

J. Willard Marriott Library
University of Utah
Electronic Reserve Course Materials

The copyright law of the United States (Title 17, United States Code) governs the making of photocopies or other reproductions of copyrighted material. Under certain conditions specified in the law, libraries and archives are authorized to furnish a photocopy or other reproduction, which is not to be used for any purpose other than private study, scholarship, or research. If a user makes a request for, or later uses a photocopy or reproduction for or purposes in excess of "fair use", that user may be liable for copyright infringement.

Peter J. Manning, Reading Romantics
(New York: Oxford UP, 1990).

Franta F12

6

Don Juan and Byron's Imperceptiveness to the English Word

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

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

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

Eliot's privileging of the word is true to his symbolist heritage. Implicit in the negative verdict on Byron is the recommendation of an evocative poetry, one that gathers itself into a dense concentration of almost magically suggestive power, a poetry marked by moments at which meaning seems to overflow mere connotation, by nodal points at which meanings accumulated through an entire work converge and are released. The sense of an investment of meaning beyond the capacity of words creates a brief illusion of intensity and inclusiveness. A standard that invokes the word thus tends to acquire the hieratic associations of the Word, the authoritative utterance in which not only meaning but also being seem actually to reside. For

Coleridge, the most reflective theorist of this mode among the English Romantics, symbolism was, as J. Robert Barth has reiterated, intimately bound up with a sacramental view of the world.³ At its extreme, however, Eliot's position values the single pregnant phrase, the resonant, gnomic aphorism. Keats's Grecian Urn, animated by the inquiries of its beholder, itself speaks only teasingly or remains silent. Unheard melodies can be judged sweeter than real ones because with them the gap between signifier and signified is widest, and the power of suggestion verges therefore on the infinite.

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

I

The language of *Don Juan* can be approached through the role of language as it is conceptualized in the poem. The most satisfying starting point is paradoxically a scene in which language is unnecessary, Byron's depiction of the embrace of Juan and Haidée. "They had not spoken; but they felt allured, / As if their souls and lips each other beckon'd," the narrator observes (II, 187):

They fear'd no eyes nor ears on that lone beach,
They felt no terrors from the night, they were
All in all to each other: though their speech
Was broken words, they *thought* a language there,—
And all the burning tongues the passions teach

Found in one sigh the best interpreter
Of nature's oracle—first love,—that all
Which Eve has left her daughters since her fall.
(II, 189)⁴

This characterization of Haidée's voice presents a familiar Romantic figure, at once pathetic and sublime. Voice is here an absolute presence, capable of doing without the agency of words and directly inspiring a response from its hearers. The less Haidée and Juan can talk, the more intensely they share:

And then fair Haidée tried her tongue at speaking,
But not a word could Juan comprehend,
Although he listen'd so that the young Greek in
Her earnestness would ne'er have made an end;
(II, 161)

Freedom from language becomes the very mark of intimacy:

And then she had recourse to nods, and signs,
And smiles, and sparkles of the speaking eye,
And read (the only book she could) the lines
Of his fair face, and found, by sympathy,
The answer eloquent, where the soul shines
And darts in one quick glance a long reply;
And thus in every look she saw exprest
A world of words, and things at which she guess'd.

And now, by dint of fingers and of eyes,
And words repeated after her, he took
A lesson in her tongue: but by surmise,
No doubt, less of her language than her look:
As he who studies fervently the skies
Turns oftener to the stars than to his book,
Thus Juan learn'd his alpha beta better
From Haidée's glance than any graven letter.
(II, 162-63)

Just before the return of Lambro brings it to an end Byron presents again the preternatural harmony between Juan and Haidée:

The gentle pressure, and the thrilling touch,
The least glance better understood than words.

Which still said all, and ne'er could say too much;
 A language, too, but like to that of birds,
 Known but to them, at least appearing such
 As but to lovers a true sense affords;
 Sweet playful phrases, which would seem absurd
 To those who have ceased to hear such, or ne'er heard.
 (IV, 14)

The poem puts forward two analogies to the communion that ordinary language is too clumsy to express. The first is mythical and honorific: "They were alone once more; for them to be / Thus was another Eden" (IV, 10). Byron delineates the privacy of Juan and Haidée as a mutual transparency, a vision of complete reciprocal love seemingly prior to the fall into selfhood. This formulation is co-ordinate with another of differing tenor; the poem continues, "All these were theirs, for they were children still, / And children still they should have ever been" (IV, 15). The second analogy introduces an infantile coloring into the paradisaical scene.

Haidée and Juan both appear as children to the narrator enmeshed in a bewildering adult world, but within the story their roles are clearly distinguished: Haidée functions as the mother of the infantile Juan. Famished and half-drowned, Juan is reborn from the sea and nursed back to health in Haidée's warm, well-provisioned, and womblike cave. As the weakened Juan slept, Haidée "bent o'er him, and he lay beneath, / Hush'd as the babe upon its mother's breast" (II, 148); when he revived, Haidée, "who watch'd him like a mother, would have fed / Him past all bounds" (II, 158).

These similes and the narrative configuration in which they occur place the ideal wordlessness of Haidée and Juan in parallel to the symbiotic union of mother and infant, at that early stage of human development before the infant comes to see himself as separate from the mother. Language at this level is a secret and subtle bond, a process of ceaseless and delicate adjustment, of needs understood and gratified before they are expressed. The figurative identification of the erotic sublime, as it were, with the dyad of mother and infant has important consequences for the conceptualization of language in *Don Juan*.

Juan participates briefly in a state anterior to the formation of an independent identity, but this fantasy of boundaryless bliss conflicts with the continued integrity of the adult who imagines it. To aspire toward the condition of Haidée and Juan carries the threat of self-

abolition: to an autonomous being the idealized fusion is equivalent to a dangerous dissolution.⁵ Inevitably, the beloved Haidée is therefore also a figure of death. As many critics have remarked, ominous overtones surround her from the moment of her introduction:

Her hair, I said, was auburn; but her eyes
 Were black as death, their lashes the same hue,
 Of downcast length, in whose silk shadow lies
 Deepest attraction, for when to the view
 Forth from its raven fringe the full glance flies,
 Ne'er with such force the swiftest arrow flew;
 'Tis as the snake late coil'd, who pours his length,
 And hurls at once his venom and his strength.
 (II, 117)

Even Haidée's most maternally protective gestures bear, in exact relation to their nurturing power, vampiric suggestions:

And then she stopp'd, and stood as if in awe,
 (For sleep is awful) and on tiptoe crept
 And wrapt him closer, lest the air, too raw,
 Should reach his blood, then o'er him still as death
 Bent, with hush'd lips, that drank his scarce-drawn breath.
 (II, 143)

These sinister aspects are reinforced by the two other instances of wordlessness in *Don Juan* with which the episode of Haidée and Juan is thematically connected. The first concerns the grotesque "misshapen pigmies, deaf and dumb" (V, 88), who guard Gulbeyaz's door:

Their duty was—for they were strong, and though
 They looked so little, did strong things at times—
 To ope this door, which they could really do,
 The hinges being as smooth as Rogers' rhymes;
 And now and then with tough strings of the bow,
 As is the custom of those eastern climes,
 To give some rebel Pacha a cravat;
 For mutes are generally used for that.
 They spoke by signs—that is, not spoke at all
 (V, 89-90)

Through the seemingly capricious comparison with the verse of Samuel Rogers, Byron links "smooth" writing to muteness and death, while the slant rhyme of "do" with "though" and "bow" makes clear that he himself rates lithe movement above euphony.⁶ The conversation between Juan and General Lascy during the battle of Ismail displays a second, but different, linking of speechlessness and death; this exchange, like that between Juan and Haidée, is marked by linguistic incompatibility:

Juan, to whom he spoke in German, knew
As much of German as of Sanscrit, and
In answer made an inclination to
The General who held him in command;

Short speeches pass between two men who speak
No common language; and besides, in time
Of war and taking towns, when many a shriek
Rings o'er the dialogue, and many a crime
Is perpetrated ere a word can break
Upon the ear, and sounds of horror chime
In like church bells, with sigh, howl, groan, yell, prayer,
There cannot be much conversation there.

(VIII, 57-58)

Byron's description of Juan's enthusiasm for battle recalls several features of the episode of Juan and Haidée and so brings the two episodes into relationship:

—I say not *the* first,
But of the first, our little friend Don Juan
Walked o'er the walls of Ismail, as if nurst
Amidst such scenes—though this was quite a new one
To him, and I should hope to *most*. The thirst
Of Glory, which so pierces through and through one,
Pervaded him—although a generous creature,
As warm in heart as feminine in feature.

And here he was—*who upon Woman's breast,*
Even from a child, felt like a child; howe'er
The man in all the rest might be confest,
To him it was Elysium to be there;
And he could even withstand that awkward test
Which Rousseau points out to the dubious fair,

"Observe your lover when he *leaves* your arms;"
But Juan never left them, while they had charms,

Unless compelled by fate, or wave, or wind,
Or near relations, who are much the same.

(VIII, 52-54; emphasis added in 53)

The end of this sequence reminds the reader of Juan's enforced departure from Julia as well as from Haidée, and the incongruity of echoing Juan's amorous exploits in the midst of carnage is Byron's means of reinforcing the fundamental kinship of the opposites. Juan is "nursed" in battle as he is nursed by Haidée; for Juan to be alone with Haidée "was another Eden" (IV, 10), and for him to be fighting "was Elysium" (VIII, 53). Byron announces "fierce loves and faithless wars" (VII, 8) as his subject, and the reversal of Spenser is possible because at one level love and war function identically. The link between the two actions is passion, etymologically the root of passivity. Juan's much-remarked passivity might be considered as the annulment of psychological distance, the consequence of an overwhelming presence. The thirst for glory "pervades" Juan, or, to cite the *OED* definitions, it diffuses and spreads through or into every part of him, it permeates and saturates him. Common to the intensity of war and love is an obliteration of detachment, and, as the introduction of the configuration both here and in the Haidée episode insinuates, the prototype of this experience, erasing the outlines of the self, is the fusion of infant and mother.

The fantasy of fusion is situated at two poles: it is a fantasy of origins, of mother and infant, and it returns as a fantasy of prospective conclusions in sexual union, or in war and death. These become prominent in Byron's portrayal of the lustful Empress Catherine whose troops destroy Ismail. Catherine's infatuation with Juan establishes the equivalence of the "oh!" of sexual joy and the "ah!" of misery:

Oh Catherine! (for of all interjections
To thee both *oh!* and *ah!* belong of right
In love and war) how odd are the connections
Of human thoughts, which jostle in their flight!
Just now *yours* were cut out in different sections:
First Ismail's capture caught your fancy quite;
Next of new knights, the fresh and glorious hatch;
And *thirdly*, he who brought you the dispatch!

(IX, 65)

Byron began the description of Catherine by expanding upon Horace's ascription of war to sexual passion: "nam fuit ante Helenam cunnus taeterrima belli / causa" (Satire I, 3:107-8). The *doubles entendres* of that passage are not more remarkable than its insistence that the gate of life and death is one:

Oh, thou "teterrima Causa" of all "belli"—
 Thou gate of Life and Death—thou nondescript!
 Whence is our exit and our entrance,—well I
 May pause in pondering how all Souls are dipt
 In thy perennial fountain:—how man fell, I
 Know not, since Knowledge saw her branches stript
 Of her first fruit, but how he falls and rises
 Since, thou has settled beyond all surmises.

Some call thee "the worst Cause of war," but I
 Maintain thou art the *best*: for after all
 From thee we come, to thee we go, and why
 To get at thee not batter down a wall,
 Or waste a world? Since no one can deny
 Thou dost replenish worlds both great and small:
 With, or without thee, all things at a stand
 Are, or would be, thou Sea of Life's dry Land!

Catherine, who was the grand Epitome
 Of that great Cause of war, or peace, or what
 You please (it causes all things which be,
 So you may take your choice of this or that)—
 (IX, 55-57)

Catherine, at once aggression and sexual passion, birth and death, source and end, is an image of woman as the terrifying and engulfing force who must be resisted. The light she retrospectively casts alters the impression made by Juan and Haidée. Their intimacy offers the sole example of complete communication in *Don Juan*, and Byron's treatment of it, in itself and as part of the series culminating in Catherine, suggests how the fantasy union presses toward a lethal silence. Catherine's Russian is as foreign to Juan as Haidée's Romaic, nor does Catherine speak directly in the poem. If Haidée and Juan transcend the usual barriers of the self, the poem also delineates the limitations inherent in their ecstasy. Insofar as their love is perfect it is finished, incapable of development; "for they were children still, /

And children still they should have been" (IV, 15). Haidée and Juan reach a state of atemporal happiness, but from the human perspective such freedom from time is stasis and death. The narrator observes as Haidée and Juan join their lives on the beach that she:

had nought to fear,
 Hope, care, nor love beyond, her heart beat *here*.
 And oh! that quickening of the heart, that beat!
 How much it costs us!

(II, 202-3)

What the illusion of the all-encompassing *here* costs is the past and still more the future, the change of the self in time.

The totality of Juan's and Haidée's passion is a fearful exclusion, but the countervailing claims of the life they sublimely reject are kept before the reader by the interventions of the narrator. He enables us to perceive that the fantasy of full speech and full understanding, with its attendant values of wholeness, presence, and atemporality, is not an isolated ideal: the thematic networks within which it exists in *Don Juan* expose its connection with silence and the death silence figures. Juan's passion annihilates him on the breast of Haidée, and an ultimate value of silence brings to an end of the role of the poet. The narrator and Juan, the poet and the character, are equally endangered: the Latin root of *infant* means "he who does not speak." The episode of Haidée and Juan is Byron's version of the *Ode on a Grecian Urn*: in Byron's meditation on his lovers, as in Keats's, the values of an encompassing symbolic, finally static imagination are set against the humbler commitments and narrative imaginings of the speaker himself. Both poets at last withdraw from the potent ideal they have imagined—the figures on the urn, Juan and Haidée—to face the imperfections of "breathing human passion." But whereas Keats throughout his career remains uncertain what language to put in place of the ennobling fictions of epic and romance that he repeatedly elaborated only to reject, Byron deploys a language that acknowledges and enacts the inescapable facts of absence and loss while affirming human vitality. "You have so many 'divine' poems," Byron vexedly exclaimed to his publisher, "is it nothing to have written a Human one?"⁷ The style of *Don Juan* is co-ordinate with the role of speech in the poem: it is best studied through the plot it represents.

II

Somewhat later in his essay on Byron, Eliot turns to "a long passage of self-portraiture from *Lara*" already singled out by Charles Du Bos in *Byron et la fatalité* and declares:

Du Bos deserves full credit for recognizing its importance; and Byron deserves all the credit that Du Bos gives him for having written it. This passage strikes me also as a masterpiece of self-analysis, but of a self that is largely a deliberate fabrication—a fabrication that is only completed in the actual writing of the lines. The reason why Byron understood this self so well, is that it is largely his own invention; and it is only the self that he invented that he understood perfectly.

Eliot here brilliantly specifies the self-creation Byron wrought in the Byronic hero, but the creation was not wholly uncontenting. If the Byronic hero was no simple transcription of Byron but a fabrication, it was nonetheless a fiction responsive to the fears and desires of its author. The role required of the Byronic hero is displayed in the relationship in *Don Juan* between Juan and Lara's descendant, Haidée's father, Lambro.

At first glance Lambro functions merely as a *senex* who intrudes upon the lovers and puts an end to their happiness. Insofar as Haidée's love imperils Juan, however, Lambro is also a savior who rescues Juan from an absorption he is too weak to withstand. Byron's two heroes are the opposing faces of a single figure (biographically, Juan embodies parts of Byron's childhood, and Lambro, returning to his shattered home, expresses aspects of Byron's response to his broken marriage).⁸ *Don Juan* presents in the temporal sequence of drama the continuum of psychological strategy: the stern warrior is the protagonist Byron generates to preserve the passive child from collapsing back into his mother. Alfonso's interruption of Juan's affair with Julia in Canto I operates as a similarly providential occurrence, because Juan risks being crushed by the older women for whom he has become the pawn: his mother, Inez, who contrived the affair for her own reasons, and Julia, suddenly transformed at the end of the canto from a sympathetically self-deceiving lover into a skillfully deceitful intriguer.⁹

As the defense Julia makes on the night the lovers are discovered (I, 145–47) reaches its climax, Byron's rhetoric rises toward

the sublime: "pale / She lay, her dark eyes flashing through their tears, / Like skies that rain and lighten" (I, 158). While the tide of Julia's apology breaks over Alfonso and his posse, Juan lies inert, hidden in the bed between Julia and her maid, "half-smother'd" (I, 165), in danger of "suffocation by that pretty pair" (I, 166). Here as elsewhere in *Don Juan*, the powerful speech of others is a menace to the hero.

The erotic triangle in both these episodes bears unmistakable oedipal overtones, and in both the function of the father figure as a principle of difference is apparent. By forcibly separating Juan from the mother whose love overwhelms him, Lambro, like Alfonso before him, makes possible Juan's independence. Moreover, even as the child models his identity on the father whom he cannot supplant, so Juan asserts himself in responding to this older rival. Attacked by Alfonso, Juan is driven to act: "His blood was up; though young, he was a Tartar, / And not at all disposed to prove a martyr" (I, 184). So, too, after his weakness and silence in Canto II and his position in Canto III as Haidée's consort, dependent on her wealth and status, Juan achieves a brief autonomy in his defiance of Lambro: "'Young man, your sword;' so Lambro once more said: / Juan replied, 'Not while this arm is free'" (IV, 40). This confrontation is virtually the first time Byron presents Juan in direct discourse, and his speech is the proof of his temporary self-sufficiency.¹⁰

When Lambro overcomes Juan and casts him forth he sets in renewed motion the oscillating and ambiguous journey whose curves shape *Don Juan*. In his passivity Juan falls into a repetitive series at each stage of which he is almost absorbed by a dominating woman—Julia, Haidée, the "imperious" Gulbeyaz, the devouring Catherine, the "full-blown" Fitz-Fulke, and Adeline, "the fair most fatal Juan ever met" (XIII, 12); circumstances free him from her, but only to propel him toward the subsequent lapse. The journey is ambiguous because this potentially deadly woman, mother and lover, is a figure of desire and because Juan's freedom consists only of this endless chain of disruptions and losses.

Two alternatives to this dilemma would seem to exist in *Don Juan*. One is typified by Lambro, whose isolated marauding life and coolly powerful manner show him as the avatar of the hero who fills Byron's earlier works. The absolute masculine will with which Lambro crushes Juan and re-establishes his priority, however, *Don Juan* exposes as no solution at all. His contest is depicted by the narrative

as more with Haidée herself than with her love object. Haidée's resistance to Lambro (IV, 44–45) is uncolored by the irony with which Byron tinges Juan's, and the extended pathetic description of her death (IV, 54–71) completes the eclipse of Juan's moment of bravery. In exerting his authority over Haidée, Lambro destroys the peace of his home: the desolate fate he brings on his island and himself (IV, 72) reveals that he too cannot exist apart from the mother figure. The second solution is embodied in the narrator, who is not so much in the story as above it, but whose words are shaped by the same exigencies as those his story witnesses.

Don Juan locates the origin of language in the Edenic harmony of mother and child: Haidée teaches Juan his "alpha beta" (II, 163). The narrator develops the myth from his own experience:

'Tis pleasing to be school'd in a strange tongue
By female lips and eyes—that is, I mean,
When both the teacher and the taught are young,
As was the case, at least, where I have been;
They smile so when one's right, and when one's wrong
They smile still more, and then there intervene
Pressure of hands, perhaps even a chaste kiss;—
I learn'd the little that I know by this
(II, 164)

Language here figures as innately sexualized: talk is desire. Byron underscores the connection in writing of Italy in *Beppo*:

I love the language, that soft bastard Latin,
Which melts like kisses from a female mouth,
And sounds as if it should be writ on satin,
With syllables which breathe of the sweet South,
And gentle liquids gliding all so pat in,
That not a single accent seems uncouth,
Like our own harsh, northern whistling, grunting guttural,
Which we're obliged to hiss, and spit, and sputter all.
I like the women too . . .
(44–45)¹¹

Yet the consummation of the desire for women must be resisted, deferred, because it would annihilate the poet's voice. As the puns on death and dying in Elizabethan poetry reveal, orgasm is "the little

death." It is also, as a canceled, unfinished stanza of *Don Juan* suggests, a phenomenon literally beyond language:

But Oh! that I were dead—for while alive—
Would that I neer had loved—Oh Woman—Woman—
<All that I writ> All that I write or wrote can neer revive
To paint a sole sensation—though quite common—
Of those in which the Body seemed to drive
My soul from out me at thy single summon
Expiring in the hope of sensation—¹²

Juan's career and the narrator's reflections thus place language between two equally dangerous termini, both of which are approached with desire yet self-protectively put off. At one extreme looms the power of erotic bliss to annul self and voice, at the other the similar threat of the fusion of infant with mother.

In this schema language exists as the unresolved middle between the states that would abrogate it. Moreover, this middle is a middle of repetitions, for the story *Don Juan* tells is of the loss of the desired object in the necessary separation from her, the yearning for her, and the fresh flight from her. Human existence, as the poem sees it, perpetually re-enacts the primary liberating catastrophe of separation. A repetition is also a re-petition, a re-asking: the repetitions of the poem set forth again and again the mournful questions "How did I become separate?" "Who am I?" Women as much as men exemplify the pattern: once begun, they too must re-enact their initiating gesture:

In her first passion woman loves her lover,
In all the others all she loves is love,
Which grows a habit she can ne'er get over,
And fits her loosely—like an easy glove,
As you may find, whene'er you like to prove her:
One man alone at first her heart can move;
She then prefers him in the plural number,
Not finding that the additions much encumber.
I know not if the fault be men's or theirs;
But one thing's pretty sure; a woman planted—
(Unless at once she plunge for life in prayers)—
After a decent time must be gallanted;
Although, no doubt, her first of love affairs

Is that to which her heart is wholly granted;
 Yet there are some, they say, who have had *none*,
 But those who have ne'er end with only *one*.
 (III, 3-4)

The last stanza illustrates the ever-varying interpenetrations of the story level and the narrative commentary in *Don Juan*, the two aspects Robert Escarpit has distinguished as "le temps fictif" and "le temps psychologique."¹³ This interpenetration breaks down any simple distinction between the story and its telling: there is only the modulation of language. The narrator's seemingly unmotivated generalization recalls Julia, banished to a convent a canto earlier, and her imposed constancy is the fate his fluid mode avoids. Juan vows eternal fidelity:

And oh! if e'er I should forget, I swear—
 But that's impossible, and cannot be—
 Sooner shall this blue ocean melt to air,
 Sooner shall earth resolve itself to sea,
 Than I resign thine image, Oh! my fair!
 Or think of anything excepting thee
 (II, 19)

This protestation is notoriously interrupted by retching, and happily, for Juan's romantic dedication to a single image is the willed counterpart to Julia's unwilling stasis. Juan can go forward because he forgets and because he is prevented from ever looking back. Similarly, Byron's refusal to linger over the episode of Juan and Haidée is a refusal of fixation, a refusal of the seductions of completion and finality. He writes their story not as a self-contained heroico-pathetic romance like his own earlier tales, but as part of an ongoing narrative whose rhythms undo the authority both of its dreams of bliss and of its conclusion. Byron repudiates his own temptation by the totalizing fantasy of Juan and Haidée (IV, 52-53, 74), passionate union or faithful death, to affirm the vital multiplicity of his own independent existence: not for him the diminishing pledge not to "think of anything else, excepting thee." In so doing he restores the intermediate space in which language (and hence his poem) can continue to exist. The space is empty, and marked by absence and lack, but it is an emptiness that invites filling by the imagination of the poet.

III

At the end of the first canto of *Don Juan* Byron threatens to promulgate a definitive set of "poetical commandments": "I'll call the work 'Longinus o'er a Bottle, / Or, Every Poet his own Aristotle'" (I, 204). In no respect does Byron differ more greatly from the rules than in his departure from the Aristotelean precept that a work of literature should have a beginning, a middle, and an end: *Don Juan* is all middle. The epic conventionally begins *in medias res*, but at the actual middle point of epic is a stabilizing device, a place about which the story can be organized: Odysseus narrating his adventures, Aeneas describing the fall of Troy to Dido, Raphael recounting the war in Heaven to Adam and Eve as an instructive example. In *Don Juan*, however, the condition of unfinishedness is not merely an aspect of the story, a temporary fiction exposed when the whole is complete, but one that attaches to the poet himself and influences the ongoing creation of his text.

The lines of *Don Juan* which the notion of indeterminacy perhaps first brings to mind are the melodramatic ones at the end of Canto XV:

Between two worlds life hovers like a star,
 Twixt night and morn, upon the horizon's verge:
 How little do we know that which we are!
 How less what we may be!
 (XV, 99)

This fundamental unsettledness speaks in other tones as well:

Of all the barbarous Middle Ages, that
 Which is the most barbarous is the middle age
 Of man; it is—I really scarce know what;
 But when we hover between fool and sage,
 And don't know justly what we would be at,—
 A period something like a printed page,
 Black letter upon foolscap, while our hair
 Grows grizzled, and we are not what we were,—
 Too old for youth,—too young, at thirty-five,
 To herd with boys, or hoard with good threescore,—

I wonder people should be left alive;
But since they are, that epoch is a bore

(XII, 1-2)

This reflection has been prepared for by the allusions to Dante in the previous cantos (e.g., X, 27), but Byron transforms the tradition that thirty-five, as the midpoint of man's allotted span of years, is a moment of decision; the era which in *The Divine Comedy* marks a crisis becomes in *Don Juan* a particularly anomalous stage in which meaningful choice seems impossible. The stanzas connect the uncertainties of middle life directly to the paradoxes of a text—"A period something like a printed page, / Black letter upon white foolscap"—and this odd conjunction recurs at the opening of the fifteenth canto, where Byron opposes the fertile indeterminacy of his text to the brevity of life and blankness of boredom:

Ah!—What should follow slips from my reflection:
Whatever follows ne'ertheless may be
As àpropos of hope or retrospection,
As though the lurking thought had follow'd free.
All present life is but an Interjection,
An "Oh!" or "Ah!" of joy or misery,
Or a "Ha! ha!" or "Bah!"—a yawn, or "Pooh!"
Of which perhaps the latter is most true.

But, more or less, the whole's a syncopé,
Or a singultus—emblems of Emotion,
The grand Antithesis to great Ennui

(XV, 1-2)

Here is another form of the paradox already noted. The contradiction recurs, for the "syncopé" of emotion which combats boredom itself abolishes consciousness: a syncope is also the loss of syllables and sounds in the middle of a word, hence also the emblem of the cutting-short of the poet's voice. The sexual overtones of the "Oh!" of "joy" and their equivalence to the "Ah!" of "misery" recall the dangerous themes previously developed in the portrait of Catherine (see IX, 65, quoted above).

The intermediate position *Don Juan* occupies thus appears as a positive *modus vivendi*. The repeated suspension of the story functions on two levels. Juan is caught between infantile unconsciousness

and sexual self-annihilation, and the poem's interruption of all his affairs corresponds to a refusal to allow passion its obliterating force. The narrator, yearning for both states, is also caught between his lost youth ("No more—no more—Oh! never more on me / The freshness of the heart can fall like dew" [I, 214]), and a future that must ultimately be death. His refusal to treat life according to the familiar pattern of crisis autobiography is a dissent from the notion of a fixed identity, of a life stiffening into shape once and for all, just as his refusal to precipitate a single final meaning is a mode of ensuring the inexhaustible vitality of his text. On both levels he is committed to filling the empty present, to staving off closure at any cost: "the past tense, / The dreary 'Fuimus' of all things human," which "must be declined" (XIII, 40) again links life and language by operating brilliantly in both contexts. The poem's insistence on its own indeterminacy and arbitrariness is its style of freedom: by rejecting the points of fullness—origin and end—Byron devotes himself to a discourse of absences, fragments, and losses which can yet keep the moment open.

The characteristic mode of this discourse is excursive, associative, metonymic, in contrast to the kind of metaphoric, symbolic concentration lauded by Eliot. As we have seen, Byron's resistance to such nodes of convergence is a matter both of substance and of technique: he denies the fatal power of certain meanings by continuing past them, and refuses permanence to identifications and identity. *Don Juan* is thus an anti-sublime poem, a poem that no sooner reaches a point of intensity than it undoes its own effects: the poem advances by negating the obsessions to which it returns, and then moving on, again and again.¹⁴ Insofar as Juan represents aspects of Byron's life, for example, they are admitted only by negation: Juan's crises are Juan's, never acknowledged as the narrator's. Byron, in contrast to Coleridge and Wordsworth, deliberately stays on the surface (as much as he can), and that is why, despite the extravagantly artificial manner of *Don Juan*, he appears as a realist.¹⁵

The narrative of *Don Juan* seems to be set free of the constraints of purposefulness:

I ne'er decide what I shall say, and this I call
Much too poetical. Men should know why
They write, and for what end; but, note or text,
I never know the word which will come next.

(IX, 41)

Don Juan abounds in this sort of confession, each a protest against a vision of complete authorial control. Byron renounces the goal of a fictitious (and factitious) unity, of a designed poem whose meaning would be thoroughly determinate, thoroughly subservient to an end. In so doing he reinstates the power of language to initiate an endless play of meanings, a range of possibilities unrestricted by the demands of an author obviously shaping, or invested in, his work. Compare, for example, the increasing pressure Wordsworth places on his narrative in the later books of *The Prelude* as he strives to make his lived experience accord with a scheme in which "All [is] gratulant, if rightly understood" (1805, XIII, 385).¹⁶ Byron's structureless habit of proceeding enables him to combat his anxieties by playing them out; it allows him to take on as his own some of the characteristics of the women whom he has placed as the potent other, desired and feared. His characterization of his poem is suggestively similar to that which he gives of women's letters:

The earth has nothing like a She epistle,
And hardly heaven—because it never ends.
I love the mystery of a female missal,
Which, like a creed, ne'er says all it intends,
But full of cunning as Ulysses' whistle,
When he allured poor Dolon . . .
(XIII, 105)

The digressive manner of *Don Juan* bespeaks a relaxation of will which permits ominous material to surface: instead of repression, whose indefinite force heightens the sublime, the associative chains of *Don Juan* work toward expression and neutralization.¹⁷ Symbolic and metaphoric poetry achieves its richness through compression and ambiguity; *Don Juan*, which, like women's letters, also "ne'er says all it intends," creates its vitality by extended meanings—inexhaustible sequences rather than pregnant points.

Eliot remarks that "if Byron had distilled his verse, there would have been nothing whatever left," but he is uninterested in the positive implications of his witticism. Byron's manner liberates his unconscious; it enables him to write a poem that can continually surprise its author. The long poem for which the Romantics strove, only to find their aspirations turn into an onerous task or poignant failure, is for Byron a spontaneous, ceaselessly proliferating process. Novelty, rather than inevitability, marks the growth of *Don Juan*. The result is

a poetry of surprising conjunctions and momentary delights. Consider, for example, the last quoted stanza. "The earth has nothing like a She epistle" sounds, apart from the oddity and false literariness of "She epistle," like a cliché, but the weakly descriptive phrase acquires force when a buried comparison is released in the second line: "And hardly heaven." This in turn becomes the starting point of a brief but consistent series of religious terms: "mystery," "missal," and "creed." If, as the drafts McGann prints of this stanza suggest, Byron was trapped into "whistle" by the need to rhyme with "epistle" and "missal," he resourcefully overcame the awkwardness with the allusion to Dolon and Ulysses. The unexpected change of context, from Christian to classical, is found elsewhere, notably in the clash between epic and Christian values which Byron insists that the reader confront with the Siege of Ismail. The poem repeatedly draws on epic tradition: Ismail is the modern counterpart of Troy, and Juan's wanderings are a skewed version of Odysseus's, as the echoes of the *Odyssey* in the Haidée episode make explicit.¹⁸ The linking of female letters to epic craftiness insinuates again the replacement in *Don Juan* of physical adventure by the greater psychological perilousness of "cruizing o'er the ocean woman" (XIII, 40). Moreover, the juxtaposition of religious terms and deception—"you had better / Take care what you reply to such a letter" ends the stanza—connects the seemingly chance allusion to the theme of hypocritical piety running throughout the poem: think of Donna Inez keeping the erotically ornamented "family Missal" for herself (I, 46). It also recalls the elaborate love letter written by the convent-bound Julia in Canto I. Byron drops the allusions at the close of the stanza, but not before they have provoked trains of association that send the reader over the whole poem. To read *Don Juan* is to encounter a succession of such tantalizing occasions, a succession that is not determined by any obvious logic, which is inconsecutive but not therefore inconsequential. The sequences begin with license but as they develop become meaningful; they are justified by what they unfold, and so rise above irrelevance. *Don Juan* is not so much "fortuitous," as Jerome McGann describes it, as it is "overdetermined"; it is because the "fortuitous" happenings can be situated in many overlapping configurations that they possess meaning.¹⁹ The reader may explore each occasion or not, as he chooses, before the flow of the narrator's talk carries him on to the next. The poem, then, is not precisely the "grand poetic riddle" (VIII, 139) the narrator once calls it. Riddling is part of its appeal,

but—to use a word that in its various forms occurs twenty-three times in the poem—it is rather a multiplicity of “puzzles.” *Don Juan* asks less for comprehensive interpretation than for participation.

This range of meaning is possible only when the radically private language of mother and child represented in the relationship of Juan and Haidée is broken by the separation of the child from the mother. The taboos of the Oedipus complex send the son forth on his metonymic career, seeking satisfaction not in his mother but in a surrogate for her, not striving to usurp his father in actuality but to become like him in another setting. The Oedipus complex is thus, as Freud insisted, the foundation of culture, because it is through the Oedipus complex that the child passes from the family to his broader culture. To do so is to pass from the private language of mother and child to the pre-existent terms of the culture, to dream nostalgically of that lost transparency of communication but to feel oneself doomed to speak in the always slightly misfitting words the culture provides; at this level the ever-present allusions of *Don Juan* are the emblem of the pre-emption of the narrator’s own voice by the babble of all who have preceded him. “Doomed” but also “enabled”: in *Don Juan* Byron exploits this dilemma instead of concealing it by a myth of symbolic plenitude.

To illustrate the strengths of Byron’s manner it may be useful to turn once more to Coleridge. Arguing in the *Biographia Literaria* against Wordsworth’s assertion that the *Lyrical Ballads* were written in “the real language of men,” Coleridge examines the fallacy on which the statement rests:

Every man’s languages varies, according to the extent of his knowledge, the activity of his faculties, and the depth or quickness of his feelings. Every man’s language has, first, its *individualities*; secondly, the common properties of the *class* to which he belongs; and thirdly, words and phrases of *universal* use. The language of Hooker, Bacon, Bishop Taylor, and Burke, differs from the common language of the learned class only by the superior number and novelty of the thoughts and relations which they had to convey. The language of Algernon Sidney differs not at all from that, which every well-educated gentleman would wish to write, and (with due allowances for the undeliberateness, and less connected train, of thinking natural and proper to conversation) such as he would wish to talk. Neither one or the other differ half as much from the general language of cul-

tivated society, as the language of Mr. Wordsworth’s homeliest composition differs from that of a common peasant. For “real” therefore we must substitute *ordinary*, or *lingua communis*. And this, we have proved, is no more to be found in the phraseology of low and rustic life than in that of any other class. . . . Anterior to cultivation the *lingua communis* of every country, as Dante has well observed, exists every where in parts, and no where as a whole.²⁰

In the *Preface* to the *Lyrical Ballads* Wordsworth had espoused a view of language as deriving directly from objects; Coleridge exposes the mistake of this “natural” view by maintaining that the “best part of human language . . . is derived from reflection on the acts of the mind itself,” and is “formed by a voluntary appropriation of fixed symbols to internal acts” (II, 54). He thus restores language to the distinctively human matrix in which it comes into being, and his formulation permits a recasting of Eliot’s critique. To say that Byron “added nothing to the language” is, in Coleridge’s more discriminating framework, to indicate the lack of any strongly idiosyncratic “individualities” in his style, but also to throw the emphasis on its “common properties” and “words and phrases of *universal* use.”

Byron cherishes the membership of *Don Juan* in the linguistic community to which it ineluctably belongs. The words he speaks have a history of their own, meanings they carry with them from their innumerable uses outside and prior to the poem. They are his only for an instant, loaned to him only briefly for his own purposes, before they return to their larger ongoing life. “If fallen in evil days on evil tongues,” Byron writes in the *Dedication* to *Don Juan*, “Milton appeal’d to the Avenger, Time,” and he continues: “Time, the Avenger, execrates his wrongs, / And makes the word ‘*Miltonic*’ mean ‘*sublime*’” (st. 10). Of more interest than Byron’s enlistment of Milton to lambaste Southey is his highlighting of the historical process by which words acquire meaning. The allusion to *Paradise Lost* is typical of *Don Juan*, a veritable echo chamber reverberating with phrases, imitations, parodies, and half-heard fragments from Homer, Virgil, Dante, Shakespeare, Milton, Pope, and scores of lesser figures. These shadowy presences augment Byron’s voice by locating him within his tradition. Even were it true, as Eliot charges, that Byron added nothing to the language, one might yet reply that through him a whole tradition is summoned and renovated. His contempt for the “insolent . . . wish,” as he saw it, of Southey, Coleridge, and

Wordsworth "to supersede all warblers here below" (*Dedication*, st. 3) is the corollary of his refusal to give superordinate value to the concept of originality which, given his consciousness of, and commitment to, the public continuities of language, could only seem to him an impoverishing mystification.

Allusion is only a special case of the way in which *Don Juan* continually unmask the illusion of its own autonomy in order to reap the benefits of acknowledging all that lies outside it. To choose words already invested with significance by their recognizability as literature—allusions—is in one respect to beg the central issue, because one of the fundamental questions raised by *Don Juan* concerns the conventional distinctions between the literary and the nonliterary. Macassar oil, Congreve's rockets, the brand names of ships' pumps, and all the other odd objects that find their way from daily life into *Don Juan*, on the one hand, and the highwaymen's slang, parodied jargons, and the mention of pox and like taboo subjects, on the other, constitute a challenge, less socially radical than Wordsworth's but kindred and no less far-reaching, to the notion of a specialized poetic diction. *Don Juan*, building on the comic precedents of the previous century,²¹ demonstrates more thoroughly than does Wordsworth's own work the contention of the *Preface to the Lyrical Ballads* "that there neither is, nor can be, any essential difference between the language of prose and metrical composition." The conversation poem that "affects not to be poetry," that undertaking about whose implications Coleridge remained uneasy, reaches a triumphant apogee in *Don Juan*.²²

Yet to speak, as in the title of Ronald Bottrall's essay, of "Byron and the Colloquial Tradition in English Poetry" is still somewhat to underestimate the ramifications of *Don Juan*, because the poem places itself in relation not only to a tradition *within* literary history but also to what would seem to stand outside it.²³ *Don Juan* could scarcely exist without the conventions Byron manipulates to make his meaning. If his "narration [of her genealogy] / May have suggested" (I, 59) that Julia will be the culmination, that is only because of the expectations of a pattern held by readers and writers within a given culture, their common literary competence. But Byron does not privilege these patterns, or, to put it more accurately, he privileges them by calling attention to their artificiality. To read *Don Juan* is to be made aware of the arbitrary agreements on which the making and maintaining of meaning rest. The relationship between flamboy-

ant literariness and ostentatious anti-, or non-, literariness is a differential one: each throws the other into relief, and both together direct our attention to the functioning of language, to the conventions by which it works and the domains into which historically it has divided itself. By unveiling the artificiality of his own procedures, Byron displays the fictiveness of language generally and the delicate and complex consensus through which it is preserved. The myriad slippages and maladjustments of that social network create the gaps in which his irony and satire operate.

Don Juan, to return to the quotation from Coleridge, can imitate "the indeliberateness, and less connected train, of thinking natural and proper to conversation" because it sees conversation as an exemplary act performed in language, hence different in degree only, not kind, from literature. Byron repeatedly announces a freedom guided only by his own intelligent curiosity: "So on I ramble, now and then narrating, / Now pondering" (IX, 42). By refusing to mark itself off absolutely from everyday life, by denying that it constitutes any sort of special experience, *Don Juan* gains the power to include its opposite within itself. "This narrative is not meant for narration," the narrator comments, "But a mere airy and fantastic basis, / To build up common things with common places" (XIV, 7). Byron had chosen as the motto for the first cantos of *Don Juan* "Difficile est propria communia dicere," a phrase he had translated in *Hints from Horace* as "Whate'er the critic says or poet sings / 'Tis no slight task to write on common things."²⁴ He thereby directly connects the difficulty of his art to the prosaic nature of his medium: because his words claim no magic in themselves and because he regularly turns us outward from his words to their uses elsewhere, Byron demonstrates with remarkable clarity the basis of poetry not in "individual words," as Eliot implies, but in the relationship they mutually establish. Though seeing that Byron must be quoted at length to make his effect, Eliot does not recognize the alternative conception of language his practice successfully illustrates: individually colorless counters are transformed into a compelling series by the unexpected but self-validating connections Byron fabricates between them. The aggregative and associative mode of the poem is a virtual paradigm of Coleridge's definitions of the Fancy, but the loss of the intensity Coleridge ascribed to the Imagination only is more than offset by the revelation of the power of language itself, both within and without this particular poem. Despite Byron's evident pride in his achievement, *Don Juan*

is almost less concerned with its own status as a unique *parole*, to use a Saussurean distinction, than it is with the overall function of *langue*.²⁵ *Don Juan* advances its claim to our interest not so much by conveying a meaning as by making its readers aware of the prior conventions on which any sharable meanings whatever depend.²⁶ Or, to remain with Coleridge, to read *Don Juan* is to be made aware of the characteristics of the "lingua communis [which] . . . exists every where in parts, and no where as a whole."

Despite such declarations as that of Wordsworth in the *Prospectus to The Recluse* that he would employ "words / Which speak of nothing more than what we are," the poetics of Romanticism habitually resorts to a language of intimation. If the period is one of Natural Supernaturalism, as a magisterial description would have it, that terminology itself betrays the very binary opposition the poetry seeks to mediate. In the *Preface to the Lyrical Ballads* Wordsworth sets forth his aims in a fashion that similarly maintains a distinction: he proposed, he says, "to choose incidents and situations from common life" and "to throw over them a certain coloring of imagination, whereby ordinary things should be presented to the mind in an unusual way." To see merely the object is the sign of Peter Bell's imaginative poverty: "A primrose by a river's brim / A yellow primrose was to him, / And it was nothing more" (II, 58-60). Though he insists on the "real," Wordsworth takes the object as instrumental to the transforming imagination. For Coleridge likewise, the symbol is defined by its embodiment of a realm beyond itself: it "is characterized by a translucence of the Special in the Individual, or of the General in the Especial or of the Universal in the General. Above all the translucence of the Eternal in and through the Temporal."²⁷ But in poetry there can be only words, and this illusion of depth and timelessness is a linguistic conjuring trick, a sleight of hand performed in language and inseparable from it. Byron's satiric and anti-sublime deconstructions strip away this illusion, insisting that we recognize that it is through our own language that we create the images that enchant us. Byron stresses not the "mystery" putatively residing in the object but the "doubt" caused by our own fallible mental activities. Paradoxically, it is by thus affirming the priority of our constructions that Byron returns us to the object world, but not as an empirical, objective given. To stretch Oscar Wilde, he too knows that it is only shallow people who do not judge by appearances: *Don Juan* shows that "the real" is the totality of our conventions, the agreed-upon

social vision of reality. Here, too, Coleridge provides a useful gloss. In a footnote to Chapter IV of the *Biographia Literaria*, he discusses the evolutionary process by which synonyms initially "used promiscuously" gradually distinguish themselves from each other: "When this distinction has been so naturalized and of such general currency, that the language itself does as it were *think* for us (like the sliding rule which is the mechanic's safe substitute for arithmetical knowledge) we then say, that it is evident to *common sense*" (I, 86). *Don Juan* continually lays bare the dangers of this "common sense" by correcting delusion, attacking cant, brutally reiterating the brutal "facts" of war and death, but simultaneously calling to our attention the sway of language and social bonds on which it in turn rests. "I write the world" (XV, 60), Byron can declare, because in writing he fully enters the transpersonal medium in which "the world" represents (and misrepresents) itself to itself.

Language in *Don Juan* thus points not to a supralinguistic reality (and hence is spared the agonizing doubt of language characteristic of a Shelley) but to a community of speakers and readers in the world their language builds up. In his influential *Romantic Image* Frank Kermode showed how "inextricably associated" in the Romantic-Symbolist tradition are the beliefs "in the image as a radiant truth out of space and time, and in the necessary isolation or estrangement of men who can perceive it."²⁸ These views may be found throughout *Childe Harold* and occasionally in *Don Juan*, but the nature of the latter poem qualifies the statements made within it. Even as he reduced the magical image, Byron restored the poet to his fellow men. Their common habitation in language binds together the two central figures of *Don Juan*: the narrator and the reader his fiction projects. The isolation Byron-as-Juan suffers is recuperated in the affiliation of Byron-as-narrator to his audience.

Though the web of words which is *Don Juan* reveals "the class to which [Byron] belongs" and the aristocratic Whig liberalism of his principles, the poem is remarkably unprescriptive of its reader. Assent, or the maneuvering of the reader into a point of view congruent with that of the author, is only one of the many and successive aims of the poem: the implicitly dramatized responses range from shock and anger to laughter at the author's image of himself, the narrator. The most generous aspect of *Don Juan* is the depth and variety of the experiences it acknowledges: the poem solicits the reader to bring with him all the works of literature he has read, all the political con-

trousers in which he is enmeshed, all the mundane objects through which he moves, all his conflicting passions as child, parent, and lover. The poem functions not so much centripetally, directing attention to its uniqueness (though it does so gleefully), as centrifugally, returning each reader to the complex of private and public experiences that make up his particular life.²⁹ The comprehensiveness of *Don Juan* and the much debated question of its status as epic are subjects that can be reformulated in terms of the inclusiveness of the response it figures but does not restrict.³⁰ There is no single perfect reading of *Don Juan*: the text enfranchises all that infinite series of readings, neither idiosyncratic nor stock, which the common cultural context of author and reader empowers. It earns this richness because it is shaped not by the concept of uniqueness but by the concept of difference. The narrator demonstrates that identity exists only through the roles furnished by his culture, and hence is something both his and not his. To avert a threatening alienation, an imprisonment in a role, he must continually repudiate the stances he adopts, defining himself not by fixed points but by the shifting pattern of his movement between them. At one level *Don Juan* is a prolonged elegy for the loss of the union of mother and child represented by Haidée and Juan, but the poem also deploys a tenacious and resilient resistance to the temptations of that fantasy. The attempt to master the conflict perpetuates it: the repetitions of *Don Juan* reiterate the dilemma, revealing Byron's continued subjection to, as well as his conquest of, his desires and fears. The place of language in *Don Juan* is inevitably ambiguous: the situations in which it might be superseded by transparency of communication Byron rejects as self-destructive, and so he remains trapped, his reliance on language the sign of all that he has lost. Language for Byron can never be what it briefly is for Haidée and Juan, private and innocent; every fresh employment of it further implicates him in the continuum of history and society. Caught in words, however, Byron makes the exposure and exploitation of their treacherous wealth serve his ends. By displaying the unavoidable inauthenticity of language, he liberates its fictiveness and sets in motion the self created only through it. He unmasks the illusion of full meaning dear to Eliot and the Symbolists, asking us to recognize that poetry can be made not only by saturating the individual word but also by ceaselessly uncovering the paradoxes hid in the use of ordinary words. The contradictions at the center of an existence defined by a language that is creative but inevitably con-

ventional, his but not his, a means of connection but a story of separation, a mode of recovery but an admission of loss, a fantasy of wholeness that is desired but resisted, Byron accepts and makes generate the elaborate play that enlarges the narrator and animates the words of *Don Juan*.

Notes

1. "Byron," *On Poetry and Poets* (1943; rpt. New York: Noonday, 1964), pp. 232-33.
2. I mean only to indicate that this accusation has not been rebutted, not to underrate the excellent studies of Byron's style. In addition to the works cited below, I would single out George M. Ridenour, *The Style of DON JUAN* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1960); M. K. Joseph, *Byron the Poet* (London: Gollancz, 1964); and W. W. Robson, "Byron as Poet," rpt. in his *Critical Essays* (London: Routledge, 1966), pp. 148-88. Two recent essays of relevance are Bernard Beatty's "Lord Byron: Poetry and Precedent," in *Literature of the Romantic Period 1750-1850*, ed. R. T. Davies and B. G. Beatty (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1976), pp. 114-34; and Francis Berry's "The Poet of *Childe Harold*," in *Byron: A Symposium*, ed. John D. Jump (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1975), pp. 35-51, which also takes up Eliot's critique.
3. *The Symbolic Imagination: Coleridge and the Romantic Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977).
4. All quotations of *Don Juan* are from *Lord Byron: The Complete Poetical Works*, ed. Jerome J. McGann, Vol. V (Oxford: Clarendon, 1986).
5. See on this subject Jean Laplanche, *Life and Death in Psychoanalysis*, tr. Jeffrey Mehlman (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976).
6. The variant for line 4 printed by McGann shows the original contrast to have been between the quiet of the doors and the vitality of Byron's own speaking voice: "The hinges being <oiled / oilier> much smoother than these rhymes."
7. Letter of April 6, 1819, *Byron's Letters and Journals*, ed. Leslie A. Marchand, Vol. VI (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1976), p. 105.
8. Lambro, usually said to be modeled on Ali Pacha, had autobiographical roots, too. See III, 51-52.
9. To the degree that Inez connives at the affair she and Julia converge. Juan's affair with Julia thereby seems a displacement of maternal incest: Alfonso's intervention is thus punishment for the forbidden act and rescue from a dangerous absorption.
10. Juan first speaks in the poem during the second canto, when his farewell is quickly cut short by seasickness (II, 18-20), and when he bars the panicky crew from the grog (II, 36), where Byron takes his speech directly from a scene in his sources. He is unheard during the subsequent 180 stanzas of Canto II and throughout Canto III.

11. Quotation from *Lord Byron: The Complete Poetical Works*, ed. Jerome J. McGann, Vol. IV (Oxford: Clarendon, 1986).

12. Printed in *Don Juan*, ed. McGann, p. 660.

13. *Lord Byron: Un tempérament littéraire*, 2 vols. (Paris: Cercle du Livre, 1957), II, 58.

14. It could not, of course, repeatedly undo the sublime if it did not repeatedly strive for it. This movement is akin to that described as "desublimating" by Thomas Weiskel, *The Romantic Sublime* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976). I have not used the term because the relation between "the sublime" and "sublimation" within Weiskel's otherwise stimulating argument remains problematic.

15. Roman Jakobson proposed the relationships of metaphor to symbolism and metonymy to realism in section 5, "The Metaphoric and Metonymic Poles," of his essay, "Two Aspects of Language and Two Types of Aphasic Disturbances," in Roman Jakobson and Morris Halle, *Fundamentals of Language*, 2d rev. ed. (The Hague: Mouton, 1971), pp. 69-96.

16. The notion of free play is taken from Jacques Derrida; see, for example, "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," *The Structuralist Controversy*, ed. Richard Macksey and Eugenio Donato (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1972), pp. 247-65.

17. The relationship of repression and the sublime is a theme of the criticism of Harold Bloom; see *A Map of Misreading* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975).

18. For example, III, 23, on Lambro's arrival, "An honest gentleman at his return / May not have the good fortune of Ulysses." The allusions are studied in my *Byron and His Fictions* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1978).

19. "Fortuitous" is a word McGann often uses to describe the growth of the poem in *DON JUAN in Context* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976). The accretive chains, however, are often generated by the anxieties aroused by certain recurrent subjects, such as women. The motives for the resulting digressions and evasions are partly concealed from Byron himself. These gaps and switches suggest that the meaning of *Don Juan*, to use a Lacanian phrase, is not simply one that Byron speaks but one that speaks him. It is precisely such "arbitrary" links as the one the rhyme forces between epic craft and female cunning that show the connection and inscription of personal and cultural themes in the unconscious. *Don Juan* seems to me a little less rationally experimental, less scientifically instructive and more anarchic (as well as obsessive), than it appears in McGann's presentation. *DON JUAN in Context* is nonetheless the most penetrating discussion yet of the mode of the poem; that, starting from such different premises, my conclusions should often coincide with McGann's I wishfully interpret as corroboration of their general rightness.

20. James Engell and W. Jackson Bate, eds., *Biographia Literaria*, 2 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), II, 55-56. Subsequent page references are incorporated in the text.

21. A. B. England has explored Byron's affinities with Butler and Swift

as well as the more commonly cited Pope and Fielding in *Byron's DON JUAN and Eighteenth-Century Literature* (Lewisburg, Penn.: Bucknell University Press, 1975).

22. See Max F. Schulz, *The Poetic Voices of Coleridge* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1964), pp. 81, 179.

23. *Criterion* 18 (1939): 204-24, and rpt. in M. H. Abrams, ed., *English Romantic Poets: Modern Essays in Criticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1960), pp. 210-27. Bottrall answers Eliot by arguing that Byron's "interest was rather in the fundamental rhythmic movement of speech than in the word."

24. Given in the variorum *Don Juan*, IV, 4.

25. Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, ed. Charles Bally, Albert Sechehaye, and Albert Riedlinger, tr. Wade Baskin (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966), Chapter 3.

26. In an essay of that title, Roland Barthes locates "the structuralist activity" in the reconstruction of an object in order to show its rules of functioning (tr. Richard Howard, *Partisan Review* 34 [1967]: 82-88). The structuralist critic Barthes describes focuses not on the content of meanings but on the act of producing them: he "recreates the course taken by meaning, he need not designate it." A criticism based on these principles reveals virtues in Byron ignored by the still-prevailing organicist or apocalyptic camps.

27. "The Statesman's Manual," *Lay Sermons*, ed. R. J. White, *Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, Vol. VI (London: Routledge, 1972), p. 30.

28. Frank Kermode, *Romantic Image* (1957; rpt. New York: Random House-Vintage, 1964), p. 2.

29. Ruskin commented long ago on a conjunction between the proselike directness in Byron and the suggestive freedom he grants the reader. Observing that "He is the best poet who can by the fewest words touch the greatest number of secret chords of thought in the reader's own mind, and set them to work in their own way," Ruskin chooses as specific example a couplet from *The Siege of Corinth*:

"Tis midnight: on the mountains brown—The Pale round moon shines deeply down." Now the first eleven words are not poetry, except by their measure and preparation for rhyme; they are simple information, which might just as well have been given in prose—it is prose, in fact: It is twelve o'clock—the moon is pale—it is round—it is shining on brown mountains. Any fool, who had seen it, could tell us that. At last comes the poetry, in the single epithet, "deeply." Had he said "softly" or "brightly" it would still have been simple information. But of all the readers of that couplet, probably not two received exactly the same impression from the "deeply," and yet received more from that than from all the rest together. Some will refer the expression to the fall of the steep beams, and plunge down with them from rock to rock into the woody darkness of the cloven ravines, down to the undermost pool of eddying black water, whose echo is lost among their leafage; others will think of the deep *feeling* of the pure light, of the thousand memories and emotions that rise out of their

rest, and are seen white and cold in its rays. This is the reason of the power of the single epithet, and this is its *mystery*.

Quoted in *Byron: The Critical Heritage*, ed. Andrew Rutherford (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1970), pp. 426–27.

30. See, for example, Donald Reiman's forceful brief essay, "Don Juan in Epic Context," *Studies in Romanticism* 16 (1977): 587–94.