John Clare’s *Don Juan* is much more upsetting than Byron’s. Byron writes to offend his readers, and then to bring them round to his perspective: Clare has, in his isolation and madness, no readers to write for. Where Byron only wants to ridicule the sentimentality with which women cloak their adulteries, Clare snarls at women’s sexuality and at poets’ hypocrisy with a Juvenalian distaste – though his abhorrence of women doesn’t stop him needing their company, and his distaste for the whoring that is poetry doesn’t curtail his need to go on writing it.

We look in vain here for a narrative, or for characters. Clare is, like Caroline Lamb, experimenting with someone else’s idiom, and from motives as murky as hers. Though his poem has great power, he doesn’t really succeed in “being Byron”. The work is too cruel, too miserable, insufficiently humorous and charitable, to be mistaken for one of Byron’s. Perhaps the task only *seems* to reveal a darker side to Clare’s nature: if that’s the case, he is, like Byron, employing a mask, for he has, even in his insanity, learned the most important thing about Byron’s ottava rima work – you can re-invent your own persona in it from line to line, and still remain yourself.

Clare read Byron, and studied him as a phenomenon, though obtaining his books was hard at first for one so poor: “I had the works of Lord Byron promised by 6 different people and never got them from none of them”, he writes. Eventually he obtained a Byron, which he left in his will to “my friend Eliza Louisa Emmerson”, describing it as “4 Vols. 8vo”.

When Byron died Clare showed that he had the measure of Byronism, then as now a journalistic creation:

> the public did not think of looking for the immortality of his name among Warrens Blacking Princes Kalador … they expected to see it among the immortal Memorys of the Bards of Old England were they find it occup[y]ing one of the [highest places].

He may have got to know *Don Juan* for the first time after September 16th 1824, when a friend, “Henderson of Milton”, brought him a copy, which he started to read the next day:

> Began Don Juan  
> 2 verses of the Shipwreck very fine and the character of Haidee is the best I have yet met  
> it is very beautiful  
> the Hero seems a fit partner for Tom and Jerry fond of getting into scrapes and always finding means to get out agen for ever in the company of ladys who seem to watch at night for opportunitys for every thing but saying their prayers  
> perhaps they are as good as their neighbours  
> may better they do with out that fas[h]ionable veil hypocrisy.

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2: Ibid, 247. The description might indicate an Murray edition of either 1816 or 1823; neither would contain a complete *Don Juan*.
3: Ibid, 158.
He didn’t like the later cantos:

Lookd again into ‘Don Juan’ like it better and feel a wish that the great poet had livd to
finish it tho he appears to have lost his intended plan on setting out and to have continued
it with any purpose that came uppermost – Don Juans visit to England reads tiresome and
one wishes at the end that he had met with another shipwreck on his voyage to have sent
him else were.5

The following item may indicate the occasion for Clare’s Don Juan. It seems to date from
1841:

Received from C. Redding while in Prison on Leopards Hill Eleven books two Given and
the rest returnable – viz – Child Harold – Reddings Poems – and following lent viz Don
Juan 1 Vol 5 Cantos – 2nd Part Cantos 6.7.8. Part 3rd Cants 9,10,11 – Part 4th 12, 13,
14 – Part 5th Cants 15,16,6

Byron shows a knowledge of Clare at one point only. It’s in a section of Observations
upon Observations (1821) a continuation of his quarrel with W.L.Bowles, who himself refers
to “a certain poet of Nature”:

“A Certain poet of Nature” – is not the style of commendation. It is the very prologue to
the most Scandalous paragraphs of the Newspapers – when

“Willing to wound – & yet afraid to strike”

“A certain high personage” – “a certain peeress” “a certain illustrious foreigner” what do
these words ever precede but defamation? Had he felt a spark of kindling kindness for
John Clare – he would have named him. – There is a Sneer in the sentence as it stands.7

The reference is brief, but it shows some empathy. Byron was himself used to being
abused by Mr. Sneers. Bowles uses the phrase in a riposte to a review by Octavius Gilchrist of
Clare’s 1820 volume Poems, Descriptive of Rural Life and Scenery; but we don’t know that
Byron read any more of it than was there quoted, or any more of Clare’s work.

Byron showed an interest in prisons throughout much of his poetry – Clare improves on
his model by writing from within what he seems to think of as a prison: Dr Matthew Allen’s
“madhouse” at High Beech in Epping Forest. An objection might be that the pastoral interlude
represented by the song at the centre of the poem makes the imprisonment seem rather
attractive – until we see that the song has, as subtext, As You Like It, in which the forest is a
prison (see line 179 below), which all the exiles leave as soon as they are able to. Clare was in
fact a voluntary patient at High Beech, and he “escaped” in July 1841.

Clare refers three times to Prince Albert’s impending departure for Germany, with
conflicting thoughts about what its effect will be on Queen Victoria (see lines 87, 97 and
205). At another he imagines Victoria going to Germany with their baby daughter (115-16).
Envy seems to Clare’s motive. Albert and Victoria – the leading “celebrities” of their day –
have great freedom to roam, where Clare has none. They have – he assumes, correctly – a
passionate marriage to enjoy, where Clare has nothing. They have the luxury of jealousy and
the confidence of secure affection, where he has only the knowledge of rejection, and
confinement in his forest prison, where all he can do is fantasise. His “escape” from Dr Allen
and High Beech, and his long journey to Northborough, was an attempt to rise above his
circumstances and emulate Albert, Victoria, Rosalind, Orlando, the Banished Duke and so on,

7: CMP 179-80.
in their peregrinations and escapes: the irony being that after his arrival at Northborough Clare was committed – not on a voluntary basis – to Northampton General Lunatic Asylum.

Clare imagines Byron, like Juan, to have all the freedom of movement which he lacks – as well as better-quality paper and writing implements (279-80) and many more available women (268). But Byron, too, knows that he is in a prison – indeed, as he is not dead (269-70) as he “is” Clare and Clare “is” him (263-70), they share the same incarceration. The class structure which would privilege Byron over Clare is in fact powerless to do so.

Very little of this is explicit, but is said by association and implication. Clare shows above all that he has at once mastered the second most important aspect of Byron’s ottava rima style: “… never straining hard to versify, / I rattle on exactly as I’d talk / With Any body in a ride or walk” (Don Juan XV, 19, 6-8).

But his jokes are much grimmer.

I have been assisted in assembling this edition by Joanna Ball, Anne Barton, and Eric Robinson, to whom I am very grateful.

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DON JUAN A POEM8

‘Poets are born’ – & so are whores9 – the trade is
Grown universal – in these canting days
Women of fashion must of course be ladies
& whoreing is the business – that still pays
Playhouses Ball rooms – there the masquerade is
– To do what was of old – & now adays
Their maids – nay wives so innocent & blooming
Cuckold their spouses to seem honest women

Milton sung Eden & the fall of man
Not woman for the name implies a wh—e 10
& they would make a ruin of his plan
Falling so often they can fall no lower
Tell me a worse delusion if you can
For innocence – & I will sing no more
Wherever mischief is tis womans brewing
Created from manself10 – to be mans ruin

The flower in bud hides from the fading sun
& keeps the hue of beauty on its cheek
But when full blown they into riot run
The hue turns pale & lost each ruddy streak
So ’tis with woman who pretends to shun
Immodest actions which they inly seek
Night hides the wh—e – cupboards tart & pasty
Flora11 was p-x-d – & womans quite as nasty

9: Clare wavers between using the word to mean “prostitutes” and its earlier signification, of “loose women” in general; he inclines, however, to the former meaning. The first passage equates poets, performers and prostitutes in a way that recalls Don Juan III stanzas 78-87.
10: Genesis 2, 21-3.
Marriage is nothing but a driveling hoax
To please old codgers when they’re turned of forty
I wed & left my wife like other folks
But not until I found her false & faulty
O woman fair – the man must pay thy jokes
Such makes a husband very often naughty
Who falls in love will seek his own undoing
The road to marriage is – ‘the road to ruin’

Love worse than debt or drink or any fate
It is the damnest smart of matrimony
A hell incarnate is a woman-mate
The knot is tied – & then we loose the honey
A wife is just the prototype to hate
Commons for stock & warrens for the coney
Are not more trespassed over in rights plan
Then this incumbrance on the rights of man

There’s much said about love & more of women
I wish they were as modest as they seem
Some borrow husbands till their cheeks are blooming
Not like the red rose blush – but yellow cream
Lord what a while those good days are in coming –
Routs Masques & Balls – I wish they were a dream
– I wish for poor men luck – an honest praxis
Cheap food & clothing – no corn laws or taxes

I wish – but there is little got bye wishing
I wish that bread & great coats never had risen
I wish that there was some such word as ‘pishun’
For rhyme sake for my verses must be dizen
With dresses fine – as hooks with bait for fishing
I wish all honest men were out of prison
I wish M.P’s. would spin less yarn – nor doubt
But burn false bills & cross bad taxes out

I wish young married dames were not so frisky

11: Flora is simultaneously a Roman prostitute, and the goddess of flowers (Robinson 90).
12: Compare Don Juan, III, 5, 1-5: ‘Tis melancholy, and a fearful sign / Of human frailty, folly, also Crime, / That Love and Marriage rarely can combine, / Although they both are born in the same clime – Marriage from Love, like Vinegar from Wine ...
13: Compare Don Juan V, 20, 6-8: “Well, then, your third,” said Juan, “what did She? / “She did not run away, too, did She, Sir?” / “No, faith.” – “What then?” – “I ran away from her.” – Clare married Martha Turner (“Patty”) in 1820, but retained a great nostalgic affection for his earlier love, Mary Joyce. In his insanity he thought that he was married to them both, and in prison for bigamy.
14: The rabbit. The couplet means that adulterous women are as often had as rabbits are caught in warrens, or as the village common is trespassed on by privately-owned cattle (Robinson 90).
15: Implies that Tom Paine was wrong in wanting political reform first: he should have demanded a prior reform of women, who are more tyrannous to men than political tyrants.
16: A set of honest customs.
17: My guess here is that Clare found his rhymes for 1, 2, 5 and 6, but then got stuck on 3 and 4.
18: Dressed ostentatiously.
19: Compare Don Juan I, 3, 5-8: Joubert, Hoche, Marceau, Lannes, Dessais, Moreau, / With many of the military set, / Exceedingly remarkable at times, / But not at all adapted to my rhymes. –
Nor hide the ring to make believe they're single
I wish small beer\(^{20}\) was half as good as whiskey
& married dames with buggers would not mingle
There's some too cunning far & some too frisky
& here I want a rhyme – so write down 'jingle'
& there's such putting in\(^{21}\) – in whores crim con\(^{22}\)
Some mouths would eat forever & eat on\(^{23}\)

Childern are fond of sucking sugar candy
& maids of sausages – larger the better
Shopmen are fond of good sigars & brandy
& I of blunt\(^{24}\) – & if you change the letter
To C or K it would be quite as handy
& throw the next away – but I'm your debtor
For modesty – yet wishing nought between us
I'd hawl close to\(^{25}\) a she as vulcan did to venus\(^{26}\)

I really can't tell what this poem will be\(^{27}\)
About – nor yet what trade I am to follow
I thought to buy old wigs\(^{28}\) – but that will kill me
With cold starvation – as they're beaten hollow\(^{29}\)
Long speeches in a famine will not fill me
& madhouse traps still take me by the collar
So old wig bargains now must be forgotten
The oil that dressed them fine\(^{30}\) has made them rotten\(^{31}\)

I wish old wigs were done with ere they're mouldy
I wish – but heres the papers large & lusty
With speeches that full fifty times they've told ye
– Noble Lord John to sweet Miss Fanny Fusty\(^{32}\)
Is wed – a lie good reader I ne'er sold ye
– Prince Albert goes to Germany & must he
Leave the queens snuff box where all fools are strumming\(^{33}\)
From addled eggs no chickens can be coming\(^{34}\)

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\(^{20}\): Watered-down beer.
\(^{21}\): Indecent.
\(^{22}\): Adulteries ("criminal conspiracies").
\(^{23}\): Implies not oral sex, but the vagina as a second mouth.
\(^{24}\): Cash.
\(^{25}\): Move in close on (nautical phrase, from sea-fights).
\(^{26}\): An alexandrine closes an ottava rima stanza! Compare Hone's Canto the Third, line 848.
\(^{27}\): "poem" is monosyllabic.
\(^{28}\): See Don Juan, 213, 1-3: But now at thirty years my hair is gray / (I wonder what it will be like at forty? / I thought about a Wig the other day). The third line actually reads I thought of dying it the other day – but see letter to Hobhouse of May 17th 1819 (BLJ VI 131). However, Clare is, as Byron would have been, playing with the pun "wigs / Whigs".
\(^{29}\): The Whigs had been defeated in the election of July 1841 (Robinson 92).
\(^{30}\): Clare intends us to hear an echo of Don Juan, 1, 17, 7-8: In Virtues nothing earthly could surpass her – / Save thine "incomparable Oil", Macassar!
\(^{31}\): That is, "all the money spent on beer (‘oil a man’s wig’ – get him drunk; Robinson 92) and bribes has turned the boroughs back into rotten ones, as if pre-1832”.
\(^{32}\): Clare refers to the wedding between Lord John Russell – architect of the 1832 Reform Bill – and Lady Fanny Elliott, in July 1841 (Robinson 92). The word "fanny" did not achieve its indecent connotation until 1860.
\(^{33}\): Indecent: see Beppo, 2, 7-8: And there are Songs, and quavers, roaring, humming, / Guitars, and every other sort of strumming. The "snuff-box" is the vagina.
Whigs strum state fiddle strings untill they snap
With cuckoo cuckold cuckoo year by year
The razor plays it on the barbers strap
   – The sissars grinder thinks it rather quere
That labour wont afford him ‘one wee drap’
Of ale or gin or half & half or beer
   – I wish prince Albert & the noble dastards
Who wed the wives – would get the noble bastards

I wish prince Albert on his german journey
I wish the Whigs were out of office &
Pickled in law books of some good attorney
For ways & speeches few can understand
They’ll bless ye when in power – in prison scorn ye
   & make a man rent his own house & land –
I wish prince Alberts queen was undefiled
   – & every man could get his wife with child

I wish the devil luck with all my heart
As I would any other honest body
His bad name passes bye me like a f—t
Stinking of brimstone – then like whisky toddy
We swallow sin which seems to warm the heart
   – There’s no imputing any sin to God – he
Fills hell with work – & is’n’t it a hard case
To leave old whigs & give to hell the carcass

Me—b—ne may throw his wig to little Vicky
& so resign his humbug & his power
   & she with the young princess mount the dickey
On ass milk diet for her german tour
Asses like ministers are rather tricky
I & the country proves it every hour
W—ll—gt—n & M—lb—n in their station
Coblers to queens – are phisic to the nation

These batch of toadstools on this rotten tree
Shall be the cabinet of any queen
Though not such coblers as her servants be
They’re of Gods making – that is plainly seen
Nor red nor green nor orange – they are free
To thrive & flourish as the Whigs have been
But come tomorrow – like the Whigs forgotten
You’ll find them withered stinking dead & rotten

34: Yet Albert and Victoria had had one child – Victoria Adelaide, born November 1840 – having married in February.
35: The couplet impugns, by implication, the marital chastity of Queen Victoria herself.
36: Compare Don Juan, XI, 79, 7-8: Where are the Grenvilles? Turned as usual. Where / My friends the Whigs? Exactly where they were.
37: Lord Melbourne, now friend of H., sometime husband of Caroline Lamb. He had resigned as Prime Minister in August 1841.
38: The driver’s seat in a carriage (Robinson 94). With indecent overtone.
39: Pun: “Aye, and the country …”
40: Medicine: here intended ironically.
Death is an awfull thing it is by God
I’ve said so often & I think so now
Tis rather droll to see an old wig nod
Then doze & die the devil don’t know how
Odd things are wearisome & this is odd –
Tis better work then kicking up a row
I’m weary of old Whigs & old whigs heirs
& long been sick of teazing God with prayers

I’ve never seen the cow turn\(^{41}\) to a bull
I’ve never seen the horse become an ass
I’ve never seen an old brawn\(^{42}\) cloathed in whool –
But I have seen full many a bonny lass
& wish I had one now\(^{43}\) beneath the cool
Of these high elms – Muse tell me where I was\(^{44}\)
O – talk of turning I’ve seen Whig & Tory
Turn imps of hell – & all for Englands glory

I love good fellowship & wit & punning\(^{45}\)
I love ‘true love’ & God my taste defend
I hate most damnably all sorts of cunning –
I love the Moor & Marsh & Ponders end –
I do not like the song of ‘cease your funning’\(^{47}\)
I love a modest wife\(^{48}\) & trusty friend
– Bricklayers want lime as I want rhyme for fillups
– So here’s a health to sweet Eliza Phillips\(^{49}\)

SONG

Eliza now the summer tells
Of spots where love & beauty dwells
Come & spend a day with me
Underneath the forest tree\(^{50}\)
Where the restless water flushes
Over mosses mounds & rushes

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\(^{41}\): To turn was (i) to change into but (ii) to fuck, as in “We’re off to take a turn in Bushy Park”.
\(^{42}\): A porker fattened for the table; also a male prostitute.
\(^{43}\): Despite his distaste for them expressed in the first eight stanzas above.
\(^{44}\): For Byron’s addresses to his muse, see *Don Juan* II, 6, 8 – 7, 1, and III, 1, 1.
\(^{45}\): For the entire stanza, compare *Beppo*, stanzas 42-8, ending:

\begin{quote}
I like the taxes, when they’re not too many,
I like a sea-coal fire, when not too dear,
I like a beef-steak too, as well as any,
Have no objection to a Pot of Beer,
I like the weather – when it is not rainy –
That is, I like two months of every Year:
And so God save the Regent, Church, and King!
Which means that I like all, and every thing. –
\end{quote}

\(^{46}\): Ponders End was then in Epping Forest, to the north-east of London, centred between Edmonton, Enfield, Waltham Cross, and High Beech, where Clare lived, in Dr Matthew Allen’s asylum.
\(^{47}\): Polly Peachum’s bitchy air to Lucy Lockit at *The Beggar’s Opera*, II xiii.
\(^{48}\): Though the early sections of the poem imply that there are none such.
\(^{49}\): Eliza Phillips unidentified, though Clare dedicates this poem to her in a letter. In the context created by the couplet, her surname is indecent, implying that she enjoys being “filled up”.
\(^{50}\): Compare the song *Under the greenwood tree* (*As You Like It*, II v).
& where love & freedom dwells
With orchis flowers & fox glove bells
Come dear Eliza set me free
& oer the forest roam with me

Here I see the morning sun
Among the beechtree’s shadows run
That into gold the short sward turns
Where each bright yellow blossom burns
With hues that would his beams out shine
Yet nought can match those smiles of thine
I try to find them all the day
But none are nigh when thou’rt away
Though flowers bloom now on every hill
Eliza is the fairest still

The sun wakes up the pleasant morn
& finds me lonely & forlorn
Then wears away to sunny noon
The flowers in bloom the birds in tune
While dull & dowie\(^5\) all the year
No smiles to see no voice to hear
I in this forest prison lie
With none to heed my silent sigh
& underneath this beechen tree
With none to sigh for Love but thee

Now this new poem is entirely new\(^52\)
As wedding gowns or money from the mint
For all I know it is entirely true
For I would scorn to put a lie in print\(^53\)
– I scorn to lie for princes – so would you
& ere I shoot I try my pistol flint
– The cattle salesman – knows the way in trying
& feels his bullocks ere he thinks of buying

Lord bless me now the day is in the gloaming
& every evil thought is out of sight
How I should like to purchase some sweet woman\(^54\)
Or else creep in with my two wives to night\(^55\)–
Surely that wedding day is on the comeing
Abscence like phisic poisons all delight –
Mary & Martha both an evil omen
Though both my own – they still belong to no man\(^56\)

But to our text again\(^57\) – & pray where is it

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\(^51\): Dreary.
\(^52\): See Don Juan, I, 200, 5: New Characters; the Episodes are three …; or I, 201, 7: I’ve got new Mythological machinery …
\(^53\): Don Juan, I, 202, 8: … this Story’s actually true.
\(^54\): As several are in Canto IV of Don Juan.
\(^55\): Clare’s “Mary and Martha”: see above, line 27n.
\(^56\): Clare having been “un-manned” by his mental trouble.
\(^57\): Compare Beppo, 63, 1-2: To turn – and to return, the Devil take it! / This Story slips forever through my fingers …
Begin as parsons do at the beginning
Take the first line friend & you cannot miss it
‘Poets are born’ & so are whores for sinning
– Here’s the court circular – o Lord is this it
Court cards like lists of – not the naked meaning
Here’s Albert going to Germany they tell us
& the young queen down in the dumps & jealous

Now have you seen a tramper\textsuperscript{58} on race courses
Seeking an honest penny as his trade is
Crying a list of all the running horses
& showing handbills of the sporting ladies
– In bills of fare you’ll find a many courses
Yet all are innocent as any maid is
Put these two dishes into one & dress it
& if there is a meaning you may guess it\textsuperscript{59}

Don Juan was Ambassador from Russia\textsuperscript{60}
But had no hand in any sort of tax
His orders hung like blossoms of the fushia
& made the ladies hearts to melt like wax
He knew Napoleon & the king of Prussia\textsuperscript{61}
& blew a cloud over spirits wine or max\textsuperscript{62}
But all his profits turned out losses rather
To save one orphan which he forced to father\textsuperscript{63}

There’s Doctor Bottle imp who deals in urine
A keeper of state prisons for the queen
As great a man as is the Doge of Turin\textsuperscript{64}
& save in London is but seldom seen
Yclep’d old A-ll-n\textsuperscript{65} – mad brain’d ladies curing
Some p-x-d like Flora & but seldom clean
The new road over the forest is the right one
To see red hell & further on the white one

Earth hells\textsuperscript{66} or b-gg-r sh-ps or what you please
Where men close\textsuperscript{67} prisoners are & women ravished
I’ve often seen such dirty sights as these
I’ve often seen good money spent & lavished
To keep bad houses up for doctors fees
& I have known a b-gg-rs tally\textsuperscript{68} travers’d

\textsuperscript{58}: A vagrant (same as “tramp”).
\textsuperscript{59}: Line 213 means “make a pun”. The puns in the stanza are “horses / whores”, “fare” (meal) / “fair” (woman), and “courses” (races / divisions of a meal). The joke is against the different kinds of human parasite that are to be found at racetracks.
\textsuperscript{60}: See Don Juan X, stanzas 44-6.
\textsuperscript{61}: More than Byron’s Juan knows.
\textsuperscript{62}: Good-quality gin. See Don Juan XI, 16, 2-3: The dying man cried, “Hold – I’ve got my gruel – / Oh! for A Glass of Max!”
\textsuperscript{63}: Clare means “one orphan whom he was forced to father”. He refers to Leila, saved by Juan from the siege of Ismail in Canto VIII, stanzas 81-96.
\textsuperscript{64}: There never were Doges of Turin; Clare needs a rhyme.
\textsuperscript{65}: Dr Allen, who ran High Beach mental home.
\textsuperscript{66}: A hell was a gambling-house.
\textsuperscript{67}: “close “ may signify “shit-house”.
\textsuperscript{68}: ‘tally’ means ‘commissioned kilometre’ or ‘traveller’.
Till all his good intents begin to falter
– When death brought in his bill & left the halter

O glorious constitution what a picking
Ye’ve had from your tax harvest & your tythe
– Old hens which cluck about that fair young chicken
– Cocks without spurs that yet can crow so blythe
Truth is shut up in prison while ye’re licking
The gold from off the gingerbread – be lythe
In winding that patched broken old state clock up
Playhouses open – but mad houses lock up

Give toil more pay where rank starvation lurches
& pay your debts & put your books to rights
Leave whores & playhouses & fill your churches
Old clovenfoot your dirty victory fights
Like theft he still on nature’s manor poaches
& holds his feasting on another’s rights
To show plain truth you act in bawdy farces
Men show their tools – & maids expose their arses

Now this day is the eleventh of July
& being Sunday I will seek no flaw
In man or woman – but prepare to die
In two days more I may that ticket draw
& so may thousands more as well as I
To day is here – the next who ever saw
– Next Tuesday used to be Lord Byrons birthday

Lord Byron poh – the man wot rites the werses
& is just what he is & nothing more
Who with his pen lies like the mist disperses
& makes all nothing as it was before
Who wed two wives & of the truth rehearses
& might have had some twenty thousand more
Who has been dead so fools their lies are giving
& still in Allens madhouse caged & living

If I do wickedness to day being Sunday
Can I by hearing prayers or singing psalms
Clear off all debts twixt god & man on monday
& lie like an old hull that dotage calms
& is there such a word as Abergundy
I’ve read that poem called the ‘Isle of Palms’
– But singing sense pray tell me if I can

68: A bugger’s tally is an employed catamite, a “male mistress”.
69: He was arrested, tried and hanged for “an unnatural crime” (while, perhaps, his employer got off, and even betrayed him). For a complementary interpretation, see Robinson 98.
70: This is accurate – July 11th was a Sunday in 1841. Clare was born on July 13th (Robinson 99).
71: It never was – Byron was born on January 22nd. Clare wishes / asserts that he is Byron.
72: Must I restrain me, through the fear of Strife / From holding up the Nothingness of Life? – Don Juan VII, 6, 7-8.
73: Byron only married once; Clare is thinking of his own “Mary and Martha”.
74: A poem (1812) by John Wilson (“Christopher North”). Byron had read it too (BLJ VIII 219).
Live an old rogue & die an honest man

I wish I had a quire of foolscap paper
Hot pressed – & crowpens 75 – how I could endite
A silver candlestick & green wax taper
Lord bless me what fine poems I would write
The very tailors they would read & caper & mantua 76 makers would be all delight
Though laurel wreathes my brows did ne’er environ
I think myself as great a bard as Byron 77

I have two wives & I should like to see them
Both by my side before another hour
If both are honest I should like to be them
For both are fair & bonny as a flower & one o Lord – now do bring in the tea mem 78
Were bards pens steamers each of ten horse power
I could not bring her beautys fair to weather
So I’ve towed both in harbour blest together

Now i’n’t this canto worth a single pound
From anybodys pocket who will buy
As thieves are worth a halter I’ll be bound
Now honest reader take the book & try & if as I have said it is not found
I’ll write a better canto bye & bye
So reader now the money till unlock it & buy the book & help to fill my pocket 79

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75: That is, first-class writing instruments such as Byron used, as opposed to the poor-quality pens and paper Clare had to use.

76: A loose, cloak-like upper garment worn by women (from the French “manteau”); a mantle.

77: The rhyme echoes Don Juan, III, 36, 1-4: Ah! what is Man? what perils still environ / The happiest Mortals even after dinner – / A day of Gold from out an Age of Iron / Is all that Life allows the luckiest Sinner … this echoes Samuel Butler, Hadibrus, Part I, Canto III, 1-2: Ay me! what perils do environ / The man that meddles with cold iron … see also BLJ VII 23. Byron himself images himself in a similar way at Don Juan XI, 55, 5-8: Even I, Albeit I’m sure I did not know it, / Nor sought of foolscap subjects to be king, / Was reckoned a considerable time / The grand Napoleon of the realms of rhyme. –

78: A supposedly elegant contraction of the already-contracted “Ma’am”. “Tea is ready”: compare Beppo, 76, 7, or Don Juan IV, 108, 8.

79: Compare Don Juan, I, 221, 1-3: But for the present, Gentle Reader! and / Still gentler Purchaser! the Bard – that’s I – / Must, with permission, shake you by the hand / And so your humble Servant, and Good Bye! “… fill my pocket” may imply “get an erection”.