

W. W. NORTON & COMPANY, INC.
Also Publishes

- ENGLISH RENAISSANCE DRAMA: A NORTON ANTHOLOGY
edited by David Bevington et al.
- THE NORTON ANTHOLOGY OF AFRICAN AMERICAN LITERATURE
edited by Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Nellie Y. McKay et al.
- THE NORTON ANTHOLOGY OF AMERICAN LITERATURE
edited by Nina Baym et al.
- THE NORTON ANTHOLOGY OF CHILDREN'S LITERATURE
edited by Jack Zipes et al.
- THE NORTON ANTHOLOGY OF ENGLISH LITERATURE
edited by M. H. Abrams and Stephen Greenblatt et al.
- THE NORTON ANTHOLOGY OF LITERATURE BY WOMEN
edited by Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar
- THE NORTON ANTHOLOGY OF MODERN AND CONTEMPORARY POETRY
edited by Jahan Ramazani, Richard Ellmann, and Robert O'Clair
- THE NORTON ANTHOLOGY OF POETRY
edited by Margaret Ferguson, Mary Jo Salter, and Jon Stallworthy
- THE NORTON ANTHOLOGY OF SHORT FICTION
edited by R. V. Cassill and Richard Bausch
- THE NORTON ANTHOLOGY OF THEORY AND CRITICISM
edited by Vincent B. Leitch et al.
- THE NORTON ANTHOLOGY OF WORLD LITERATURE
edited by Sarah Lawall et al.
- THE NORTON FACSIMILE OF THE FIRST FOLIO OF SHAKESPEARE
prepared by Charlton Hinman
- THE NORTON INTRODUCTION TO LITERATURE
edited by Alison Booth, J. Paul Hunter, and Kelly J. Mays
- THE NORTON INTRODUCTION TO THE SHORT NOVEL
edited by Jerome Beaty
- THE NORTON READER
edited by Linda H. Peterson and John C. Brereton
- THE NORTON SAMPLER
edited by Thomas Cooley
- THE NORTON SHAKESPEARE, BASED ON THE OXFORD EDITION
edited by Stephen Greenblatt et al.

For a complete list of Norton Critical Editions, visit
wnorton.com/college/English/nce_home.htm

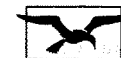
A NORTON CRITICAL EDITION

BYRON'S POETRY
AND PROSE



AUTHORITATIVE TEXTS
CRITICISM

Selected and Edited by
ALICE LEVINE
HOFSTRA UNIVERSITY



W • W • NORTON & COMPANY • New York • London

letter, that a different (and better) conclusion is indicated. Byron said he had "not quite fixed whether to make him end in Hell—or in an unhappy marriage,—not knowing which would be the severest.—The Spanish tradition says Hell—but it is probably only an Allegory of the other state."³ I think Byron would have married Juan to Aurora and that they would have lived unhappily ever after—in the hell of an unhappy marriage.

Narcissus has been punished. The love affair with himself that began with *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* has led to his jilting in *Don Juan*, and as in mythology he remains as a beautiful flower, the greatest poem of the nineteenth century. Byron spent his professional life trying to learn the truth about himself and trying to tell it. Hobhouse persuaded him to destroy the beginnings of a journal in Albania in 1809, and he aided and abetted the destruction of the final one in May 1824. *Don Juan*, yet another attempt, traces the growth not of the poet's mind, à la Wordsworth, but of the poet's psyche. In *The Prelude* we know that our Redeemer liveth and that his name is Wordsworth, who tells us in thirteen or fourteen books how he achieved that awesome responsibility. The point is that we can all be like Wordsworth. Byron, in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, hyped himself into believing that he had redeemed himself only, but in *Don Juan* he took back even that. Wordsworth's poem is exemplary, Byron's cautionary. *Don Juan* is his memoir in verse, and it would be difficult to conceive of any more direct and forceful contradiction of the idea that "no biographical evidence can change or influence critical evaluation."

JAMES CHANDLER

"Man fell with apples": The Moral Mechanics of *Don Juan*[†]

Epics explain. That much is clear from the narrative convention that has most consistently distinguished the genre: the beginning *in medias res*. The point holds no less obviously for modernized epics, such as *Paradise Lost* and *The Prelude*, than for ancient ones. And it holds no less obviously for *Don Juan* than for these other English examples, in spite of the fact that Byron invokes the marking convention only to insist that he will have no use for it:

Most epic poets plunge in "medias res,"
(Horace makes this the heroic turnpike road)
And then your hero tells, when'er you please,
What went before—by way of episode. . . .
(I:6)

3. LJ 8: 78.

† From *Rereading Byron: Essays Selected from Hofstra University's Byron Bicentennial Conference*, ed. Alice Levine and Robert N. Keane. Copyright © 1993 Hofstra University. Reprinted by permission of Garland Publishing, Inc. An expanded version of this essay appears as chapter 6, "Byron's Causes: The Moral Mechanics of *Don Juan*," in *England in 1819* (University of Chicago Press, 1998).

That, says Byron, "is the usual method, but not mine— / My way is to begin with the beginning" (1:7). Commenting on this passage in his chapter on "Form" in *Don Juan in Context*—perhaps the most interesting chapter in the best book on the subject—Jerome McGann concludes that Byron's declaration should be taken as a disclaimer of the poem's interest in explanation:

... epic poets continually begin *in medias res* because such a narrative procedure establishes the need for an explicatory context. The convention of *in medias res* puts the reader in suspense, not about what will happen, but about how and why the present state of affairs came to be. *In medias res* enforces the desire to understand events in terms of an orderliness that springs from causes and natural consequences. To begin *in medias res* is to ensure that the events of the epic will be set only in the context of what is relevant to them. It is a probability device.

Don Juan is different. It explicitly does not begin *in medias res* and its arrangement scarcely covets probability.¹

Don Juan is different—McGann is certainly right about that—and perhaps if we look only at this issue of ordonnance, we can see the poem as uncovertous of "probability." But other indicators suggest that the relation of the poem to explanatory ambition is at the very least one of deep ambivalence, for it sometimes seems to verge on downright obsession.

If we look instead to diction, for example, we can actually go some way toward quantifying the poem's preoccupation with the topic. The conjunction "because" occurs one hundred and fourteen times in *Don Juan*, more than four times the number of its appearances in all of Wordsworth's poetical works. The word "cause" occurs fifty-six times in the poem, a figure that puts it near the top of the poem's most frequently-appearing nouns and verbs—higher, for example than such staples of Byronic diction as *passion*, *war*, *word*, *words*, *age*, *sun*, *light*, and *water*. *Cause* also happens to appear exactly the same number of times as *women*, a coincidence one might discount as meaningless if it were not that gender categories do so much explanatory work in the poem. There are about a dozen instances of some form of the word "explain" itself, some of which directly thematize explanation as an issue.

Byron wrote to his publisher, John Murray, in 1819 that he had no other intention in the poem than "to giggle and make giggle," and herein lies another way to recognize *Don Juan's* strong interest in explanation (6:208). For the poem's great faculty of pleasure, its celebrated wit, exercises itself most flamboyantly in the making of explanatory jokes. These jokes are not all of the same kind; and they are not all equally funny or pleasurable. There is a range of them, for example, that are not particularly funny or pleasurable because they parody what is itself already a failed effort at explanatory humor in Wordsworth's "The Thorn," the poem invoked as the mock narrative framework for *Don Juan* in Byron's Preface. Wordsworth's jokes appear paradigmatically in response to the whys and wherefores of the poem's internal balladic dialogue:

"Now wherefore thus, by day and night,
In rain, in tempest, and in snow,
Thus to the dreary mountain-top
Does this poor woman go?
And why sits she beside the thorn
When the blue day-light's in the sky,
Or when the whirlwind's on the hill,
Or frost air is keen and still,
And wherefore does she cry?—
Oh wherefore? wherefore? tell me why
Does she repeat that doleful cry?"
I cannot tell; I wish I could;
For the true reason no one knows.

(78–90)²

The old sea-captain who narrates the poem, and who is the object of Byron's first lampoon in *Don Juan*, offers several such disavowals of his explanatory capacity: "I'll give you the best help I can . . ." (111), "No more I know; I wish I did. . . ." (155). Yet while these comments may be cast in the form of disclaimers of his explanatory authority, their effect is to call attention to the narrator's explanatory obsessions. Indeed, he often succumbs to the temptation to offer surmises in spite of protests about his incapacities. It is in any case clear from Wordsworth's famous note to "The Thorn," a text that comes in for particular ridicule in Byron's Preface, that Wordsworth attempted to frame the poem as an investigation of how causal categories function in what anthropologists such as Lévy-Bruhl came to call the "primitive mentality."³

Byron appropriates Wordsworth's disclamatory idiom pervasively in *Don Juan*. When Don Alfonso invades Julia's bedroom during her liaison with Juan, the narrator says he is at a loss to account for it: "I can't tell how or why or what suspicion / Could enter Don Alfonso's head" (1:139). Introducing Juan's premonition of disaster before Lambro's return in Canto 4, which the narrator will go on to describe as "feelings causeless, or at least abstruse," he says:

I know not why, but in that hour to-night
Even as they gazed, a sudden tremor came
And swept, as 'twere across their hearts delight . . .
(4:21)

Of Dudù's blush in Canto 6, the narrator says: "I can't tell why she blushed, nor can expound / The mystery of this rupture of their rest" (6:85). Of the disappearance of Juan's infantry corps during the siege of Ismail, he says:

2. This and subsequent citations from 1800 text of the poem as republished in Wordsworth, *Lyrical Ballads*, ed. R.L. Brett and A. R. Jones (Edinburgh: T. and A. Constable, 1963).

3. Lucian Lévy-Bruhl, *Primitive Mentality*, trans. Lilian A. Clare (London: Allen & Unwin, 1923); the question of causation is perhaps the central one in Lévy-Bruhl's famous study. For a good discussion of how proto-anthropological discourses shape Wordsworth's major poetry, see Alan Bewell, *Wordsworth and the Enlightenment* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988).

1. Jerome McGann, *Don Juan in Context* (Chicago, 1976), p. 100.

... the gods know how. I can't
Account for everything which may look bad
In history . . .

(8:31)

And of Juan's sickness during his "service" for Catherine in Canto 10:

Perhaps—but sans perhaps, we need not seek
For causes young or old. . . .
I don't know how it was, but he grew sick.

(10:38–39)

The Wordsworthian *occupatio* remains in play even into the English cantos, as one can see in the review of various speculations on the cause of the unearthly music that occasionally sounds through the arches of Norman Abbey: "The cause I know not, nor can solve; but such / The fact: I've heard it—once perhaps too much" (13:64). The ironies that operate in these jokes are both labile and heterogeneous. While some (like the Norman Abbey joke) seem to indicate skepticism about assigning causes to clear up mysterious events, others (like the joke about Juan's sickness) appear to point to causes that could be inobvious only (it is implied) to the most repressed or obtuse among Byron's readership. Likewise the relation of these jokes to their Wordsworthian target is difficult to ascertain. It is hard to tell if Wordsworth's "I cannot tell" is being mocked as an escape from the responsibilities of explanation or, on the other hand, as a too-simple irony that conceals a concomitantly naive optimism about the poet's ability to explain such matters as the psychology of superstition in the first place. It is hard to tell, indeed, what telling might *mean* in many of these instances.

One can also find in *Don Juan* a second form of causal humor, certainly related to the first but more effective as humor and probably more salient in the poem. These are the jokes of a narrator who is in fact quite cavalier about the problem of identifying causes behind what he observes. The tone is set for these moments early on when, in a pastiche of Montesquieu's climatological analysis, the narrator asserts in Canto 1 that the sexual mores of Southern European countries are "all the fault of that indecent sun, / Who cannot leave alone our helpless clay, / But will keep baking, broiling, burning on" (1:63). Or again in Canto 5:

The Turks do well to shut—at least sometimes—
The women up—because in sad reality,
Their chastity in these unhappy climes
Is not a thing of that astringent quality,
Which in the North prevents precocious crimes,
And makes our snow less pure than our morality.

(5:157)

These are explanations of sexuality, but a more common version of this more confident Byronic joke involves an explanation from sexuality. For example, in an early episode explicitly satirical of Wordsworthian sublimity, where the narrator has occasion to report Juan's distracted ruminations between encounters with Donna Julia, Juan is said to be wandering and wondering in "self-communion with his own high soul":

'Twas strange that one so young should thus concern
His brain about the action of the sky;
If you think 'twas philosophy that this did,
I can't help thinking puberty assisted.

(1:93)

If one recognizes in these explanatory jokes the stuff out of which the poem is made, one also recognizes that they are characteristically "anti-philosophical," which is to say "materialist" in orientation. The explanations of "philosophy"—which Byron tends to identify with Coleridge, Plato, and Berkeley—lead one to mistake ideas for things. Byron's explanations set out to expose this delusion. They deal in things themselves—material "facts," as Byron likes to stress. Berkeley may be allowed to introduce Canto 11 with his dictum that "there was no matter," but it is met immediately by Byron's witty rejoinder: "'twas no matter what he said" (11:1). When he strikes this posture, Byron seems to presume a certain easy access to his "facts," and he gestures openhandedly toward providing such access for his readers as well. In this role, Byron shows unqualified confidence in his talent for lucid explanation: "I wish to be perspicuous," he says in Canto 5 with no apparent doubts about his ability to do so—no doubts, that is, in spite of the lability of the ironies that attend his use throughout the poem of the "I-know-not-why" idiom from "The Thorn."

Some of the problems about Byron's "materialism" can be illustrated in what is probably his most explicitly formulated meditation on the problem of causality in *Don Juan*, the witty exordium to Canto 10, which contemplates the relation between explanation in natural philosophy and in (what the eighteenth century called) "moral philosophy":

When Newton saw an apple fall, he found
In that slight startle from his contemplation—
'Tis said (for I'll not answer above ground
For any sage's creed or calculation)—
A mode of proving that the earth turned round
In a most natural whirl called "Gravitation,"
And this is the sole mortal who could grapple,
Since Adam, with a fall, or with an apple.

Man fell with apples, and with apples rose,
If this be true; for we must deem the mode
In which Sir Isaac Newton could disclose
Through the then unpaved stars the turnpike road,
A thing to counterbalance human woes;
For ever since immortal man hath glowed
With all kinds of mechanics, and full soon
Steam-engines will conduct him to the Moon.

(10: 1–2)

This passage may have the look of perspicuity about it, but its juxtaposition of natural mechanics and moral mechanics could scarcely be more problematically framed. Certain post-Newtonian philosophers, such as Hume, attempted to work out the possibilities of extending the Newtonian method

beyond natural science. To accept the Humean premises to which Byron often seems so committed, premises that William Godwin accepted wholesale in *Political Justice* and that for years had Shelley's full endorsement, is to see natural and moral mechanics as analogues of one another, two sciences united by a single method. On this view, the sense of necessity that underwrites an account of the operations of nature—the operations of the stars, for example—is exactly the same *in form* as the sense of necessity that underwrites what can be told about the operations of human nature. Such a picture, however, is Pelasgian in character, and if we take account of Byron's use of Genesis as the framework for the moral side of the question, we find that the analogy no longer seems to hold. For whether one locates the consequences of a fall in the blindness of the subject's understanding or in the corruption of the subject's will—i.e., in the theory of knowledge or the theory of action—the physical-science/moral science analogy breaks down. It is a problem of comparing apples with, well, apples that you just can't compare them with. Thus *Don Juan* both creates and erases the structure of analogy between physical science and moral science, and herein lies the discrepancy in Byron's own "mode of proving" or "... showing." This is the glitch in the mechanics with which he glows.⁴

What further raises the stakes on this score is the way in which Byron uses the issue of explanation in attacking his poetic adversaries. Central to this critique is Byron's allegation of the failure of the Lake Poets to achieve perspicuity in their writings. As early as in the second stanza of the poem's Dedication one can find the witty dismissal of some of Coleridge's recent work on the grounds of its opacity. The reference is probably to the *Lay Sermons* (1816–17):

And Coleridge, too, has lately taken wing,
But, like a hawk encumber'd with his hood,
Explaining metaphysics to the nation—
I wish he would explain his Explanation.
(D: 2)

Two stanzas after the satirical remarks about Coleridge's opaque self-encumbrances, his poetical partner comes in for criticism along similar lines:

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 . . .
And he who understands it would be able
To add a story to the Tower of Babel.
(D:4)

4. Peter Manning's discussion of this passage rightly notes how "the allusions to Prometheus and Adam suggest that *Don Juan* is not only epic action and Romantic introspection but also a version of history." The version of history that Byron has in view, for Manning, is "the history of consciousness seen as a movement from a past hypostatized as univalent, conscious only of the present, hence innocent, to the ambiguities and temporal self-consciousness of the modern era." Manning's *Don Juan*, in other words, is the history of historical consciousness itself, in roughly the sense identified by R. G. Collingwood, to whom Manning specifically refers. See *Byron and his Fictions* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1978), 214–216. I will try below to resituate this interesting claim about the poem, and likewise Manning's observation about Juan's "passivity," when I take up the problem of *Don Juan* as a historical novel.

The pun on "story" would seem to compromise the perspicuity of this very comment about Wordsworth's lack of it and thus to compress into a single line one major pattern of irony in the poem.

There is something else to be noted here. Both of these early keynote passages couch the issue we are investigating in terms of intelligibility (to borrow a distinction from modern philosophy of explanation) rather than those of causality.⁵ Coleridge *explicates* metaphysics, one might paraphrase Byron, but needs to explicate his explication; Wordsworth is faulted (this critique derives from Francis Jeffrey) for writing incomprehensible defenses of his poetry in the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* and other essays. We have already seen that there is a problem, in view of the labile ironies in *Don Juan*, about the poem's own general intelligibility. That is one problem to be addressed. Another, obviously related, is that of how the relation of intelligibility and causation appear in those parts of the poem most involved with the topic or practice of explanation.

The question of intelligibility figures prominently, and even explicitly, in that description of Juan's wanderings in the woods just before his adultery with Donna Julia, a passage in which, as we have seen, causal humor is particularly intense. Juan wanders through "leafy nooks," attempting to imagine his sexual interest in Julia as a merely speculative curiosity:

He thought about himself and the whole earth,
Of man the wonderful and of the stars,
And thou 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
To perfect knowledge of the boundless skies;
And then he thought of Donna Julia's eyes.
(1:92)

In his very act of inquiring into the causes of general ("man") and external ("the stars") objects of his observation, Juan becomes mystified about his own motives, and thus grows unintelligible to himself. The apparently casual disposition of the items in the catalogue would seem to betoken a certain insouciance of disposition *toward* those objects. That *affect*, on the other hand, can be read as an *effect* of Juan's self-deception. We can, that is, read the last object in the catalogue, Julia's eyes, as the one that counts, and the one that provides means of explaining the wandering of his attention in the first place.

The question of intelligibility becomes explicit when Byron likens Juan's confusion in these "leafy nooks" to the sort of confusion to which Wordsworth fell prey during those wanderings in nature that he made the subject of his most celebrated poetry:

5. This distinction has been in play at least since Peter Winch's Wittgensteinian critique of the nomological view of explanation held by Carl Hempel and the Berlin school; see *The Idea of a Social Science and its Relation to Philosophy* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1958), esp. pp. 18–21. For a more recent formulation, also sympathetic to Wittgenstein, see Anthony Giddens, *Central Problems in Social Theory* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1979). Speaking of Hempel's neo-Humian position, Giddens writes: "Explanation, most broadly conceived, can be more appropriately treated as the clearing up of puzzles or queries; seen from this point of view, explanation is the making intelligible of observations of events that cannot be readily interpreted within the context of an existing theory or frame of meaning" (p. 258).

There poets find materials for their books,
 And every now and then we read them through,
 So that their plan and prosody are eligible,
 Unless like Wordsworth they prove unintelligible.

(1:90)

I find that the line "so that their plan and prosody are eligible" is itself unintelligible here, and conclude that Byron is once again performing the confusion he says he deplores. As for the analogy of the confusions imputed to Juan and Wordsworth, it becomes so strong that it threatens to become a confusion of Juan and Wordsworth themselves, or at least this is a plausible inference from the narrator's having to enter the ensuing semantic clarification: "He, Juan (and not Wordsworth), . . . pursued / His self-communion with his own high soul" (91). Further, the location that the narrator has taken from the "The Thorn"—"I know not why"—is now modified to apply to the class of persons (such as Juan, and Wordsworth himself) who tend to mistake the effects of philosophy for those of puberty:

In thoughts like these true wisdom may discern
 Longings sublime, and aspirations high,
 Which some are born with, but the most part learn
 To plague themselves withal, *they know not why.*

(1:93; my italics)

The Lake poets as a group appear in the poem as writers whose failure to achieve perspicuity in explanation is a function of a failure to acknowledge material causality, especially sexual causality, in everyday life.

To see how much importance *Don Juan* lends to this linkage between one's acknowledgment of certain kinds of causes and the intelligibility of one's writing, we need only consider how it forms the basis, in turn, for a linkage between the Lake Poets and the poem's preeminent bogeyman: the Viscount Castlereagh, England's Foreign Minister and chief negotiator at the Congress of Vienna (and thus a principal architect of the European Restoration after Waterloo). Byron's Castlereagh, two-faced embodiment of tyranny and sycophancy in the poem, is the figure *par excellence* at once of verbal unintelligibility and suppressed sexuality. He appears in the Dedication after the lampoon on Southey, Coleridge, and Wordsworth, and as their master—and thus in the position of one whose character can explain theirs. The set-piece lampoon of Castlereagh with which Byron closes his Dedication is as trenchant as anything that one might find in the satire of, say, Swift and Pope, whom Byron so admired.

The subject of this lampoon is initially called the "intellectual eunuch Castlereagh," and subsequently referred to only with pronouns of neutral gender. Yet Byron's description of Castlereagh does not finally represent him as without sexual passion:

Cold-blooded, smooth-faced, placid miscreant!
 Dabbling its sleek young hands in Erin's gore,
 And thus for wider carnage taught to pant,
 Transferr'd to gorge upon a sister-shore;
 The vulgarest tool that tyranny could want,
 With just enough of talent, and no more,

To lengthen fetters by another fix'd,
 And offer poison long already mix'd.

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 curb'd, and thoughts to be confined,
 Conspiracy or Congress to be made—
 Cobbling at manacles for all mankind—
 A tinkering slavemaker, 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 how to bind,
 Deeming the chain it wears even men may fit.

(D:12–15)

Though Byron will go on to say that Castlereagh is "fearless, because *no* feeling dwells in ice," this is a description of one whose sexuality is not inert, but sado-masochistic. It is not that Castlereagh is without desire. Rather, the desire that he has is only to serve and bind. He pants to wreak wider carnage with his sleek hands. The alleged perversion, furthermore, appears as a displacement that comes of a disavowal. It develops as part of a process of self-emasculatation understood as sexual self-denial, the denial of the *place* of sexuality in one's life. Castlereagh's language is what it is because he has tried to debar passion from entering it. In this respect, ironically, Byron's implied argument resembles one that Wordsworth had made, though not published, in *The Prelude*, where he describes the theory-justified violence of the Reign of Terror as conduct in which passions exert their power without ever hearing the sound of their own names. Byron's Castlereagh can't manage his language because he doesn't own it, and he doesn't own his language because he doesn't own up to his passion. His phrases are manacles, to recall Blake's terms, not in that they are "mind forg'd" but in that they are unforged by their own user. The chains in which he would sadistically bind others are the same chains in which he himself has been bound, figured here as the "set trash of phrase" that issues in the mechanical operations of his oratory.

The issue of intelligibility in Castlereagh's prose reappears more explicitly in lines that introduce Juan's encounter with Catherine the Great, in Canto 9, after the *Waverley*-styled account of Juan's involvement in the siege of Ismail. Juan is about to achieve cabinet-level status in the Russian state by virtue of Catherine's sexual preference for him, her decision to elevate Juan over "him who, in the language of his station, / Then held that

'high official situation.'" (9:48). Byron takes it upon himself to "explain" the phrase "high official situation":

Oh, gentle ladies! should you seek to know
 The import of this diplomatic phrase,
 Bid Ireland's Londonderry's Marquess show
 His parts of speech; and in the strange displays
 Of that odd string of words, all in a row,
 Which none divine, and every one obeys,
 Perhaps you may pick out some queer *no*-meaning,
 Of that weak wordy harvest the sole gleanings.
 I think I can explain myself without
 That sad inexplicable beast of prey—
 That Sphinx, whose words would ever be a doubt,
 Did not his deeds unriddle them each day—
 That monstrous Hieroglyphic—that long Spout
 Of blood and water, leaden Castlereagh!
 (9:49–50)

Here, the figure of the chain made by one's oppressor and inflicted on one's victim reappears as the meaningless "string of words" in Castlereagh's prose. Byron thus reformulates the charge against Castlereagh's bureaucratic cant explicitly in terms of its unintelligibility—his "queer no meaning"—and the punning phrase "bid [him] show his parts" (of speech) articulates a suspicion about the soundness of Castlereagh's grammar as a suspicion about the soundness of both his sexual parts and intellectual parts as well.

Byron's own capacity for self-explanation is defined not only by his act of self-definition against Castlereagh but also, paradoxically, by his claim that he does not need Castlereagh to make himself "perspicuous." The implicit contradiction here is only aggravated by the general sense that Byron's resort to Castlereagh (or Southey, or Coleridge, or Wordsworth) for purposes of invidious self-definition recurs so routinely in this poem as to become a kind of narrative tic. How else to explain this tic if not by positing an anxiety about the uncertain state of Byron's and his poem's own forms of (self-)intelligibility? The labile ironies in the poem's recurrent explanatory jokes, like the mutual incompatibilities of its deep explanatory paradigms, already offer ample grounds for such anxieties.

There is a further complication. While the canto 9 passage portrays Castlereagh in his writings as a Sphinx to be unriddled and thus suggests a defining antithesis to Byron's self-representation in *Don Juan*, some lines near the end of Canto 8 take stock of the poem in a way that, even before the fact, calls such a self-characterization into question:

Reader! I have kept my word,—at least so far
 As the first Canto promised. You have now
 Had sketches of love, tempest, travel, war—
 All very accurate, you must allow,
 And *Epic*, if plain truth should prove no bar;
 For I have drawn much less with a long bow
 Than my forerunners. Carelessly I sing,
 But Phoebus lends me now and then a string,

With which I still can harp, and carp, and fiddle,
 What further hath befallen or may befall
 The Hero of this grand poetic riddle,
 I bye and bye may tell you, if at all.⁶ . . .
 (8:138–39)

The riddle of *Don Juan*, then, is perhaps how the poem can be both a riddle and not a riddle—or, if we concede that it is a riddle, how its riddling differs from that of its adversary, who evidently stands for all that the poem professes to abhor.

Byron stresses that his is a "grand poetic"—that is to say, an "Epic"—riddle. Let's suppose that the riddle of *Don Juan* differs from the riddle of Castlereagh's writings by virtue of the way it registers exactly that complex relation—just as we might say that Byron's contradictory deployment of explanatory idiom differs from Wordsworth's by virtue of its registering of *that* relation, the one between him and Wordsworth. The epic dimension of *Don Juan* would then more generally be understood in terms of its capacity for accommodating a variety of such relations. This would be the difference between, on the one hand, the unintelligibility of the local and unmeaning repetitions of cant and (on the other) the unintelligibility that we find in the work of a writer like Whitman, who claims to contain multitudes: Do I contradict myself, very well then I contradict myself. This epic dimension might further be said to lend historical perspective on such relations in the poem, especially the perspective of historical contemporaneity. On such an account, Byron would be inscribing himself into the representation of an epoch in which, much as he might wish to lampoon his fellow representative men, we can make out a dim recognition that he is of their number.

If the supposition seems far fetched, it may be well to recall what Byron said on the subject of contemporaneity at about this time, when he took part in the controversy over the canonical status of Pope. Here again, the issue is broached by way of a problem about intelligibility, though here Byron is more willing to see it as a problem in his own writings. The rhetorical crescendo of his *Letter to* . . . [John Murray], published in 1821, occurs as an elaboration of his charge that the present enemies of Pope "have raised a mosque by the side of a Grecian temple of the purest architecture; and, more barbarous than the barbarians from whose practice I have borrowed the figure, they are not contented with their own grotesque edifice, unless they destroy the prior, and purely beautiful fabric which preceded, and which shames them and theirs for ever and ever." Byron then answers the charge of hypocrisy on this score by conceding its truth:

I shall be told that amongst those I *have* been (or it may be still *am*) conspicuous—true, and I am ashamed of it. I have been amongst the builders of this Babel, attended by a confusion of tongues. . . .⁷

6. This passage offers an example of *syntactic* unintelligibility to go with the other forms that we have noted. The clause, "What further hath befallen or may befall . . ." constitutes the direct object, incompatibly, of both "fiddle" and "tell."

7. *Works of Lord Byron*, ed. R. E. Prothero and E. H. Coleridge, 13 vols. (London: 1898–1904), 5:559.

What Byron goes on to say in his own defense—i.e., that he has not been among the detractors of the pure classical temple erected by Pope—is less directly relevant here than his acknowledgment that when it comes to the production of romantic unintelligibility he cannot escape being of his age.⁸

And yet there are problems with even this attempt to recuperate Byronic intelligibility in the face of the aporias of his text. I would like to raise just one here. I mentioned the Waverley novels in conjunction with the account of the Siege of Ismail, and any discussion of explanation, contemporaneity, and history in *Don Juan*, must include the crucial role of Scott's epic historical fiction in the making of Byron's attempt to answer it with an epic historical fiction of his own. What properly should follow at this point in the discussion is an extensive analysis of Byron's relation to this writer who was, after all: 1) his most illustrious rival in the literary market; 2) someone whose novels he claimed to have read "fifty times" and for an hour a day while working on *Don Juan*; 3) someone whose work left both explicit and implicit marks all over the poem; and 4) the writer who, in the Waverley novels, created the literary form in which the problem of what it means to "be of one's age" was given the fullest realization. Further, if there is one Romantic project that is as fully absorbed in the problematics of explanation as *Don Juan* is, it is surely Scott's attempt in the Waverley novels to bring Edinburgh's "philosophical history" to bear on the practice of fiction. With space enough for the task, it would not be difficult to show how the epic conception of *Don Juan* is modeled on the Waverley novels, nor how young Juan is Byron's answer to the passive hero from the Waverley series, the character shaped in being buffeted by conflicting historical forces.⁹

Instead, in what space remains I will just look briefly at the representation of Juan's encounter with Catherine the Great, who, like Castlereagh, is a world historical individual in *Don Juan*, and who is perhaps the only character in the poem to surpass him in daemonic power. This episode, perhaps more obviously derivative of one of Scott's inventions than any other in the poem, also points to Byron's crucial departure from Scott's narrative practice in the Waverley novels, especially in regard to explanation. The reason this sort of episode recurs so often in Scott's fiction is that, as Lukács has explained, it follows from the attempt to keep the mediocre character at center of the focus and to stage collisions of this character with the world historical individuals of his culture. One need only think of Edward Waverley's meeting with Bonnie Prince Charles, Henry Morton's with Claverhouse (in *Old Mortality*) or Jeannie Deans's meeting with the Duke of Argyll (in *The Heart of Mid-Lothian*) to recall how this sort of incident is handled by Scott.

8. For a more detailed account of Byron's position on this subject see my "The Pope Controversy: Romantic Poetics and the English Canon," *Critical Inquiry* (Spring, 1984) 10:481-509.

9. The topic of Byron's relation to Scott has enjoyed some recent attention. There are two brief biographical essays in *Byron and Scotland*, ed. Angus Calder (Totowa, N.J.: Barnes and Noble, 1989): P.H. Scott, "Byron and Scott," pp. 51-64, and J. Drummond Bone, "Byron, Scott, and Scottish Nostalgia," 119-31. Andrew Rutherford takes up the question of Byron's relation to Scott's fiction toward the latter half of his "Byron, Scott, and Scotland," in *Lord Byron and His Contemporaries*, ed. Charles Robinson (Newark, Del.: Delaware Univ. Press, 1982), 43-65. Perhaps the most provocative discussion of the subject, especially in respect to their mutually constructed relation to the literary market, is Sonia Hofkash's "The Writer's Ravishment: Women and the Romantic Author—the Example of Byron," in *The Romantic Woman*, ed. Anne K. Mellor (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press), pp. 99-104.

In such episodes, Scott tends to draw the historical figure in such a way as to typify a specifically historical formation or sociological group of the cultural epoch in question; the encounter serves to place the mediocre hero in connection with such forces. Certain residual tendencies of this narrative strategy survive in Byron's handling of the Juan-Catherine episode. Seeing the poem as moving through a series of "stages of society," from the barbarism of the shipwreck episode to the commercial manners of the English cantos, we might say that Catherine and her modernized court typify something about the social structure of Europe's developing nation states in the eighteenth century. Something of this historical particularity is suggested in the way in which Byron dresses Juan for the part he will play in this meeting. We are asked to "suppose" Juan as "Love turned a Lieutenant of Artillery":

His Bandage slipped down into a cravat;
His wings subdued to epaulettes; his Quiver
Shrunk to a scabbard, with his Arrows at
His side as a small sword, but sharp as ever;
His bow converted into a cocked hat;
But still so like, that Psyche were more clever
Than some wives (who make blunders no less stupid)
If She had not mistaken him for Cupid.

(9:45)

But just as the particularity of Juan's role as late-eighteenth-century military officer is overshadowed by the mythic type he is said to embody, so Catherine will be made to play Psyche to his Cupid here, as well as Helen to his Paris. And when it comes to issues of explanation and causality, which are intensely foregrounded here, explanation from period specificity tends to give way to an overriding explanatory axis, just as the third-person narrative decorum of the passage gives way to an apostrophe that is extraordinary even by the wide-ranging standards of this poem:

Oh, thou 'tetterima 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 the things which be,
 So you may take your choice of this or that)—
 Catherine, I say, was very glad to see
 The handsome herald, on whose plumage sat
 Victory; and, pausing as she saw him kneel
 With his dispatch, forgot to break the seal.
 Then recollecting the whole Empress, nor
 Forgetting quite the woman (which composed
 At least three parts of this great whole) she tore
 The letter open with an air which posed
 The Court, that watched each look her visage wore,
 Until royal smile at length disclosed
 Fair weather for the day. Though rather spacious,
 Her face was noble, her eyes fine, mouth gracious.
 (9:55–57)

The addressee of the apostrophe in stanzas 55 and 56, as the Latin allusion makes clear, is the Horatian *cunnius*, and Byron's figurings of it at this key juncture in the poem mark some of the most complex poetry he ever composed. Stylistically, these lines comprise one of those rare passages in his work where his Augustan sensibility fully merges with both a Cavalier poetic subject matter and Metaphysical poetic talent for complicating the witty conceit, though style provides only one point of access to these bizarre lines.

Some of the complications of the metonymy in question here are elaborated by an ostentatious logic that seems to call attention to Byron's "wish to be perspicuous." Although the *cunnius* is the worst cause of war, he argues, it is also the best, since of all causes of war this at least can also replenish the populations that war destroys. In stanza 57, which returns from apostrophic to narrative mode, Byron extends the analysis of the *cunnius* as the cause of war by an implicitly syllogistic line of thought that runs thus: if the *cunnius* is the cause of all things, and if war is a thing, then it is necessarily the cause of war as well.

Only, the complications generated here are not so easily held in check. In the passage leading up to these lines, Byron has prepared the undoing of Catherine's historical specificity by the strong suggestion that the Siege of Ismail is a replay of the Homeric account of the Siege of Troy, a siege he represents as carried out on very much, as it were, the same grounds. At first, one might take Byron's dehistoricizing move here as a simplification of Scott's practice in such episodes. Where Scott makes such scenes occasions for the applications of his explanatory frameworks for relating characters to one another, Byron turns one of his characters, Catherine, into the "Epitome" of what he insists on calling the cause of all things, the great (w)hole itself. This is Catherine as Woman, Woman as Eve, Eve as the absent cause (in the meditation on Newton and the apples) of all of Man's fallings and risings. This very reduction, however, is articulated in terms of tropes that seem to defy it and to recomplicate the question with a vengeance. In Kenneth Burke's terms, the passage might be said to conflate the dramatic functions of scene and agent.¹ For the *cunnius* in this pas-

1. Kenneth Burke, *A Grammar of Motives* (New York, 1945), pp. xvii–xxv and 3–15.

sage is figured both as a part of the scene—the gate of our exits and our entrances—and as a part played in the scene, in the person of Catherine, who is said to be epitomized by it.

To unpack this contradiction, let alone this entire sequence in the poem, is beyond my purpose here. A first step in the analysis, however, would point to Byron's deployment of the first person plural pronoun, which seems to wobble along an axis very close to that which can be seen in Byron's self-conscious paranomasia with "man" as marking both gendered and ungendered humanity.² In calling the *cunnius* the scene of "our exits and our entrances," he even seems to be giving himself away on this point, since the first "our" indicates a non-gendered first-person plural and the second a gendered one. The relation of what might be called the "grammar of gender" in Byron to the recent work of Louis Crompton on Byron's sexuality is yet another question. Crompton actually deals with the case of Castlereagh at some length in his study, but his concern is chiefly with the "historical" Castlereagh, and with the possibility that his suicide in 1822 was occasioned by attempts to blackmail him for alleged homosexual liaisons.³ Oddly, Crompton doesn't address the Dedication, where Byron makes an issue of Castlereagh's sexuality three years before either the suicide controversy or the arrest of Bishop Clogher on charges of homosexuality, two events that Byron links in the 1822 preface to Cantos 6–8. Wishing, like Crompton, "that Byron had had the decency not to engage in popular gay-baiting," one can nonetheless feel that the case of *Don Juan* is far more complicated than Crompton's account makes out.⁴ Much of the complication is generated out of the relation of Castlereagh and Catherine in the poem. Does Byron's Castlereagh become the epitome of all that lies beyond the causal field of the all-causing *cunnius* of which Catherine is the epitome? In calling Castlereagh an intellectual eunuch, can Byron be suggesting that the explanatory confusions of this monstrous sphinx are what they are because "it" has attempted to place itself beyond the power of what the poem represents as the *primum mobile*? And if so, then where does this sort of placement leave "Byron" himself in the poem's epic framework of erotics and explanations?

The most vexing questions of all for the poem, in the end, have to do precisely with the way in which "Byron" figures as a site of motivation for what we read in *Don Juan*. At the beginning and the end of the long set-piece description of Donna Julia there are editorial interjections: "Her eye (I'm very fond of handsome eyes) / Was large and dark" and "Her stature tall—I hate a dumpy woman" (1:60–61). Causal relations are very much in play here but it is hard to judge how they run: are the editorial

2. There are a number of passages in *Don Juan* that acknowledge the problem of the gender-specificity of humanist idiom. Even in the stretch between this encounter with Catherine and the "Man fell with apples" passage at the start of the next canto we find one that marks this semantic wobble, a stanza in which the apothegm in Shakespearean humanist idiom, "What a strange thing is man!," is followed immediately by the qualification: "And what stranger thing is woman!" (9:64). For an even more explicit revision of the Shakespearean idiom, see the use made of Brutus's most famous speech in the opening lines of successive stanzas in canto 6: "There is a tide in the affairs of men. . . . There is a tide in the affairs of women" (6:3–4). For a good recent discussion of related gender questions in the poem see Susan Wolfson, "Their She-Condition: Cross-Dressing and the Politics of Gender in *Don Juan*," *ELH* (Fall, 1987), 54:585–613.

3. Louis Crompton, *Byron and Greek Love* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press); the case of Castlereagh is discussed on pp. 301–11.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 310.

comments occasioned by the picture of such charms, or are they meant to explain why the character is drawn that way in the first place? To put it another way, do such comments explain Byron's masquerade of masculinity or does it tend rather to explain them? We are still early in the Byron revival, and criticism has only begun to broach such questions for the perspicuous perplexity of this text. When they are pursued further it may prove that the poem does covet probability after all, but that it is confused by this very desire and quite at a loss to explain it. That is why the task is left to us.