

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—even to the heart—
But yet one prayer—Alas! how fares it with thee?

MAN. Old man! 'tis not so difficult to die.⁵
[MANFRED expires.]

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

1816–17

1817

Don Juan Byron began his masterpiece (pronounced in the English fashion, *Don Joó-un*) 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; but I had or have materials." The work was composed with remarkable speed (the 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. Its hero, the Spanish libertine, had in the original legend been superhuman in his sexual energy and wickedness. Throughout Byron's version the unspoken but persistent joke is that this archetypal lady-killer of European legend is in fact more acted upon than active. Unfailingly amiable and well intentioned, he is guilty largely of youth, charm, and a courteous and compliant spirit. The women do all the rest.

The chief models for the poem were the Italian seriocomic versions of medieval chivalric romances; the genre had been introduced by Pulci in the fifteenth century and was adopted by Ariosto in his *Orlando Furioso* (1532). 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 which the initial interlaced rhymes (*ababab*) 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 "Whistlecraft," 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 blatantly 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 opinionated remarks 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 predicament: "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

Fragment¹

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° and soda-water! German wine

From Canto the First

[JUAN AND DONNA JULIA]

1

I want a hero: an uncommon want,
When every year and month sends forth a new one,
Till, after cloying the gazettes with cant,

5. When this line was dropped in the printing of the first edition, Byron wrote angrily to his publisher: "You have destroyed the whole effect and

moral of the poem by omitting the last line of Manfred's speaking."

1. This stanza was written on the back of a page of the manuscript of canto 1. For the author's revisions while composing two stanzas of *Don Juan*, see "Poems in Process" in the NAEL Archive.

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.

* * *

5

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.

6

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.

7

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.

8

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,

Cadiz perhaps—but that you soon may see:—

Don Juan's parents lived beside the river,

A noble stream, and call'd the Guadalquivir.

9

His father's name was José⁵—Don, of course,

A true Hidalgo,⁶ free from every stain nobleman

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:

10

His mother was a learned lady, famed

For every branch of every science known—

In every Christian language ever named,

With virtues equall'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.

11

Her memory was a mine: she knew by heart

All Calderon and greater part of Lopé,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.

12

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 trans-

lated 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 keep his meter.

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 the

art of memory who had lectured in England in 1811.

8. Athenian. *Attic salt* is a term for the famed wit of the Athenians.

cotton

13

She knew the Latin—that is, “the Lord’s prayer,”

And Greek—the alphabet—I’m nearly sure;

She read some French romances here and there,

100 Although her mode of speaking was not pure;

For native Spanish she had no great care,

At least her conversation was obscure;

Her thoughts were theorems, her words a problem,

As if she deem’d that mystery would ennoble ‘em.

22

’Tis pity learned virgins ever wed

170 With persons of no sort of education,

Or gentlemen, who, though well born and bred,

Grow tired of scientific conversation:

I don’t choose to say much upon this head,

I’m a plain man, and in a single station,

175 But—Oh! ye lords of ladies intellectual,

Inform us truly, have they not hen-peck’d you all?

23

Don José and his lady quarrell’d—*why*,

Not any of the many could divine,

Though several thousand people chose to try,

180 ’Twas surely no concern of theirs nor mine;

I loathe that low vice—curiosity;

But if there’s any thing in which I shine,

’Tis in arranging all my friends’ affairs,

Not having, of my own, domestic cares.

24

185 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—

190 But that’s no matter, and the worst’s behind,

For little Juan o’er me threw, down stairs,

A pail of housemaid’s water unawares.

25

A little curly-headed, good-for-nothing,

And mischief-making monkey from his birth;

195 His parents ne’er agreed except in doting

Upon the most unquiet imp on earth;

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,

200 To teach him manners for the time to come.

26

Don José and the Donna Inez led

For some time an unhappy sort of life,

Wishing each other, not divorced, but dead;

They lived respectably as man and wife,

205 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.

27

For Inez call’d some druggists, and physicians,

210 And tried to prove her loving lord was *mad*,⁹

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,

215 Save that her duty both to man and God

Required this conduct—which seem’d very odd.

28

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;

220 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.

29

225 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

230 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!”

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.

Their friends had tried at reconciliation,
 Then their relations, who made matters worse:
 ('Twere hard to say upon a like occasion
 To whom it may be best to have recourse—
 I can't say much for friend or yet relation):
 The lawyers did their utmost for divorce,
 255 But scarce a fee was paid on either side
 Before, unluckily, Don José died.

He died: and most unluckily, because,
 According to all hints I could collect
 From counsel learned in those kinds of laws,
 260 (Although their talk's obscure and circumspect)
 His death contrived to spoil a charming cause;^o
 A thousand pities also with respect
 To public feeling, which on this occasion
 Was manifested in a great sensation.

lawsuit

Dying intestate,^o Juan was sole heir
 290 To a chancery suit, and messuages,¹ and lands,
 Which, with a long minority and care,
 Promised to turn out well in proper hands:
 Inez became sole guardian, which was fair,
 And answer'd but to nature's just demands;
 295 An only son left with an only mother
 Is brought up much more wisely than another.

without a will

Sagest of women, even of widows, she
 Resolved that Juan should be quite a paragon,
 And worthy of the noblest pedigree:
 300 (His sire was of Castile, his dam from Aragon.)
 Then for accomplishments of chivalry,
 In case our lord the king should go to war again,
 He learn'd the arts of riding, fencing, gunnery,
 And how to scale a fortress—or a nunnery.

305 But that which Donna Inez most desired,
 And saw into herself each day before all

1. Houses and the adjoining lands. "Chancery suit": a case in what was then the highest English court, notorious for its delays.

The learned tutors whom for him she hired,
 Was, that his breeding should be strictly moral:
 Much into all his studies she enquired,
 310 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,
 315 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,
 320 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;
 325 His reverend tutors had at times a tussle,
 And for their Aeneids, Iliads, 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,
 330 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;
 335 But Virgil's songs are pure, except that horrid one
 Beginning with "Formosum Pastor Corydon."⁴

Lucretius' irreligion⁵ is too strong
 For early stomachs, to prove wholesome food;
 I can't help thinking Juvenal⁶ 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 Sublime* 10, 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.

340 Although no doubt his real intent was good,
For speaking out so plainly in his song,
So much indeed as to be downright rude;
And then what proper person can be partial
To all those nauseous epigrams of Martial?

44

345 Juan was taught from out the best edition,
Expurgated by learned men, who place,
Judiciously, from out the schoolboy's vision,
The grosser parts; but fearful to deface
Too much their modest bard by this omission,
350 And pitying sore his mutilated case,
They only add them all in an appendix,⁷
Which saves, in fact, the trouble of an index;

52

For my part I say nothing—nothing—but
410 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,
415 No—no—I'd send him out betimes to college,
For there it was I pick'd up my own knowledge.

53

For there one learns—'tis not for me to boast,
Though I acquired—but I pass over *that*,
As well as all the Greek I since have lost:
420 I say that there's the place—but "*Verbum sat*,"⁸
I think I pick'd up too, as well as most,
Knowledge of matters—but no matter *what*—
I never married—but, I think, I know
That sons should not be educated so.

54

425 Young Juan now was sixteen years of age,
Tall, handsome, slender, but well knit: he seem'd
Active, though not so sprightly, as a page;
And every body but his mother deem'd
Him almost man; but she flew in a rage

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).

430 And bit her lips (for else she might have scream'd)
If any said so, for to be precocious
Was in her eyes a thing the most atrocious.

55

Amongst her numerous acquaintance, all
Selected for discretion and devotion,
435 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,
440 (But this last simile is trite and stupid.)

56

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.)
445 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 grandmamma chose to remain.

57

She married (I forget the pedigree)
450 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,
455 Marrying their cousins—nay, their aunts, and nieces,
Which always spoils the breed, if it increases.

58

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
460 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 grandmamma
Produced her Don more heirs at love than law.

9. The belt ("zone") 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).

59

465 However this might be, the race^o went on
 Improving still through every generation,
 Until it centred in an only son,
 Who left an only daughter; my narration
 May have suggested that this single one
 470 Could be but Julia (whom on this occasion
 I shall have much to speak about), and she
 Was married, charming, chaste,² and twenty-three.

60

Her eye (I'm very fond of handsome eyes)
 Was large and dark, suppressing half its fire
 475 Until she spoke, then through its soft disguise
 Flash'd an expression more of pride than ire,
 And love than either; and there would arise
 A something in them which was not desire,
 But would have been, perhaps, but for the soul
 480 Which struggled through and chasten'd down the whole.

61

Her glossy hair was cluster'd o'er a brow
 Bright with intelligence, and fair, and smooth;
 Her eyebrow's shape was like th' ærial bow,
 Her cheek all purple with the beam of youth,
 485 Mounting, at times, to a transparent glow,
 As if her veins ran lightning; she, in sooth,
 Possess'd an air and grace by no means common:
 Her stature tall—I hate a dumpy woman.

62

Wedded she was some years, and to a man
 490 Of fifty, and such husbands are in plenty;
 And yet, I think, instead of such a ONE
 'Twere better to have two of five-and-twenty,
 Especially in countries near the sun:
 And now I think on't, "mi vien in mente,"³
 495 Ladies even of the most uneasy virtue
 Prefer a spouse whose age is short of thirty.

63

'Tis a sad thing, I cannot choose but say,
 And all the fault of that indecent sun,
 Who cannot leave alone our helpless clay,
 500 But will keep baking, broiling, burning on,

family line

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.

64

505 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,
 510 By laying whate'er sum, in mulct,⁴ they please on
 The lover, who must pay a handsome price,
 Because it is a marketable vice.

65

Alfonso was the name of Julia's lord,
 A man well looking for his years, and who
 515 Was neither much beloved nor yet abhorr'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,
 520 For jealousy dislikes the world to know it.

69

545 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
 550 When he was sixteen, Julia twenty-three;
 These few short years make wondrous alterations,
 Particularly amongst sun-burnt nations.

70

Whate'er the cause might be, they had become
 Changed; for the dame grew distant, the youth shy,
 555 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
 560 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.

71

Yet Julia's very coldness still was kind,
 And tremulously gentle her small hand
 Withdrew itself from his, but left behind
 A little pressure, thrilling, and so bland
 565 And slight, so very slight, that to the mind
 'Twas but a doubt; but ne'er magician's wand
 Wrought change with all Armida's⁵ fairy art
 Like what this light touch left on Juan's heart.

72

And if she met him, though she smiled no more,
 570 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,
 575 And will not dare to trust itself with truth,
 And love is taught hypocrisy from youth.

75

Poor Julia's heart was in an awkward state;
 She felt it going, and resolved to make
 595 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 Tarquin⁶ quake:
 She pray'd the Virgin Mary for her grace,
 600 As being the best judge of a lady's case.

76

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;
 605 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.

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*.

77

She now determined that a virtuous woman
 610 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,
 615 For people who are pleasanter than others,
 But then they only seem so many brothers.

78

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,
 620 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're over;
 And if the man should ask, 'tis but denial:
 I recommend young ladies to make trial.

79

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."
 630 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.

86

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
 685 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.

7. The sorceress in Torquato Tasso's *Jerusalem Delivered* (1581) who seduces Rinaldo into forgetting his vows as a crusader.

8. 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*.

90

Young Juan wander'd by the glassy brooks
Thinking unutterable things; he threw
715 Himself at length within the leafy nooks
Where the wild branch of the cork forest grew;
There poets find materials for their books,
And every now and then we read them through,
So that their plan and prosody are eligible,
720 Unless, like Wordsworth, they prove unintelligible.

91

He, Juan, (and not Wordsworth) so pursued
His self-communion with his own high soul,
Until his mighty heart, in its great mood,
Had mitigated part, though not the whole
725 Of its disease; he did the best he could
With things not very subject to control,
And turn'd, without perceiving his condition,
Like Coleridge, into a metaphysician.

92

He thought about himself, and the whole earth,
730 Of man the wonderful, and of the stars,
And how the deuce they ever could have birth;
And then he thought of earthquakes, and of wars,
How many miles the moon might have in girth,
Of air-balloons, and of the many bars
735 To perfect knowledge of the boundless skies;—
And then he thought of Donna Julia's eyes.

93

In thoughts like these true wisdom may discern
Longings sublime, and aspirations high,
Which some are born with, but the most part learn
740 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;
Do you think 'twas philosophy that this did,
I can't help thinking puberty assisted.

94

745 He pored upon the leaves, and on the flowers,
And heard a voice in all the winds; and then
He thought of wood-nymphs and immortal bowers,
And how the goddesses came down to men:
He miss'd the pathway, he forgot the hours,
750 And when he look'd upon his watch again,

He found how much old Time had been a winner—
He also found that he had lost his dinner.

103

'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;
820 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.

104

825 '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,⁹
830 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!

105

She sate, but not alone; I know not well
How this same interview had taken place,
835 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,
840 But very difficult, to shut their eyes.

106

How beautiful she look'd! her conscious¹ heart
Glow'd in her cheek, and yet she felt no wrong.
Oh Love! how perfect is thy mystic art,
845 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's 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 *Lalla Rookh* (1817) had portrayed the "heathenish heaven" of Islam as populated by "houris," beautiful maidens who in the afterlife will give heroes their reward.

1. Secretly aware (of her feelings).

The precipice she stood on was immense,
So was her creed^o in her own innocence.

belief

107

She thought of her own strength, and Juan's youth
850 And of the folly of all prudish fears,
Victorious virtue, and domestic truth,
And then of Don Alfonso's fifty years:
I wish these last had not occur'd, in sooth,
Because that number rarely much endears,
855 And through all climes, the snowy and the sunny,
Sounds ill in love, whate'er it may in money.

113

The sun set, and up rose the yellow moon:
The devil's in the moon for mischief; they
900 Who call'd her CHASTE, methinks, began too soon
Their nomenclature; there is not a day,
The longest, not the twenty-first of June,
Sees half the business in a wicked way
On which three single hours of moonshine smile—
And then she looks so modest all the while.

114

There is a dangerous silence in that hour,
905 A stillness, which leaves room for the full soul
To open all itself, without the power
Of calling wholly back its self-control;
The silver light which, hallowing tree and tower,
910 Sheds beauty and deep softness o'er the whole,
Breathes also to the heart, and o'er it throws
A loving languor, which is not repose.

115

And Julia sate with Juan, half embraced
And half retiring from the glowing arm,
915 Which trembled like the bosom where 'twas placed;
Yet still she must have thought there was no harm,
Or else 'twere easy to withdraw her waist;
But then the situation had its charm,
And then—God knows what next—I can't go on;
920 I'm almost sorry that I e'er begun.

116

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 controulless core
925 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.

117

And Julia's voice was lost, except in sighs,
930 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,
935 A little still she strove, and much repented,
And whispering "I will ne'er consent"—consented.

126

'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:
1005 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.

127

But sweeter still than this, than these, than all,
1010 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,
1015 No doubt in fable, as the unforgiven
Fire which Prometheus² filch'd for us from heaven.

133

Man's a phenomenon, one knows not what,
And wonderful beyond all wondrous measure;
'Tis pity though, in this sublime world, that
1060 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.

But whether glory, power, or love, or treasure,
The path is through perplexing ways, and when
The goal is gain'd, we die, you know—and then—

134

1065 What then?—I do not know, no more do you—
And so good night.—Return we to our story:
'Twas in November, when fine days are few,
And the far mountains wax a little hoary,
And clap a white cape on their mantles blue;
1070 And the sea dashes round the promontory,
And the loud breaker boils against the rock,
And sober suns must set at five o'clock.

135

'Twas, as the watchmen say, a cloudy night;
No moon, no stars, the wind was low or loud
1075 By gusts, and many a sparkling hearth was bright
With the piled wood, round which the family crowd;
There's something cheerful in that sort of light,
Even as a summer sky's without a cloud:
I'm fond of fire, and crickets, and all that,
1080 A lobster salad, and champagne, and chat.

136

'Twas midnight—Donna Julia was in bed,
Sleeping, most probably,—when at her door
Arose a clatter might awake the dead,
If they had never been awake before,
1085 And that they have been so we all have read,
And are to be so, at the least, once more;—
The door was fasten'd, but with voice and fist
First knocks were heard, then "Madam—Madam—hist!

137

"For God's sake, Madam—Madam—here's my master,
1090 With more than half the city at his back—
Was ever heard of such a curst disaster!
'Tis not my fault—I kept good watch—Alack!
Do pray undo the bolt a little faster—
They're on the stair just now, and in a crack°
1095 Will all be here; perhaps he yet may fly—
Surely the window's not so very high!"

138

By this time Don Alfonso was arrived,
With torches, friends, and servants in great number;

The major part of them had long been wived,
1100 And therefore paused not to disturb the slumber
Of any wicked woman, who contrived

By stealth her husband's temples to encumber:³
Examples of this kind are so contagious.
Were one not punish'd, all would be outrageous.

139

1105 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,
1110 To hold a levee⁴ round his lady's bed,
And summon lackeys, arm'd with fire and sword,
To prove himself the thing he most abhorr'd.

140

Poor Donna Julia! starting as from sleep,
(Mind—that I do not say—she had not slept)
1115 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.
1120 To prove her mistress had been sleeping double.

141

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,
1125 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."

142

Now Julia found at length a voice, and cried,
1130 "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?
1135 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.

4. Morning reception.

143

He search'd, they search'd, and rummaged every where,
Closet and clothes' press, chest and window-seat,
And found much linen, lace, and several pair

1140 Of stockings, slippers, brushes, combs, complete,
With other articles of ladies fair,

To keep them beautiful, or leave them neat:

Arras⁵ they prick'd and curtains with their swords,
And wounded several shutters, and some boards.

144

1145 Under the bed they search'd, and there they found⁶—
No matter what—it was not that they sought;
They open'd windows, gazing if the ground

Had signs or footmarks, but the earth said nought;

And then they stared each others' faces round:

1150 'T is odd, not one of all these seekers thought,

And seems to me almost a sort of blunder,

Of looking *in* the bed as well as under.

145

During this inquisition, Julia's tongue

Was not asleep—"Yes, search and search," she cried,

1155 "Insult on insult heap, and wrong on wrong!

It was for this that I became a bride!

For this in silence I have suffer'd long

A husband like Alfonso at my side;

But now I'll bear no more, nor here remain,

1160 If there be law, or lawyers, in all Spain.

146

"Yes, Don Alfonso! husband now no more,

If ever you indeed deserved the name,

Is't worthy of your years?—you have threescore—

Fifty, or sixty, it is all the same—

1165 Is't wise or fitting, causeless to explore

For facts against a virtuous woman's fame?

Ungrateful, perjured, barbarous Don Alfonso,

How dare you think your lady would go on so?"

159

1265 The Senhor Don Alfonso stood confused;

Antonia bustled round the ransack'd room,

And, turning up her nose, with looks abused

5. A tapestry hanging on a wall.

6. Perhaps a chamber pot.

Her master, and his myrmidons,⁷ of whom
Not one, except the attorney, was amused;

1270 He, like Achates,⁸ faithful to the tomb,
So there were quarrels, cared not for the cause,
Knowing they must be settled by the laws.

160

With prying snub-nose, and small eyes, he stood,

Following Antonia's motions here and there;

1275 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

1280 Were proved by competent false witnesses.

161

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,

1285 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.

162

At first he tried to hammer an excuse,

1290 To which the sole reply was tears, and sobs,

And indications of hysterics, whose

Prologue is always certain throes, and throbs,

Gasps, and whatever else the owners choose:

Alfonso saw his wife, and thought of Job's;⁹

1295 He saw too, in perspective, her relations,

And then he tried to muster all his patience.

163

He stood in act to speak, or rather stammer,

But sage Antonia cut him short before

The anvil of his speech received the hammer,

1300 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;

7. Servants, so named for the followers Achilles led to the Trojan War.

8. The *fidus Achates* ("faithful Achates") of Virgil's *Aeneid*, whose loyalty to Aeneas has become proverbial.

9. Job's wife advised her afflicted husband to "curse God, and die." He replied, "Thou speakest as one of the foolish women speaketh" (Job 2.9–10).

He cast a rueful look or two, and did,
He knew not wherefore, that which he was bid.

164

1305 With him retired his "*posse comitatus*,"¹
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*"
1310 In Don Alfonso's facts, which just now wore
An awkward look; as he revolved the case,
The door was fasten'd in his legal face.

165

No sooner was it bolted, than—Oh shame!
Oh sin! Oh sorrow! and Oh womankind!
1315 How can you do such things and keep your fame,
Unless this world, and t'other too, be blind?
Nothing so dear as an unfilch'd good name!
But to proceed—for there is more behind:
With much heartfelt reluctance be it said,
1320 Young Juan slipp'd, half-smother'd, from the bed.

166

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;
1325 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.²

169

1345 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?
1350 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 *posse* (*posse 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 future Richard III, was reputed to have been assassinated by being drowned in a cask ("butt") of malmsey, a sweet and aromatic wine.

170

1355 He turn'd his lip to hers, and with his hand
Call'd back the tangles of her wandering hair;
Even then their love they could not all command,
And half forgot their danger and despair:
Antonia's patience now was at a stand—
"Come, come, 'tis no time now for fooling there,"
1360 She whisper'd, in great wrath—"I must deposit
This pretty gentleman within the closet:"

173

Now, Don Alfonso entering, but alone,
Closed the oration of the trusty maid:
1380 She loiter'd, and he told her to be gone,
An order somewhat sullenly obey'd;
However, present remedy was none,
And no great good seem'd answer'd if she staid:
Regarding both with slow and sidelong view,
She snuff'd the candle, curtsied, and withdrew.

174

1385 Alfonso paused a minute—then begun
Some strange excuses for his late proceeding;
He would not justify what he had done,
To say the best, it was extreme ill-breeding;
But there were ample reasons for it, none
1390 Of which he specified in this his pleading:
His speech was a fine sample, on the whole,
Of rhetoric, which the learn'd call "*rigmarole*."

180

Alfonso closed his speech, and begg'd her pardon,
Which Julia half withheld, and then half granted,
1435 And laid conditions, he thought, very hard on,
Denying several little things he wanted:
He stood like Adam lingering near his garden,
With useless penitence perplex'd and haunted,
Beseeching she no further would refuse,
1440 When, lo! he stumbled o'er a pair of shoes.

181

A pair of shoes!—what then? not much, if they
Are such as fit with ladies' feet, but these

(No one can tell how much I grieve to say)
 Were masculine; to see them, and to seize,
 1445 Was but a moment's act.—Ah! well-a-day!
 My teeth begin to chatter, my veins freeze—
 Alfonso first examined well their fashion,
 And then flew out into another passion.

182

He left the room for his relinquish'd sword,
 1450 And Julia instant to the closet flew.
 "Fly, Juan, fly! for heaven's sake—not a word—
 The door is open—you may yet slip through
 The passage you so often have explored—
 Here is the garden-key—Fly—fly—Adieu!
 1455 Haste—haste! I hear Alfonso's hurrying feet—
 Day has not broke—there's no one in the street."

183

None can say that this was not good advice,
 The only mischief was, it came too late;
 Of all experience 'tis the usual price,
 1460 A sort of income-tax laid on by fate:
 Juan had reach'd the room-door in a trice,
 And might have done so by the garden-gate,
 But met Alfonso in his dressing-gown,
 Who threaten'd death—so Juan knock'd him down.

184

Dire was the scuffle, and out went the light;
 1465 Antonia cried out "Rape!" and Julia "Fire!"
 But not a servant stirr'd to aid the fight.
 Alfonso, pommell'd to his heart's desire,
 Swore lustily he'd be revenged this night;
 1470 And Juan, too, blasphemed an octave higher;
 His blood was up: though young, he was a Tartar,³
 And not at all disposed to prove a martyr.

185

Alfonso's sword had dropp'd ere he could draw it,
 And they continued battling hand to hand,
 1475 For Juan very luckily ne'er saw it;
 His temper not being under great command,
 If at that moment he had chanced to claw it,
 Alfonso's days had not been in the land
 Much longer.—Think of husbands', lovers' lives!
 1480 And how ye may be doubly widows—wives!

3. A formidable opponent.

186

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,
 1485 Juan contrived to give an awkward blow,
 And then his only garment quite gave way;
 He fled, like Joseph,⁴ leaving it; but there,
 I doubt, all likeness ends between the pair.

187

Lights came at length, and men, and maids, who found
 1490 An awkward spectacle their eyes before;
 Antonia in hysterics, 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:
 1495 Juan the gate gain'd, turn'd the key about,
 And liking not the inside, lock'd the out.

188

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,
 1500 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.

189

If you would like to see the whole proceedings,
 1505 The depositions, and the cause at full,
 The names of all the witnesses, the pleadings
 Of counsel to nonsuit,⁵ or to annul,
 There's more than one edition, and the readings
 1510 Are various, but they none of them are dull;
 The best is that in short-hand ta'en by Gurney,⁶
 Who to Madrid on purpose made a journey.

190

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. Judgement against the plaintiff for failure to

establish his case.

6. William B. Gurney (1777–1855), official shorthand writer for the houses of Parliament and a famous court reporter.

1515 That had for centuries been known in Spain,
 Since Roderic's Goths, or older Genseric'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,
 1520 She sent her son to be embark'd at Cadiz.

191

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
 1525 (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:—

192

"They tell me 'tis decided; you depart:
 1530 '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
 1535 Be on this sheet, 'tis not what it appears;
 My eyeballs burn and throb, but have no tears.

193

"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,
 1540 So dear is still the memory of that dream;
 Yet, if I name my guilt, 'tis not to boast,
 None can deem harshlier of me than I deem:
 I trace this scrawl because I cannot rest—
 I've nothing to reproach, nor to request.

194

1545 "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,
 1550 And few there are whom these can not estrange;
 Men have all these resources, we but one,
 To love again, and be again undone.

7. The Germanic tribes that overran Spain and other parts of southern Europe in the 5th through 8th centuries, notorious for rape and violence.

195

"My breast has been all weakness, is so yet;
 I struggle, but cannot collect my mind;
 1555 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 needle⁸ trembling to the pole
 1560 It ne'er can reach, so turns to you, my soul.

196

"You will proceed in beauty, and in pride,
 Beloved and loving many; all is o'er
 For me on earth, except some years to hide
 My shame and sorrow deep in my heart's core;
 1565 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.

197

"I have no more to say, but linger still,
 1570 And dare not set my seal upon this sheet,
 And yet I may as well the task fulfil,
 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,
 1575 And I must even survive this last adieu,
 And bear with life, to love and pray for you!"

198

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
 1580 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*,"¹
 The motto, cut upon a white cornelian;
 The wax was superfine, its hue vermilion.

199

1585 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).

1. She follows you everywhere (French). Byron himself owned a seal inscribed with this motto, as

well as a cornelian gemstone, given him by John Edleston, the boy with whom he had a romantic friendship while at Cambridge. Byron's 1807 poem "The Cornelian" memorializes this relationship.

Dependent on the public altogether;

We'll see, however, what they say to this,
Their favour in an author's cap's a feather,

1590 And no great mischief's done by their caprice;

And if their approbation we experience,

Perhaps they'll have some more about a year hence.

200

My poem's epic, and is meant to be

Divided in twelve books; each book containing,

1595 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,

1600 So that my name of Epic's no misnomer.

201

All these things will be specified in time,

With strict regard to Aristotle's rules,

The *Vade Mecum*² of the true sublime,

Which makes so many poets, and some fools:

1605 Prose poets like blank-verse, I'm fond of rhyme,

Good workmen never quarrel with their tools;

I've got new mythological machinery,³

And very handsome supernatural scenery.

202

There's only one slight difference between

1610 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

1615 Their labyrinth of fables to thread through,

Whereas this story's actually true.

203

If any person doubt it, I appeal

To history, tradition, and to facts,

To newspapers, whose truth all know and feel,

1620 To plays in five, and operas in three acts;

All these confirm my statement a good deal,

But that which more completely faith exacts

and tragedy.

3. The assemblage of supernatural personages and incidents introduced into a literary work.

2. Go with me (Latin, literal trans.); handbook. Byron is deriding the neoclassical view that Aristotle's *Poetics* proposes "rules" for writing epic

Is, that myself, and several now in Seville,
Saw Juan's last elopement with the devil.⁴

204

1625 If ever I should condescend 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,

1630 And carry precept to the highest pitch:

I'll call the work "Longinus o'er a Bottle,

Or, Every Poet his *own* Aristotle."

205

Thou shalt believe in Milton, Dryden, Pope,⁵

Thou shalt not set up Wordsworth, Coleridge, Southey;

1635 Because the first is crazed beyond all hope,

The second drunk, the third so quaint and mouthy:

With Crabbe⁶ it may be difficult to cope,

And Campbell's Hippocrene⁷ is somewhat drouthy:

1640 Thou shalt not steal from Samuel Rogers, nor

Commit—flirtation with the muse of Moore.⁸

206

Thou shalt not covet Mr. Sotheby's⁹ Muse,

His Pegasus,¹ nor any thing that's his;

Thou shalt not bear false witness like "the Blues"²—

(There's one, at least, is very fond of this);

1645 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—d!³

207

If any person should presume to assert

1650 This story is not moral, first, I pray,

4. The usual plays on the Juan legend ended with Juan in hell; an early-20th-century version is George Bernard Shaw's *Man and Superman*.

5. This is one of many passages, in prose and verse, in which Byron vigorously defends Dryden and Pope against his Romantic contemporaries.

6. George Crabbe, whom Byron admired, was the author of *The Village* and other realistic poems of rural life.

7. Fountain on Mount Helicon whose waters supposedly gave inspiration.

8. Thomas Campbell, Samuel Rogers, and Thomas Moore were lesser poets of the Romantic period; the last two were close friends of Byron and members of London's liberal Whig

circles.

9. The wealthy William Sotheby, minor poet and translator, is satirized, as Botherby, in Byron's *Beppo*.

1. The winged horse symbolizing poetic inspiration.

2. I.e., Bluestockings, a contemporary term for female intellectuals, among whom Byron numbered his wife (line 1644).

3. Byron's parody of the Ten Commandments seemed blasphemous to some commentators. In 1817 the radical publisher William Hone was put on trial for the ostensible blasphemy of a political satire that had used the form of the Anglican Church's creed and catechism.

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;
 1655 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^o the other day—
 1700 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,
 1705 Hived in our bosoms like the bag o' the bee:
 Think'st thou the honey with those objects grew?
 1710 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!
 1715 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,
 1720 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;
 1725 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
 1730 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:"⁴—a chymic treasure⁵
 1735 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,
 1740 Whose summit, like all hills, is lost in vapour;
 For this men 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;
 1745 But somebody or other rummaging,
 Burglariously broke his coffin's lid:
 1750 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!
 1755 All things that have been born were born to die,
 And flesh (which Death mows down to hay) is grass;⁷
 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,
 1760 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. "Chymic": alchemic. I.e., the "treasure" is

counterfeit gold.

6. Byron was unhappy with the portrait bust of him recently made by the Danish sculptor Thorwaldsen.

7. An echo of Isaiah 40.6 and 1 Peter 1.24: "All flesh is grass."

221

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-b'ye!
 1765 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.

222

"Go, little book, from this my solitude!
 1770 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—
 1775 The four first rhymes are Southey's every line:⁸
 For God's sake, reader! take them not for mine.

From Canto the Second

[THE SHIPWRECK]

11

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;
 85 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.

12

I can't but say it is an awkward sight
 90 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,
 95 When gazing on them, mystified by distance,
 We enter on our nautical existence.

* * *

8. The lines are part of the last stanza of Southey's "Epilogue to the Lay of the Laureate."

17

And Juan wept, and much he sigh'd and thought,
 While his salt tears dropp'd into the salt sea,
 130 "Sweets to the sweet" (I like so much to quote;
 You must excuse this extract, 'tis where she,
 The Queen of Denmark, for Ophelia brought
 Flowers to the grave);¹ and, sobbing often, he
 135 Reflected on his present situation,
 And seriously resolved on reformation.

18

"Farewell, my Spain! a long farewell!" he cried,
 "Perhaps I may revisit thee no more,
 But die, as many an exiled heart hath died,
 140 Of its own thirst to see again thy shore:
 Farewell, where Guadalquivir's waters glide!
 Farewell, my mother! and, since all is o'er,
 Farewell, too, dearest Julia!—(Here he drew
 Her letter out again, and read it through.)

19

"And, oh! if e'er I should forget, I swear—
 145 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!
 150 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).

20

"Sooner shall heaven kiss earth (here he fell sicker),
 Oh, Julia! what is every other woe?
 155 (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!"
 160 (Here he grew inarticulate with retching)

21

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,