When o'er the brim the sparkling bumpers reach" (II,



178-81), discussed in chapter III. Other digressions are more relevant, drawing parallels between the story and the narrator's past experience: "'Tis pleasing to be school'd in a strange tongue / By female lips and eyes" (II, 164); or suggesting that the experience of love is a very general one: "Oh Love! of whom great Caesar was the suitor" (II, 205-07); or probing into characters' motives: "But Juan! had he quite forgotten Julia?" (II, 208). However, the reader is not struck most forcibly by relative relevancy or irrelevancy in these asides. Even the metaleptic hiatus is for her muted by a much stronger sense of transgression, deriving simply from change of tone. The "digressive" passages vary widely in tone from despairing cynicism to wry elegiac sadness, but all of them are motivated by a profound scepticism about love which will not, by any effort of wrenching on the part of the reader, tally with the ideal of enduring, monogamous, romantic love which the narrator appears, in the narrative passages, to share with his protagonists at this stage. The narrative charts, in strikingly lyrical stanzas, and with a sympathy sufficiently empathic at times to efface the narrator's personality altogether, a love affair so perfectly ideal as to contradict every doubt, sneer and sophism of which the narrator's voice is capable. No compromise is reached between the two discourses. Stanzas like the following occur one below the other:

The lady watch'd her lover—and that hour  
 Of Love's, and Night's, and Ocean's solitude  
 O'erflow'd her soul with their united power;  
 Amidst the barren sand and rocks so rude  
 She and her wave-worn love had made their bower,  
 Where nought upon their passion could intrude,  
 And all the stars that crowded the blue space  
 Saw nothing happier than her glowing face.

Alas! the love of women! it is known  
 To be a lovely and a fearful thing;  
 For all of theirs upon that die is thrown,  
 And if 'tis lost, life hath no more to bring  
 To them but mockeries of the past alone,  
 And their revenge is as the tiger's spring,  
 Deadly, and quick, and crushing; yet as real  
 Torture is theirs, what they inflict they feel. (II, 198-99)

And the narrator can be much more cynical than this: contradicting himself, he later claims that for woman, though "One man alone at first her heart can move; / She then prefers him in the plural number, / Not finding that the additions much encumber" (III, 3). On occasion, he will shift alarmingly from elegy to levity within a single stanza:

Alas! they were so young, so beautiful,  
 So lonely, loving, helpless, and the hour  
 Was that in which the heart is always full,  
 And, having o'er itself no further power,  
 Prompts deeds eternity cannot annul,  
 But pays off moments in an endless shower  
 Of hell-fire—all prepared for people giving  
 Pleasure or pain to one another living. (II, 192)

My reader may not become, like Hazlitt, enraged by this transgressiveness, but she must infallibly be disturbed, because to the end of the poem she cannot honestly, taking everything into account, formulate What Byron Has to Say About Love in *Don Juan*; because it will not formulate, unless something is left out or added—except as a contradiction. On the one hand, she is tempted to accept the ironical view that love gives the highest illusion of happiness offered in this world of illusions, and yet is impossible to sustain, though it may offer itself time after time, each time with its same deceptive suggestion of both newness and permanence. As John Johnson, the man who has had three wives, puts it, without disparaging the brightness of life's later

illusions:

“ . . . All, when life is new,  
Commence with feelings warm and prospects high;  
But time strips our illusions of their hue,  
And one by one in turn, some grand mistake  
Casts off its bright skin yearly like the snake.

“Tis true, it gets another bright and fresh,  
Or fresher, brighter; but the year gone through,  
This skin must go the way too of all flesh,  
Or sometimes only wear a week or two . . . .” (V, 21-22)

And Juan's further adventures in the poem seem continually to support this view, and to ironize the Haidée episode merely by his living on to love again.

But, on the other hand, the reader finds that this episode is simply not presented as one among a sequence of such affairs. Time stops here, in defiance of change:

Moons changing had roll'd on, and changeless found  
Those their bright rise had lighted to such joys  
As rarely they beheld throughout their round;  
And these were not of the vain kind which cloy,  
For theirs were buoyant spirits, never bound  
By the mere senses; and that which destroys  
Most love, possession, unto them appear'd  
A thing which each endearment more endear'd. (IV, 16)

The narrator cannot do anything to make his protagonists move; nothing remains to narrate but iteration. His more and more frequent remarks about the necessity of such perfect lovers' dying young are really a comment about this kind of romance: after the consummation, nothing further is left to say, and the story must logically end here. And although Lambro's satanic entry into their paradise scatters the lovers, fragments the narrative and propels it forward through Juan into the cumulative onward changes which Don Juan stories

conventionally follow, for Haidée the tale does end here. Haidée is totally consistent and absolutely faithful not only to Juan but to her blood, which, like her mother's, "partakes the planet's hour" (IV, 56); and, in fact, she belongs not at all to the novel or the Don Juan genres, but to romance or tragedy. The novel (and this *Don Juan*) is full of fallible, backsliding people, who have ideals and yet deceive themselves, or are, like Juan, heroic only by accidents of circumstance. But Haidée is essentially heroic and contradicts by her very presence every speculation on the infidelity of woman to be found in the poem. She dies of love magnificently—and by a literary convention not evident elsewhere in the story.

Modern critics, such as Mellor and Thorslev, encourage readers to regard the Haidée episode within its context as a good example of Romantic irony. The romance is presented with lyricism and enthusiasm and yet it is, in the long view, ironically negated by the life-affirming story of Juan which transcends it. Mellor is at pains to point out that "the authentic romantic ironist is as filled with enthusiasm as he is with scepticism. He is as much a romantic as an ironist."<sup>23</sup> Like the existentialists, he inhabits, as Thorslev explains at length, an "open universe,"<sup>24</sup> though he has more faith than the existentialists "in the ability of man to cope" with it.<sup>25</sup> Defying closed systems, the Romantic ironist repudiates the overdetermined ending of romance, which must conclude with love or death or both. (These alternatives are not mutually exclusive, for love and death are the light and dark sides of the same coin.) All this is easy for the reader to accept in the long view, but the long view does not adequately detail the actual texture of a sentence or stanza as experienced during an actual reading of a long work. Much more consistent and less transgressive works than

*Don Juan* fit the definition of Romantic irony quite adequately. Readers of *Eugene Onegin* and *Wilhelm Meister* are not subjected to the same kind of emotional jolts that the reader of *Don Juan* experiences in the short view. As mentioned before, the narrator could conceivably be ironic all the time, without being unsympathetic to the story or its protagonists. The fact that Byron is a master of the ironic technique and uses it superbly in this very work makes the non-ironic passages all the more remarkable. Conversely, the non-ironic passages offer a disturbing background to the ironic voice, foregrounding it sharply by contrast.

Irony of tone requires a little twisting of the truth, or exhibition of bad faith, or slantwise perspective on things; it is, in fact, a dialogic mode in which two or more voices are in dialectical tension with one another:

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. (I, 117)

In this stanza, the dialectics of Julia's conscience and Julia's desires, and the narrator's moralism and his humanism, create a complex network into which the witty clinching of the couplet falls not as a bawdy guffaw so much as a complicated, knowing smile. The reader sympathises deeply with both Juan and Julia throughout this first erotic episode, but when it comes forcibly—and comically—to an end, she does not feel Juan's voyage into further adventures to be a betrayal of her loyalties, whatever it may be of Julia's. Even the tragic tone of Julia's final letter from the nunnery is undermined by the fact that it

"was written upon gilt-edged paper / With a neat little crow-quill, slight and new" (I, 198). This is Romantic irony without pain, because the reader has been prepared, by ironies of tone throughout the episode, for the ironies of event which end it.

Passages which exhibit no irony of tone are spoken by a single voice in absolute seriousness and sincerity; they demand reciprocally from the reader, by their very nature, absolute assent. The reader who gives assent to such a passage, having tried it carefully for ironic traps, were she later to find her trust betrayed by ironies not potentially present in this passage, would have a certain justification for feeling indignant. Although the more dialogic or ironic sections may elicit from her at times a sympathy or assent which she cannot curtail with ease, a great deal of the pleasure of such sections is her sense of "having been had." She, like Juan or Julia, is being seduced by a situation into too strong a commitment, when the narrator is, in fact, playing with her affections. However, the monological passages are not set-ups for the reader in this way, and for these, too, she must be alert. Only ironies of *situation* finally assail Haidée's place in the poem; Aurora Raby, the English beauty whose final significance is not established because of the poem's premature end, is probably intended for a similar fate:

Early in years, and yet more infantine  
 In figure, she had something of 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. (XV, 45)

Despite the revisions, alternatives and repetitions in this stanza, it exhibits none

of that playful experimentalism evident elsewhere through these effects. The narrator is determining and overdetermining an image; even the "as if" constructions are the attempts of a speaker to catch up with an absolutely clear, absolutely authoritative vision. These repeated attempts serve almost as the repetitions of incantation to wrap the speaker more and more closely into his speech and into intimacy with the thing invoked by the speech. The reader is co-opted into assent so strong as to approach identification with him; dialectic is out of the question. One might contrast this stanza to the following on Dudù, another winsome woman attractive to Juan, in order to hear the difference between the single voice and the more syncopated ironic voice:

She was not violently lively, but  
 Stole on your spirit like a May-day breaking;  
 Her eyes were not too sparkling, yet, half-shut,  
 They put beholders in a tender taking;  
 She look'd (this simile's quite new) just cut  
 From marble, like Pygmalion's statue waking,  
 The Mortal and the Marble still at strife,  
 And timidly expanding into life. (VI, 43)

An awareness of others' (and the narrator's) preference for liveliness and sparkling eyes, and a metalingual consciousness of his own role as entertainer of a reader whose sympathies and tastes can be "toyed with," contend in this stanza with the narrator's sympathetic representation of his subject. Out of this slight contention comes the stanza's irony and the precise individual shade of its irony.

Both Mellor and Thorslev agree that Romantic irony—and *Don Juan* as their touchstone case—fits into Wayne Booth's system of classification as "unstable, overt, infinite" irony.<sup>26</sup> They are looking, of course, at the long view, taking the whole poem into account, and they do not detail the varieties of

stable, covert or finite ironies and their non-ironic counterparts that occur locally in the work. The most important parameter in Booth's tripartite system is the first: the stable-unstable dichotomy. Booth himself is decidedly wary of unstable ironies, especially when they are infinite in scope, because their meaning remains unfixed and unfixable; it is impossible for the reader to assign value finally to any proposition within an unstable-ironic work:

The author—insofar as we can discover him, and he is often very remote indeed—refuses to declare himself *for* any stable proposition, even the opposite of whatever proposition his irony vigorously denies. The only sure affirmation is that negation that begins all ironic play: “*this* affirmation must be rejected,” leaving the possibility, and in infinite ironies, the clear implication, that since the universe (or at least the universe of discourse) is inherently absurd, all statements are subject to ironic undermining. No statement can really “mean what it says.”<sup>27</sup>

Booth does not directly concern himself with Romantic irony and uses only modern examples of unstable irony. Although he declares that the open universe must be portrayed by means of unstable irony, he does not sufficiently pursue the implications of an open universe. Concentrating on the negative aspect of irony, he overlooks the force and enthusiasm with which affirmations can be made in this chaotic universe—even when they are, simultaneously or later, to be ironized or negated. Booth seems to fall here into the camp of Hegel and Kierkegaard, who regard irony as “infinite absolute negativity,”<sup>28</sup> in contrast to that of Friedrich Schlegel, the main proponent of Romantic irony, who sees irony as containing both positive and negative propositions equally, without necessarily valorizing the negative over the positive. Schlegel's “absolute synthesis of absolute antithesis, the continual self-creating interchange of two conflicting thoughts,”<sup>29</sup> makes enthusiastic affirmations and subsequently contradicts them in order not to



be trapped by them into determinism. Romantic irony requires an "eternal agility"<sup>30</sup> in order to remain balanced and conscious of contradictory alternatives. D. C. Muecke, in his book *The Compass of Irony*, unlike Booth in *A Rhetoric of Irony*, takes cognizance of this binary, paradoxical possibility, and he claims that Romantic irony "does not take sides but regards both sides critically."<sup>31</sup>

The great problem with Romantic irony is the one pinpointed by Hegel in his brief critique of Schlegel in *The History of Philosophy*: it requires an infinite ability to play. He writes:

It can make a pretence of knowing all things, but it only demonstrates vanity, hypocrisy, and effrontery. Irony knows itself to be master of every possible context; it is serious about nothing, but plays with all forms.<sup>32</sup>

Hegel conceives play and seriousness to be mutually exclusive, and valorizes what he sees as the responsible, adult alternative. This position can be attacked from several angles. Sartre would claim seriousness to be the undesirable element: "Man is serious when he takes himself for an object";<sup>33</sup> Schiller, and others, would establish play as primary to, and inclusive of, seriousness: "man only plays when he is in the fullest sense of the word a human being, and he is only fully a human being when he plays."<sup>34</sup> However, something in the nature of man is resistant to play: weariness and despair can make him refuse, temporarily or permanently, to participate in the game. The reader does not have to be as disparaging of play as Hegel is to see that "eternal agility" is not easy for finite man, to whom the life-drive is often and finally overshadowed by a death-wish.<sup>35</sup> Sir Walter Raleigh, in whose writings the immanence of death is a haunting reality, points the paradox more clearly and more poignantly:

Thus march we playing to our latest rest—  
Only we die in earnest, that's no jest.<sup>36</sup>

Even with a work like *Don Juan*, in which the narrator seems at times to possess an infinite agility, a reader, like Hazlitt, can easily flag behind him in the face of death or love and cry "Enough!" Desire for an end to all this play can coexist with the best of motives; it can derive from a knowledge that the game requires a kind of heartlessness on the part of the players and a suspicion that heartlessness in the face of death is in fact what the life-affirming impulse amounts to. To fall from the Schlegelian interpretation of irony into the Hegelian one is all too easy: the paradox of affirmation and negation is much more difficult to sustain than the valorizing of negation which sees the affirmation as a kind of hoax, a set-up to be shot down by a cynically smiling fiend. The reason why the Julia episode is easier to stomach than the Haidée affair is that it is more "ironic" than "Romantic"; its relative lack of affirmation and the more consistent irony of tone in its narration valorize the negative side all along. The earlier passage is Romantic irony without pain perhaps because it is not as good an example of Romantic irony as the later one.

This critique of Romantic irony *per se* is not irrelevant to a reading of *Don Juan*. The search for limits to, or stabilities within, its irony is for the reader synonymous with her quest for comprehension of its final meanings. The quest may, of course, end up in acknowledgement of the absence of final meanings; but this essentially amounts to the same thing. In the ultimate ironizing of the Haidée romance, the pain experienced by the reader is part of the narrator's experience too: he mourns for the lovers in many elegiac asides, such as that beginning "Alas! they were so young, so beautiful" (II, 192). Thus,

at the outer limits of its ironic scale, the poem seems to include a critique of irony itself. Hazlitt's response is one of the responses inscribed within the text, although many other responses are also inscribed and this one is not at the top of the hierarchy. The implied reader of *Don Juan* transcends Hazlitt's objections, even while conscious of them.

*Don Juan's* narrator transgresses himself obsessively on many other subjects in addition to romantic love. Almost the whole of Cantos VII to IX is devoted to the subject of military glory, which, with various meditations on poetic glory and other types of fame, forms a major theme of the poem. A Victorian would perhaps like the keynote to be struck in the elegiac sublime, thus:

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)

But this tragic vision can be travestied by a kind of Falstaffian undermining of the concept itself:

An uniform to boys, is like a fan  
 To women; there is scarce a crimson varlet  
 But deems himself the first in Glory's van.  
 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, or—but it is time to ease  
 This Canto, ere my Muse perceive fatigue. (VII, 84-85)

Then again, the narrator will turn around and talk of the "all-cloudless Glory" of George Washington (IX, 8), and will extoll the battlefields of Washington and

Leonidas as "holy ground" (VIII, 5), amid other stanzas that at length develop the "true portrait of one battle-field" (VIII, 12) as closer to hell than anything else human nature can conceive:

All that the mind would shrink from of excesses;  
 All that the body perpetrates of bad;  
 All that we read, hear, dream of man's distresses;  
 All that the Devil would do if run stark mad;  
 All that defies the worst which pen expresses;  
 All by which Hell is peopled, or as sad  
 As Hell—mere mortals who their power abuse,—  
 Was here (as heretofore and since) let loose. (VIII, 123)

And then, soon after this passionate, single-voiced outburst, occurs the following passage, which has offended certain modern critics,<sup>37</sup> as well as (probably) Hazlitt before them:

Some odd mistakes too happened in the dark,  
 Which show'd a want of lanterns, or of taste—  
 Indeed the smoke was such they scarce could mark  
 Their friends from foes,—besides, such things from haste  
 Occur, though rarely, when there is a spark  
 Of light to save the venerably chaste:—  
 But six old damsels, each of seventy years,  
 Were all deflowered by different Grenadiers. (VIII, 130)

It is difficult to locate the speaker's position here, perhaps for want of "lanterns" on the reader's, or of "taste" on his part.

On the subject of poetic glory, the poem is equally ambivalent. Like all types of fame, this glory is dependent on the elusive faculty of memory. The narrator exclaims at one point: "Why I'm Posterity—and so are you; / And whom do we remember? Not a hundred" (XII, 19). And yet, in the face of readers who disapprove of him, he declares (for future time) that he himself "*will be read*" (X, 28). Also, he includes an invocation to "thou eternal Homer!"

(VII, 80), whose irony does not touch the poet's immortality, only the goriness of his subject-matter. Then again, he undermines the eternity of Homer and of all poets and heroes alike:

The time must come, when both alike decay'd,  
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. (IV, 104)

Inevitably, Byron is not always as dignified as this—or as Shelley in "Ozymandias," which has a similar theme to the following stanza:

What are the hopes of man? Old Egypt's King  
Cheops erected the first pyramid  
And largest, thinking it was just the thing  
To keep his memory whole, and mummy hid;  
But somebody or other rummaging,  
Burglariously broke his coffin's lid:  
Let not a monument give you or me hopes,  
Since not a pinch of dust remains of Cheops. (I, 219)

Of course these speculations on fame and glory are intimately related to an area in which the narrator is more consistently sceptical: metaphysics. However, he manages to be transgressive here in other ways, for example in his frequent self-admonitions to keep off the subject: "But I am apt to grow too metaphysical" (IX, 41); "But I'm relapsing into metaphysics" (XII, 72);

But here again, why will I thus entangle  
Myself with metaphysics? None can hate  
So much as I do any kind of wrangle;  
And yet, such is my folly, or my fate,  
I always knock my head against some angle  
About the present, past, or future state. (XV, 91)

But these laments, like his ridiculous fib about the "regularity" of his poetic design, which "Forbids all wandering as the worst of sinning" (I, 7), are not

meant to be taken for a second seriously, and, in fact, they cover up more important transgressions. The reader, thinking of the poem in retrospect, will probably remember its universe as consisting of endless Cuvieresque cycles of "falls and rises" (IX, 55),<sup>38</sup> in which the "snatch[ing]" of "certainty" is impossible (XIV, 1), although even Berkeleyan scepticism is seen as a kind of egotistical wish-fulfilment: "all's ideal—*all ourselves*" (XI, 2); and, in any case, "who can believe it?" (XI, 1). Systems themselves are cyclic, consuming one another and thereby precluding total belief:

But System doth reverse the Titan's breakfast,  
 And eats her parents, albeit the digestion  
 Is difficult. Pray tell me, can you make fast,  
 After due search, your faith to any question?  
 Look back o'er ages ere unto the stake fast  
 You bind yourself, and call some mode the best one.  
 Nothing more true than *not* to trust your senses;  
 And yet what are your other evidences? (XIV, 2)

Fairly consistent with this sceptical attitude is to construct, whimsically, a possible universe, based lightly on the evidence of Cuvier's fossils and mammoths, in which creations are cyclic, each one smaller perhaps than the last, but all equally fallen:

*How* will—to these young people, just thrust out  
 From some fresh Paradise, and set to plough,  
 And dig, and sweat, and turn themselves about,  
 And plant, and reap, and spin, and grind, and sow,  
 Till all the Arts at length are brought about,  
 Especially of war and taxing,—how,  
 I say, will these great relics, when they see 'em,  
 Look like the monsters of a new Museum? (IX, 40)

(The grossest of these "great relics," being, needless to say, King George the Fourth (39).) But not so consistent is to construct, similarly, a new age which

is, in fact, a "millennium": an age to end ages and cycles, in which the reader can assume that "war and taxing" have ceased because "thrones" have been abolished and the world has achieved freedom:

For I will teach, if possible, the stones  
To rise against Earth's tyrants. Never let it  
Be said that we still truckle unto thrones;—  
But ye—our children's children! think how we  
Showed *what things were* before the world was free!

That hour is not for us, but 'tis for you:  
And as, in the great joy of your millennium,  
You hardly will believe such things were true  
As now occur, I thought that I would pen you 'em;  
But may their very memory perish too!—  
Yet if perchance remembered, still disdain you 'em  
More than you scorn the savages of yore,  
Who *painted* their *bare* limbs, but *not* with gore.

And when you hear historians talk of thrones,  
And those that sate upon them, let it be  
As we now gaze upon the Mammoth's bones,  
And wonder what old world such things could see,  
Or hieroglyphics on Egyptian stones,  
The pleasant riddles of Futurity—  
Guessing at what shall happily be hid,  
As the real purpose of a Pyramid. (VIII, 135–37)

The tone of this passage is variable, lightening from the prophetic fervour of "I will teach . . . the stones / To rise," to the breeziness of "I thought that I would pen you 'em," and, in the fanciful elaboration of the pastimes of this new age, the earlier certainty of its existence ("ye—our children's children!") seems to become diffused into an airy speculation, a possibility. The same question that arises in the reader over the Haidée episode recurs here: does this airiness, this insouciant changing of tone, really ironize or negate the serious apocalyptic tone of the earlier part? Widening the question, the reader finds that it turns into the old one about Romantic as well as any other kind of unstable irony: where

is the author?—is he actually *for* anything?—does he merely include these positive, apparently unambiguous senses of endings, such as this millennium and Haidée's tale, as possibilities among the others, thereby contradicting their finality, ironizing their value as endings, putting, in Hazlitt's phrase, "pitiful hoax[es]" upon the "unsuspecting reader," until she learns at last not to trust or believe at all? The answer, at least in the short term, is that she must go on perceiving and responding without losing trust or belief; she must acquire an extraordinary agility, a profound playfulness which will allow her to continue following the narrator over hiatus and transgression, through passion, probability, possibility and whimsy, with the kind of scepticism which postpones judgement almost indefinitely without shedding compassion or the courage to remain in the game.

The narrator expects this high standard of agility from his reader, for he leads her across "canals of contradiction" (XV, 88) to float "Like Pyrrho, on a sea of speculation" (IX, 18), or to sail "in the Wind's Eye," "leaving land far out of sight" (X, 4), only at the least expected moment to be perplexed by "Indigestion / (Not the most 'dainty Ariel)'" (XI, 3), or, while soaring aloft, by a wing-sprain of the Pegasus on which he and she are riding (IV, 1). Talking of his poem, he loves to puzzle the reader with the problem of truth and fiction, sometimes by formulating a paradoxical truth: "And after all, what is a lie? 'Tis but / The truth in masquerade" (XI, 37); "Fiction / Is that which passes with least contradiction" (XV, 3); "Apologue, fable, poesy and parable, / Are false, but may be render'd also true" (XV, 89); "Don Juan, who was real, or ideal,— / For both are much the same, since what men think / Exists when once the thinkers are less real" (X, 20). Sometimes, instead of a truth, he will tell an



enigmatic lie: "Besides, my Muse by no means deals in fiction: / She gathers a repertory of facts" (XIV, 13); "But then the fact's a fact—and 'tis the part / Of a true poet to escape from fiction" (VIII, 86); "But I detest all fiction even in song, / And so must tell the truth" (VI, 8); "Haidée and Juan were not married, but / The fault was theirs, not mine" (III, 12).

The narrator is well aware of possible objections raised by rheumatic readers anxious for a place of rest from all these acrobatics, and he takes delight in pulling supports out from under them:

Also observe, that like the great Lord Coke,  
 (See Littleton) whene'er I have expressed  
 Opinions two, which at first sight may look  
 Twin opposites, the second is the best.  
 Perhaps I have a third too in a nook,  
 Or none at all—which seems a sorry jest;  
 But if a writer should be quite consistent,  
 How could he possibly show things existent?

If people contradict themselves, can I  
 Help contradicting them, and every body,  
 Even my veracious self?—But that's a lie;  
 I never did so, never will—how should I?  
 He who doubts all things, nothing can deny;  
 Truth's fountains may be clear—her streams are muddy,  
 And cut through such canals of contradiction,  
 That she must often navigate o'er fiction. (XV, 87–88)

Several red herrings are concealed here, apart from the side-swipe at the confusedness of English property law ("Coke," "Littleton"). The reader retains a glimmering suspicion that expressing "opinions" is not on quite the same level as "show[ing] things existent." Theoretically, the possibility exists of showing very inconsistent things existent without expressing inconsistent opinions about them. The whole passage smells suspiciously of fish. True, Byron's narrator often appears to inhabit a metaphysical universe of no fixed form, because his

scepticism is so profound as to be sceptical of scepticism itself ("So little do we know what we're about in / This world, I doubt if doubt itself be doubting" (IX, 17)). But as far as his social universe goes, "people contradict themselves" because they deceive themselves—and one another—and the narrator sees quite clearly through all their cant. His "opinions" are not, in fact, as inconsistent as he claims. The purpose of the passage is to obfuscate and confound—and also to pull the leg of—a reader who might moralistically object to the poem's broad and tolerant attitudes, here, as the preceding stanzas indicate, to the propriety of a young virgin's having sexual day-dreams. The narrator goes on to explain, once again, the reasons for his metaphysical scepticism: that truth and falsity are inextricably linked in the paradox of fiction. Then he asks: "But what's reality? Who has its clue? / Philosophy? No; she too much rejects. / Religion? Yes; but which of all her sects?" (XV, 89), suggesting that the reader is no more privileged on this point than the narrator himself. What is easy for the reader to overlook here is the sympathy to religion half-hidden within the hostility to "sects" and their narrow perspectives—she would find it even easier if she happened to belong to a sect herself. But this sympathy is only the first indication of the moral standpoint quite steadily adhered to in this section. Two stanzas on, the narrator's belief in toleration is much more clearly delineated when he claims that he "wish[es] well to Trojan and to Tyrian" (XV, 91) and, in the next, he lays all his cards on the table, rising, despite the comic rhyme, the outworn volcano image and the slightly apologetic tone, to a passion that strikes a note of disarming sincerity over his familiar *bête noire*, the tyrant who stands in opposition to tolerance and liberty:

But though I am a temperate Theologian,  
 And also meek as a Metaphysician,  
 Impartial between Tyrian and Trojan  
 As Eldon on a lunatic commission,—  
 In politics my duty is to show John  
 Bull something of the lower world's condition.  
 It makes my blood boil like the springs of Hecla,  
 To see men let these scoundrel Sovereigns break law. (XV, 92)

The narrator has offered a perch, after all, as a reward for the reader who has exhibited sufficient suppleness and stamina to follow him over the tight-ropes and swings; and it is, apparently, a stable one. Friedrich Schlegel, in a passage quoted also by Muecke,<sup>39</sup> points to the infinite regress which unstable irony is finally sucked into. Byron's poem stops short of this:

Finally, there is the irony of irony. Generally speaking, the most fundamental irony of irony is that even it becomes tiresome if we are always confronted with it. But what we want this irony to mean in the first place is something that happens in more ways than one. For example, if one speaks of irony without using it, as I have just done; if one speaks of irony ironically without in the process being aware of having fallen into a far more noticeable irony; if one can't disentangle oneself from irony anymore, as seems to be happening in this essay on incomprehensibility; if irony turns into a mannerism and becomes, as it were, ironical about the author; if one has promised to be ironical for some useless book without first having checked one's supply and then having to produce it against one's will, like an actor full of aches and pains; and if irony runs wild and can't be controlled any longer.

What gods will rescue us from all these ironies?<sup>40</sup>

Byron's narrator may not find any gods or transcendental metaphysics to rescue him, but he does discover certain enduring values which are not travestied within his poem—nor even without it, in that metatext completed in Greece in 1824, the life of the poet himself.

Looking into the theme of love for absolutes is not likely to prove a fruitful search. This is a Don Juan poem and, despite the fact that its Don is,

unlike his archetype, no heartless seducer, the story must run its cumulative polygamous course, pausing though it does, sadly, over the loss of at least one of its women. The narrator—and, as everybody knows and knew, the poet too—is an older Don Juan, more cynical and talkative, but perhaps no wiser in love than his hero. He claims early on that his “days of love are over, [him] no more / The charms of maid, wife, and still less of widow, / Can make the fool of which they made before” (I, 216), but this turns out to be a lie: during the time of composition he admits to the temptations “last night” of “the prettiest creature, fresh from Milan” (II, 209). He also lies, one way or another, when he says first that he “never married” (I, 53) and later on that he has indeed been wed and that “the young lady made a monstrous choice” (XII, 38). (Of course the reader knows the proposition to reject, knowing the poet’s life, which is alluded to as a public fact in the second.) But with or without lies, contradictions, changes of opinion and variations in tone from cynicism to reverence, a Don Juan is not a character to apply to for absolute values in the field of erotic love. Women are replaceable, says his story, whatever instincts or wishes he may have to the contrary. He must play a role of life-affirming opportunism, whether he ends up as “in the Pantomime / Sent to the devil” (I, 1), or not. The reader cannot know how Byron would have ended his poem had he lived to complete it;<sup>41</sup> but then neither can she imagine a more satisfactory ending than the last stanza of Canto XVI, which freezes Juan into the attitude of uncompleted desire, like a parody of Keats’s “Bold lover,”<sup>42</sup> with his hand poised for eternity on the palpitating bosom of the Duchess of Fitz-Fulke. However, even this moment of significant gesture is subverted and replaced in most editions of *Don Juan*, in which this last section sent by Byron for

publication is followed by the fragment of Canto XVII found with his body at Missolonghi. In the fragment, Juan and the Duchess, passed beyond their moment of mischief and passion, appear pale and worn at breakfast, that most mundane of meals, to confront the other characters' searching and accusatory eyes. Juan's life, at least, is finally ironic, endlessly progressive (or regressive), driven by desire and circumstance through continual cycles of possession and loss, of affirmation and negation, of construction and deconstruction. Inhabiting an open universe, he is deprived, fittingly, of the opportunity of dying—that inexorable closure which is the fate of all living beings and of some fictional characters (including the inscribed reader: "and what know you, / Except perhaps that you were born to die?" (XIV, 3)).

But Haidée escapes Juan's fate and rescues herself from the ironic universe. She is not a Don Juan, not the *subject* of the poem; she is denied the status of protagonist granted doubly to the lovers in a romance, as in *Romeo and Juliet*, *Troilus and Criseyde*, and yet she offers an alternative, a turning the poem itself refuses, into the ambivalence of a blind alley which is also a way out. Her story's blindness is its closure, its determinism; her escape is from meaninglessness. To die of love is to affix meaning permanently and heroically to a life; it is also to negate freedom, possibility and even love itself in love's breathing, instinctual reality. Her death does suffer from irony, in the long run, because Juan does not die too and because it occurs within the context of a Don Juan story; but it nevertheless represents an unrealized possibility of transcending the ironies of erotic love.

Not Juan, nor the narrator, nor Byron could die of love, or even commit themselves finally and irrevocably to one human being. As the existentialists

have discovered, total commitment to some human ideal is the way out of the labyrinth of absurdity; martyrdom is merely a possible result of this commitment and, perhaps, the clearest way of representing and proving it. The reader must conclude that for Byron the implied author of *Don Juan*, as for Byron the man, monogamy was a profoundly problematic concept. But other concepts were not at all problematic for him. Had he lived in another age in which the complexities of political liberty were more immediately evident, he might have been more ironical on the subject; but he was born neither too early nor too late, suffering none of the disillusionments of the modern era, nor of Wordsworth's generation, who were old enough to have witnessed the horrifying progress of Revolution into Terror in France. *Don Juan* was written in an age of anachronism and reaction: the Congress System and the hated "Holy Alliance" had re-established legitimacy and the *ancien régime* in Europe; fear of revolution on the part of rulers everywhere manifested itself in new forms of oppression; even the Lake Poets, who had dreamed of "democracy" and had "prated to the world of Pantisocracy" (III, 93), now turned "Tory at / Last" (Ded., 1). In his recorded writings and conversations, Byron remained immovable in his belief in human freedom; he spoke in the House of Lords only three times, once on behalf of the Frame-Breakers, once in defence of Roman Catholic emancipation and once in favour of a general reform of Parliament; he worked for the unification movement in Italy and went to Greece to join the national revolution against the Turkish oppressor. Dying there of illness rather than battle-wounds, he nevertheless escaped, at least for a generation, the possible irony of this death by becoming in the minds of his contemporaries a martyr, a battlecry and a slogan that finally won the war for Greece. To encounter the following stanza in

*Don Juan* is almost uncanny:

And I will war, at least in words (and—should  
 My chance so happen—deeds) with all who war  
 With Thought;—and of Thought's foes by far most rude,  
 Tyrants and Sycophants have been and are.  
 I know not who may conquer: if I could  
 Have such a prescience, it should be no bar  
 To this my plain, sworn, downright detestation  
 Of every despotism in every nation. (IX, 24)

This is the true, single voice of the man. To insist here on a distinction between a narrator, an "implied author" and a "real author" on Chatman's scheme<sup>43</sup> would be pointless, indeed misleading. Byron died and integrated himself. His life is now a closed text and one which impinges on his poem to reduce—at certain points—all ironic distances and perspectives. Less ambiguously than Haidée, the lover of liberty has rescued himself from the "irony of irony": "A terrible beauty is born."<sup>44</sup>

The theory of the death (metaphorical) of the author has never been very successful in studies of Byron.<sup>45</sup> G. Wilson Knight calls him "a man in whom poetry has become incarnate."<sup>46</sup> In reading *Don Juan*, at least, the reader would be guilty of sheer sophistry were she to ignore the known life of the author, to which the poem alludes continually, using it as a subtext, often to ironic effect. The narrator tells lies on occasion, but intends that he should be found out. Jumps from text to metatext, from fact to fiction and back again are frequent; the poem is constantly getting outside itself or pulling the outside into itself. In *Don Juan*, the reader is justified in regarding the death (real) of the "real author" as registering itself in the text, or rather, as occupying that space of white paper underneath the fourteenth stanza of Canto XVII, and the silence that follows the utterance of the last line. The narrator is Byron in a mask

and, occasionally, Byron without a mask. Absolutely no reason exists for the reader to believe that Byron would not have continued to write the poem had he continued to live: as Balachandra Rajan claims, *Don Juan* is not a fragment in the way *Christabel* is a fragment.<sup>47</sup> The narrator-author dies as Rosencrantz and Guildenstern die: he simply "fail[s] to reappear," ceases to speak.<sup>48</sup> The reader may be permitted to assume that certain questions have for him been answered, or at least stilled, those which "*every body one day will / Know very clearly—or at least lie still*" (XI, 4).

But this is whimsy, or digression. What is important to the argument of this dissertation is that hatred of tyranny is indeed a stable foothold for the reader in the stormy abyss of the poem's universe. And Byron offers another. He once remarked to Lady Blessington: "There are but two sentiments to which I am constant—a strong love of liberty, and a detestation of cant, and neither is calculated to gain me friends."<sup>49</sup> "Love of liberty" is a positive ideal, the thing for which he was prepared to die; "detestation of cant" is a negative one which may exist in a poem in wholly ironic form. However, irony deriving from a definite hatred of a definite thing is stable irony and does not leave the reader floating in the gulf as unstable ironies do. Byron's word "cant" covered a host of evils, which Joseph explains at length in his chapter on the subject.<sup>50</sup> Cant can loosely be defined as self-deception, though, naturally, it includes deception of others as well as hypocrisy and refers specifically to a mode of discourse, which may be an inner thought-process or a public rhetoric. In Byron's characters, cant may be treated with a fairly gentle teasing: "One hand on Juan's carelessly was thrown, / Quite by mistake—she thought it was her own" (I, 109). For fellow poets, his irony can take the form of bluff raillery:



You—Gentlemen! by dint of long seclusion  
 From better company, have kept your own  
 At Keswick, and, through still continued fusion  
 Of one another's minds, at last have grown  
 To deem as a most logical conclusion,  
 That Poesy has wreaths for you alone:  
 There is a narrowness in such a notion,  
 That makes me wish you'd change your lakes for ocean. (Ded., 5)

Or it may deepen to a sneer:

Such names at present cut a convict figure,  
 The very Botany Bay in moral geography;  
 Their loyal treason, renegado rigour,  
 Are good manure for their more bare biography.  
 Wordsworth's last quarto, by the way, is bigger  
 Than any since the birthday of typography;  
 A drowsy frowzy poem, call'd the "Excursion,"  
 Writ in a manner which is my aversion.

He there builds up a formidable dyke  
 Between his own and others' intellect. (III, 94-95)

But when he deals with the worst kind of political cant—epitomized by the hated foreign minister, Castlereagh, Marquess of Londonderry—he does not often or for long retain the good humour essential to keeping his irony comic:

Oh, gentle ladies! should you seek to know  
 The import of this diplomatic phrase,  
 Bid Ireland's Londonderry's Marquess show  
 His parts of speech; and in the strange displays  
 Of that odd string of words, all in a row,  
 Which none divine, and every one obeys,  
 Perhaps you may pick out some queer *no-meaning*,  
 Of that weak wordy harvest the sole gleaning.

I think I can explain myself without  
 That sad inexplicable beast of prey—  
 That Sphinx, whose words would ever be a doubt,  
 Did not his deeds unriddle them each day—  
 That monstrous Hieroglyphic—that long Spout  
 Of blood and water, leaden Castlereagh! (IX, 49-50)

The malapropisms for which Castlereagh was notorious could not for long remain funny to one who ascribed most of the atrocities in Europe and the British Isles to him and his Congress System. In fact, this is the point at which "love of liberty" and "hatred of cant" coincide, because Byron, like George Orwell,<sup>51</sup> saw the connection between obfuscation and oppression, between Castlereagh's "set trash of phrase" (Ded., 13) and the "disgusting trade" of "States to be curb'd, and thoughts to be confined" (Ded., 14). He could rise to the high style in single-voiced, savage invective on this subject:<sup>52</sup>

Cold-blooded, smooth-faced, placid miscreant!  
 Dabbling its sleek young hands in Erin's gore,  
 And thus for wider carnage taught to pant,  
 Transferr'd to gorge upon a sister shore,  
 The vulgarest tool that Tyranny could want,  
 With just enough of talent, and no more,  
 To lengthen fetters by another fix'd,  
 And offer poison long already mix'd. (Ded., 12)

The irony here is not humorous at all; it is a sense of monstrous incongruity: a talent which is also no talent, a relationship of sisterhood which is also one of cannibalism.

But Byron's hatred of cant drives him not only to the negative sublime. He is capable of lifting up heroic examples of figures impervious to cant:

If, fallen in evil days on evil tongues,  
 Milton appeal'd to the Avenger, Time,  
 If Time, the Avenger, execrates his wrongs,  
 And makes the word "Miltonic" mean "*sublime*,"  
*He* deigned not to belie his soul in songs,  
 Nor turn his very talent to a crime;  
*He* did not loathe the Sire to laud the Son,  
 But closed the tyrant-hater he begun. (Ded., 10)

Clearly, this positive ideal is one and a piece with Byron's own most fervent intentions: to fight Tyranny and its tools both in "words" as a poet and in "deeds" as a man until his life was "closed." More hidden than this is an unvoiced hope of being himself avenged by Time—a hope which, despite Cheops's disappointment and the wrackful siege of mutability, he expresses more than once in *Don Juan*. Although a poet's immortality may be a more relative matter than the arrogant and blind would like to believe (in the *end* it may amount only to "Some dull MS. oblivion long has sank, / Or graven stone found in a barrack's station" (III, 89)), the narrator discovers a mysterious wonder in himself at the endurance of the written word over the thought that gave rise to it, and the man that thought:

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 wonder has to communicate, to recreate itself in the reader, because of the brilliant metaleptic trick coiled with the word "this" in the penultimate line. "This" is still "here"; it points permanently at itself, even on another "rag" imprinted over a century after the poet's death.

After testing the ground and ascertaining the stable places, the reader may, if she chooses, make forays into the more washy parts of the morass and risk her weight on them for a while. She may, if she is of a sentimental turn or in an enthusiastic mood, make a case for Byron's idealization of love over his travesty of it, or for his hopes of immortality over his apprehensions of nothingness. Irony demands collaboration between reader and writer; the hovering balance between contradictory positions is as difficult for a reader to sustain as for a writer—perhaps more so, for she has to fathom the author's intention as well,<sup>53</sup> and, where this is not clear, she may find herself hovering for nothing while the writer, if only she knew it, is pacing out a solid path for her somewhere else. My reader, who is a sceptic and would rather do any amount of hovering than risk her weight on the deceptive footholds around the quicksand, is heartened by the knowledge that secure ground is to be found in certain clearly visible places, and though she herself remains mostly balanced in the ironic position over the other issues in *Don Juan*, she is aware that more positive interpretations of its romance, morality and metaphysics are viable, given that the issue of liberty is unambivalent. Her feeling is that even when an answer is given somewhere in the poem, the poet demands that its apprehension be postponed almost indefinitely, so that the manifold complexities of the problem be perceived and pondered as they deserve. *Don Juan* demands agility of its reader in order to prevent her from becoming a moribund consumer of cant.

## NOTES TO CHAPTER V

<sup>1</sup>Quoted by Willis M. Pratt in *Byron's Don Juan IV: Notes on the Variorum Edition* (Austin: U of Texas P, 1957) 295. The source is an anonymous contribution to the *New Monthly Magazine* (XII [August, 1819], 75-78), by an author who called himself "W. C."

<sup>2</sup>Pratt, 303. From the *Edinburgh Magazine* LXXXVIII (August, 1821) 105-08.

<sup>3</sup>Pratt 296. Letter to William Magiun (Mrs. Oliphant, *Annals of a Publishing House* I, 380-81).

<sup>4</sup>William Hazlitt, "Lord Byron," *The Spirit of the Age or Contemporary Portraits* (London: Grant and Richards, 1904) 100-01.

<sup>5</sup>Hazlitt 104.

<sup>6</sup>Henry Fielding, *The History of Tom Jones: A Foundling* (New York: Random House, 1931) 210.

<sup>7</sup>This couplet is probably not ironic, though it is explanatory, which is a slightly more distant mode than that of the sestet. Byron did not feel that Eve had left her daughters a very great legacy besides the capacity for love (see XIV, 23-25); for this he profoundly pitied them.

<sup>8</sup>Jerome McGann, *Fiery Dust* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1968) 202.

<sup>9</sup>Laurence Sterne, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* (New York: Modern Library, n.d.) 202.

<sup>10</sup>George Eliot, *Middlemarch* (London: Oxford UP, 1967) 207.

<sup>11</sup>Charles Dickens, *Bleak House* (London: Everyman, 1966) 596.

<sup>12</sup>Percy Bysshe Shelley, *The Revolt of Islam* VI, xxxiv, *Poetical Works* (London, Oxford UP, 1968) 102. This passage is, of course narrated by a character, Laon; but the whole poem is presented as a vision and its characters, already dead or divine in the first place, personify the authoritative voices of inspired prophecy within the interior world of the single self. Their dialogue is not dialectic so much as cumulative—or perhaps concentric. As with Byron's *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, the main problem confronting a reader of this poem is the question of who is speaking at a given time. Being voices of the single self, they are not very clearly distinguished one from another.

<sup>13</sup>See Elizabeth French Boyd, *Byron's Don Juan* (New York: Humanities P, 1958) vi: "*Don Juan* is . . . a novel in verse." Also, Karl Kroeber, *Romantic Narrative Art* (Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1960) 148: "Much more persuasive [than to call it an epic] is the tendency of modern critics to describe *Don Juan* as a novel."

<sup>14</sup>Pushkin calls *Eugene Onegin* a "novel" within the work itself ((New York: Dutton, 1981) ch.VIII, v.50, 221). This Russian Byronist avoids using all the rhapsodic possibilities of his verse: he allows it to trespass from the more "novelistic" type of narration only as far as some lyrical descriptions of nature and a few elegiac passages on love in the narrator's slightly world-weary voice. Tatyana's discourse is, of course, more impassioned, but she herself is vulnerable to irony

<sup>15</sup>Fielding 109-12.

<sup>16</sup>Herman Melville, *Moby Dick* (New York: Random House, 1926) 166.

<sup>17</sup>See Herbert Read, *The True Voice of Feeling* (London: Faber, 1953) 67.

<sup>18</sup>Alfred Tennyson, *In Memoriam, Poems and Plays* (London: Oxford UP, 1968) 262.

<sup>19</sup>Samuel Taylor Coleridge, "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," *Poems* (London: Everyman, 1973) 175.

<sup>20</sup>Genesis 8: 9.

<sup>21</sup>For example, "A Wonderful Long Chapter Concerning the Marvellous, Being Much the Longest of All Our Introductory Chapters," Fielding, 332-39.

<sup>22</sup>Melville 157.

<sup>23</sup>Anne K. Mellor, *English Romantic Irony* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1980) 5.

<sup>24</sup>See Peter L. Thorslev, Jr., chapter 6: "The Open Universe and Romantic Irony," *Romantic Contraries* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1984) 142-86.

<sup>25</sup>Thorslev 144. See also Mellor's chapter entitled "Fear and Trembling: From Lewis Carroll to Existentialism" (165-84).

<sup>26</sup>Mellor 23; Thorslev 175.

<sup>27</sup>Wayne C. Booth, *A Rhetoric of Irony* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1974) 240-41.

<sup>28</sup>Søren Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Irony* (London: Collins, 1966) 278.

<sup>29</sup>Friedrich Schlegel, "Athenaeum Fragments," *Lucinde and the Fragments* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1971) 176.

<sup>30</sup>Schlegel, "Ideas," *Lucinde and the Fragments* 247.

<sup>31</sup>D. C. Muecke, *The Compass of Irony* (London: Methuen, 1969) 200.

<sup>32</sup>G. W. F. Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* III, (New York: Humanities P, 1955) 507.

<sup>33</sup>Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness* (London: Methuen, 1957) 580.

<sup>34</sup>Friedrich Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1967) 107. See also Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens* (Boston: Beacon, 1968) 173: "We have to conclude . . . that civilization is, in its earliest phases, played. It does not come *from* play like a babe detaching itself from the womb: it arises *in* and *as* play, and never leaves it." Also, Roger Callois, *Man, Play, and Games* (New York: Glencoe, 1958) 175: "Play is a total activity. It involves a totality of human behavior and interests."

<sup>35</sup>Sigmund Freud, in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (New York: Liveright, 1961), vividly—and, to his generation, shockingly—delineates life's motivational forces as arising out of a struggle "between the life instincts (Eros) and the death instincts" (55). He speculates that death itself is not a biological necessity but a result of mental compulsion by the ego's "death instincts" (38–41).

<sup>36</sup>Sir Walter Raleigh, "On the Life of Man," *Selected Writings* (Great Britain: Carcanet, 1984) 55.

<sup>37</sup>See Andrew Rutherford, *Byron* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1961) 179. Also, Leslie A. Marchand, *Byron's Poetry* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1965) 204.

<sup>38</sup>Many critics have seen "Rising and falling" as the poem's major theme (Mellor 64). See, especially, George M. Ridenour, chapter 2: "A Waste and Icy Clime," *The Style of Don Juan* (USA: Yale UP, 1969) 19–50; M. K. Joseph, "'A Versified Aurora Borealis': the Fall and the Ice Age," *Byron the Poet* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1964) 223–34; Robert F. Gleckner, *Byron and the Ruins of Paradise* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins P, 1967) 330.

<sup>39</sup>Muecke 201–02. (He uses a different translation.)

<sup>40</sup>Schlegel, "On Incomprehensibility," *Lucinde and the Fragments* 279.

<sup>41</sup>See Joseph 156–59, for a summary and discussion of the possible endings proposed for *Don Juan*. Byron apparently changed his mind more in terms of what he had already written than because of some previous plan or external whim.

<sup>42</sup>See John Keats, "Ode on a Grecian Urn": "Bold lover, never, never canst thou kiss, / Though winning near the goal," in *Poetical Works* (London: Oxford UP, 1967) 210.

<sup>43</sup>Seymour Chatman, *Story and Discourse* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1978) 151.

<sup>44</sup>"Easter 1916," *The Collected Poems of W. B. Yeats* (London: Macmillan, 1952) 202–05.

<sup>45</sup>See Roland Barthes's influential essay, "The Death of the Author," *Image-Music-Text* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977) 142-48. Also chapter II, note 21.

<sup>46</sup>G. Wilson Knight, *Lord Byron* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1967) 3.

<sup>47</sup>In *The Form of the Unfinished* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1985), Balachandra Rajan argues that "Byron's work, in its acceptance of the actual and its indifference to the purposive, swings the balance of power from the whole to the fragment" (181). He claims, moreover, that the "right of the poem to remain unfinished is evident in everything it makes of itself" (182-83). "Appropriately enough," he claims, "this satire on the unfinished ends by being itself unfinished, but it also implicitly bestows upon the unfinished the status of a literary tradition" (17). *Christabel*, on the other hand, he describes as an "incomplete" poem, a poem "which ought to be completed" (14).

<sup>48</sup>Tom Stoppard, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* (London: Faber, 1967) 61. See also near the play's end, where Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, in stark contrast to the players' melodramatic representations of death, simply disappear in midsentence (91).

<sup>49</sup>Ernest J. Lovell, Jr., ed., *Lady Blessington's Conversations of Lord Byron* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1969) 220.

<sup>50</sup>Joseph, chapter VIII: "The Age of Cant" 283-317.

<sup>51</sup>Although Orwell's "Newspeak" may seem to be more a matter of overdefinition than of obfuscation, one of its functions is "not so much to express meanings as to destroy them"—a very similar function to that of the "queer *no* meaning, / Of that weak wordy harvest": Castlereagh's rhetoric. George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1949) 308.

<sup>52</sup>See chapter II, note 46.

<sup>53</sup>In the process of the "reconstruction" of ironic meaning, according to Booth, a "decision must be made [by the reader] about the author's knowledge or beliefs . . . . It is this decision about the author's own beliefs that entwines the interpretation of stable ironies so inescapably in intentions" (11). Booth may be, as Susan Suleiman suggests, a metaphysician and a moralist ("Interpreting Ironies," *Diacritics*, 6, 2 (1976): 20) who is quite openly and necessarily guilty of the intentional fallacy (19), but this does not make his theory less useful in the study of stable ironies, in which some kind of collaboration between implied author and implied reader is essential.



## CHAPTER VI

### NARRATOR, READER, PROTAGONIST

"What Byron has won in *Don Juan*," claims Mark Storey, "is what so many of the other major Romantic poets were anxious to achieve—the dramatisation of self in poetry."<sup>1</sup> The important word here is "dramatisation." A drama unfolds for its audience in the present, unlike traditional autobiography, whose "hallmark," according to Karl Joachim Weintraub, "is that it is written from a specific retrospective point of view, the place at which the author stands in relation to his past."<sup>2</sup> Not gratuitously, nor in the interests of merely local effects, has this dissertation demanded of its own reader that *Don Juan* be perceived as a kind of performance in the present, in which the reader has certain roles to play. The "dramatisation of self" cannot be solely soliloquy; the progress of a drama involves interaction. Other characters must exist, on whom the protagonist can act, to whom he can respond. They must, even if it is an illusory time-frame, share a present. This may not seem likely in a written poem constructed on the mutually exclusive principles of first-person and often omniscient narrator, fictional story and reader (not listener); especially as all that remains in the end is a text and individual readers—who, in the late twentieth century are different from what an early nineteenth-century poet might have

predicted. However, the power of the text to create its illusion remains, and one of this text's chief characteristics is that it trespasses and transgresses across the logical boundaries between narrator's, characters' and reader's worlds more often and more boldly than most, hence creating at times the impossible zone in which the three principles—or two of them at a time—share a present or past together and can interact. Out of this interaction emerges for the reader the sense of a presence other than her own—other than the fictional presence of Juan and his lovers—the presence of a “real” personality, who, history assures her, did exist once as a living man, in a more living sense than in traditional autobiography: the poet, lover, libertarian, Byron.

The three-sided relationship of narrator, character and reader in *Don Juan* is more intimate than in most literature, partly because of the eroding effect of metalepsis on their categories. However, this relationship cannot usually be described by a simple triangle, because it changes shape constantly and complicates into other designs. The model I have constructed is misleading insofar as it posits only a single reader of *Don Juan*. My reader is an idealized fictional “real reader,” derived from one subjective view of the ideal; of course, opinions may differ about ideals and in any case actual “real readers” of the poem are legion and as various as humanity. And within the text's own fictions exist inscribed readers, some of whose roles my reader can take up, but others of which she cannot fully identify with, or are put there for her to reject. Similarly, the narrator is composite and inconsistent. Sometimes he is Byron in a mask and sometimes he is a fiction; occasionally as mask or fiction he says or does something that makes him not Byron at all. The hero, too, is problematic. His distance from narrator and reader varies. Sometimes he seems to be a

totally opposed principle to the narrator; at other times he appears very like the narrator's younger self as in true autobiography; sometimes the reader sides with him against the narrator and sometimes with the narrator against him; occasionally he seems to act for Byron while the narrator mouths the moralisms of society against him; often he is merely a puppet created to give narrator and reader something to watch and talk about. Other protagonists exist in the poem, too, who are given varying quantities of Byronic authority or personality—for example, Lady Adeline and John Johnson. These relationships need examination, but not before a recapitulation of some of the conclusions drawn by earlier chapters.

As was remarked initially, stanzaic poetry differs from prose in that it presents visually to the reader a column of distinct, squarish impressions on a page, and auditorily a pattern of sounds containing certain repetitions which group and stylize language far beyond the possibilities of normal speech. The very fact of using this opaque, rectangular object, this repetitive, "unnatural" shape, forces the writing, the stanza as object, and hence the act of making it and the hand that wrought it, much nearer the surface of the reader's consciousness than do the variable formations of most prose paragraphs. Like sculpture, because it is so deliberately *formed*, the stanza has the effect of occupying space significantly; similarly, it occupies time. Karl Kroeber has suggested that in the writing of *ottava rima* the presentness of Byron is most immediately felt,<sup>3</sup> for the stanza insists on a shape in time. The verse must be recreated in the present; it has a duration which, far more than prose, precludes that summarizing, scanning activity with which the eye—or the mind's eye—will run almost instantaneously over pages and pages of print. People are, or have

been, inclined to learn poetry by rote in order to be able to reproduce it in "real time"; prose—or, at least, "non-literary" prose—seldom demands this exact retention of the thing itself. The verse of *Don Juan* is at times heavily over-stylized, particularly in its use of rhyme. Feminine rhyme is not essential—or easy—in English stanzas; it is used continually here as an over-elaboration of form. Triple-, broken-, and trick-rhymes make its effect positively baroque. The numerous comments offered by the narrator on his prosodic technique, though they occur in the "prose sense" of the poem, cause the stanza to take on a similarly overwritten effect. I have used a visual (i. e., spatial) metaphor to describe this: I have claimed that the verse, at least sporadically, becomes opaque as opposed to transparent when it demands attention for itself as signifier, apart from its signified meaning. But this metaphor must be taken as operative in a temporal, as well as in a spatial sense, for the stanza, like a prima donna, insists not only on its physical shape, but also on the span of time it registers in the listener's consciousness.

If the stanza gives Byron a space in time in which to exist—as speaker—its duration must measure not writer's (or compositional) time, but speaker's, and listener's, time. Aware that the receiver, as either listener or reader, is the consciousness on whom the poem is finally parasitic, Byron is careful to style himself very frequently an oral source, whose time, as he metaphorically utters the words, is identical with that of the reader. A reader who reads aloud is merely his mouthpiece, his ventriloquist's dummy; her real place—and he frequently puts her in it—is receiver of words that come from outside herself. In insisting on being a speaker, he creates the illusion that he, as performer, is dominating, generating the reader's attention-time, and, hence,

the reader's existence as reader. Thus he masks the fact that he is recreated out of the text by the reader. He often refers to his utterances as talk or speech: "I'll tell you why I say so" (II, 199); "'Ye Gods, I grow a talker!' Let us prate" (XII, 64); "But I have spoken of all this already" (II, 171); "We'll talk of that anon" (I, 122); "I shall not say exactly what he *said*" (VIII, 93).

But actually, the impression of speech is much more widespread and implicit than this. The narrator frequently pretends to be improvising imperfectly, so that the blind alleys and deletions of natural speech register in his utterance. "I have forgotten what I meant to say" (IX, 36), he declares, having been about to make a world-shattering revelation; when he finds himself dwelling on "a pot of [English] beer" (X, 77), he changes the subject at once in order to avoid weeping; having searched for some time for a way of explaining the connection between love and idleness, he suddenly exclaims, "Eureka! I have found it!" (XIV, 76) and starts again. And the spontaneity of talk is represented even more often in deeper structures, such as sentence construction, which in *Don Juan* tends toward the compound rather than the complex and contains many parentheses, additions and asides, which at times, especially in the digressions, so overlay the metrical framework as to make it audibly almost imperceptible. For example, in his most gossipy mood, the narrator will produce stanzas like the following:

For my part I say nothing—nothing—but  
     *This* I will say—my reasons are my own,—  
 That if I had an only son to put  
     To school (as God be praised that I have none),  
 'Tis not with Donna Inez I would shut  
     Him up to learn his catechism alone,  
 No—no—I'd send him out betimes to college,  
 For there it was I picked up my own knowledge. (I, 52)

Here, the punctuation and italics actually signal the speaker's gestures as well as changes in the pitch of his voice.

All these devices enforce a sense of present time upon the reader. The narrator is the man with his mouth still open, in the act of forming words as the reader's consciousness moves through them at the speed of speech. Yet the spoken duration of the stanza is only the base line for this poem's Tritonic game with time. The narrator styles himself a writer at least as often as a speaker: "But, oh that I should ever pen so sad a line!" (XIV, 46); "I write what's uppermost without delay" (XIV, 7); "They accuse me—*Me*—the present writer of / The present poem—of—I know not what" (VII, 3). Now the writer-reader model must involve a time-lapse between sender and receiver: each will occupy a separate time, and these will not run at the same rate. As the present writer of the present dissertation is all too well aware, the time of writing is a much slower process than the time of reading, even if all the hours wasted chewing the pen are not counted.

However, a kind of spontaneous writing is possible—though it is used more frequently in personal letters than in epic poems or doctoral theses—in which revisions and deletions are part of the text and the writer occupies a continuous present time marked out by the constant forward motion of his pen upon the page. The reader may be sceptical, when she comes to think of it, of anyone's ability to write thus in *ottava rima*, but this is the type of writing Byron's narrator most often claims to be doing. (As a matter of fact, the manuscripts of *Don Juan* suggest that Byron composed at a rate that almost corroborates the truth of this fiction.)<sup>4</sup> He requires that writing should be seen as a linear series of events moving through time and pausing only at the ends

of cantos,<sup>5</sup> instead of the more common collage of events: revisions, drafts, deletions and additions, not to mention proofreading and copying. Occupying a single present time as writer, he can, as in the other illusion of speaker, dominate his reader's time, making it follow in succession and at a similar speed, the vagaries of his moods, speculations, digressions and associations as they unfold for him.

Only once does he suggest that composer's time is slower than reader's. This is right at the beginning of the poem and apt to be forgotten as the relationship between reader and writer is established: "And therefore I shall open with a line / (Although it cost me half an hour in spinning) / Narrating somewhat of Don Juan's father" (I, 7). Normally, he suppresses this past-tense half-hour in the interests of an active present in which the moment of composition is identical with the moment of his consciousness. "Note or text," he writes, "I never know the word which will come next" (IX, 41). Affecting spontaneity and improvisation, he asserts that he never "strain[s] hard to versify" (XV, 19); having put down the naughty word "lust" (not at all by mistake as it—as usual—happens), he at once explains that he "cannot stop to alter words once written" (IX, 77). Thus, he uses the oral model, in which words once said cannot be unsaid, as an excuse for many of his habits as a writer.

In a stanza discussing the faults of the one preceding it, he begins, while the preceding stanza is still close by, with the present tense ("The 'tu's too much"), but, as he moves further away from it through his octave, he changes to the past ("was thrust in") and then, as his insistence forces the reader—for once—to glance back and reread, leaving him for a moment, he moves on to

vaguer verbs of possibility ("can," "may"), which suggest a hypothetical future not shared by him:

In short, the maxim for the amorous tribe is  
Horatian, "Medio tu tutissimus ibis."

The "tu"'s *too* much,—but let it stand,—the verse  
Requires it, that's to say, the English rhyme,  
And not the pink of old Hexameters;  
But, after all, there's neither tune nor time  
In the last line, which cannot well be worse,  
And was thrust in to close the octave's chime:  
I own no prosody can ever rate it  
As a rule, but *truth* may, if you translate it. (VI, 17–18)

Although at various times the poet gives his reader summarized plans for *Don Juan* ("my poem's epic, and is meant to be / Divided in twelve books" (I, 200)), he changes his mind just as often, usually (as he claims) because some other person (the publisher (IV, 97); Apollo (XII, 55)) has persuaded him to do so. More accurately he summarizes for the reader what has gone before: "You have now / Had sketches of love, tempest, travel, war" (VIII, 138); "Remember, reader! you have had before / The worst of tempests and the best of battles" (XII, 88). This suggests that, as in the life of consciousness, only the past of the poem can be known; it also posits a spontaneous, linear, first-time reader, who needs, like a listener, to be reminded of the shape of the whole, because of the vagaries of memory. The narrator keeps her "with him" by removing the necessity of skipping back and breaking the present-tense relationship.

Mostly, the narrator styles himself as in the act of composition; the poem is *forming* rather than *formed* : "I feel this tediousness will never do— / 'Tis being *too* epic, and I must cut down / (In copying) this long canto into two" (III, 111). It is a first draft; the writer dashes things down and often only



afterwards sees their full significance:

The whole camp rung with joy; you would have thought

That they were going to a marriage feast:

(This metaphor, I think, holds good as ought,

Since there is discord after both at least). (VII, 49)

This habit of his, to use not “metaphor” proper but simile in its many forms (here “you would have thought” replaces the “as if” construction), is a measure of the poem’s experimentalism. The narrator is forever “trying out” an image, sometimes applying to the reader for approbation (“What say you to a bottle of champagne?” (XIII, 37)) and sometimes to his own experience (“*That’s* an appropriate simile, *that Jackall*;— / I’ve heard them in the Ephesian ruins howl” (IX, 27)).

This narrator takes pains to force the reader’s focus into *his* world, *his* time-space. As the writer of a letter might describe himself so vividly in the act of writing that his reader is conscious of the writing rather than of the reading, so Byron foists his side of the writer-reader relationship upon my reader. When the poem becomes opaque or self-reflexive for her, she usually becomes aware of the poem-as-being-written rather than of the poem-as-being-read. (This “being written” is not in Barthes’ sense of the “*scriptible*” text.<sup>6</sup> Byron’s reader is kept in strict order as reader; somebody else is doing the writing for her, except occasionally when she is consulted at his whim.) Perhaps this is most obvious in the poem’s jokes. Coming across some verbal exhibit such as the rhyme “intellectual . . . hen-peck’d you all” (I, 22), or the word “Koklophti” in a list of Russian names (VII, 17), the reader is suddenly and absurdly conscious of the text; but she is also conscious of the personality who—alone—could have put such constructs into a text like this. “Typical!” is one of the comments that

risers to her lips in recounting them.

Admittedly, the act of reading is sometimes "there" in the poem too:

O, reader! If that thou canst read,—and know,  
'Tis not enough to spell, or even to read,  
To constitute a reader; there must go  
Virtues of which both you and I have need. (XIII, 73)

But very often the reader is merely co-opted as an assistant in painting a scene:

but all descriptions garble  
The true effect, and so we had better not  
Be too minute; an outline is the best,  
A lively reader's fancy does the rest. (VI, 98)

On the occasions when the narrator quarrels with his reader, he usually ends up asserting his independence of her: "I can't oblige you, reader! to read on; / That's your affair, not mine" (XII, 87); "I write the world, nor care if the world read" (XV, 60). Of course, the latter is a lie; he contradicts it elsewhere: "I *won't* philosophize, and *will* be read" (X, 28). In any case, this mobile, chatty, temperamental style of writing posits a reader more often and more obviously than most. But the point is that the narrator dominates his reader and seldom allows the alternative image—the "real" one—of the reader alone with the book, to obscure his insistent picture of himself with his incomplete poem, his pen in his "right hand" (IV, 99), in the throes of composition.

Only by one device does he allow the reader's experience to become startlingly vivid to her. By the reflexive use of the word "this," discussed in the previous chapter, he calls attention to the text as object, an object which has, in "reality," passed from his hands into hers. It is an important building-block in

the construction of his own authenticity. If he were merely to refer to the known life of Lord Byron, the famous poet ("But Juan was my Moscow, and Faliero / My Leisic, and my Mount Saint Jean seems Cain" (XI, 56)), or to the habits of a poetic gentleman residing in Ravenna ("I canter by the spot each afternoon / Where perished in his fame the hero-boy" (IV, 103)), then his "existence" would appear to the reader a thing apart from the text, or one of the many fictions generated by it. However, the reader has under her eyes the direct evidence of a life—a thing which has come to her like a legacy from the hand and mind of a now-dead person—and this he uses most immediately to recreate himself. The demonstrative is sometimes used to point to some local effect in the line or stanza in which it occurs: "The hinge seemed to speak, / Dreadful as Dante's rhima, or this stanza" (XVI, 116). But when it is made to refer to the real object on which it is printed ("their new portmanteau . . . may be lined with this my canto" (II, 16)),<sup>7</sup> the effect of the metalepsis on the reader is quite different. The poem has "got into" her world; she has in her hands—unless her edition happens to be engraved on stone—an object which could be put to the very use mentioned. Hence, when the narrator places himself in the same frame as "this . . . paper," the effect is to move the man very close to the reader in time, as if he had been working on it very recently, like the writer of a letter:

Why, just now,  
In taking up this paltry sheet of paper,  
My bosom underwent a glorious glow,  
And my internal Spirit cut a caper. (X, 3)

But referring to the solidity of the page is not the only epistolary device Byron uses. He also positions the writing event within a life which, plausibly,

contains other events, though only the present of the writing can be given by active present-tense verbs:

The night (I sing by night—sometimes an owl,  
 And now and then a nightingale)—is dim,  
 And the loud shriek of sage Minerva's fowl  
 Rattles around me her discordant hymn:  
 Old portraits from old walls upon me scowl—  
 I wish to heaven they would not look so grim;  
 The dying embers dwindle in the grate—  
 I think too that I have sate up too late:

And therefore, though 'tis by no means my way  
 To rhyme at noon—when I have other things  
 To think of, if I ever think,—I say  
 I feel some chilly midnight shudderings,  
 And prudently postpone, until mid-day,  
 Treating a topic which alas but brings  
 Shadows;—but you must be in my condition  
 Before you learn to call this superstition. (XV, 97–98)

This ghostly setting, the portraits, the late hour, etc., are props put in to harmonize the poet's experience with the story's Gothic turn at this point. At other times the narrator suggests diurnal writing habits:

I feel my brain turn round,  
 And all my fancies whirling like a mill;  
 Which is a signal to my nerves and brain,  
 To take a quiet ride in some green lane. (IX, 85)

But the important thing is that he places the writing event—in time and space—within a life, and ascribes to the very words that are unfolding for the reader the power to affect that life. Writing about a Teniers painting of a “bell-mouthed goblet” makes the narrator “feel quite Danish” and causes him to call out (within the poem) to a waiter or servant (outside the poem, but present for him) for wine: “What ho! a flask of Rhenish” (XIII, 72). Similarly, the immediate events of his life influence the poem: he “forego[es]” describing all the

dishes at a Norman Abbey banquet because he has recently dined himself (XV, 71).

The narrator's concentration on his own time sometimes allows him to play games with his reader's present. When dealing with relationships among his characters, he is often

glad of a pretence  
To leave them hovering, as the effect is fine,  
And keeps the atrocious reader in *suspense*;  
The surest way for ladies and for books  
To bait their tender or their tenter hooks. (XIV, 97)

"*Suspense*" is a device which operates on the reader when the narrator's consciousness has moved ahead of the reader's present but refuses to give up the knowledge gleaned from this god-like excursion into reader's (and characters') future. When he mentions at the end of Canto XI what, for his story, "Is yet within the unread events of time" (XI, 90), he fails, on this occasion, to suggest that it is also in the *unwritten* "events of time," hinting, in his contradictory manner, that he does sometimes know "the word which will come next."

But this kind of manipulating game occurs only at his moments of greatest alienation from an inscribed audience. In the first example he refers to an "atrocious reader," who is certainly not my sympathetic female construct; in the second he is apostrophising hypocritical English society, to whom he has just told the unpleasant truth: "You are *not* a moral nation, and you know it / Without the aid of too sincere a poet" (XI, 87). Normally, reader and writer are seen as sharing a rather erratic journey together. The first-person plural is often used in comments on pace ("let us ramble on" (XV, 22)), direction ("We leave this royal couple to repose" (VI, 20)), position ("Here pause we for the present"

(VII, 87)) and detour ("This we pass over. We will also pass / The usual progress of intrigues between / Unequal matches" (X, 24)). In fact, the narrator habitually uses a metaphor in which "we" (that is, he and the reader) share a vehicle or conveyance on "our" journey through *Don Juan*—or life.<sup>8</sup> It can be Pegasus (IV, 1), a boat (II, 4) or a hackney coach (XIV, 26), but, regardless of who may be its principal guide, all travellers alike are subject to the horse's sprains, the winds' inconstancy and the coach's joltings: "we" are in it together. This is a relationship which has not been sufficiently stressed in writings on *Don Juan*. I myself in Chapter V have tended to over-emphasize the many traps and pitfalls set by the narrator for the reader and have styled the reader's search for solid ground in an ironic universe as a private one.

For that ideal recipient of the author's discourse whom Chatman calls the "implied reader"<sup>9</sup> is much closer to the author in sympathy than, for example, the "immanent reader" discussed by the German critic, Günther Blaicher;<sup>10</sup> and, unlike the implied reader of some ironic works, *Don Juan's* is quite clearly inscribed in the poem. Blaicher's article is the only audience-oriented work available on *Don Juan* and it can be summarized in English as follows: in the early cantos, the narrator begins by invoking the privileged, urbane "gentle reader" of eighteenth-century convention, but he becomes progressively disillusioned by the moral outcries and scathing critical attacks that hail each instalment of the poem as it is published. Hence he becomes more and more alienated from his "gentle reader," using the term in later cantos only ironically and searching for new readers in the lower classes (for example, "Cockneys") and in posterity. Finally, he gives up the attempt in despair, writing towards the end for himself alone. Blaicher's tonal ear is not highly developed, except perhaps for notes of

despair and disillusion, and he seems to have missed the humour of the poem altogether. Often when the narrator is merely teasing his reader ("Gent. Reader, nothing" (XIV, 7))<sup>11</sup> or pushing her into a role appropriate to the story ("Grim reader! did you ever see a ghost?" (XV, 95)),<sup>12</sup> Blaicher takes him as offering a serious indictment of the English reading public. It must come as a surprise for an appreciative reader of *Don Juan* to learn from Blaicher that she is increasingly rejected by the author as the poem progresses. If anything, her experience is the opposite of this, as he and she warm to their relationship and become more accustomed to each other's habits. Blaicher discovers the reader in the text somewhat mechanically in the use of the word "reader" (and, occasionally, "we"); perhaps the concordance was his basic text, not the poem itself. This may be why he coins the term "immanent" for his receiver, rather than familiar terms such as "inscribed" or "implied," which have been used to describe more complex respondents than the Aunt Sally in whom he is interested.

In fact, evidence of and reference to the reader or readers of *Don Juan* are much more widespread and structurally varied than Blaicher takes care to discover. Since he claims that after Canto X the rot really sets in in the author-reader relationship, here is an example from as late as Canto XIV which demonstrates the kind of exchange that he constantly ignores:

she had seen the world, and stood its test,  
As I have said in—I forget what page;  
My Muse despises reference, as you have guess'd  
By this time. (XIV, 54)<sup>13</sup>

This narrator's relaxed presumption on the reader's indulgence, his perfect confidence in the fact that she doesn't mind at all if he has forgotten the page,

his knowledge that she is accustomed to—and diverted by—his blaming his indolence on the Muse: all this is subsumed by a relationship of informality and mutual understanding, a relationship which is, in fact, essential to most of the pleasure of the text of *Don Juan*.

Examples of this kind can be found early and late: “Here my chaste Muse a liberty must take— / Start not! still chaster reader—she’ll be nice hence- / Forward” (I, 120). The reader did not start from chastity, but is glad to pretend, just as the narrator is; this is a game they’re playing. In Canto IV, he can be found protesting rather too much:

All this must be reserved for further song;  
 Also our hero’s lot, howe’er unpleasant,  
 (Because this Canto has become too long)  
 Must be postponed discreetly for the present;  
 I’m sensible redundancy is wrong,  
 But could not for the muse of me put less in’t. (IV, 117)

He knows, of course, that the reader is finding her chief pleasure in “redundancy,” just as he himself is. But he is not always as ironic as this with his reader’s indulgence: “Meanwhile, as Homer sometimes sleeps, perhaps / You’ll pardon to my muse a few short naps” (V, 159). “Go ahead,” is the reader’s reply; “I could do with a rest myself.” (The ends of cantos are registered as pauses in the shared, continuous, present time of the narrator’s and reader’s relationship.) He can, on occasion, become more resistant to the reader’s desires and, instead of apologising, harangue her thus:



It is an awful topic—but 'tis not  
 My cue for any time to be terrific:  
 For chequered as is seen our human lot  
 With good, and bad, and worse, alike prolific  
 Of melancholy merriment, to quote  
 Too much of one sort would be soporific;—  
 Without, or with, offence to friends or foes,  
 I sketch your world exactly as it goes. (VIII, 89)

This is indeed more defensive, but the fact that he explains that he's not going to be "terrific" for very long, that he explains *why* he has to deal with "awful topic[s]," that he takes the trouble to explain at all, suggests that he has in mind a friend, not a foe, and one who can be trusted not to take "offence." The playfulness and intimacy of passages like the following are what really set the tone of *Don Juan*: "I'm 'at my old Lunes'—digression, and forget / The Lady Adeline Amundeville" (XIII, 12). A comment like this would be impossible without the assumed presence of a friend who not only forgives, but appreciates his "old Lunes"; the constant habit of apologising or berating himself for them is a game, of politeness only playable with such a friend. As late as Canto XVI, quotations can be found, by placing the finger almost at random on the page, which illustrate the narrator's sense of shared experience and understanding with the reader:

I say no more—I've said too much;  
 For all of us have either heard or read—  
 Off—or *upon* the hustings—some slight such  
 Hints from the independent heart or head  
 Of the official candidate (XVI, 77);

or of the narrator's slightly exaggerated politeness, which ironizes not a relationship of hostility, but one of extreme intimacy: "Now this (but we will whisper it aside) / Was—pardon the pedantic illustration— / Trampling on Plato's

pride with greater pride" (XVI, 43).

An essay by Sona Stephan Hoisington on *Eugene Onegin* clarifies the problem with Blaicher's article on *Don Juan*. Hoisington defines a whole "hierarchy of narratees" in Pushkin's poem, starting at the top with the most important, the implied reader.<sup>14</sup> The implied reader of *Onegin* is the friend and confidante who understands the narrator's jokes; clearly the very similar implied reader of *Don Juan* is the figure whom I have been discussing in the paragraph above. The implied reader, according to Hoisington, is the most important in the "hierarchy of narratees" of any particular work because she (or he) is "the fictitious person we become in the process of reading it."<sup>15</sup> Now, although Blaicher designates the inscribed receiver in whom he is interested as "*einer textimmanenten Leserfiktion*"<sup>16</sup> (an immanent fictional reader), and although he appears unaware of any other narratee within the poem, his "*immanente Leser*" is clearly not the narratee at the top of the hierarchy, the implied reader, at all. Blaicher has fixated upon the narratee which Hoisington calls the "mock reader." Hoisington finds it "apparent" in *Eugene Onegin*

that the implied reader should not be confounded with the "reader" so addressed within the work, or what I should like to call the "mock reader." In fact, there is a great gulf between them. The mock reader addressed so deferentially by the narrator . . . is associated paradoxically with a whole set of values the implied author rejects.<sup>17</sup>

Hoisington elaborates his model, making a further distinction between "mock readers" and "mock friends"—the latter being another group with whom the implied reader chooses not to identify;<sup>18</sup> but still, his scheme is too simple to fit *Don Juan*, which includes a much more complex network of narratees than this. My reader—a fiction constructed out of my own ego, who is a "real"

twentieth-century reader trying to fulfil the role of *Don Juan's* implied reader"—is asked on occasion, for example, to take up the mask of "mock reader" in order to play the game. Talking of the luxurious claustrophobia of an Oriental harem, the narrator claims that, as in an "Italian convent," here "all the passions have, alas! but one vent." He goes on to ask (as if repeating the reader's words): "And what is that?" At once he answers (with shocked innocence): "Devotion, doubtless—how / Could you ask such a question?" (VI, 32–33). This is like a "knock-knock" joke; the respondent is forced to ask, "Who's there?" because it is a role she has to play in this kind of game. These are not her words; they are written into the script. To remark that the implied author and implied reader are not shocked or innocent at all is quite unnecessary. The joke depends on an assumed prurience on the part of both which they "put on" for the occasion.

The reader is several times given a dramatic role in *Don Juan*, which does not define her full experience. In fact, she has a choice between taking up the role in the first-person, or as seeing its responses as a third-person exchange between the narrator and somebody else. "Grim reader! Did you ever see a ghost?" demands the narrator in Canto XV. Responding for her and to her, he goes on: "No; but you have heard—I understand—be dumb!" (XV, 95). My reader is perfectly willing to follow the narrator's example at this point, go Gothic and join the dialogue as required; but another reader might feel that the role belongs to a mock reader with whom she cannot identify. This is a good example, for my reader, of the narrator's sharing and dominating reader's time. His dominance is signalled by the fact that although she appears to answer, her words are registered only by his repetition of them.

However, my reader is not always prepared to play the part of respondent in these dramatic exchanges. In Canto VI she does put a "Kind construction" on the narrator's words at his request and so, like him, she becomes alienated from that "mock reader" who refuses to do this:

Kind reader! pass  
This long parenthesis: I could not shut  
It sooner for the soul of me, and class  
My faults even with your own! which meaneth, Put  
A kind construction upon them and me:  
But *that* you won't—then don't—I am not less free. (VI, 56)

Similarly, she does not "shut / The book," as certain prudish mock readers are invited to do at III, 12. However, despite the masculine "sir," she does not mind being the recipient of the narrator's advice about seasickness:

The best of remedies is a beef-steak  
Against sea-sickness; try it, sir, before  
You sneer, and I assure you this is true,  
For I have found it answer—so may you. (II, 13)

(She may have been about to "sneer," too, until the narrator's—Byron's—sincere assurance that it has worked for him.)

The difficulty, in *Don Juan*, is defining exactly where the implied reader ends and the mock reader, or readers, begin. The extension of the one into the other is rather like the relative positions of implied author and narrator in this poem. Some of the more intriguing pleasures derive from an ambiguity of identity which cannot always be quite resolved. When, within the address to the "Grim reader," the following exchange occurs, my reader is not sure whether she ought to claim the laugh or not:

And do not think I mean to sneer at most  
 Of these things, or by ridicule benumb  
 That source of the sublime and the mysterious:—  
 For certain reasons, my belief is serious.

Serious? You laugh:—you may; that will I not;  
 My smiles must be sincere or not at all.  
 I say I do believe a haunted spot  
 Exists—and where? That shall I not recall,  
 Because I'd rather it should be forgot,  
 "Shadows the soul of Richard" may appal.  
 In short, upon that subject I've some qualms very  
 Like those of the Philosopher of Malmsbury. (XV, 95-96)

Her first impression is that, despite his assurance to the contrary, the implied author is sharing the laugh with her; certainly he is making fun of Byron's Gothic Reputation here. But those "certain reasons" sound a note of authenticity, and the tone of the final couplet is very plausibly confessional. The "Philosopher of Malmsbury" was Thomas Hobbes, and he, no more than Byron, had a right to believe in ghosts. Now if the implied author is indeed serious, then the implied reader ought not to be laughing; but "My smiles must be sincere or not at all" is such a blatant sample of this author's irony that she knows he is smiling and does so as well. Her smile is a complicated smile, however, deriving from the divided self, from the sincerity and trickery that abound in this poem, from the author's capacity to laugh at his own beliefs while still holding them, and from his ability and the reader's to set up their egos as part of a puppet-show while talking to each other over the top of the box.<sup>19</sup>

Blaicher finds the point of crisis in the relationship between author and readers at VII, 7, where the author berates these readers as "Dogs, or Men!" and goes on to place dogs above them.<sup>20</sup> But Blaicher does not sufficiently examine the context of this outburst and neither does he consider the implied reader's position in relation to it. The canto opens with an invocation to love

and glory; they are imaged as meteors in the "polar sky" which appear high above "chill and chain'd" humanity: "us," the first-person pronoun (VII, 1). The narrator moves on to a description and defence of his poem in terms of one of his most memorable images for it—"a versified Aurora Borealis":

And such as they are, such my present tale is,  
 A nondescript and ever varying rhyme,  
 A versified Aurora Borealis,  
 Which flashes o'er a waste and icy clime.  
 When we know what all are, we must bewail us,  
 But, ne'er the less, I hope it is no crime  
 To laugh at *all* things—for I wish to know  
 What after *all*, are *all* things—but a *Show*? (VII, 2)

He still uses the first-person plural in line 5 for humanity, but he moves on to a more private and individual response—laughter instead of weeping—and the first-person singular. His tentative and potentially trusting eye upon the implied reader is signalled by "I hope it is no crime." Of course it isn't!—he and she share this recognition unlike those others who misunderstand him, "they" who appear in the next stanza:

They accuse me—*Me*—the present writer of  
 The present poem—of—I know not what,—  
 A tendency to under-rate and scoff  
 At human power and virtue, and all that;  
 And this they say in language rather rough.  
 Good God! I wonder what they would be at!  
 I say no more than has been said in Dante's  
 Verse, and by Solomon and by Cervantes;  
  
 By Swift, by Machiavel, by Rochefoucault,  
 By Fenelon, by Luther, and by Plato;  
 By Tillotson, and Wesley, and Rousseau,  
 Who knew this life was not worth a potato.  
 'Tis not their fault, nor mine, if this be so,—  
 For my part, I pretend not to be Cato,  
 Nor even Diogenes—We live and die,  
 But which is best, you know no more than I. (VII, 4-5)

Certainly this, as Blaicher suggests, comes close in some ways to the satirical indignation that marks Byron's prose preface to Cantos VI, VII and VIII. But Blaicher, stressing the fact that Byron is aligning himself with "*Heilige, Weise und Theologen*"<sup>21</sup> (saints, sages and theologians), misses—as usual—the comic tone. Byron is writing a parody of himself. The moral indignation is overdone, the list too long and inappropriate, and the rhymes ("Plato . . . potato") suggest indeed a "tendency to under-rate and scoff," despite the rhetoric. Blaicher should have been tipped off, if by nothing else, by the italicized and upper-case repetition in the first line: "*Me*." It is a comic-book protestation of innocence, whose irony exuberantly parallels another protest later in the poem: "I, the mildest, meekest of mankind, / Like Moses, or Melancthon" (IX, 21). An analysis of pronouns reveals a complex series of alienations. "They," in the first line, are obviously The Enemy. The inclusive "We," and its components, "you" and "I" in the final couplet, are slightly more puzzling. My reader feels herself to be included, because certainly she does not know "which is best," but the tone is not absolutely cordial, and she suspects that "they" have come down to second-person address at this point as well.

Two stanzas follow, which detail Socrates', Newton's and Ecclesiastes' contributions to the belief that life is vanity, and which justify this poet's now highly serious question: "Must I restrain me, through the fear of strife, / From holding up the nothingness of life?" (VII, 6). Despite the earlier humour, here is a powerful rhetoric, amounting almost to a theodicy. Byron's deeply-held hatred of cant is what informs the following stanza, the one which Blaicher sees as a watershed:

Dogs, or men! (for I flatter you in saying  
 That ye are dogs—your betters far) ye may  
 Read, or read not, what I am now essaying  
 To show ye what ye are in every way.  
 As little as the Moon stops for the baying  
 Of Wolves, will the bright Muse withdraw one ray  
 From out her skies—then howl your idle wrath!  
 While she still silvers o'er your gloomy path. (VII, 7)

Clearly, this broadside is aimed at "them" who have accused Byron of his scoffing tendencies. My reader, who is not howling with wrath over the morality of the earlier cantos, does not take it personally at all. However, "real" readers of a more pliant and easily persuaded nature may exist or may have existed, who had agreed with the criticism of those "Dogs, or men"—because rhetoric *does* persuade—and who, on reading this stanza, would change their minds. The passage is not aimed merely at alienating the critics: its content is not pure invective, or the letting off of steam. The imagery is very persuasive and in its characterization it creates, as oratory often creates, an "in-" and an "out-group," the "in-group" occupying, despite suffering and loneliness, a highly seductive position. The wolves' wrath is "idle," their cry an ugly "howl"; Byron's Muse is, like the moon, high up, "bright" and unmoved by this pointless cacophony; her beautifying and illuminating of the "gloomy path" for those who will follow is signified by the richly-weighted word, "silvers." The stanza's purpose is, at least partly, to create a larger group of readers who fulfil the author's requirements and who are prepared to take up the role of implied reader.

A variety of mock readers can be identified in *Don Juan*. The "gentle" or "kind" reader—Blacher's preoccupation—is sometimes a figure with whom my reader can identify, but mostly he exists to have his leg pulled by a collaboration of narrator and reader.<sup>22</sup> For example, Byron teasingly affirms a



stronger bond, in the interests of mercenary gain, with the buyer of his book than with this figure: "gentle reader! and / Still gentler purchaser!" (I, 221); later he puts the "gentle reader" (in the plural) on a level with a group to whom he is decidedly hostile: "Ye gentle readers and ungentle writers" (XII, 20). Just as vulnerable to irony are the "gentle ladies" whom the narrator addresses separately in Canto XI in order to try and explain in terms suitable to their chaste ears what exactly Juan's function is at Catherine's court (IX, 49-52). (My reader's gender does not tempt her to identify with this group; no "mildest, Matron-like interpretation" on her part could cover with cant the fact that Juan has become a gigolo to the queen.) Two lower-class groups are invoked to universalize and witness the experience of war's horror: "Cockneys of London! Muscadins of Paris! / Just ponder what a pious pastime war is" (VIII, 124). "Our children's children" are called upon to "think how we / Show'd *what things were* before the world was free" (VIII, 135), but my reader, despite her temporal position down the generations, does not feel impelled to identify with them, considering that "the great joy" of a "millennium" (VIII, 136) is not overwhelmingly apparent to her as yet. Slightly more ambiguous is what the narrator calls the "world," which may, considering the poem's subject-matter at the times that it is invoked, designate only the "world" of English fashionable society, but then again, considering Byron's exaggerated pouting here, it may signify something more universal:

I say, in my slight way I may proceed  
 To play upon the surface of Humanity.  
 I write the world, nor care if the world read,  
 At least for this I cannot spare its vanity.  
 My Muse hath bred, and still perhaps may breed  
 More foes by this same scroll: when I began it, I  
 Thought that it might turn out so—*now* I *know* it,  
 But still I am, or was, a very pretty poet. (XV, 60)

The Byronic way was always to give the "world" the finger, caring nevertheless very deeply about what this world thought about him the while.<sup>23</sup> Here, despite the touches of serious comment—he *is* exposing "vanity" and breeding "foes"—a genuine playfulness, an insouciant silliness ("pretty poet," indeed!), suggest that Byron really has at last outgrown his need for contemporary popularity. The implied reader may be saying "There, there!" to him at this point, but she is snickering just as much at her role as he is at his.

Of course "real" receivers (not mock readers), whom my reader feels no compulsion to identify with, are invoked quite individually and by name, though the narrator's exchanges with them are often put in for her edification. Byron's head-on attack on Castlereagh, for example, has a certain impersonality about it. It at first appears to be an address in the second person, but the insulting use of the inanimate third-person pronoun turns it into a private exclamation rather than a message passing directly from sender to receiver: "Cold-blooded, smooth-faced, placid miscreant . . . . *It* / Hath but two objects, how to serve, and bind" (Ded., 12-15). However, the attack on Wellington at the beginning of Canto IX (1-13) is a genuine address, and one which suggests the oral more than the epistolary mode. It suggests this partly by the constant use of disclaimers ("I am no flatterer" (5); "I've done" (6); "I don't mean to reflect" (7)), which give the passage an oratorical flavour. In spite of the lickspittle tone

of vocatives like "a man so great as / You, my Lord Duke!" (7), Byron has quite clearly come to bury Wellesley, not to praise him. What is less clear is that a certain amount of admiration is mixed with this damning indictment. The verdict is in the following:

And *now*—What *is* your fame? Shall the Muse tune it ye?  
*Now*—that the rabble's first vain shouts are o'er?  
 Go! hear it in your famished country's cries!  
 Behold the World! and curse your victories! (IX, 9)

But Byron perceives, as he perceives in everybody except perhaps Castlereagh, some vindicating features in this conservative statesman. Despite "not being *great* in mind," Wellington "*did great things*" (10); he may "have acted *once* a generous part" (4); his "Glory" and "heroic" "Fame" (1) are not so much unearned as sullied; "Never had mortal Man such opportunity, / Except Napoleon, or abused it more" (9).<sup>24</sup>

Particular favourites for satirical apostrophe are the Lake poets, especially Robert Southey. They are addressed directly in the Dedication, but elsewhere and more often they—and other contemporary writers, such as Keats, Bowles and Scott—are invoked in the third person for the edification of the speaker's confidante, the implied reader: "'Carnage' (so Wordsworth tells you) 'is God's daughter'" (VIII, 9). They are referred to not merely in order to place *Don Juan* within its literary context, but also for serious political and moral reasons: "Europe has slaves—allies—kings—armies still, / And Southey lives to sing them very ill" (Ded., 16).

At the end of Canto X, there is an address to Elizabeth Fry, which, in spite of the speaker's obvious admiration for her, takes the form of a furious homily in which he berates her for "Preach[ing] to poor rogues," when she

should be reforming instead the "harden'd and imperial sin" (X, 85) to be found in the great houses of the land. Similarly, but more absurdly, in Canto XIV, the narrator demands of that hero, Wilberforce, the "moral Washington of Africa," that he complete his work, and now that he has "freed the *blacks*," he "shut up the whites"—that is, Europe's tyrants, the "Holy Three," especially the Russians' "bald-coot bully Alexander" (XIV, 82-84).

These addresses to famous and celebrated figures have a public quality, like that of an open letter to a politician, as if they were written more for the ordinary reader than for the person to whom they are directed. Other examples of this kind are mostly less formal, such as the apology to "thou grand legitimate, Alexander!" put in (with a swagger) in case this rhyme should reach "as far as Petersburg," which claims (not entirely convincingly) that to call the czar's grandmother "the greatest of . . . wh-res" does not amount to a reflection on Alexander's own legitimacy (VI, 92-93). Similar in that it is unlikely to be read by its respondent is the famous reprimand of Plato, who is long-dead as we know, but who is buttonholed for rebuke in Canto I in such a familiar, back-slapping way that he becomes for the moment a character, and one on whom a large part of the blame for Julia's adultery with Juan must fall:

Oh Plato! Plato! You have paved the way,  
 With your confounded fantasies, to more  
 Immoral conduct by the fancied sway  
 Your system feigns o'er the controlless core  
 Of human hearts, than all the long array  
 Of poets and romancers:—You're a bore,  
 A charlatan, a coxcomb—and have been,  
 At best, no better than a go-between. (I, 116)

This is a little like Byron's more common strategy of blaming things on the

Muse; the apostrophe is, in fact, a distraction designed to conceal his reneging of responsibility. But addresses to certain contemporaries of Byron's occur in *Don Juan* which really have the tone of personal messages, and these strongly affect the reader, making her feel like a contemporary herself, since other messages are directed to her. In Canto V occurs an aside to John Murray, Byron's publisher: "(Plain truth, dear Murray, needs few flowers of speech)" (V, 101); and, in Canto X, a long discussion with the critic, Francis Jeffrey.<sup>25</sup> The latter begins in a slantwise, third-person mode: "However, I forgive him, and I trust / He will forgive himself;—if not, I must" (X, 11); but it moves on through a diatribe on the dirtiness of lawyers and critics to a surprisingly non-ironic direct address, which makes an exception in Jeffrey's case: "not so *you*, I own; / As Caesar wore his robe you wear your gown" (X, 15). Disarmingly, it continues through four more stanzas which recant Byron's earlier railing at the Scots and affirm his Scottish sentiments and background. The act of forgiveness is finally subordinated to a tribute coming directly from the writer as he writes: "I do not know you, and may never know / Your face,—but you have acted on the whole / Most nobly, and I own it from my soul" (X, 16). What a tribute it is the reader can own only from a full realization of her perspective: he has bequeathed immortality of the best kind as a casual addendum to this polite gift of recognition. However, the reader's most immediate perspective here is not the one which sees *Don Juan* as a Great Work of Literature, in which names casually mentioned become graven on stone—or onto the collective consciousness of the culture—but one which envisages itself as the sympathetic auditor of a speaker who is apostrophising the small audience of which she is a part, sometimes singling out one individual for attention and sometimes another.

My reader may feel, on occasion, that she is not exactly the intimate desired or implied by the narrator of *Don Juan*. A contemporary of Byron's, of similar education, would presumably have known, if not much about Jeffrey, for example, at least that he existed. "Jeffrey" was a name people recognized as belonging to a man still alive somewhere. My reader must do some research, either before or during her reading, in order to establish the fact that he is not a fiction. Of course, her task is much easier than that of a similarly ignorant contemporary because she has at hand books—both specific and general—that set forth the research of many generations of scholars and historians, and hence she has access to facts that only a small in-group would previously have known. The "bond of intimacy" between implied author and implied reader is, according to Hoisington, who uses Booth's *A Rhetoric of Irony* as a model, "created by means of irony. We find ourselves actively engaged in a 'mutual performance' with the implied author."<sup>26</sup> My reader is able to stay with the implied author at places in which contemporaries were extremely likely to tumble into the pitfalls laid for them, for example, at I, 209, where they were inclined to believe, if not that Byron had bribed the *British Review*, at least that it belonged to a grandmother of his.<sup>27</sup> Other people's scholarship thus helps her to choose the path of implied reader rather than mock reader on many occasions.

However, these occasions on which she has an advantage over an early nineteenth-century reader do not allow my reader to feel that her perspective is always superior. Vaguer kinds of knowledge exist—climates of opinion—which come and go with the years and which are much more difficult to recreate by means of a glossary or handbook of history. Byron uses public opinion a great deal in *Don Juan*, and public opinion is often not based on historical fact—which is more

easily available long after the event. Less available later is what exactly was believed at the time and by whom. Lord Byron, to borrow a cliché, was a legend in his own lifetime. A fictionalized version of his biography had already entered the folklore of at least one European nation. An accurate, "factual" biography, such as is available to a modern reader, is no substitute for the myth that prevailed during the poet's own age. Of course, a lengthy, insightful, interpretative biography like Leslie A. Marchand's, including as it does such items as newspaper references, cartoon caricatures and an account of the anonymous love letters written to the poet,<sup>28</sup> can be extremely helpful in the recreation of the myth; so can a modern reader's experience, in the age of publicity media, of the place of film stars and celebrities in the collective consciousness of the twentieth century. But the myth, except as the years and "Byronism" have overlaid and changed it, is not immediately "there" for her as it would have been for a contemporary—even for one who was aware of the factual inaccuracies of this myth.

In *Don Juan*, Byron uses "the life of Byron," as it was believed in, as a subtext. This mostly poses little more problem for a modern than it would have for a nineteenth-century reader. Along with various kinds of swaggers and self-deprecations, the reader is presented with a poet who has swum the Hellespont (II, 105), who has left England for Italy (X, 66), who is half Scottish (X, 17), who knows English society (XI, 83-85), who once loved someone called Mary (V, 4), who feels passionately about political liberty, and whose dislikes include Castlereagh, tyrants, bluestockings, Lake poets, indigestion, Malthus, war, passports, George the Fourth, taxes, mutability, and the pretence of chastity, as well as all hypocrisy and cant of every kind. A number of lies are, of course,

thrown in among these "true facts," some absurd, such as the claim that the narrator can speak very little English (II, 165), and some fairly plausible, like the existence of the literary grandmother (I, 209); but these do not necessarily skew the reader's sense of an autobiographical mode.<sup>29</sup>

What a modern reader is quite likely to miss, which would have struck a contemporary at once, is contained in one of the most prominent of all features of the poem: its title. To a contemporary, a poem called *Don Juan* and written by the notorious Lord Byron would just have to be in some sense autobiographical. However, the protagonist, not the speaker, would be the figure on whom the audience would project its collective myth. In line perhaps with what William C. Spengemann recognizes as the "shift of authority from narrator to protagonist that marks the evolution of autobiography since the Renaissance,"<sup>30</sup> "Byron" had all along been sought—and found—in the heroes of the poems Byron had written.<sup>31</sup> Manfred and the Giaour, Conrad and Cain, Lara and Selim and Alp: all the doomed and destructive protagonists of these early works had been identified with the fascinating, promiscuous—incestuous—young nobleman whom the public kept continually before its eyes, masking, as these poems masked, the humour and humanity of the man. None of these earlier works except *The Giaour* used an inscribed narrator; thus the readers' mental set was fixated on the character in their search for "Byron." When the first two cantos of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* gave the world a new perspective—a speaker and a protagonist—the world persisted in identifying not the speaker but the protagonist with the "dark outsider" in whom, according to Robert M. Torrance, they needed to believe as actually existing in their otherwise mundane "real" world.<sup>32</sup> As it happened, the poet himself increasingly identified with the speaker in this uneven



poem, the archaisms of diction and moralisms of attitude that distinguish this narrator as a fictional "other" gradually disappearing as he took on more and more the tones and values of Byron, or of Byron in a reflective, melancholy mood. By Canto IV, the poet had finally "become weary of drawing a line which every one seemed determined not to perceive" between himself and his hero.<sup>33</sup> The canto is a dramatic monologue spoken by Byron in one of his masks or postures, and Childe Harold is invoked only at the end to be dissolved, as fictions can be, by the hand that brought him into being.

In *Don Juan*, a more mature and complex work than *Childe Harold* in any of its cantos, the poet is far more in control both of his audience and his materials. His use—or abuse—of the Don Juan myth is quite deliberate; it is a strategy which sets up his audience right at the beginning, after they have become aware solely of the title, to identify "Byron" with the protagonist. Of course, this hero is in some ways clearly not Byron. He is a more unreflective and innocent character than Byron could ever have been, at any age. Far from the haunted hero of the earlier poems, he is Tom Jones in a new suit. Yet the strategy is not merely an ironic ploy to trip up audience expectations at the outset; it is a warning that being is not essence within this poem: being is performance. In a sense, the audience's expectation that a poem called *Don Juan* by Lord Byron would be about Byron is not disappointed at all; but where Byron exists in the poem, or how he comes into being through its dynamics, are questions whose answers are not the simple identification of the character with the man.

These two contemporary givens—the public quality of Byron's notoriety and the belief that Byron's poems had Byron as a protagonist—are by far the most

important and difficult of my reader's obstacles to becoming the implied reader. The others are diverting rather than problematic. For example, she often has to undergo a sex change in order to respond to the narrator's prompting. Talking of Donna Julia's taking Juan's hand and squeezing it, he says:

I cannot know what Juan thought of this,  
     But what he did, is much what you would do;  
 His young lip thank'd it with a grateful kiss,  
     And then, abash'd at its own joy, withdrew. (I, 112)

Even if this is not much what she would do in her own world—with the sexes reversed or not—the situation in the poem is so plausible and the tone of the speaker so confidential that she at once picks up the mask of the male intimate, just as she plays the game of the mock reader sometimes when it is necessary to have a shocked reaction. The difference between this fictionalization of herself and her playing the mock reader is that here no inscribed sense of herself is a divided self. When she is required to put on prudishness or prurience, another more knowing side of her always exists, unshocked and laughing. In the extract above, the narrator is demanding that the reader identify—and hence sympathise—more fully with Juan and his predicament. Given the circumstances, one of which is adolescent masculinity, the action probably *is* much what a human being would do. To concede this is to enter with the implied author into the very sources of what the world calls sin, and to find that these sources are the most understandable and often even the best of our own impulses.

This is not the only occasion when the narrator's fictionalized respondent is male. Often he is a contemporary as well, usually of the same social class as Byron.<sup>34</sup> The narrator advises his reader, on waking with a hangover: "Ring for your valet—bid him quickly bring / Some hock and soda-water" (II, 153).

Later he affirms that the reader dreads the gout (definitely an upper-class, masculine complaint) as he himself does (XV, 72). However, when he advertises that maker of excellent pumps, "Mr. Mann, of London," the audience he purports to address is a masculine group belonging to a completely different social class: "all brother tars who have need" (II, 29). Although the advertisement's social target does not include my reader, it nevertheless—as many modern commercials do—awakes her interest in the product. Like many of the more unusual inclusions in the poem, such as prescriptions, menus, lists of modern inventions and scientific theories, its effect is to place the poem very firmly in the eighteen-twenties. Self-conscious modernity in a work composed at that time might seem to encourage alienation of a reader of the nineteen-eighties, but, paradoxically, it can make her feel more at home in its world. A sense of modernity is very closely related to a sense of "now," which is often encountered with surprise in the writings of a previous age.<sup>35</sup> If the reader can be made to acquire that feeling of vertigo because we live so late or have come so far, which a writer feels about his own present time, then she is a fair way toward experiencing his sense of "now" as opposed to her own.<sup>36</sup> A distant world is somehow domesticated for her when she knows exactly what its inhabitants eat and wear, how they punish sexual infidelity, cure seasickness and hangover, how expensive their hotels are and what they read in the newspaper. Also, Byron has an unerring eye for what in the human condition is permanent. After a long list of modern discoveries in which, for example, "vaccination" is juxtaposed to "Congreve's rockets" (I, 129), the narrator goes on to explain:

This is the patent age of new inventions  
 For killing bodies and for saving souls,  
 All propagated with the best intentions;  
 Sir Humphrey Davy's lantern, by which coals  
 Are safely mined for in the mode he mentions,  
 Timbuctoo travels, voyages to the Poles,  
 Are ways to benefit mankind as true,  
 Perhaps, as shooting them at Waterloo. (I, 132)

Little in this series of paradoxes can make a modern reader feel anachronistic. We are still in "the patent age of new inventions" (perhaps we always were); all that has changed is that we have acquired a number of new items on either side of the copula in line 2. The balance of contradictory impulses, which is what interests the speaker here, has not altered.

Similarly, when Byron makes the prediction that, on the basis of Sir Isaac Newton's physics, "full soon / Steam-engines will conduct [man] to the moon" (X, 2), what strikes the reader is not a quibble about the physicist responsible or an argument over the engines' power source, but a sense of closeness to a writer looking with clear eyes from the achievements of one age into those of another not far into the future. Admittedly, she becomes aware of a "real" achievement at a point at which a contemporary would have felt only the uncertainty of a prophecy, but this does not make her any the less qualified to fulfil the role of implied reader. What the twentieth-century fact of moon voyages does to these lines is to highlight the word "soon," thereby drastically foreshortening for the modern reader the time in between Byron's writing and her reading, and making a century and a half seem but a fleeting moment in the history of man. A possible reader in five centuries' time might throw a new perspective onto the prophecy by reading the word "soon" as evident truth without the sense of foreshortening.

This reader of the year 2487, however, should not feel any the less qualified than my reader to be the implied reader, except in terms of changes in, or death of, the English language—or, perhaps, due to some global disaster, loss of the histories and commentaries which have aided my reader. (Language changes in the past hundred and sixty years are too minor for my reader to be bothered by them, although she does occasionally have to look up a nineteenth-century colloquialism and was at first confused by Byron's aristocratic affectation of dropping the "g" in the present participle, as in the rhyme "muslin . . . puzzling" (I, 12).) *Don Juan* is probably, in fact, easier to read in another age than it was in 1824, because the fictionalization of the self which becoming the implied reader requires is easier for a later reader to accept. In 1824, a reader might find his "real" self so similar to the implied reader that he would be unable to make the transformation; hence, he would quarrel with Byron on "real" grounds whenever his "real" opinions happened to conflict with those in the text, and would fall into the trap of mock reader more readily. The contemporary's "natural" tendency to identify Juan with Byron, and his immediate knowledge of Byron's reputation, are the only advantages he might have over a modern, and to some extent these things can be "artificially" acquired.

Searching through the life and loves of that fictional character, Byron's Don Juan, for exact biographical details from the life and loves of Lord Byron has proved a seductive occupation for literary and historical voyeurs ever since the poem was written.<sup>37</sup> A theory by a modern Byron critic that Juan's affair with Catherine the Great carefully parallels the young Byron's sexual encounter with Ali Pacha of Albania, for example,<sup>38</sup> may be a substitute, to the modern

reader, for the personal suspicions a contemporary reader might have had during his own experience of the poem; both types of speculation are invited and both signal a mock reader's approach. The mock reader, like the implied reader, is inscribed, and to lose a sense of his "wrong reading" is to lose some of the ironic collusion of implied author and implied reader. Biographical bait is deliberately dangled in various places. For example, anyone who knows anything about Annabella Milbanke—even the name is enough—must make the connection here:

There was Miss Millpond, smooth as summer's sea,  
 That usual paragon, an only daughter,  
 Who seem'd the cream of equanimity,  
 Till skimm'd—and then there was some milk and water,  
 With a slight shade of blue too, it might be  
 Beneath the surface; but what did it matter?  
 Love's riotous, but marriage must have quiet,  
 And being consumptive, live on a milk diet. (XV, 41)

The trouble is that the attentive reader with this tendency has already found Byron's wife in Donna Inez, whose "favourite science was the mathematical" (I, 12),<sup>39</sup> and if the reader's turn be for the hermeneutic, she might find Annabella in Aurora Raby as well.<sup>40</sup> Clearly, this doubling, or tripling, of the character smacks of trickery; these allusions are lures for readers who still persist in biting. My reader's strategy is to take the parallels impressionistically, not searching Juan's story and the biography for detailed or extended resemblances, and acknowledging at the same time the probability that as many parallels can be drawn with literary models from both the English and the Italian traditions as with events in the poet's life.<sup>41</sup>

What Juan represents in this poem is what narrator and reader cannot actually be engaging in in the present time of their writing and reading: a life

of action. The narrator has had "days of love" (I, 216) in the past, which, against his own exhortations, are nevertheless continuing in between his periods of composition (II, 209). In these interstices he goes for rides (IX, 85) and witnesses the fatal result of an "Italian quarrel" (V, 30-39). He also projects for himself a possible future life of military action, in which he would "war" "in deeds" "with all who war / With Thought" (IX, 24). However, in the "now" with which he dominates the receiver's time, he is a thing of reflection and expression. He generates and is generated by words; he cannot be observed in a wordless action because he is too busy weaving the fiction of actions with the words that are its fabric. Juan's time is not denoted by the present tense: he exists in a continuous past running perhaps quite recently behind the narrator's time, and he is seldom given the opportunity to assert his "now" because he speaks only rarely and never to the reader. But, precisely because the words with which he is generated are not his own words, he is free to move. Within the time-focus in which he exists, he is not, as is the narrator, constantly to be conceived as forming words with the mouth or the pen. In his own present, which is past to narrator and reader, he walks, rides, dances, eats, kisses and kills. Nor is his relative wordlessness a result purely of the temporal position of his story in relation to the other elements of the text. He is (except perhaps briefly, under the influence of puberty (I, 93)), an unreflective, unselfconscious character, "a 'broth of a boy,' / A thing of impulse and a child of song" (VIII, 24). Though he is puzzled occasionally by things he does not understand, such as Adeline's changeability (XVI, 96), and though he grieves, briefly, over sad events like his loss of Haidée (IV, 95; V, 117), his is not a nature which speculates on the metaphysical causes of things or is stirred to melancholy by

too much thought. He is, moreover, incapable of irony, which is the result of reflection turned slantwise toward things and events. Within the story, irony is the province of much more complex minor characters, such as John Johnson, who says of his own experience: "taking lately, by Suwarrow's bidding, / A town, was ta'en myself instead of Widden" (V, 15); and Lady Adeline, of whom the narrator says: "Like Addison's 'faint praise,' so wont to damn, / Her own but served to set off every joke" (XVI, 104). Juan is actually, in many ways, the narrator's antiself: the dialectic and the shifting emphasis between them are among the ironic dynamos on which the poem runs.

Perhaps only by comparison of *Don Juan* with Byron's earlier poems can the significance of a protagonist like Juan be appreciated. In the "Turkish tales," the hero is invariably embittered and haunted by guilt—to this extent more complex than Juan—but his faithfulness and tenderness toward the single love of his life vindicates his vision from cynicism and gives to his actions the inevitability of romance or revenge tragedy. Lambro in *Don Juan* is such a character. Twisted satanically by patriotic disillusion from the "heroic" "spirit of old Greece" (III, 55), as Alp is from Corinth, Lambro, like Conrad, turns to piracy, his single remaining virtue being his love for his daughter. (In the earlier tales the redeeming love is erotic, and its frequently incestuous nature throws a question mark over Lambro's jealousy of Haidée.) These characters resemble the gloomy Satan of *Paradise Lost*, and they share his capacity for brooding thought; but their narratives, except for part of *The Giaour*, are in the third person and as heroes they are essentially men of action. They destroy themselves and others in final acts of vengeance against the fate which excludes them from the earthly paradise towards which they have dared to aspire.<sup>42</sup> Action, or gesture, even if



this is merely "a pensive posture, leaning on the brand,"<sup>43</sup> are what hold the reader's attention in these works. If the depth and contrariness of their brooding allows them a bitterly ironic outlook, this is overwritten later by the passion with which they hurl themselves to destruction. Like Haidée, though more deliberately, they save themselves from irony by dying—in their case of hate as well as love.

In *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, the hero is caught only in the pensive posture. Though he has experienced love for a forbidden woman, this has been chaste.<sup>44</sup> What haunts him is a sense of "satiety," not of criminal guilt;<sup>45</sup> his wanderings are presented as a series of flights from ennui, not quests for ecstasy or revenge. Though he moves over great distances geographically, his reflections rather than his movements are recorded in the poem; action is no more his keynote than it is his narrator's. This is in fact the problem with *Childe Harold*. The narrator and the protagonist are, for all Byron's protests to the contrary, too similar from the beginning—and they become more similar as the poem progresses and the narrator increasingly lets fall the moralistic mask. To start with, Harold's travels are a pretext for geographically focused meditation by the narrator; towards the end, the narrator himself does the travelling as well as the meditating. As late as Canto III, a series of the narrator's thoughts on Waterloo are introduced with "And *Harold* stands upon this place of skulls";<sup>46</sup> but the opening line of Canto IV signals Harold's final redundancy: "I stood in Venice, on the Bridge of Sighs"<sup>47</sup> (my emphasis).

In some ways, Don Juan resembles the heroes of the tales more than *Childe Harold*, for he is a man (or boy) of action rather than thought. But the resemblance begins and ends here, because his actions are very differently

motivated. Compared with Conrad, Selim and Alp, Juan appears a strangely passive hero in that he makes no Satanic or Promethean thrust against the frame of things. Such efforts are the result of strong will and concentrated thought; Juan possesses neither of these capacities and is continually being acted upon by forces stronger than himself, such as the elements, history and other characters. But his good spirits and bad memory, his unreflective responsiveness and the resilience with which he recovers from one experience to encounter the next with enthusiasm, allow him to continue engaging in life—embracing it through all its transformations—to a degree of which no other Byronic hero was capable. The Giaour loves once and is doomed: despite his deliberate and active revenge he is, in fact, caught and determined by forces of love and hate over which he has no control. Juan is more free precisely because he is more passive. He is an opportunist rather than a forger of his own fate, and because of this he lives on to love again—and again.<sup>48</sup>

Juan, like Harold, carries his narrator around on his back through his travels, giving this narrator an excuse for journeys of spatial speculation. But Juan's purpose is not exhausted by this. In *Don Juan*, as opposed to *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, only one of the two parties concerned can exclaim that his "days of love are over" (I, 216); Juan's are the poem's story. This story, although it is episodic, is clearly apprehended by the reader as occupying continuous time (except for one small gap at the beginning of Canto VII),<sup>49</sup> and it is also clearly distinguished for her from the narrator's continuous present by—among other things—its occupation of the past tense. When the narrator enters his story on two occasions, he has to enter in the past tense, because only writing (or speaking) can take place for him in the present; the world of

action must be given by the past or future tenses, or a non-indicative mood. These two invasions by the narrator into Juan's time are recognized at once by the reader as transgressions precisely because the two (moving) points of focus are usually so sharply resolved for her in this poem. In *Childe Harold*, the two centres of consciousness blur and diffract each other; the reader finds it difficult to know who is talking at a given moment, and she feels the use of tenses to be inconsistent and confusing.<sup>50</sup> After a long meditation and description, whose direct messages to a receiver ("as up the crags you spring")<sup>51</sup> suggest that the words belong to the narrator, who has an audience, rather than to Harold, who talks to himself, a sudden interjection of "So deem'd the Childe,"<sup>52</sup> will startle the reader considerably, especially as the passage has not been punctuated by any quotation marks. Even more disquieting is the unexplained transition, in the next stanza, from the past tense ("deem'd") to the present ("he quits, forever quits / A scene of peace"),<sup>53</sup> with Harold still remaining the verbs' subject.

*Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* is, for all its lyrical felicities, a failed attempt at the "dramatisation of self in poetry."<sup>54</sup> It represents the heroic first attempt of a Romantic poet to recreate the self dynamically in terms of its divided nature instead of discovering itself by sincerity or confession.<sup>55</sup> To split the self into two opposed principles and allow them to interact is a dramatic alternative to that search for the one true self which leads the quester of self-consciousness to the brink of the infinite regress.<sup>56</sup> In *Childe Harold*, the opposition between the two principles is not fully established at the beginning: cloning rather than scrupulous vivisection creates an effete double instead of an antiself. What ironic antitheses there are between them progressively break down, leaving the single self at last to face his dangers alone. Balanced precariously at the edge of the

regress, he escapes solipsism—or signals his fall into it—by two encounters with the sublime which share the ambiguity of Anselm's ontological proof. If the genius of St. Paul's is indeed divine, if the Ocean is the symbol of an omnipotent, though indifferent, intellect "out there," then the narrator is rescued, transcendently, from the maelström of his own ego. But if the expanding self, which recognizes under the dome that the "grandeur overwhelms [it] not"<sup>57</sup> and which finds its respite in contemplating the sea's mighty pulses of beneficence and devastation, is merely acknowledging rhapsodically its own awesome potential for creation and destruction (as the dissolution of Harold would suggest), then the poem must be interpreted finally as the ego's elegy and paean to itself. When the latter possibility is anatomized, as with a poet not noted for his religious fervour it must be, the narrator is perceived as occupying a position of idealism so extreme as to be practically indistinguishable from solipsism. The philosophical problems associated with radical idealism are extremely complex and belong more properly to a study of, say, Shelley, than to a discussion of Byron. Suffice it to mention that Romantic poets generally attempt to rein themselves back from this extremity and that *Childe Harold* starts out with a literary strategy which potentially sidesteps it, and yet ends up facing it head-on.

On the other hand, *Don Juan*, in which the division of the self is completed and sustained, transcends these problems with masterly success. The potentially self-consuming nature of reflectiveness—reflexiveness—is prevented from turning inwards to feed on its own entrails because it has another reality, a secondary nature that is active and thoughtless, to reflect upon. Reflectiveness itself becomes responsiveness in the presence of the active other. The narrator is moved to sorrow and scorn, compassion and laughter, not by his protagonist's

passive sense of a past, but by this protagonist's actively unfolding succession of deeds and movements. And the narrator of *Don Juan* is not merely reflective anyway: he is himself active as the storyteller, the generator of his protagonist's deeds and of the fictional, successive past time in which these deeds take place. He exists in an active present, struggling with words, painting, portraying, using his own past to help himself explain, exhorting his reader to pay attention or interpret in a particular way. According to Conrad, the Don Juanism in this poem is centred more in the narrator's game with language than in the "pliable picaresque" nature of the protagonist. He writes: "The narrator, not the hero, possesses the hurricane energy of Don Giovanni, which, redirected from sex into art, is expressed in the hectic and irregular sportive velocity of the language."<sup>58</sup> This narrator does not set out on a quest to find himself—or a transcendental underpinning for the ego's errantry. He has no grail in mind, but is centred, like Don Giovanni, in the present. He performs; he does not seek. But because his own performance can be only with words, he is not—or not always—a whole person: he needs a counterpart, who, not existing in the present tense, does not have to exist for himself by words alone. If, as West claims in his chapter, "The Farce with Language," Byron in *Don Juan* "was able to present himself [as narrator] for interest as an object" because he refused to take full responsibility for this self,<sup>59</sup> responsibility is nevertheless evident in the poem and a complete self is represented. They exist in a shifting focus of authority and sympathy between the narrator and Juan, and are apprehended at any given point as the place at which the implied reader's loyalties lie at that particular moment.<sup>60</sup>

*Don Juan* often valorizes instinctual feeling over thought, and action over

words. The narrator cannot represent these active modes in himself because he exists in the present of thought and words; however, Juan's feelings and actions can sometimes offer a more persuasive argument to the reader than the narrator's verbal rhetoric. When, for example, in Canto II, Juan and Haidée consummate their love on the beach without speaking (they do not share a language), the narrator's incessant discussion of the event and its implications throws their silence into glamorous relief.<sup>61</sup> The love which is portrayed here exists in dialectical opposition to the discursive imagination, and this love is what is valorized for the implied reader.

Conversely, the consequences of unthinking action are scrupulously, horrifyingly anatomized by the narrator's sophisticated mind in the siege cantos, and, although Juan is not cruelly indicted for his deeds in battle (detailed description isolates his saving of Leila rather than his slaying of Turks), he is ironically pilloried for fighting "He knew not why" (VIII, 29) and for being brave "from ignorance of danger" (VIII, 36). It is important, for the later progress of the poem, that the reader's sympathies be not permanently alienated from Juan, but clearly they are exiled temporarily from him and centred here in the sceptical mind whose searchlight rationality can penetrate the fog of heroical cant and perceive on the field the brutal futility of war.

This dialectic between protagonist and narrator is the dialectic available to the autobiographer, purged, however, of the autobiographical narrator's obligation to take responsibility for the actions of the younger self, or to chart a transformation over time of the one self into the other.<sup>62</sup> Wordsworth, suffering a sense of loss while contemplating the "eagerness" of his own "infantine desire," discovers his earlier consciousness still inside himself, but distanced from his

present consciousness by "vacancy." The enigma of the self's recognition of its divisions—or changes over time—is slightly wrenching: "Musing on them, often do I seem / Two consciousnesses, conscious of myself / And of some other Being."<sup>63</sup> Anxiety like this over manifest divisions of all kinds can be felt throughout the Romantic canon, even though the monism that would heal them—radical idealism—is usually avoided.

But *Don Juan's* narrator and protagonist are not merely separate "consciousnesses"; they are separate bodies. Their relationship takes two possible, mutually exclusive, forms. One of these projects the protagonist as the narrator's fictional creature: this possibility is most evident in the first stanzas of the poem and at many transitions where the narrator debates possibilities for the hero and his plot. The other envisages narrator and protagonist as coexisting—or as having coexisted in the same recent past—and it is found not merely in the startling confrontations between the two on the stairs of Juan's childhood home and at the electioneering dinner, but hovers tantalizingly behind those frequent reminders that Juan is visiting or experiencing things visited or experienced a little earlier by the narrator. In neither of these forms will the relationship resolve into that of the autobiographer confronting his past self, though both weirdly reflect and distort the autobiographical model.

The answer to Mellor's question, "Would the narrator finally have come to confess that he and Don Juan are the same person?" is clearly "no" in the sense she asks it:<sup>64</sup> Juan is not, at the time of the second "meeting," turning into the narrator, or vice versa. The question represents one critical lapse in Mellor's otherwise consistent use of the Romantic-ironic paradigm. Unless Byron himself were, in the unrealized later years of his curtailed life, going to drop

this *gestalt* and surprise his reader yet again, no Hegelian synthesis would fuse or transcend his two exuberantly contrary principals. Certainly none is suggested in the poem. If Juan and the narrator change during its pages, they do not progress. Characteristic movement is addition or accretion, not transcendence or transformation. The narrator has a curious and speculative mind; he cultivates the acquisitive sin of avarice by anatomising it (XII, 1-17), but avarice is merely a parallel for his older vice, lust, which is equally acquisitive. Juan becomes temporarily a "little spoil'd" (XII, 49) and sophisticated after his affair with Catherine, but the influence of the pristine Aurora "renew[s] / In him some feelings he had lately lost" (XVI, 107), which include, quite explicitly, innocence, and the capacity for innocent love:

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, 108)

Juan's weakness is that, not being thoughtful, he cannot finally learn from experience; his strength is that he cannot become adulterated for long by it. The narrator is already fallen, cynical, sophisticated, when the poem begins; his attitudes towards what he writes endlessly shift about, but do not leave him fundamentally changed, even at the end. He warns his reader that he may always have a third opinion "in a nook, / Or none at all" (XV, 87). Unlike Wordsworth in *The Prelude*, Byron in *Don Juan* creates for himself no necessity of reconciling innocence and experience, or acquiring, by a fusion of his two selves, a higher innocence through experience. The two principles are projected in such a way that they cannot fuse, only interact. One endlessly reflects on the



other, who endlessly acts, unreflectively; the reader is left to make the reconciliation—or discover the implied author—between them, and this is different at every point and movement of the dual rhythm. The poem unfolds successively, in the present time of its narrating, and its past does not need to be continually reinterpreted in the light of a maturing consciousness—or of two maturing consciousnesses approaching each other towards apotheosis.

That Juan resembles, but is not, the narrator's younger self, is demonstrated most clearly on those occasions when he does things which the narrator himself has done earlier. The narrator, too, has been "school'd in a strange tongue / By female lips and eyes" (II, 164); he has also travelled "the shores of Ilion" (IV, 75); but his experiences are described voyeuristically and contemplatively, as if they were presented this way in the first place, and not, as in Wordsworth's exempla of early experience revisited, acquiring the perspective of thought from the later and more mature consciousness returning. It is impossible, in other words, to imagine Byron's narrator as ever having had the capacity for unpremeditated or non-meditative experience. And yet he constantly teases his reader with parallels between Juan's life and his own.

Of course, the "self" that "is called 'Byron'" is,<sup>65</sup> in *Don Juan*, more nearly or more often centred in the narrator than in Juan. This is not only because this narrator lays claim to many of Byron's own beliefs and experiences, including the composition of the poem, but also because the concept of self *per se* belongs to consciousness rather than to thoughtless action. However, a being possessing Juan's animal exuberance and liveliness often appears to the contemplative mind to be more essentially *itself* than any self-dividing self-contemplation can achieve. The narrator, by contemplating—and creating—Juan,

instead of the elusive regression of his own inner being, lives parasitically off Juan's vitality. He himself becomes outward-looking; he becomes a dramatic projection with something to do, to respond to, to see; he acquires at times a kind of unselfconscious activity in narrating, and hence a selfhood which is not as divided as that of Wordsworth's narrator. He lives, for his reader, dramatically, not merely in the sense of a "showman" performing against her own presence,<sup>66</sup> but also because he has a puppet under his hands whom he endows with a character other than his own, and with whom he can argue, sympathise and play.

His primacy over Juan is signalled in the same way that it is enforced upon the reader. The narrator must occupy centre stage because he occupies the active present tense, and this is not merely a matter of verb conjugation. His present is the present of the verse; it runs forward with the inscribed speed of the text and is "turned on" like a tape recorder as soon as a reader begins reading. Contemporary references, such as those to reigning monarchs and recent scientific discoveries, can date this powerful temporal illusion to within a few years—or even months—of the many actual moments in the early 1820's during which a man called Byron sat down in Italy to compose this poem. For example, the "*ubi sunt?*" stanzas place the writer's time—at this stage—in the period when George the Fourth had "Gone down . . . to Scotland to be fiddled / Unto by Sawney's violin" (XI, 78), which was August, 1822. Juan's time can also be dated, accurately, by the siege of Ismail, which took place in 1790, and, more vaguely, by the remark, "For Grey was not arrived, and Chatham gone" (XII, 82), which places Juan's arrival in England between 1778 and 1807. Now, if the narrator of "old-gentlemanly vice" (I, 216) were a *really*

old gentleman, so that he had visited the back stairs of Juan's childhood home as an adult over forty years before writing about it—which would make him well over sixty “now”—then the temporal scheme would be plausible.<sup>67</sup> But the narrator claims, in Canto I, to be thirty (213) and, in Canto XII, to be thirty-five (2): Byron's actual ages at these two moments of composition. Clearly, the arithmetic will not add up, though this is an issue which the poem does not often foreground. Despite the abundance of dating material, the text contains no actual dates. Dating passages from the two different lives are never juxtaposed to each other; nor do they occur in close proximity to the two meetings of Juan and the narrator. The chronological impossibility of these meetings does form part of their metaleptic trickery—a trap set for the meticulous historian—but, especially in the first encounter, the other model for the narrator-protagonist relationship is the one most clearly travestied. When the narrator jumps into the puppet-stage a mere seventy-four stanzas into Canto I, he has just created Juan, or rather, chosen him from a grab-bag of literary and historical characters and set him going. Obviously, the impossibility of a writer's meeting his own fictional character face to face is foregrounded here. The other model of their relationship—as two people born at different times, coexisting but travelling through history one behind the other—has been established by the time of the second encounter, and it does contribute to the metaleptic shock. But again the main impact of the transgression is felt in the trespass of the creating mind into the artifact of its creation. The passage begins with the narrator's reminding himself, in mid-digression, that he is late for dinner—late, that is, for the narrating of dinner, which should have taken up the narrating time he has used for the digression (XVI, 77–78). Since narrating time is independent of fictional

eating time, the confusion of categories is already established, and it continues, throughout the episode, to dominate the other possible confusion: the arithmetic improbability of Juan's and the narrator's meeting at that place and that time—supposing them to occupy the same fictional world in the first place.

In general, however, the anachronisms committed in developing the relation between these two moving points have the effect of foreshortening the gap between them. The reader has a sense of two quite plausible historical times which are simply a little closer together than could in (historical) fact have been the case; she must go to the guide book to feel the hiatus. The tendency to foreshorten time lapses is characteristic of *Don Juan*; the narrator does the same thing to the gap between himself and his reader in both the speaker-listener model—in which the gap disappears altogether—and in the writer-reader model—in which various epistolary and self-reflexive devices reduce it to a scale in which relevant and immediate interaction between two personalities can take place.

In the dominant present time of the narrating, meetings, parallelisms and criss-crossed entries and exits of the three "protagonists" can occur. The reader, or one of her parodic doubles, the mock readers, enters this present whenever the second-person "you" or the vocative "reader" invoke a response. Juan flashes into the present whenever he is reified into representative of the story, usually at the end of a digression, thus: "O my gentle Juan! / Thou art in London" (XII, 23). And on a rare occasion, both reader and hero share a hypothetical present-into-future time which is certainly longer than the time of narrating, but which seems to contain the narrator as well, holding open the door of the barouche with a bow:

While this high post of honour's in abeyance,  
 For one or two days, reader, we request  
 You'll mount with our young hero the conveyance  
 Which wafted him from Petersburg. (X, 49)

(Juan is put back in his place very promptly, however, as the object of the past-tense "wafted": a typical position for him in relation to the verb.)<sup>68</sup>

These frequent fictional and even metaleptic proximities serve as scenarios for the "dramatisation of self." In bringing himself dynamically to life in *Don Juan*, Byron creates a double, an antiself and an intimate, all of whom possess some of his own characteristics and all of whom are paradoxically active and passive at once. The narrator is passive in the present sense of physical motion, especially in comparison with Juan, who moves about constantly; but he is active in his use of words and his breathtaking journeys of thought. Juan is passive in the presence of active others in his own world, who use and abuse him, and in relation to the narrator, who pulls his strings; he is active in that he can move, respond to stimuli of all kinds, and is almost devoid of the cloying effects of thought. The reader is passive in that she must obey the narrator and feel herself to be a receiver, a follower, a foil; she is active in that she has to be agile to follow, alert and willing to change her role on cue: she cannot become complacent for a second or a pitfall will open under her feet.

Although in mundane reality there is only one living principle, the reader, confronted with an inanimate one, the text, when this reader indeed decodes the text as its instructions and implications demand, she finds that she has to recreate herself as that implied reader whose sympathies are, at each moment of the unfolding temporal experience, where Byron's are, and she also has to fictionalize herself, not so much as the recreator of "Byron," but as some

creation, forged out of the possibilities of her own imagination, by Byron himself. This fictional creation shares characteristics not only of Byron, but of his other creation—the poem's hero. Like the latter, she is imbued with a kind of passive Don Juanism, promiscuously consenting to put on each new costume the author should command, allowing herself at least half-willingly to be led down the garden path and possessing herself inconstantly of "Nature's rich / Profusion" (II, 211) as it is abundantly and variously offered her by the text. In the intentional act of her reading, she lets the text turn her into its implied reader, only to discover that she is now in a position of subordination to a more powerful personality, occupying the same ground: the implied—and "real"—author, George Gordon, Lord Byron.

## NOTES TO CHAPTER VI

<sup>1</sup>Mark Storey, *Poetry and Humour from Cowper to Clough* (London: MacMillan, 1979) 114. Edward E. Bostetter makes a similar point in *Romantic Ventriloquists* (Seattle: U of Washington P, 1963), when he claims that Byron in *Don Juan* "had found a way out of the impasse in which his contemporaries were trapped" (302).

<sup>2</sup>Karl Joachim Weintraub, *The Value of the Individual* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1978) xviii.

<sup>3</sup>Karl Kroeber, *Romantic Narrative Art* (Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1960) 117.

<sup>4</sup>Helen Gardner remarks of the manuscripts of *Don Juan*, that "the overwhelming impression is of the rapidity and vehemence of Byron's intelligence." She goes on to observe that there "is no suggestion of laboured revision; but the amount of fundamental brain-work that lies behind the 'rattling on' of *Don Juan* is none the less impressive because it plainly took place at high speed." "*Don Juan*," *Byron*, ed. Paul West (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1963) 116.

My examination of the first-draft manuscripts of Canto VIII and part of Canto IX in the Rare Books Collection of the University of Texas library in

March, 1985, corroborates Gardner's observations. The poem seems to have been written at breakneck speed, stanza after stanza, with no visible hesitation in the spidery scrawl even as it approaches the rhyme-words at the ends of lines—though occasionally *all* the words in a particular rhyme-set have been changed later, to tighten or point an utterance.

<sup>5</sup>The narrator, using the valedictory tradition, takes breaks at the ends of cantos: "laying down [his] pen," he temporarily "make[s his] bow" (II, 216). Sometimes he suggests the need for a rest: "you'll pardon to my muse a few short naps" (V, 159); on other occasions he projects an intermediary activity for himself: "a quiet ride" (IX, 85); or for his reader: "read[ing] all the National-Debt sinkers" (XII, 89).

<sup>6</sup>Roland Barthes, *S/Z* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1970) 10.

<sup>7</sup>Byron uses this rhyme again, with very minor alterations, in Canto XIV: "And though these lines should only line portmanteaus, / Trade will be all the better for these Cantos" (14).

<sup>8</sup>However, the pronoun "we" is not always an omen of the narrator's closest identification with the reader's sympathies. Byron occasionally uses a royal "we" which is, in fact, a sign of alienation from the reader, or of a retreat into superior isolation. See, for example, "But why?—we leave the reader in the dark" (II, 8), "We will omit the proofs, save one or two" (IV, 96) and "Don Juan grew a very polished Russian— / *How* we won't mention, *why* we need not say" (X, 21).

<sup>9</sup>See chapter II, note 9.

<sup>10</sup>Günther Blaicher, "Der immanente Leser in Byrons Don Juan," *Poetica* 8 (1976): 281–99. This article is listed under the heading "Rhetorical" in the annotated bibliography of Susan Suleiman and Inge Crossman, eds., *The Reader in the Text* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1980) 402. The English renderings I use in this dissertation are largely the responsibility of Monica Neudeck, a translation student at the University of British Columbia in 1985.

<sup>11</sup>Blaicher 297.

<sup>12</sup>Blaicher 298.

<sup>13</sup>Perhaps Blaicher missed this address to the reader because it is signalled by the word "you," which is not glossed in the Hagelman and Barnes concordance to *Don Juan*.

<sup>14</sup>Sona Stephan Hoisington, "The Hierarchy of Narratees in *Eugene Onegin*," by Alexander Pushkin (New York: Dutton, 1981) lxix. Hoisington's definition of the term "narratee" is slightly different from Prince's and Chatman's. Whereas he uses it to signify a broad category including the implied reader, they distinguish it strictly from the implied reader, to whom it bears the same relationship as the narrator does to the implied author. See chapter III,

note 45.

<sup>15</sup>Hoisington lxiii. Hoisington quotes from Walker Gibson's admirable article on this particular type of reader. Gibson claims that "every time we open the pages of another piece of writing, we are embarked on a new adventure in which we become a new person—a person as controlled and definable and remote from the chaotic self of daily life as the lover in a sonnet. Subject to the degree of our literary sensibility, we are recreated by the language. We assume, for the sake of the experience, that set of attitudes and qualities which the language asks us to assume, and if we cannot assume them, we throw the book away." "Authors, Speakers, Readers and Mock Readers," *College English* 11 (1949-1950): 265.

<sup>16</sup>Blaicher 282. Wolfgang Iser, using Booth's term "implied," translates it into German not as "*immanante*," but as "*implizite*." See *Der implizite Leser* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 1972).

<sup>17</sup>Hoisington lxv.

<sup>18</sup>Hoisington lxix.

<sup>19</sup>The puppet-show metaphor is a favourite of Paul West. "Take it or leave it, shouts the poet, sticking out his head while he works the marionettes with his hands," he writes of Byron's technique in *Don Juan*. *Byron and the Spoiler's Art* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1960) 67. See also his remarks about "the bored and sloppy puppeteer" (14).

<sup>20</sup>Blaicher 292.

<sup>21</sup>Blaicher 292.

<sup>22</sup>According to Hoisington, the implied reader is closer than the mock reader to the implied author because the implied reader shares the implied author's irony (lxv).

<sup>23</sup>See, for example, *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* III, cxiii, cxiv: "I have not loved the world, nor the world me." *Poetical Works* 218.

<sup>24</sup>Although his "Ode to Napoleon Buonaparte" is a consistent sneer, Byron held extremely ambiguous feelings about the man who convulsed the states of Europe during twenty years of his early life. *Childe Harold* is full of paradoxical apostrophes such as "Conqueror and captive of the world art thou!" (III, xxxvii). *Poetical Works* 208.

<sup>25</sup>Jeffrey had written, as Byron thought, a highly dismissive article on his early book, *Hours of Idleness*, then had, as Byron knew, produced some appreciative criticism of *The Giaour* and other works; just recently, he had expressed disapproval of the attack on Southey in the Dedication to *Don Juan*. See Willis W. Pratt, *Byron's Don Juan* IV: *Notes on the Variorum Edition* (Austin: U of Texas P, 1957) 206.



<sup>26</sup>Hoisington lxv.

<sup>27</sup>Byron was thrilled when, in 1819, William Roberts, then editor of the *British Review*, "took Byron's statements seriously and wrote a sober disclaimer in his magazine." Pratt 50.

<sup>28</sup>Leslie A. Marchand, *Byron: A Biography* (New York: Knopf, 1957) II, 509; I, 363; II, Plate 26, opp. 717; I, 453; II, 591.

<sup>29</sup>According to Barret J. Mandel, the *reader* of autobiography, is the agent that, by bringing different expectations to the text, distinguishes the genre from fiction. "Full of Life Now," *Autobiography*, ed. James Olney (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1980) 55.

<sup>30</sup>William C. Spengemann, *The Forms of Autobiography* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1980) 115.

<sup>31</sup>According to Peter L. Thorslev, Jr., *The Byronic Hero* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1965), "with no other English poet has the identification of poet and poetic characters been so often made" (11).

<sup>32</sup>See Robert M. Torrance, *The Comic Hero* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1978) 209. Torrance claims that the virtues of the heroes in the tales were seen as outweighing their sins and that they "licensed the most moral reader to participate with voluptuous impunity in the cult of the dark outsider whom admirers and detractors alike persistently identified, in defiance of coy disclaimers, with Byron—until Byron, to everybody's dismay, turned out to have been someone else."

<sup>33</sup>From the prose dedication to Canto IV of *Childe Harold*, *Poetical Works* 220.

<sup>34</sup>In chapter III, while examining a passage in which this respondent is invoked (V, 130–133), I refer to him for convenience as the "narratee," in order to distinguish him from my reader.

<sup>35</sup>Of course, modernity is not identical to a sense of "now," although the more conscious and intellectual the latter, the more likely it is to depend on the former. Modernity, in its true sense, according to Oscar Wilde, includes a knowledge of other times. He writes: "For he to whom the present is the only thing that is present, knows nothing of the age in which he lives. To realize the nineteenth century [Wilde's own present], one must realize every century that has preceded it and that has contributed to its making." "The Critic as Artist," *Complete Works of Oscar Wilde* (London: Collins, 1973) 1040.

<sup>36</sup>Seymour Chatman leaves out the third "NOW"—the reader's—when he writes: "Narratives establish a sense of a present moment, narrative NOW, so to speak. If the narrative is overt, there are perforce two NOWs, that of the discourse, the moment occupied by the narrator in the present tense ('I'm going to tell you the following story'), and that of the story, the moment that the

action began to transpire, usually in the preterite." *Story and Discourse* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1978) 63.

<sup>37</sup>The anonymous author of a pirated Canto III of "*Don Juan*," published in 1819, conceives Byron as "draw[ing] from himself" and relating a tale which is a parody of the Haidée episode, with himself ("Lord Harold," "Lord Beppo" or "Lord Squander") as the hero. Quoted by Samuel C. Chew in *Byron in England* (New York: Russell and Russell, 1965) 31.

Julius Millingen, in his *Memoirs of the Affairs of Greece with Various Anecdotes of Lord Byron and an Account of his Last Illness and Death* (London: Murray, 1831), claims that "*Childe Harold* is no less a faithful picture of him at one part of the day, than *Don Juan* is at another" (16).

In "Byron in Venice," Cecil Roberts detects a "desperate air of self-defence in the verve with which [Byron] narrates the irregularities of his hero"; this attitude was, so Roberts claims, consequent on Byron's own debauched behaviour at this time. *Byron the Poet*, ed. Walter A. Briscoe (London: Routledge, 1924) 124.

According to Jenni Calder, "Donna Julia of Canto I, the attractive young woman married to an older man, could have been Teresa Guiccioli. The double standards he exposed he had both experienced and participated in. The devout puritanism of Juan's mother and his education devoid of 'natural history' were also very close to home." "The Hero as Lover: Byron and Women," *Wrath and Rhyme*, ed. Alan Bold (New Jersey: Barnes and Noble, 1983) 121.

<sup>38</sup>According to Cecil Y. Lang in "Narcissus Jilted: Byron, *Don Juan*, and the Biographical Imperative," several characters in *Don Juan* can be identified as people known by Byron. For example, he claims that John Johnson is modelled on Gentleman John Jackson, Byron's boxing-master. *Historical Studies and Literary Criticism*, ed. Jerome J. McGann (Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1985) 154.

<sup>39</sup>Truman Guy Steffan, in *Byron's Don Juan I: The Making of a Masterpiece* (Austin: U of Texas P, 1957), claims that the descriptions of Donna Inez in Canto I are "loaded with malicious memories of Lady Byron" (91).

<sup>40</sup>Lang asserts that Aurora Raby is not a redemptive but a corruptive figure and that she is indubitably modelled on Annabella Milbanke (169-77).

<sup>41</sup>Similarities between *Don Juan* and *Tom Jones* are legion. (See Louis Kronenberger, *The Polished Surface* (New York: Knopf, 1969) 160.) Peter Vassalo's book, *Byron and the Italian Tradition* (London: MacMillan, 1980) is an exhaustive attempt to prove that a very large proportion of Byron's ideas, characters and narrative episodes are direct borrowings from Casti and—to a lesser extent—other Italian poets such as Pulci.

<sup>42</sup>E. D. Hirsch, Jr., in "Byron and the Terrestrial Paradise," states that to "believe in a heaven on earth is to believe in the possibility of an earthly perfection, and this was a faith that Byron never relinquished." Hirsch goes on to find this belief manifested in many of Byron's poems, including *Don Juan*. *From Sensibility to Romanticism*, eds. Frederick W. Hilles and Harold Bloom (New York: Oxford UP, 1965) 472.

<sup>43</sup>*The Corsair* I, vi, *Poetical Works* 272

<sup>44</sup>*Childe Harold* I, v, *Poetical Works* 176.

<sup>45</sup>*Childe Harold* I, iv, *Poetical Works* 176.

<sup>46</sup>*Childe Harold* III, xviii, *Poetical Works* 205.

<sup>47</sup>*Childe Harold* IV, i, *Poetical Works* 221.

<sup>48</sup>Peter Conrad, in *Shandyism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1978), compares Shakespearean tragedy with the "collapsed, wayward form" of Romanticism (vii), and concludes that the "truancy" and "debilities" of the Romantic Tristram make him more free, or true to himself, than the tragic Hamlet, who is "compelled to renounce word games, plots and amateur theatricals for tragic action, and unable to make the sacrifice" (2). "*Tristram Shandy*," Conrad declares, "is Hamlet's longed-for realm of liberty where, bounded in a nutshell, he can count himself a king of infinite space" (9).

<sup>49</sup>The narrator leaves the plot at a moment of great suspense for the reader as he ends off Canto VI, with Gulbeyaz in a fury, determined to have Juan and Dudù sewn into sacks and dropped into the Bosphorus. Canto VII begins with all sorts of warlike invocations and preparations for the siege of Islam; Juan, in the company of Johnson, Baba the eunuch and two women (Dudù and Katinka, presumably) does not turn up until stanza 56. Their escape from the harem is implied, but never narrated; only the hardships of the subsequent journey are dwelt upon. The women (Baba is not mentioned here) are taken unwillingly to safety (76), while Juan and Johnson at once prepare themselves for battle. The reader never hears of the harem dwellers again.

<sup>50</sup>Robert F. Gleckner, in *Byron and the Ruins of Paradise* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins P, 1967), ascribes most of the difficulties in reading *Childe Harold* to Byron's technique in this poem of using "multiple points of view" (270) as if his vision were multiplied by the broken mirror which he contemplates in the poem at III, xxxiii and which "reflect[s] in his own shattered individual heart the fragments of a lost Eden, a broken present, and a still more fragmented future" (243). Gleckner's interpretation is characteristically pessimistic—he even finds *Beppo* and *Don Juan* gloomy, and despairing (305, 330). Perhaps if he had observed sentence structure and verb forms more carefully, he would have found a simpler solution to *Childe Harold*'s complexity.

<sup>51</sup>*Childe Harold* I, xxi, *Poetical Works* 179.

<sup>52</sup>*Childe Harold* I, xxvii, *Poetical Works* 180.

<sup>53</sup>*Childe Harold* I, xxviii, *Poetical Works* 180.

<sup>54</sup>See M. K. Joseph, *Byron the Poet* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1964) 25: "Byron is unable or unwilling to exploit the difference between them; and once Harold ceases to be effectively either a Zeluco or a burlesque Spenserian paladin,

the attempt to differentiate between them is abandoned as purposeless. By losing sight of the distinction between narrator and titular hero, Byron sacrificed what might have been a major advantage." Also Gleckner 268.

<sup>55</sup>See Lionel Trilling's distinction between "being true to one's own self" (9) and "showing forth" oneself (89-93) in *Sincerity and Authenticity* (London: Oxford UP, 1972).

<sup>56</sup>Bostetter sees "engendered" in English Romanticism "an immense egoism in which the poet assumed that the center of reality was within himself: the universe existed as he imagined it" (4). "Only Byron," he says, "became an exception to this movement; starting from the narrow ground of the self he alone found a way of expanding outward in his poetry" (6).

<sup>57</sup>*Childe Harold IV*, clv, *Poetical Works* 240.

<sup>58</sup>Conrad 59. See also Alvin B. Kernan, *The Plot of Satire* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1965), where he claims that "Juan's lack of consciousness is constantly thrown into relief by the restless, probing, analytic quality of the narrator's mind" (182).

<sup>59</sup>West 52.

<sup>60</sup>Torrance sees the narrator and Juan as "two facets of a composite persona." He writes: "The evolving relationship of poet and hero is not one of rigorous dichotomy but of dialectical counterpoint and reciprocal interdependence" (223).

<sup>61</sup>See Thorslev, *Romantic Contraries* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1984) 174: "So Byron undermines in every conceivable way his plaintive tale of first love—and yet its value as *experience* remains untouched: if anything it is made more precious by its transiency, more valuable by the fact that all that can be said against it has been said."

<sup>62</sup>According to Louis Kronenberger, "*Don Juan* is not autobiographical: Byron set down here something much better than autobiography, he set down himself." *The Polished Surface* (New York: Knopf, 1969) 152-53.

<sup>63</sup>William Wordsworth, *The Prelude*, II, 22-33, *Poetical Works* (London: Oxford UP, 1971) 503.

<sup>64</sup>Anne K. Mellor, *English Romantic Irony* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1980) 55.

<sup>65</sup>Mellor 31.

<sup>66</sup>Kronenberger coins the term "showman" rather than "actor" for Byron in *Don Juan* because although Byron "eschews the leading role," he "insists on being almost everything else connected with the production: now dramatist and now drama critic; now heckler, now prompter, now minor actor, muttering brash

asides; frequently stealing a scene, unblushingly interrupting the show" (153).

<sup>67</sup>Joseph obviously finds these two time-frames plausible, for he writes: "Recurrently, throughout the poem, we are reminded of the narrator as a person who lives in a particular time and place, with a contemporary history, all a generation later than the "present" in which Juan himself lives. The reader is kept aware of this, as part of the framework in which the story is shown to him (even at this distance of time, adding a new "framework" of his own: the world of 1960, framing the world of 1820, framing the world of 1790...)" (206). This is all true, up to a point, but Joseph ignores the fact that Byron quite clearly breaks all these time-frames on numerous occasions, and frequently deals with them in such a way as to reduce the distances between 1790, 1820 and 1960 (or 1987) most confusingly.

<sup>68</sup>See, for example, "Juan, instead of courting courts, was courted" (X, 29), "Fair virgins blush'd upon him" (XI, 48) and "I'll make Don Juan leave the ship soon" (IV, 97).

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