

DON JUAN
Dedication

Written: Venice, late 1818

Fair-copied by Byron, Venice, late 1818

**First published in The Works of Lord Byron, with his Letters and Journals, and his Life by Thomas Moore (text of poetry edited by John Wright) 17 volumes
John Murray London, 1832**

Manuscripts:

Draft: Pierpont Morgan Library, New York; B.L. Ashley A 326 f.188 (st.3); B.L. Ashley B 4732 f. 128 (st.12); B.L. Ashley A 326 f. 189 (st.13); B.L. Ashley A 326 f. 187 (st.14); B.L. Ashley B 4732 f. 128 (st.15); B.L. Ashley A 326 f. 191 (st.16)

Fair copy by Byron: private collection

2.

“Which pye being opened, they began to sing”
(This old song and new Similie holds good) 10
“A dainty dish to set before the King,”
Or Regent, who admires such kind of food;⁷
And Coleridge, too, has lately taken wing,⁸
But like a Hawk encumbered with his hood,
Explaining Metaphysics to the Nation – 15
I wish he would explain his Explanation. –

3.

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; 20
And then you overstrain yourself, or so,
And tumble downward like the flying-fish⁹
Gasping on deck, because you soar too high, Bob,
And fall, for Lack of moisture, quite adry, Bob! –¹⁰

7: Regent: At the time B. wrote, the King, George III, was insane; his son – the future George IV – had been Prince Regent since 1812. He enjoyed the sort of flattery that Southey provided in, for example, *A Vision of Judgment*.

8: Coleridge: the one Lake poet with whom B. had been friendly had in 1817 published *Biographia Literaria*, which includes, in Chapter XXIII, added when the publisher complained it was too short, a discussion of the traditional, satanic Don Juan, woven into a review of Charles Maturin’s play *Bertram*. The book elsewhere expounds Coleridge’s philosophy in dense terms; but B. read it, and may ironically be recalling this, in which Coleridge describes his first impressions of being alone in Germany in 1798: *I seemed to myself like a liberated bird that had been hatched in an aviary, who now after his first soar of freedom poises himself in the upper air* (Chapter XXII).

9: the flying-fish: referred to in Southey’s *Madoc in Wales*, I v 102. B. quotes an adjacent passage at IV 873 below; but they also figure in several sea-narratives B. knew, especially that of the *Méduse*. In *Epistles, Odes and other Poems* (1806) Thomas Moore included *To The Flying Fish*, of which the following is the middle section:

*But when I see that wing, so bright,
Grow languid with a moment’s flight,
Attempt the paths of air in vain,
And sink into the waves again;
Alas! The flattering pride is o’er;
Like thee, awhile, the soul may soar,
But erring man must blush to think
Like thee, again, the soul may sink!*

10: adry, Bob!: a dry bob was in Regency slang intercourse without ejaculation. For a self-reflexive echo, see IV 7-8 below. Hobhouse was shocked by the joke when he first read the poem: ‘Both Scrope and myself agreed that the attack on Castlereagh was much better than that on Southey (which by the way has the phrase “dry-Bob”!!)’ (*Byron’s Bulldog*, ed. Graham, p.259).

4.

And Wordsworth, in a rather long “Excursion”¹¹ 25
 (I think the Quarto holds five hundred pages)¹²
 Has given a sample from the vasty Version
 Of his new System to perplex the Sages;
 ’Tis Poetry – at least by by his assertion,
 And may appear so when the DogStar rages;¹³ 30
 And he who understands it would be able
 To add a Story to the Tower of Babel. –¹⁴

5.

You, Gentlemen! by dint of long Seclusion
 From better company have kept your own
 At Keswick, and through still continued fusion¹⁵ 35
 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. 40

11: “Excursion”: Wordsworth’s poem of this title had been published in 1814. B. was not alone in finding it hard to come to terms with: Francis Jeffrey had begun his review of it with the statement, *This will never do*. B. sold his copy of *The Excursion* before going abroad in 1816 (CMP 244, no. 361); but evidence that he read and remembered it appears at intervals in *Don Juan*: see below, III 249, IV 857 and nn. *Juan* may in part be B.’s attempt at countering Wordsworth’s panorama of rural life and death, with its reflections on morality, religion, society and recent history, with a long poem of his own. See letter to Leigh Hunt (BLJ IV 325): “... **there is undoubtedly much natural talent spilt over ‘the Excursion’ but it is rain upon rocks where it stands & stagnates – or rain upon sands where it falls without fertilizing – who can understand him? – let those who do make him intelligible. – Jacob Behman – Swedenborg – & Joanna Southcote are mere types of this Arch-Apostle of Mystery and Mysticism ...**”

12: *Quarto*: normal size for an expensive book, approximately 17 x 24 cm.

13: *DogStar*: Sirius, the brightest fixed star, is most visible in late summer, the time when Roman poets rehearsed their public readings. B. alludes to Pope’s *Epistle to Dr Arbuthnot*, line 3.

14: *the Tower of Babel*: emblem of man’s linguistic confusion. See Genesis 11 1-9.

15: *Keswick*: Cumberland town where Southey lived. Wordsworth lived at Rydal Mount: B.’s information is from *Biographia Literaria* Chapter III.

6.

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? 45
 And Wordsworth has his place in the Excise,¹⁶ *
 You're shabby fellows – true – but poets still
 And duly seated on the immortal Hill.¹⁷

* Wordsworth's place may be in the customs – it is, I think, in that or the excise; besides another at Lord Lonsdale's table,¹⁸ where this poetical Charlatan and political parasite licks up the crumbs with abandoned alacrity, the converted Jacobin having long subsided into the clownish Sycophant – of the worst prejudices of Aristocracy.

7.

Your Bays may hide the baldness of your brows,¹⁹
 Perhaps some virtuous blushes – let them go, 50
 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 try²⁰ 55
 'Gainst you the question with Posterity. –

16: *Excise*: from 1813 Wordsworth was Distributor of Stamps for Westmoreland and Penrith – a position secured for him by Lord Lonsdale (see next note but one).

17: *the immortal Hill*: Mount Parnassus, seat of the Muses. B. had been there with Hobhouse on December 16th 1809.

18: Byron's note: Lord Lonsdale (1757-1844) was Wordsworth's patron; *The Excursion* is dedicated to him. B.'s note links Wordsworth's feudal subservience with Southey's. Compare Hazlitt on Gifford: *To crawl and lick the dust is all they expect of you, and all you can do.* (*Letter to William Gifford – Works IV 367*).

19: *Bays*: alludes to the crown of bay or laurel leaves worn by successful poets (“laureates”).

20: *Scott, Campbell, Rogers, Moore, and Crabbe*: five other poets contemporary with B. and the Lakers. Walter Scott is now better remembered for his novels, but his poems *Marmion* and *The Lady of the Lake* were then much read. Thomas Campbell was author of such poems as *Gertrude of Wyoming* (see below, I Sts.88-9); Samuel Rogers was a banker-poet, like Scott friendly with B. Thomas Moore was an Irish lyricist, and one of B.'s closest acquaintances. *Posterity* (56) has in fact decided that, of the five, George Crabbe, author of, among other poems, *Peter Grimes*, is the one who comes closest to greatness. See *Beppo*, 603, where Campbell and Crabbe are omitted from a similar list (“Scott, Rogers, Moore, and all the better brothers ...”)

8.

For me who, wandering with Pedestrian Muses,²¹
 Contend not with you on the winged Steed,²²
 I wish your Fate may yield ye, when she chooses,
 The fame you envy, and the Skill you need; 60
 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.

9.

He that reserves his laurels for Posterity 65
 (Who does not often claim the bright reversion?)²³
 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,²⁴ 70
 The major part of such Appellants go
 To – God knows where – for no-one else can know.

21: *Pedestrian muses:* B., with mock self-effacement, claims not to be able to compete with Southey, Coleridge and Wordsworth in their aspirations towards sublimity. He is quoting Horace, Satires II vi 17, and is making a distinction between his deliberately mundane style and the supposed loftiness of his subjects. Horace invokes his *Musa pedestri* as a means of praising pastoral retreat, an escape from the pressures of vulgar place-hunting – of which B. accuses the Lakers. The idea of *pedestrian muses* echoes Scott's *Waverley* (1814) Chapter 5: "I do not invite my fair readers, whose sex and impatience give them the greatest right to complain of these circumstances, into a flying chariot drawn by hippogriffs, or moved by enchantment. Mine is an humble English post-chaise, drawn upon four wheels, and keeping his Majesty's highway. Such as dislike the vehicle may leave it at the next halt, and wait for the conveyance of Prince Hussein's tapestry, or Malek the Weaver's flying sentry-box." B. was an admirer of Scott's novels, which lay claim to a quasi-epic quality while keeping at the same time to a down-to-earth historical probability. The hero of *Waverley* is himself at the mercy of a sensibility founded on fantastical romances.

22: *winged Steed:* Pegasus, beloved of the Muses. Images of flying creatures proliferate through the Dedication (as they do through the *Divine Comedy*). See Scott, previous note.

23: *bright reversion:* honour due to the claimant at some future date. The phrase is from Pope, *Elegy to the Memory of an Unfortunate Lady*, ll.9-10: *Is there no bright reversion in the sky, / For those who greatly think, or bravely die?* In sts.9 and 10 of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, canto IV, B. had imagined with some detachment and scepticism what his reputation would be.

24: *Titan:* in this case, Apollo, god of poetry.

10.

If fallen in evil days on evil tongues,²⁵
Milton appealed to the Avenger, Time,²⁶
If Time, the Avenger, execrates his wrongs, 75
And makes the word "*Miltonic*" mean "*Sublime*",²⁷
He deigned not to belie his soul in Songs,
Nor turn his very talent to a Crime –²⁸
He did not loathe the Sire to laud the Son,²⁹
But closed the Tyrant-hater he begun. – 80

25: *If fallen in evil days on evil tongues:* B. alludes to Milton's self-description at *Paradise Lost* VII 24-6: "More safe I Sing with mortal voice, unchang'd / To hoarse or mute, though fall'n on evil days, / On evil days though fall'n, and evil tongues ...". There is self-identification in the allusion.

26: *Milton:* John Milton (1608-74) author of *Paradise Lost*. An emblem of ostracised integrity overcoming all obstacles to produce a patriotic masterpiece.

27: *Sublime:* "belonging to the highest regions of thought" (O.E.D.); the word also refers to flight.

28: *turn his very talent to a Crime:* implies that Southey's early republican poetry was his best. At Missolonghi B. told William Parry that Southey's radical tragedy *Wat Tyler* was "the best thing he ever wrote."

29: *loathe the Sire to laud the Son:* Milton justified the execution of Charles I publicly. One of Southey's early poems praised Henry Marten, one of Charles' judges: he did not reprint it.

11.

Think'st thou, could he, the blind Old Man, arise
 Like Samuel from the Grave, to freeze once more³⁰
 The blood of Monarchs with his Prophecies,
 Or be alive again – again all hoar³¹
 With time and trials, and those helpless eyes 85
 And heartless daughters, worn, and pale, and poor,*
 Would *he* adore a Sultan? *he* obey
 The intellectual Eunuch Castlereagh?³²

or

Would he subside into a hackney Laureat?
 A scribbling self-sold soul-hired scorned Iscariot? †

* Note to Stanza 11. – “Pale but not cadaverous.”³³ – Milton’s two elder daughters are said to have robbed him of his books, besides cheating and plaguing him in the economy of his house, & &^c. Hayley compares him to Lear – see part third, *Life of Milton*, by W. Hayley (or *Hailey*, as spelt in the edition before me.)

† Note I doubt if Laureat & Iscariot be good rhymes but must say as Ben Johnson did to Sylvester who challenged him to rhyme with

“I John Sylvester
 “Lay with your Sister.

Johnson answered – “I Ben Johnson lay with your wife” Sylvester answered “that is not *rhyme*” – *no* Said Ben Johnson; “But it is *true*.” —

—
 or: I John Sylvester
 Kissed your sister

—
 I Ben Jonson
 Kissed your wife³⁴

30: *arise / Like Samuel:* the ghost of Samuel is summoned up for Saul by the Witch of Endor, and tells Saul that the Lord has departed from him; see *I Samuel* 28 7-25, and the Hebrew Melody *Saul*.

31: *Or be alive again:* echoes Macbeth’s words to Banquo’s ghost at III iii 103.

32: *Castlereagh:* Viscount Castlereagh, Foreign Secretary who created the continental coalition against Napoleon in 1813 and represented Britain at the Congress of Vienna, which met to re-draw the post-Waterloo map of Europe; B. detested him above all other politicians. He committed suicide by cutting his throat with a pen-knife to avoid a scandal involving a male prostitute dressed as a woman (see below, Preface to Cantos VI VII and VIII, and Canto X, 468).

33: ‘According to another account he was seen in a small house, “neatly enough dressed in black cloaths, sitting in a room hung with rusty green; pale but not cadaverous, with chalkstones in his hands. He said, that if it were not for the gout, his blindness would be tolerable.”’ – Johnson, *Life of Milton*.

34: Fair copy alternative couplet and Byron’s note: for use if received sts.12-16 were to be cut. Johnson should read *Jonson* and *John, Joshua* (Joshua Sylvester, translator, 1563-1618). The couplet is vertical in the right-hand margin of the fair copy. The joke may have come to B. via Hobhouse, who, in his diary entry for March 7 1814, records: “By the way Rolfe told us a story: Ben Jonson and one Sylvester agreed upon rhyming extemporaneously – said the last ‘I John Sylvester slept with your sister’ – says the other – ‘I Ben Jonson slept with your wife’ – ‘Why that’s no rhyme!’ – – “No but it’s true tho.”

12.

Cold-blooded, smooth-faced, placid Miscreant!
Dabbling its sleek young hands in Erin's gore,³⁵ 90
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, 95
And offer poison long already mixed. –

13.

An Orator of such set trash of phrase,³⁶
Ineffably, legitimately vile,
That even its grossest flatterers dare not praise,
Nor foes – all Nations – condescend to smile; 100
Not even a *sprightly* Blunder's spark can blaze
From that Ixion Grindstone's ceaseless toil,³⁷
That turns and turns, to give the World a notion
Of endless torments, and Perpetual motion.

35: *its*: like *smooth-faced* (line 89) carries on the idea of Castlereagh as a eunuch. *Erin's gore*: Ireland, where Castlereagh was Chief Secretary from 1798-1801. The United Irishmen, a patriotic movement, were savagely defeated during his time there. His offence was exacerbated by the fact that he was Irish himself.

36: *set trash of phrase*: Castlereagh was a very unstylish orator: compare B.'s Moore-derived joke below, at V 695n.

37: *Ixion Grindstone's ceaseless toil*: Ixion, father of the Centaurs, was punished for a number of lustful sins by being tied to a perpetually-revolving wheel.

14.

A Bungler even in its disgusting trade, 105
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 – 110
A tinkering Slavemaker, who mends old chains,
With God's and Man's abhorrence for its gains.³⁸

Mr John Murray, As publisher to the Admiralty and of various Government works – if the five Stanzas concerning Castlereagh should risk your ears or the *Navy List*, you may omit them in the publication; in that case, the two last lines of Stanza 10 must end with the couplet inserted per margin. – The stanzas on *Castlerighi* (as the Italians call him) are 11, 12, 13, 14, 15. –³⁹

15.

If we may judge of matter by the mind,
Emasculated to the marrow, It
Hath but two objects – how to serve, and bind, 115
Deeming the chain it wears even men may fit;
Eutropius of its many masters – blind⁴⁰ *
To Worth as Freedom, Wisdom as to Wit –
Fearless, because *no* Feeling dwells in Ice,
Its very Courage stagnates to a Vice. – 120

Stanza 14. For the character of Eutropius the Eunuch and minister, see Gibbon.

38: *With God's and Man's abhorrence*: echoes Horace, *Ars Poetica*, 372-3: ... *non homines, non di, non concessere columnae* (neither men nor gods nor booksellers can tolerate ...). The Latin is, however, about poetry, not tyranny: Castlereagh and Southey are being implicitly combined into one insupportable unit. See St. Michael's words at *The Vision of Judgement*, 1.728: “Non Di, Non homines’ – *you know the rest.*” –

39: For similar Byronic sarcasm regarding John Murray and his establishment connections see BLJ X 17. As stana. 3 was not at this stage written, the numbers here are out.

40: 117 and Byron's note. *Eutropius*: a Byzantine eunuch who ruled in the place of the nominal Emperor, Arcadius. He was finally disgraced and executed; among his alleged crimes was that of harnessing to his chariot sacred horses reserved for use by the Emperor – more flying creatures. Chapter 32 of Gibbon's *Decline and Fall* gives an account of the affair.

16.

Where shall I turn me not to *view* its bonds?
 For I will never *feel* them – Italy!⁴¹
 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,⁴² 125
 Have voices – tongues to cry aloud for me;
 Europe has slaves, allies, kings, armies still,
 And Southey lives to sing them very ill. –⁴³

Proof 2: “These be good rhymes” Pope’s father

17.

Meantime, Sir Laureat, I proceed to dedicate
 In honest, simple verse, this song to you; 130
 And if in flattering strains I do not predicate,
 ’Tis that I still retain my “Buff and blue”;⁴⁴
 My Politics, as yet, are all to educate;
 Apostacy’s so fashionable too,
 To keep one creed’s a task grown quite Herculean – 135
 Is it not so, my Tory, Ultra-Julian?

41: *Italy!*: B. wrote *Don Juan* entirely in Italy, which was at the time under the rule of Austria, thanks to the settlement of the Congress of Vienna (made in part by Castlereagh). With Count Gamba and his son Piero, the father and brother of Teresa Guiccioli, his Italian mistress, he was involved with the Carbonari movement, which dedicated itself (without result) to national liberation.

42: *Erin’s yet green Wounds*: for Castlereagh’s involvement with Ireland’s suffering, see above, 88n.

43: PROOF COMMENT: Pope’s father, after setting his son verse-tasks and making him revise the results thoroughly, would say, “These are good rhymes”. B., who professed to admire Pope above all other English poets, gets the phrase from Johnson’s *Life: His primary and principle purpose was to be a poet, with which his father accidentally concurred by proposing subjects, and obliging him to correct his performances by many revisals; after which the old gentleman, when he was satisfied, would say, “These are good rhymes”*.

44: “Buff and blue” colours of the Whig party, for whom B. always expressed an ostentatious loyalty. Taken from the colours of Washington’s troops in the American Revolution.