ABBOT. Alas! how pale thou art—thy lips are white—
And thy breast heaves—and in thy gasping throat
The accents rattle—Give thy prayers to heaven—
Pray—albeit but in thought,—but die not thus.

MAN. Tis over—my dull eyes can fix thee not;
But all things swim around me, and the earth
Heaves as it were beneath me. Fare thee well—
Give me thy hand.

ABBOT. Cold—cold—ever the heart—

But yet one prayer—Alas! how fares it with thee?

MAN. Old man! 'tis not so difficult to die.

[Manfred expires.]

ABBOT. He's gone—his soul hath taken its earthless flight—
Whither? I dare to think—but he is gone.

1816-17

Don Juan Byron began his masterpiece (pronounced in the English fashion, Don Jo-u-nun) in July 1818, published it in installments beginning with cantos 1 and 2 in 1819, and continued working on it almost until his death. Initially he improvised the poem from episode to episode. "I have no plan," he said, "I had no plan; 888 lines of canto 13, for example, were dashed off within a week, and it aims at the effect of improvisation rather than of artful compression; it asks to be read rapidly, at a conversational pace.

The poem breaks off with the sixteenth canto, but even in its unfinished state Don Juan is the longest satirical poem, and indeed one of the longest poems of any kind, in English literature. Its hero, the Spanish libertine, had in the original legend been a superhuman and sexual being. Throughout the version the unspoken but persistent joke is that this archetypal lady-killer of European legend is in fact made up of youth, charm, and a courteous and compliant spirit. The women do all the rest.

The chief models for the poem were the Italian and German epics of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries; the genre had been introduced by Pulci in the fifteenth century and was adopted by Ariosto in his Orlando Furioso (532). From these writers Byron caught the mixed moods and violent oscillations between the sublime and the ridiculous as well as the colloquial management of the complex ottava rima—an eight-line stanza—in the initial interlaced rhymes (abaab) build up to the comic turn in the final couplet (cc). Byron was influenced in the English use of this Italian form by a mildly amusing poem published in 1817, under the pseudonym of "Whistlercraft," by his friend John Hookham Frere. Other recognizable antecedents of Don Juan are Jonathan Swift's Gulliver's Travels and Samuel Johnson's Rasselas, both of which had employed the naive traveler as a satiric device, and Laurence Sterne's novel Tristram Shandy, with its comic exploitation of a narrative medium blantly subject to the whimsy of the author. But even the most original literary works play variations on inherited conventions. Shelley at once recognized his friend's poem as "something wholly new and relative to the age."

Byron's literary advisers thought the poem unacceptably immoral, and John Murray took the precaution of printing the first two installments (cantos 1-2, then 3-5) without identifying Byron as the author or himself as the publisher. The eleven completed cantos that followed were, because of Murray's continuing jitters, brought out in 1823-24 by the radical publisher John Hunt. In those cantos Byron's purpose deepened. He set out to create a comic yet devastatingly critical history of the Europe of his own age, sending the impressionable Juan from west to east and back again, from his native Spain to a Russian court (by way of a primitive Greek Island and the 1790 siege of the Turkish town of Ismail) and then into the English gentry's country manors. These journeys, which facilitated Byron's satire on almost all existing forms of political organization, would, according to the scheme that he projected for the poem as a whole, ultimately have taken Juan to a death by guillotining in Revolutionary France.

Yet the controlling element of Don Juan is not the narrative but the narrator. His running commentary on Juan's misadventures, his reminiscences, and his opinions on the epoch of political reaction in which he is actually telling Juan's story together add another level to the poem's engagement with history. The narrator's reflections also at the same time lend unity to Don Juan's effervescent variety. Tellingly, the poem opens with the first-person pronoun and immediately lets us into the storyteller's predilection: "I want a hero...." The voice then goes on, for almost two thousand stanzas, with effortless volubility and shifts of mood. The poet, who in his brilliant successful youth created the gloomy Byronic hero, in his later and sadder life created a character (not the hero, but the narrator of Don Juan) who is one of the great comic inventions in English literature.

FROM DON JUAN

Fragment

On the back of the Poet's MS. of Canto I

I would to heaven that I were so much clay,
As I am blood, bone, marrow, passion, feeling—
Because at least the past were pass'd away—
And for the future—(but I write this reeling,
Having got drunk exceedingly to-day,
So that I seem to stand upon the ceiling)
I say—the future is a serious matter—
And so—for God's sake—hock 6 and soda-water!

German wine

From Canto the First

[Juan and Donna Julia]

I want a hero; an uncommon want,
When every year and month sends forth a new one.
Till, after claying the gazettes with cant,
The age discovers he is not the true one:
Of such as these I should not care to vaunt,
I’ll therefore take our ancient friend Don Juan—
We all have seen him, in the pantomime,¹
Sent to the devil somewhat ere his time.

Brave men were living before Agamemnon²
And since, exceeding valorous and sage,
A good deal like him too, though quite the same none;
But then they shone not on the poet’s page,
And so have been forgotten—I condemn none,
But can’t find any in the present age
Fit for my poem (that is, for my new one);
So, as I said, I’ll take my friend Don Juan.

Most epic poets plunge “in medias res”³
(Horace makes this the heroic turnpike road).⁴
And then your hero tells, whene’er you please,
What went before—by way of episode,
While seated after dinner at his ease,
Beside his mistress in some soft abode,
Palace, or garden, paradise, or cavern,
Which serves the happy couple for a tavern.

That is the usual method, but not mine—
My way is to begin with the beginning:
The regularity of my design
Forbids all wandering as the worst of sinning,
And therefore I shall open with a line
(Although it cost me half an hour in spinning)
Narrating somewhat of Don Juan’s father,
And also of his mother, if you’d rather.

In Seville was he born, a pleasant city,
Famous for oranges and women—he
Who has not seen it will be much to pity,
So says the proverb—and I quite agree;
Of all the Spanish towns is none more pretty,

5

Cadiz perhaps—but that you soon may see:—
Don Juan’s parents lived beside the river,
A noble stream, and call’d the Guadalquivir.

His father’s name was José⁵—Don, of course,
A true Hidalgo,⁶ free from every stain
Of Moor or Hebrew blood, he traced his source
Through the most Gothic gentlemen of Spain;
A better cavalier ne’er mounted horse,
Or, being mounted, e’er got down again,
Than José, who begot our hero, who
Begot—but that’s to come—Well, to renew:

His mother was a learned lady, famed
For every branch of every science known—
In every Christian language ever named,
With virtues equal’d by her wit alone,
She made the cleverest people quite ashamed,
And even the good with inward envy groan,
Finding themselves so very much exceeded
In their own way by all the things that she did.

Her memory was a mine: she knew by heart
All Calderon and greater part of Lope,⁶
So that if any actor miss’d his part
She could have served him for the prompter’s copy;
For her Feinagle’s⁷ were an useless art,
And he himself obliged to shut up shop—he
Could never make a memory so fine as
That which adorn’d the brain of Donna Inez.

Her favourite science was the mathematical,
Her noblest virtue was her magnanimity,
Her wit (she sometimes tried at wit) was Attic⁸ all,
Her serious sayings darken’d to sublimity;
In short, in all things she was fairly what I call
A prodigy—her morning dress was dimity,⁹
Her evening silk, or, in the summer, muslin,
And other stuffs, with which I won’t stay puzzling.

1. The Juan of legend was a popular subject in English pantomime.
2. In Homer’s Iliad, the king commanding the Greeks in the siege of Troy. This line is translated from a Latin ode by Horace.
3. Into the middle of things (Latin, Horace’s Art of Poetry 148).
4. I.e., the smoothest road for heroic poetry.
5. Normally “José”, Byron transferred the accent to the middle of memory who had lectured in England in 1811.
6. Calderón de la Barca and Lope de Vega, the great Spanish dramatists of the early 17th century.
7. Gregor von Feinagle, a German expert on cotton.
Instead of quarrelling, had they been but both in
Their senses, they’d have sent young master for
To school, or had him soundly whipp’d at home,
To teach him manners for the time to come.

200

Don Jóse and the Donna Inez led
For some time an unhappy sort of life,
Wishing each other, not divorced, but dead;
They lived respectively as man and wife,
Their conduct was exceedingly well-bred,
And gave no outward signs of inward strife,
Until at length the smother’d fire broke out,
And put the business past all kind of doubt.

205

For Inez call’d some druggists, and physicians,
And tried to prove her loving lord was mad,
But as he had some lucid intermissions,
She next decided he was only bad;
Yet when they ask’d her for her depositions,
No sort of explanation could be had,
Save that her duty both to man and God
Required this conduct—which seem’d very odd.

210

She kept a journal, where his faults were noted,
And open’d certain trunks of books and letters,
All which might, if occasion served, be quoted;
And then she had all Seville for abettors,
Besides her good old grandmother (who doted);
The hearers of her case became repeaters,
Then advocates, inquisitors, and judges,
Some for amusement, others for old grudges.

215

And then this best and meekest woman bore
With such serenity her husband’s woes,
Just as the Spartan ladies did of yore,
Who saw their spouses kill’d, and nobly chose
Never to say a word about them more—
Calmly she heard each calumny that rose,
And saw his agonies with such sublimity,
That all the world exclaim’d, “What magnanimity!

220

And so I interfered, and with the best
Intentions, but their treatment was not kind;
I think the foolish people were possess’d,
For neither of them could I ever find,
Although their porter afterwards confess’d—
But that’s no matter, and the worst’s behind,
For little Juan o’er me throw, down stairs,
A pail of housemaid’s water unawares.

225

A little curly-headed, good-for-nothing,
And mischief-making monkey from his birth;
His parents ne’er agreed except in doting
Upon the most unquiet imp on earth;

230

9. Lady Byron had thought her husband might be insane and sought medical advice on the matter. This and other passages obviously allude to his wife, although Byron insisted that Donna Inez was not intended to be a caricature of Lady Byron. In her determination to preserve her son’s innocence, Donna Inez also shares traits with Byron’s mother.
The learned tutors whom for him she hired,
Was, that his breeding should be strictly moral:
Much into all his studies she enquired,
And so they were submitted first to her, all,
Arts, sciences, no branch was made a mystery.
To Juan’s eyes, excepting natural history.2

The languages, especially the dead,
The sciences, and most of all the abstruse,
The arts, at least all such as could be said
To be the most remote from common use.
In all these he was much and deeply read;
But not a page of any thing that’s loose,
Or hints continuation of the species,
Was ever suffer’d, lest he should grow vicious.

His classic studies made a little puzzle,
Because of filthy loves of gods and goddesses,
Who in the earlier ages made a bustle;
But never put on pantaloons or bodices;
His reverend tutors had at times a tussle,
And for their Aeclid, Ilidas, and Odysseys,
Were forced to make an odd sort of apology,
For Donna Inez dreaded the Mythology.

Ovid’s a rake, as half his verses show him,
Anacreon’s morals are a still worse sample,
Catullus scarcely has a decent poem,
I don’t think Sappho’s Ode a good example,
Although Longinus3 tells us there is no hymn
Where the sublime soars forth on wings more ample;
But Virgil’s songs are pure, except that horrid one
Beginning with “Formosum Pastor Corydon.”4

Lucretius’ irreligion is too strong
For early stomachs, to prove wholesome food;
I can’t help thinking Juvenal5 was wrong.

2. Includes biology, physiology, and particularly botany, popular in the era in part because study of plants’ stamens and pistils offered a form of surreptitious sex education.
3. In On the Nature of Things, the Greek rhetorician Longinus praises a passage of erotic longing from one of Sappho’s odes.
4. Virgil’s Eclogue 2 begins, “The shepherd, Corydon, burned with love for the handsome Alexis.”
5. In De Rerum Natura (On the Nature of Things), Lucretius argues that the universe can be explained in entirely materialist terms without reference to any god.
6. The Latin satires of Juvenal attacked the corruption of Roman society in the 1st century C.E. and displayed its vices.
And bit her lips (for else she might have screamed)'d
If any said so, to be precocious
Was in her eyes a thing the most atrocious.

Amongst her numerous acquaintance, all
Selected for discretion and devotion,
There was the Donna Julia, whom to call
Pretty were but to give a feeble notion
Of many charms in her as natural
As sweetness to the flower, or salt to ocean,
Her zone to Venus, 9 or his bow to Cupid,
(But this last simile is trite and stupid.)

The darkness of her oriental eye
Accorded with her Moorish origin;
(Her blood was not all Spanish, by the by;
In Spain, you know, this is a sort of sin.)
When proud Granada fell, and, forced to fly,
Boabdil wept, 1 of Donna Julia's kin
Some went to Africa, some stay'd in Spain,
Her great great grandmother chose to remain.

She married (I forget the pedigree)
With an Hidalgo, who transmitted down
His blood less noble than such blood should be;
At such alliances his sires would frown,
In that point so precise in each degree
That they bred in and in, as might be shown,
Marrying their cousins—nay, their aunts, and nieces,
Which always spoils the breed, if it increases.

This heathenish cross restored the breed again,
Ruin'd its blood, but much improved its flesh;
For from a root the ugliest in Old Spain
Sprung up a branch as beautiful as fresh;
The sons no more were short, the daughters plain:
But there's a rumour which I fain would hush,
'Tis said that Donna Julia's grandmother
Produced her Don more heirs at love than law.

7. Fact! There is, or was, such an edition, with all the obnoxious epigrams of Martial placed by themselves at the end [Byron's note]. Martial, another Latin poet, was a contemporary of Juvenal.
8. A word to the wise is sufficient (Latin).
9. The bolt ('cabe') of Venus made its wearer sexually irresistible.
1. The Moorish king of Granada (the last Islamic enclave in Spain) wept when his capital fell and he and his people were forced to emigrate to Africa (1492).
That howsoever people fast and pray,
The flesh is frail, and so the soul undone:
What men call gallantry, and gods adultery,
Is much more common where the climate's sultry.

Happy the nations of the moral North!
Where all is virtue, and the winter season
Sends sin, without a rag on, shivering forth
('Twas snow that brought St. Francis back to reason);
Where juries cast up what a wife is worth,
By laying whate'er sum, in mulct, they please on
The lover, who must pay a handsome price,
Because it is a marketable vice.

Alfonso was the name of Julia's lord,
A man well looking for his years, and who
Was neither much beloved nor yet abhor'd:
They lived together, as most people do,
Suffering each other's foibles by accord,
And not exactly either one or two;
Yet he was jealous, though he did not show it,
For jealousy dislikes the world to know it.

Juan she saw, and as a pretty child,
Caress'd him often—such a thing might be
Quite innocently done, and harmless styled,
When she had twenty years, and thirteen he;
But I am not so sure I should have smiled
When he was sixteen, Julia twenty-three;
These few short years make wondrous alterations,
Particularly amongst sun-burnt nations.

What'er the cause might be, they had become
Changed; for the dame grew distant, the youth shy,
Their looks cast down, their greetings almost dumb,
And much embarrassment in either eye;
There surely will be little doubt with some
That Donna Julia knew the reason why,
But as for Juan, he had no more notion
Than he who never saw the sea of ocean.

2. I.e., faithful to her husband.
3. It comes to my mind (Italian).
4. By way of a fine or legal penalty.
Yet Julia's very coldness still was kind,
And tremulously gentle her small hand
Withdrawn from his, but left behind
A little pressure, thrilling, and so bland
And slight, so very slight, that to the mind
'Twas but a doubt; but nor magician's wand
Wrought change with all Armida's fairy art
Like what this light touch left on Juan's heart.

And if she met him, though she smiled no more,
She look'd a sadness sweeter than her smile,
As if her heart had deeper thoughts in store
She must not own, but cherish'd more the while
For that compression in its burning core;
Even innocence itself has many a wile,
And will not dare to trust itself with truth,
And love is taught hypocrisy from youth.

Poor Julia's heart was in an awkward state;
She felt it going, and resolved to make
The noblest efforts for herself and mate,
For honour's, pride's, religion's, virtue's sake;
Her resolutions were most truly great,
And almost might have made a Tarquin's quake:
She pray'd the Virgin Mary for her grace,
As being the best judge of a lady's case.

She vow'd she never would see Juan more,
And next day paid a visit to his mother,
And look'd extremely at the opening door,
Which, by the Virgin's grace, let in another;
Grateful she was, and yet a little sore—
Again it opens, it can be no other,
'Tis surely Juan now—No! I'm afraid
That night the Virgin was no further pray'd.

She now determined that a virtuous woman
Should rather face and overcome temptation,
That flight was base and dastardly, and no man
Should ever give her heart the least sensation,
That is to say, a thought beyond the common
Preference, that we must feel upon occasion,
For people who are pleasant, than others,
But then they only seem so many brothers.

And even if by chance—and who can tell?
The devil's so very sly—she should discover
That all within was not so very well,
And, if still free, that such or such a lover
Might please perhaps, a virtuous wife can quell.
Such thoughts, and be the better when they were over;
And if the man should ask, 'tis but denial:
I recommend young ladies to make trial.

And then there are such things as love divine,
Bright and immaculate, unmix'd and pure
Such as the angels think so very fine,
And matrons, who would be no less secure
Platonic, perfect, "just such love as mine;"
Thus Julia said—and thought so, to be sure;
And so I'd have her think, were I the man
On whom her reveries celestial ran.

So much for Julia. Now we'll turn to Juan.
Poor little fellow! he had no idea
Of his own case, and never hit the true one;
In feelings quick as Ovid's Miss Medea. 7
He puzzled over what he found a new one,
But not as yet imagined it could be a
Thing quite in course, and not at all alarming.
Which, with a little patience, might grow charming.

5. The sorceress in Torquato Tasso's Jerusalem Delivered (1581) who seduces Rinaldo into forgetting his vows as a crusader.
6. A member of a legendary family of Roman kings noted for tyranny and cruelty; perhaps a reference specifically to Lucius Tarquinius, the villain of Shakespeare's The Rape of Lucrece.
He found how much old Time had been a winner—
He also found that he had lost his dinner.

'Twas on a summer's day—the sixth of June—
I like to be particular in dates.
Not only of the age, and year, but moon;
They are a sort of post-house, where the Fates
Change horses, making history change its tune.
Then spur away o'er empires and o'er states,
Leaving at last not much besides chronology,
Excepting the post-obits8 of theology.

'Twas on the sixth of June, about the hour
Of half-past six—perhaps still nearer seven—
When Julia sate within as pretty a bower
As e'er held houri in that heathenish heaven
Described by Mahomet, and Anacreon Moore;
To whom the lyre and laurels have been given,
With all the trophies of triumphant song—
He won them well, and may he wear them long!

She sate, but not alone; I know not well
How this same interview had taken place,
And even if I knew, I should not tell—
People should hold their tongues in any case;
No matter how or why the thing befell,
But there were she and Juan, face to face—
When two such faces are so, 'twould be wise,
But very difficult, to shut their eyes.

How beautiful she look'd! her conscious heart
Glowed in her cheek, and yet she felt no wrong.
Oh, Love! how perfect is thy mystic art,
Strengthening the weak, and trampling on the strong,
How self-deceitful is the sagest part
Of mortals whom thy lure hath led along—

8. I.e., postobit bonds (post obitum, "after death" [Latin]): loans to an heir that fall due after the death of the person whose estate he or she is to inherit. Byron, meaning is, probably that only theology purports to tell us what rewards are due in heaven.
9. Byron's friend the poet Thomas Moore, who in 1800 had translated the Odes of the ancient Greek Anacreon and whose popular Orientalist poem Lailla Roski (1817) had portrayed the "heavenly heaven" of Islam as populated by "houris," beautiful maidens who in the afterlife will give heroes their reward.

Immoral conduct by the fancied sway
Your system feigns o'er the controllable 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.

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.

'Tis sweet to win, no matter how, one's laurels,
By blood or ink; 'tis sweet to put an end
To strife; 'tis sometimes sweet to have our quarrels,
Particularly with a tiresome friend:
Sweet is old wine in bottles, ale in barrels;
Dear is the helpless creature we defend
Against the world; and dear the schoolboy spot
We ne'er forget, though there we are forgot.

But sweeter still than this, than these, than all,
Is first and passionate love—It stands alone,
Like Adam's recollection of his fall;
The tree of knowledge has been pluck'd—all's known—
And life yields nothing further to recall
Worthy of this ambrosial sin, so shown,
No doubt in fable, as the unforgiven
Fire which Prometheus* filch'd for us from heaven.

Man's a phenomenon, one knows not what,
And wonderful beyond all wondrous measure;
'Tis pity though, in this sublime world, that
Pleasure's a sin, and sometimes sin's a pleasure;
Few mortals know what end they would be at.

2. The Titan Prometheus incurred the wrath of Zeus by stealing fire from heaven for humans.
The major part of them had long been wived,
And therefore paused not to disturb the slumber
Of any wicked woman, who contrived
By stealth her husband's temples to encumber?
Examples of this kind are so contagious,
Were one not punish'd, all would be outrageous.

I can't tell how, or why, or what suspicion
Could enter into Don Alfonso's head;
But for a cavalier of his condition
It surely was exceedingly ill-bred,
Without a word of previous admonition,
To hold a levee round his lady's bed,
And summon lackeys, arm'd with fire and sword,
To prove himself the thing he most abhor'd.

Poor Donna Julia! starting as from sleep
(Mind—that I do not say—she had not slept)
Began at once to scream, and yawn, and weep;
Her maid Antonia, who was an adept,
Contrived to fling the bed-clothes in a heap,
As if she had just now from out them crept;
I can't tell why she should take all this trouble
To prove her mistress had been sleeping double.

But Julia mistress, and Antonia maid,
Appeard like two poor harmless women, who
Of goblins, but still more of men afraid,
Had thought one man might be deterred by two,
And therefore side by side were gently laid,
Until the hours of absence should run through,
And truant husband should return, and say,
"My dear, I was the first who came away."

Now Julia found at length a voice, and cried,
"In heaven's name, Don Alfonso, what d' ye mean?
Has madness seized you? would that I had died
Ere such a monster's victim I had been!
What may this midnight violence betide,
A sudden fit of drunkenness or spleen?
Dare you suspect me, whom the thought would kill?
Search, then, the room!"—Alfonso said, "I will."

3. I.e., with horns that, growing on the forehead,
were the traditional emblem of the cuckolded husband.
Her master, and his myrmidons, of whom
Not one, except the attorney, was amused;
He, like Achates, faithful to the tomb,
So there were quarrels, cared not for the cause,
Knowing they must be settled by the laws.

With prying snub-nose, and small eyes, he stood,
Following Antony's motions here and there;
With much suspicion in his attitude;
For reputations he had little care;
So that a suit or action were made good,
Small pity had he for the young and fair,
And ne'er believed in negatives, till these
Were proved by competent false witnesses.

But Don Alfonso stood with downcast looks,
And, truth to say, he made a foolish figure;
When, after searching in five hundred nooks,
And treating a young wife with so much rigour,
He gain'd no point, except some self-rebukes,
Added to those his lady with such vigour
Had pour'd upon him for the last half-hour,
Quick, thick, and heavy—as a thunder-shower.

At first he tried to hammer an excuse,
To which the sole reply was tears, and sobs,
And indications of hysterics, whose
Prologue is always certain throes, and throbs,
Gasp, and whatever else the owners choose:
Alfonso saw his wife, and thought of Job's; he saw too, in perspective, her relations,
And then he tried to muster all his patience.

He stood in act to speak, or rather stammer,
But sage Antony cut him short before
The anvil of his speech received the hammer,
With "Pray, sir, leave the room, and say no more,
Or madam dies."—Alfonso mutter'd, "D—n her,
But nothing else, the time of words was o'er;

5. A tapestry hanging on a wall.
6. Perhaps a chamber pot.
He cast a rueful look or two, and did,
He knew not wherefore, that which he was bid.

With him retired his "passus comitatus;"
The attorney last, who linger'd near the door,
Reluctantly, still tarrying there as late as
Antonia let him—not a little sore
At this most strange and unexplain'd "hiatus."

In Don Alfonso's facts, which just now were
An awkward look; as he revolved the case,
The door was fasten'd in his legal face.

No sooner was it bolted, than—Oh shame!  
Oh sin! Oh sorrow! and Oh woe mankind!

How can you do such things and keep your fame,
Unless this world, and t'other too, be blind?
Nothing so dear as an unfech'd good name,
But to proceed—for there is more behind.
With much heartfelt reluctance be it said,
Young Juan slipp'd, half-smother'd, from the bed.

He had been hid—I don't pretend to say
How, nor can I indeed describe the where—
Young, slender, and pack'd easily, he lay,
No doubt, in little compass, round or square;

But pity him, I neither must nor may,
His suffocation by that pretty pair;
Twere better, sure, to die so, than be shut
With maudlin Clarence in his Malmsey butt.  

What's to be done? Alfonso will be back
The moment he has sent his fools away.
Antonia's skill was put upon the rack,
But no device could be brought into play—
And how to parry the renew'd attack?

Besides, it wanted but few hours of day:
Antonia puzzled, Julia did not speak,
But press'd her bloodless lip to Juan's cheek.

1. The complete form of the modern word passus comitatus means literally "power of the county" [Latin], i.e., the body of citizens summoned by a sheriff to preserve order in the county.

2. Clarence, brother of Edward IV and of the noble Richard III, was reputed to have been assassinated by being drowned in a butt ("butt") of malmsy, a sweet and aromatic wine.
Alfonso grappled to detain the foe,
And Juan throttled him to get away,
And blood (twas from the nose) began to flow;
At last, as they more faintly wrestling lay,
Juan contrived to give an awkward blow,
And then his only garment quite gave way;
He fled, like Joseph, leaving it; but there,
I doubt, all likeness ends between the pair.

Lights came at length, and men, and maids, who found
An awkward spectacle their eyes before;
Antonia in hysteric, Julia swoon'd;
Alfonso leaning, breathless, by the door;
Some half-torn drapery scatter'd on the ground,
Some blood, and several footsteps, but no more:
Juan the gate gain'd, turn'd the key about,
And liking not the inside, lock'd it out.

Here ends this canto.—Need I sing, or say,
How Juan, naked, favour'd by the night,
Who favours what she should not, found his way,
And reach'd his home in an unseemly plight?
The pleasant scandal which arose next day,
The nine days' wonder which was brought to light,
And how Alfonso sued for a divorce,
Were in the English newspapers, of course.

If you would like to see the whole proceedings,
The depositions, and the cause at full,
The names of all the witnesses, the pleadings
Of counsel to nonsuit, or to annul,
There's more than one edition, and the readings
Are various, but they none of them are dull;
The best is that in short-hand ta'en by Gurney,
Who to Madrid on purpose made a journey.

But Donna Inez, to divert the train
Of one of the most circulating scandals

4. In Genesis 39.7ff. the chaste Joseph flees from the advances of Potiphar's wife, leaving "his garment in her hand."
5. Judas against the plaintiff for failure to establish his case.
That had for centuries been known in Spain,
   Since Roderic's Goths, or older Genesico's Vandals, 7
First vow'd (and never had she vow'd in vain)
    To Virgin Mary several pounds of candles;
And then, by the advice of some old ladies,
    She sent her son to be embark'd at Cadiz.

She had resolved that he should travel through
    All European climes, by land or sea,
To mend his former morals, or get new,
    Especially in France and Italy.
(At least this is the thing most people do).
    Julia was sent into a nunnery,
And there, perhaps, her feelings may be better
    Shown in the following copy of her letter:

"They tell me 'tis decided; you depart;
   'Tis wise—'tis well, but not the less a pain;
I have no further claim on your young heart,
   Mine is the victim, and would be again;
To love too much has been the only art
   I used;—I write in haste, and if a stain
Be on this sheet, 'tis not what it appears;
My eyeballs burn and throb, but have no tears;

"I loved, I love you, for that love have lost
    State, station, heaven, mankind's, my own esteem,
And yet can not regret what it hath cost,
    So dear is still the memory of that dream;
Yet, if I name my guilt, 'tis not to boast,
   None can deem harsher of me than I deem:
I trace this scrawl because I cannot rest—
    I've nothing to reproach, nor to request.

"Man's love is of his life a thing apart,
   'Tis woman's whole existence; man may range
The court, camp, church, the vessel, and the mart,
   Sword, gown, gain, glory, offer in exchange
Pride, fame, ambition, to fill up his heart,
    And few there are whom these can not estrange;
Men have all these resources, we but one,
    To love again, and be again undone."

8. Of a compass.
9. The candle (to melt wax to seal the letter).

"My breast has been all weakness, is so yet;
    I struggle, but cannot collect my mind;
    My blood still rushes where my spirit's set,
    As roll the waves before the settled wind;
    My brain is feminine, nor can forget—
    To all, except your image, madly blind;
    As turns the needle" trembling to the pole
    It ne'er can reach, so turns to you, my soul.

"You will proceed in beauty, and in pride,
    Beloved and loving many; all is over;
    For me on earth, except some years to hide
    My shame and sorrow deep in my heart's core;
These I could bear, but cannot cast aside
    The passion which still rages as before,—
    And so farewell—forgive me, love me—No,
    That word is idle now—but let it go.

"I have no more to say, but linger still,
    And dare not set my seal upon this sheet,
    And yet I may as well the task fulfill;
    My misery can scarce be more complete:
I had not lived till now, could sorrow kill;
    Death flies the wretch who fain the blow would meet.
    And I must even survive this last adieu,
    And bear with life, to love and pray for you!"

This note was written upon gilt-edged paper
    With a neat crow-quill, rather hard, but new;
Her small white fingers scarce could reach the taper; 9
    But trembled as magnetic needles do.
And yet she did not let one tear escape her;
    The seal a sun-flower; "Elle vous suit partout," 9
    The motto, cut upon a white cornelian;
    The wax was superfine, its hue vermilion.

This was Don Juan's earliest scrape; but whether
    I shall proceed with his adventures is

8. Of a compass.
9. The candle (to melt wax to seal the letter).
Dependent on the public altogether;
We'll see, however, what they say to this,
Their favour in an author's cap a feather,
And no great mischief done by their caprices,
If their approbation we experience,
Perhaps they'll have some more about a year hence.

My poem's epic, and is meant to be
Divided in twelve books; each book containing,
With love, and war, a heavy gale at sea,
A list of ships, and captains, and kings reigning,
New characters; the episodes are three:
A panoramic view of hell's in training;
After the style of Virgil and of Homer,
So that my name of Epic's no misnomer.

All these things will be specified in time,
With strict regard to Aristotle's rules,
The Vade Mecum of the true sublime,
Which makes so many poets, and some fools:
Prose poets like blank-verse, I'm fond of rhyme.
Good workmen never quarrel with their tools;
I've got new mythological machinery,
And very handsome supernatural scenery.

There's only one slight difference between
Me and my epic brethren gone before;
And here the advantage is my own, I ween;
(Not that I have not several merits more,
But this will more peculiarly be seen);
They so embellish, that 'tis quite a bore
Their labyrinth of fables to thread through,
Whereas this story's actually true.

If any person doubt it, I appeal
To history, tradition, and to facts,
To newspapers, whose truth all know and feel,
To plays in five, and operas in three acts;
All these confirm my statement a good deal.
But that which more completely faith exacts

If ever I should descend to prose,
I'll write poetical commandments, which
Shall supersede beyond all doubt all those
That went before; in these I shall enrich
My text with many things that no one knows,
And carry precept to the highest pitch:
I'll call the work "Longinus o'er a Bottle,
Or, Every Poet his own Aristotle."

Thou shalt believe in Milton, Dryden, Pope;
Thou shalt not set up Wordsworth, Coleridge, Southey;
Because the first is crazed beyond all hope,
The second drunk, the third so quaint and mouthy:
With Crabbe it may be difficult to cope,
And Campbell's Hippocrene is somewhat drouthy:
Thou shalt not steal from Samuel Rogers, nor
Commit—flirtation with the muse of Moore.

Thou shalt not covet Mr. Sotheby's Muse,
His Pegasus, nor any thing that's his;
Thou shalt not bear false witness like "the Blues" —
(There's one, at least, is very fond of this);
Thou shalt not write, in short, but what I choose:
This is true criticism, and you may kiss—
Exactly as you please, or not,—the rod;
But if you don't, I'll lay it on, by G—dl!

If any person should presume to assert
This story is not moral, first, I pray,
That they will not cry out before they're hurt,
Then that they'll read it o'er again, and say,
(But, doubtless, nobody will be so pert)
That this is not a moral tale, though gay;
Besides, in Canto Twelfth, I mean to show
The very place where wicked people go.

213
But now at thirty years my hair is grey—
(I wonder what it will be like at forty?
I thought of a peruke, the other day—)
My heart is not much greener; and, in short, I
Have squander'd my whole summer while 'twas May,
And feel no more the spirit to retort; I
Have spent my life, both interest and principal,
And deem not, what I deem'd, my soul invincible.

214
No more—no more—Oh! never more on me
The freshness of the heart can fall like dew,
Which out of all the lovely things we see
Extracts emotions beautiful and new,
Hived in our bosoms like the bag o' the bee:
Think'st thou the honey with those objects grew?
Alas! 'twas not in them, but in thy power.
To double even the sweetness of a flower.

215
No more—no more—Oh! never more, my heart,
Canst thou be my sole world, my universe!
Once all in all, but now a thing apart,
Thou canst not be my blessing or my curse:
The illusion's gone for ever, and thou art
Insensible, I trust, but none the worse,
And in thy stead I've got a deal of judgment,
Though heaven knows how it ever found a lodgement.

216
My days of love are over; me no more
The charms of maid, wife, and still less of widow,
Can make the fool of which they made before,—
In short, I must not lead the life I did do;
The credulous hope of mutual minds is o'er,
The copious use of claret is forbid too,
So for a good old-gentlemanly vice,
I think I must take up with avarice.

217
Ambition was my idol, which was broken
Before the shrines of Sorrow, and of Pleasure;
And the two last have left me many a token
O'er which reflection may be made at leisure.
Now, like Friar Bacon's brazen head, I've spoken,
"Time is, Time was, Time's past:"—a chimie treasure
Is glittering youth, which I have spent betimes—
My heart in passion, and my head on rhymes.

218
What is the end of Fame? 'tis but to fill
A certain portion of uncertain paper:
Some liken it to climbing up a hill,
Whose summit, like all hills, is lost in vapour,
For this in write, speak, preach, and heroes kill;
And bards burn what they call their "midnight taper;"
To have, when the original is dust,
A name, a wretched picture, and worse bust. 6

219
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.

220
But I being fond of true philosophy,
Say very often to myself, "Alas!
All things that have been born were born to die,
And flesh (which Death mows down to hay) is grass;
You've pass'd your youth not so unpleasantly,
And if you had it o'er again—twould pass—
So thank your stars that matters are no worse,
And read your Bible, sir, and mind your purse."

4. Spoken by a bronze bust in Robert Greene's Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay (1594). This comedy was based on legends about the magical power of Roger Bacon, the 13th-century Franciscan monk who was said to have built with diabolical assistance a brazen head capable of speech.
5. "Chimic"; alchemy. I.e., the "treasure" is counterfeit gold.
6. Byron was unhappy with the portrait bust of him recently made by the Danish sculptor Thorvaldsen.
7. An echo of Isaiah 40:6 and 1 Peter 1:24: "All flesh is grass."
But for the present, gentle reader! and
Still gentler purchaser! the bard—that's I—
Must, with permission, shake you by the hand,
And so your humble servant, and good-bye!
We meet again, if we should understand
Each other; and if not, I shall not try
Your patience further than by this short sample—
'Twere well if others follow'd my example.

"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 four first rhymes are Southey's every line.
For God's sake, reader! take them not for mine.

From Canto the Second

[THE SHIPWRECK]

Juan embark'd—the ship got under way,
The wind was fair, the water passing rough;
A devil of a sea rolls in that bay,
As I, who've cross'd it oft, know well enough;
And, standing upon deck, the dashing spray
Flies in one's face, and makes it weather-tough:
And there he stood to take, and take again,
His first—perhaps his last—farewell of Spain.

I can't but say it is an awkward sight
To see one's native land receding through
The growing waters; it unmans one quite,
Especially when life is rather new:
I recollect Great Britain's coast looks white,
But almost every other country's blue,
When gazing on them, mystified by distance,
We enter on our nautical existence.

"And, oh! if e'er I should forget, I swear—
But that's impossible, and cannot be—
Sooner shall this blue ocean melt to air,
Sooner shall earth resolve itself to sea,
Than I resign thine image, oh, my fair!
Or think of any thing excepting thee;
A mind diseased no remedy can physic
(Here the ship gave a lurch, and he grew sea-sick).

"Sooner shall heaven kiss earth (here he fell sicker),
Oh, Julia! what is every other woe?
(For God's sake let me have a glass of liquor,
Pedro, Battista, help me down below.)
Julia, my love! (you rascal, Pedro, quicker)—
Oh, Julia! (this curst vessel pitches so)—
Beloved Julia, hear me still beseeching!"
(Here he grew inarticulate with retching)

He felt that chilling heaviness of heart,
Or rather stomach, which, alas! attends,
Beyond the best apothecary's art,
The loss of love, the treachery of friends,