

DON JUAN

By Lord Byron

[Note: Stanza and Line numbers have not been included.]

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DEDICATION

Bob Southey! You're a poet, poet laureate,
And representative of all the race.
Although 'tis true that you turned out a Tory at
Last, yours has lately been a common case.
And now my epic renegade, what are ye at
With all the lakers, in and out of place?
A nest of tuneful persons, to my eye
Like four and twenty blackbirds in a pye,

Which pye being opened they began to sing'
(This old song and new simile holds good),
'A dainty dish to set before the King'
Or Regent, who admires such kind of food.

And Coleridge too has lately taken wing,
But like a hawk encumbered with his hood,
Explaining metaphysics to the nation.
I wish he would explain his explanation.

You, Bob, are rather insolent, you know,
At being disappointed in your wish
To supersede all warblers here below,
And be the only blackbird in the dish.
And then you overstrain yourself, or so,
And tumble downward like the flying fish
Gasping on deck, because you soar too high,
Bob, And fall for lack of moisture quite a dry Bob.

And Wordsworth in a rather long Excursion
(I think the quarto holds five hundred pages)
Has given a sample from the vasty version
Of his new system to perplex the sages.
'Tis poetry, at least by his assertion,
And may appear so when the Dog Star rages,
And he who understands it would be able
To add a story to the tower of Babel.

You gentlemen, by dint of long seclusion
From better company, have kept your own
At Keswick, and through still continued fusion
Of one another's minds at last have grown
To deem, as a most logical conclusion,
That poesy has wreaths for you alone.

There is a narrowness in such a notion,
Which makes me wish you'd change your lakes for
ocean.

I would not imitate the petty thought,
Nor coin my self-love to so base a vice,
For all the glory your conversion brought,
Since gold alone should not have been its price.
You have your salary; was't for that you wrought?
And Wordsworth has his place in the Excise.
You're shabby fellows—true—but poets still
And duly seated on the immortal hill.

Your bays may hide the baldness of your brows,
Perhaps some virtuous blushes; let them go.
To you I envy neither fruit nor boughs,
And for the fame you would engross below,
The field is universal and allows
Scope to all such as feel the inherent glow.
Scott, Rogers, Campbell, Moore, and Crabbe will try
'Gainst you the question with posterity.

For me, who, wandering with pedestrian Muses,
Contend not with you on the winged' steed,
I wish your fate may yield ye, when she chooses,
The fame you envy and the skill you need.
And recollect a poet nothing loses
In giving to his brethren their full meed
Of merit, and complaint of present days

Is not the certain path to future praise.

He that reserves his laurels for posterity
(Who does not often claim the bright reversion)
Has generally no great crop to spare it, he
Being only injured by his own assertion.
And although here and there some glorious rarity
Arise like Titan from the sea's immersion,
The major part of such appellants go
To—God knows where—for no one else can know.

If fallen in evil days on evil tongues,
Milton appealed to the avenger, Time,
If Time, the avenger, execrates his wrongs
And makes the word Miltonic mean sublime,
He deigned not to belie his soul in songs,
Nor turn his very talent to a crime.
He did not loathe the sire to laud the son,
But closed the tyrant-hater he begun.

Think'st thou, could he, the blind old man, arise
Like Samuel from the grave to freeze once more
The blood of monarchs with his prophecies,
Or be alive again—again all hoar
With time and trials, and those helpless eyes
And heartless daughters—worn and pale and poor,
Would he adore a sultan? He obey
The intellectual eunuch Castlereagh?

Cold-blooded, smooth-faced, placid miscreant!
Dabbling its sleek young hands in Erin's gore,
And thus for wider carnage taught to pant,
Transferred to gorge upon a sister shore,
The vulgarest tool that tyranny could want,
With just enough of talent and no more,
To lengthen fetters by another fixed
And offer poison long already mixed.

An orator of such set trash of phrase,
Ineffably, legitimately vile,
That even its grossest flatterers dare not praise,
Nor foes—all nations—condescend to smile.
Not even a sprightly blunder's spark can blaze
From that Ixion grindstone's ceaseless toil,
That turns and turns to give the world a notion
Of endless torments and perpetual motion.

A bungler even in its disgusting trade,
And botching, patching, leaving still behind
Something of which its masters are afraid,
States to be curbed and thoughts to be confined,
Conspiracy or congress to be made,
Cobbling at manacles for all mankind,
A tinkering slave-maker, who mends old chains,
With God and man's abhorrence for its gains.

If we may judge of matter by the mind,
Emasculated to the marrow, it

Hath but two objects, how to serve and bind,
Deeming the chain it wears even men may fit,
Eutropius of its many masters, blind
To worth as freedom, wisdom as to wit,
Fearless, because no feeling dwells in ice;
Its very courage stagnates to a vice.

Where shall I turn me not to view its bonds,
For I will never feel them. Italy,
Thy late reviving Roman soul desponds
Beneath the lie this state-thing breathed o'er thee.
Thy clanking chain and Erin's yet green wounds
Have voices, tongues to cry aloud for me.
Europe has slaves, allies, kings, armies still,
And Southey lives to sing them very ill.

Meantime, Sir Laureate, I proceed to dedicate
In honest simple verse this song to you.
And if in flattering strains I do not predicate,
'Tis that I still retain my buff and blue;
My politics as yet are all to educate.
Apostasy's so fashionable too,
To keep one creed's a task grown quite
Herculean Is it not so, my Tory, ultra-Julian?

CANTO THE FIRST

I want a hero: an uncommon want,
When every year and month sends forth a new one,
Till, after cloying the gazettes with cant,
The age discovers he is not the true one;
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,
Sent to the devil somewhat ere his time.

Vernon, the butcher Cumberland, Wolfe, Hawke,
Prince Ferdinand, Granby, Burgoyne, Keppel,
Howe,

Evil and good, have had their tithe of talk,
And fill'd their sign posts then, like Wellesley now;
Each in their turn like Banquo's monarchs stalk,
Followers of fame, 'nine farrow' of that sow:
France, too, had Buonaparte and Dumourier
Recorded in the Moniteur and Courier.

Barnave, Brissot, Condorcet, Mirabeau,
Petion, Cloutz, Danton, Marat, La Fayette,
Were French, and famous people, as we know:
And there were others, scarce forgotten yet,
Joubert, Hoche, Marceau, Lannes, Desaix, Moreau,
With many of the military set,
Exceedingly remarkable at times,
But not at all adapted to my rhymes.

Nelson was once Britannia's god of war,

And still should be so, but the tide is turn'd;
There 's no more to be said of Trafalgar,
'T is with our hero quietly inurn'd;
Because the army 's grown more popular,
At which the naval people are concern'd;
Besides, the prince is all for the land-service,
Forgetting Duncan, Nelson, Howe, and Jervis.

Brave men were living before Agamemnon
And since, exceeding valorous and sage,
A good deal like him too, though quite the same
none;

But then they shone not on the poet's page,
And so have been forgotten:—I condemn none,
But can't find any in the present age
Fit for my poem (that is, for my new one);
So, as I said, I 'll take my friend Don Juan.

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

That is the usual method, but not mine—
My way is to begin with the beginning;

The regularity of my design
Forbids all wandering as the worst of sinning,
And therefore I shall open with a line
(Although it cost me half an hour in spinning)
Narrating somewhat of Don Juan's father,
And also of his mother, if you 'd rather.

In Seville was he born, a pleasant city,
Famous for oranges and women—he
Who has not seen it will be much to pity,
So says the proverb—and I quite agree;
Of all the Spanish towns is none more pretty,
Cadiz perhaps—but that you soon may see;
Don Juan's parents lived beside the river,
A noble stream, and call'd the Guadalquivir.

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

His mother was a learned lady, famed
For every branch of every science known
In every Christian language ever named,
With virtues 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.

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

Her favourite science was the mathematical,
Her noblest virtue was her magnanimity,
Her wit (she sometimes tried at wit) was Attic 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,
Her evening silk, or, in the summer, muslin,
And other stuffs, with which I won't stay puzzling.

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,
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.

She liked the English and the Hebrew tongue,
And said there was analogy between 'em;
She proved it somehow out of sacred song,
But I must leave the proofs to those who 've seen
'em;

But this I heard her say, and can't be wrong
And all may think which way their judgments lean
'em,

"T is strange—the Hebrew noun which means "I
am,"

The English always use to govern d--n.'

Some women use their tongues—she look'd a lecture,
Each eye a sermon, and her brow a homily,
An all-in-all sufficient self-director,
Like the lamented late Sir Samuel Romilly,
The Law's expounder, and the State's corrector,
Whose suicide was almost an anomaly—
One sad example more, that 'All is vanity'
(The jury brought their verdict in 'Insanity').

In short, she was a walking calculation,
Miss Edgeworth's novels stepping from their
covers,

Or Mrs. Trimmer's books on education,
Or 'Coelebs' Wife' set out in quest of lovers,

Morality's prim personification,
In which not Envy's self a flaw discovers;
To others' share let 'female errors fall,'
For she had not even one—the worst of all.

O! she was perfect past all parallel—
Of any modern female saint's comparison;
So far above the cunning powers of hell,
Her guardian angel had given up his garrison;
Even her minutest motions went as well
As those of the best time-piece made by Harrison:
In virtues nothing earthly could surpass her,
Save thine 'incomparable oil,' Macassar!

Perfect she was, but as perfection is
Insidious in this naughty world of ours,
Where our first parents never learn'd to kiss
Till they were exiled from their earlier bowers,
Where all was peace, and innocence, and bliss
(I wonder how they got through the twelve hours),
Don Jose, like a lineal son of Eve,
Went plucking various fruit without her leave.

He was a mortal of the careless kind,
With no great love for learning, or the learn'd,
Who chose to go where'er he had a mind,
And never dream'd his lady was concern'd;
The world, as usual, wickedly inclined
To see a kingdom or a house o'erturn'd,

Whisper'd he had a mistress, some said two—
But for domestic quarrels one will do.

Now Donna Inez had, with all her merit,
A great opinion of her own good qualities;
Neglect, indeed, requires a saint to bear it,
And such, indeed, she was in her moralities;
But then she had a devil of a spirit,
And sometimes mix'd up fancies with realities,
And let few opportunities escape
Of getting her liege lord into a scrape.

This was an easy matter with a man
Oft in the wrong, and never on his guard;
And even the wisest, do the best they can,
Have moments, hours, and days, so unprepared,
That you might 'brain them with their lady's fan;
And sometimes ladies hit exceeding hard,
And fans turn into falchions in fair hands,
And why and wherefore no one understands.

'T is pity learned virgins ever wed
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,
But—Oh! ye lords of ladies intellectual,
Inform us truly, have they not hen-peck'd you all?

Don Jose and his lady quarrell'd—why,
Not any of the many could divine,
Though several thousand people chose to try,
'T was surely no concern of theirs nor mine;
I loathe that low vice—curiosity;
But if there 's anything in which I shine,
'T is in arranging all my friends' affairs,
Not having of my own domestic cares.

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

A little curly-headed, good-for-nothing,
And mischief-making monkey from his birth;
His parents ne'er agreed except in doting
Upon the most unquiet imp on earth;
Instead of quarrelling, had they been but both in
Their senses, they 'd have sent young master forth
To school, or had him soundly whipp'd at home,
To teach him manners for the time to come.

Don Jose 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,
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.

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

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

And then this best and weakest woman bore
With such serenity her husband's woes,
Just as the Spartan ladies did of yore,

Who saw their spouses kill'd, and nobly chose
Never to say a word about them more—
Calmly she heard each calumny that rose,
And saw his agonies with such sublimity,
That all the world exclaim'd, 'What magnanimity!'

No doubt this patience, when the world is damning
us,

Is philosophic in our former friends;
'T is also pleasant to be deem'd magnanimous,
The more so in obtaining our own ends;
And what the lawyers call a 'malus animus'
Conduct like this by no means comprehends;
Revenge in person 's certainly no virtue,
But then 't is not my fault, if others hurt you.

And if your quarrels should rip up old stories,
And help them with a lie or two additional,
I 'm not to blame, as you well know—no more is
Any one else—they were become traditional;
Besides, their resurrection aids our glories
By contrast, which is what we just were wishing all:
And science profits by this resurrection—
Dead scandals form good subjects for dissection.

Their friends had tried at reconciliation,
Then their relations, who made matters worse.
('T were hard to tell upon a like occasion
To whom it may be best to have recourse—

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