

Satire, Libertinism and the Memory of *Paradise Lost* in Lord Byron's *Don Juan*

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As satire, Byron's *Don Juan* is protean. For the poet's poignant irony directed to himself, the poem does not fit in any of the three sorts of classic satire Dryden classified into,¹ while from one kind to another Byron's satire rapidly shifts there. The poet's teeth are as sharp as Juvenal's, when he bites at Robert Southey for the latter's treachery to the Whig causes. With a true Horatian sustained irony, he attacks Donna Inez's ignorance and odious self-righteousness by praising her erudition and magnanimity. Not even the scholarly elaborateness of Varronian satire is lacking when Byron refers to the classics in "Longinus o'er a Bottle" (I, 204), or in the amusing parody of Milton's elegant compliment of the prelapsal Eve to her husband.² Nevertheless, our representative Romantic poet constantly adds to these varied forms of satire his characteristic *cri de coeur* at the miseries of mankind and his own. The quarrels between Don José and Donna Inez, for instance, are but thinly disguised quarrels of Lord and Lady Byron's, including Lady Byron's remark that her divorce was her duty to God:³

For Inez called some druggists and physicians,
And tried to prove her loving lord was *mad*,
But as he had some lucid intermissions,
She next decided he was only *bad*;
Yet when they asked her for her depositions,
No sort of explanation could be had
Save that her duty both to man and God
Required this conduct—which seemed very odd (I, 27).

If the wife's hysteric sham religiosity appears ridiculous, the light-hearted commiseration in the passage is no less cutting to the unfaithful husband. Such tears behind laughter and laughter to blow up tears are truly unique. No classic or Augustan satirist ever turned his scourge simultaneously on himself and his enemies, if implicit.

Such double-edgedness of satire, however, singularly takes off the sharp edge of chastisement or sneer. The attacker, usually standing in safety, is never spared from the attack in Byron's poem, so that the poet must work in irony rather than in sharp wit:

Don José and his lady quarrelled—*why*,
Not any of the many could divine,
Though several thousand people chose to try,
‘T was surely no concern of theirs nor mine;
I loathe that low vice—curiosity;
But if there's anything in which I shine,
‘T is in arranging all my friends' affairs,
Not having, of my own, domestic cares (I , 23).

No wonder Lady Caroline Lamb believed that *Don Juan* lacks “the Razor edge of satire to make it go down....”⁴ Critics like Byron's contemporaries are forever puzzled at how to pin down the object of Byron's satire and to define his singularly ineffectual method. Alvin B. Kernan, for instance, concludes that the impossibility “of discriminating what the world styles vice and what it styles virtue”⁵ is the very subject of Byron's satire, even though no chastisement nor sneer can work efficiently on such a vague subject. David Worcester's calling *Don Juan* a burlesque in witty improvisation and self-mockery⁶ cannot be the last word, for the critic has not answered the crucial question of why on earth Byron's uniquely double-edged, self-addressed, emotionally-moving satire should be written in the name of Don Juan, the celebrated rake. The audience of Mozart's *Don Giovanni* can not even imagine what will be made a target of satire in the severe warning against libertinism of the legend. Given the famed slipperliness the work, let us limit our present problem to this one question, what is satirized in *Don Juan*, and investigate the tradition behind Byron's work.

What can be satirized with the Don Juan legend is understood best if Byron's sources are traced back to Molière's *Dom Juan* (1665). The story of a rake and freethinker who defied the Church and marriage was written by Tirso de Molina in Spain, and actually staged in churches as a morality play in the Italian Counter-Reformation.⁷ The hero being condemned in the hell-fire at the end even in Molière's satiric version, the

audience could not have been quite sure whether it was libertinism or the religious party in Louis XIV's court that was satirized, had *Dom Juan* not been written right after the suppression of the famous *Tartuffe*, which invited the attack of the religious party on Molière. Such evidently was the impact of Molière's witty twist, in which out of a rake is born a most universal-minded character who brilliantly satirizes religious hypocrisy, that despite the success at the Palais Royal the author never printed the work before his death. The text for the stage was soon replaced by Thomas Corneille's milder version in verse.⁸ Yet it is here in Molière's play that the subtleness of Byron's satire finds its predecessor.

Molière's hero is characterized by two peculiarities; his overwhelming desire to develop his individuality to an extreme, and his bold way of shifting the attitude in his attack on religious hypocrisy. The elegant *gentilhomme* was born for his universal desire to love, and he must be faithful to his nature, "...je conserve des yeux pour voir le mérite de toutes, et rends à chacune les hommages et les tributs où la nature nous oblige,"⁹ says he in defending himself. Such amazing, Faust-like expansiveness of individuality, so royally pursued, naturally meets a resistance on the part of society. Then Dom Juan robs his attacker of his weapon by resorting to hypocrisy. When Done Elvire, a noble woman Dom Juan seduced from a convent asks him to marry her, he replies with exemplary courtesy and piety,

Il m'est venu des scruples, Madame, et j'ai ouvert les yeux de l'âme sur ce que je faisais. J'ai fait réflexion que, pour vous épouser je vous ai dérobée à la clôture d'un convent, que vous avez rompu des voeux qui vous engageoient autre part, et que le Ciel est fort jaloux de ces sortes de choses. Le repentir m'a pris, et j'ai craint le courroux céleste; j'ai cru que notre mariage n'étoit qu'un adultère déguisé, qu'il nous attireroit quelque disgrâce d'en haut, et qu'enfin je devois tâcher de vous oublier, et vous donner moyen de retourner à vos premières chaînes.¹⁰

An ironic double meaning is heard all the way through the reply. The hero is half-serious, because a marriage is a blasphemy to nature which urges him to love the whole universe in all the women existent, and thereby to attain a full development of his individuality. The imperti-

nences that he shamelessly exploits pious talk in order to protect his alleged freedom from marriage, and used the word, "Ciel," for a double meaning. For the hero "Heaven" means his nature which is nothing but the pleasure of flesh he totally committed himself to. The nimble foot work of the hero, however, is as highly amusing as his impertinence. First he asserts his freedom from any moral obligation, second he pretends the very hypocrisy for attacking the hypocrisy of established morals. It is this quick shifting of his stand that makes Molière's comedy so brilliant. Hypocrisy is a privileged vice, boasts the hero, right after he pleased his venerable father with a pretence of repentance, for it is the only way to effect his impudences and still to be able to resent everybody else's vices, "...mais, l'hypocrisie est un vice privilégié, qui de sa main, ferme la bouche à tout le monde, et jouit en repos d'une impunité souveraine."¹¹

Curiously enough, Byron's narrator in *Don Juan* inherited these two characteristics of Molière's hero: his imperial urge to conquer the whole world in his love and his quick shifting of the ground when he attacks religious hypocrisy: "Je me sens un coeur à aimer toute la terre; et comme Alexandre..."¹² says Molière's hero. Byron's narrator also declares in his jestful digression:

I love the sex, and sometimes would reverse
 The Tyrant's wish, "that Mankind only had
 One neck, which he with one fell stroke might pierce:"
 My wish is quite as wide, but not so bad,
 And much more tender on the whole than fierce;
 It being (not *now*, but only while a lad)
 That Womankind had but one rosy mouth,
 To kiss them all at once from North to South (VI, 27).

Byron's attacks on religious hypocrisy are sprinkled all over the digressions in the poem, and are gentler than Molière's. Donna Inez, Juan's mother, wrote to her son on hearing that Juan is now successful at the Empress Catherine's court as her favourite. Inez recommends Juan to God, and appreciates Catherine's motherly kindnesses to her son. At this the poet explodes:

Oh for a *forty-parson power* to chant
 Thy praise, Hypocrisy! Oh for a hymn

Loud as the virtues thou dost loudly vaunt,
 Not practice! Oh for trump of Cherubim!
 Or the ear-trumpet of my good old aunt,
 Who, though her spectacles at last grew dim,
 Drew quiet consolation through its hint,
 When she no more could read the pious print.
 She was no Hypocrite at least, poor soul,
 But went to heaven in as sincere a way
 As anybody on the elected roll,
 Which portions out upon the Judgment Day
 Heaven's freeholds, in a sort of Doomsday scroll,
 Such as the conqueror William did repay
 His knights with, lotting others' properties
 Into some sixty thousand new knights' fees (X, 34-35).

Here Byron's satire is even subtler than Molière's hero's. After the splendid beginning, in which the poet calls for the Last Judgment to prove a petty, mundane vice in the true mock-heroic style, an old lady's "ear-trumpet" is bathetically emphasized on the golden background of heaven. The comic contrast of the Eschatological Vision and an innocent little tool with which a deaf old lady tries to catch the world-resounding trumpet to awake the dead, together with the comparison of heavenly rewards to William the Conqueror's robbing of Englishmen's property, makes us suspect a possible irony in the line, "She was no Hypocrite at least, poor soul."

The wit of Molière's hero's and of Byron's narrator's caricatures the mean, irksome vice of hypocrisy, so elusive and so openly impudent, by agreeing to it in a superb jest. By this rapid shifting of ground, from the desire of the universal love to mock-piety, they declare that they are totally independent of society whose moral taxes each of the extreme individualists, and protects their Faust-like, unlimited drive. The difference, of course, should be noticed. Byron, talking almost always in irony in *Don Juan*, seldom asserts as Molière's Dom Juan does. Quoting Montaigne's celebrated motto, *Que sais-je?* (IX, 17), the poet poses in the gentle doubt of his aunt's piety. Besides this, André Maurois stood in witness that Byron was actually a believer, unlike Dom Juan in France or Don Juan in Spain.¹⁸ Nevertheless, Molière and Byron certainly shared the

same temperament of daring independence, even though Byron refers only once to Molière in *Don Juan* (X III, 94).

What on earth is this libertinism, so popular in King Charles's court after the Restoration, from which Molière and Byron have drawn so attractive a satire? Dale Underwood points out in his study of Sir George Etherege that two antagonistic philosophies contribute to the libertine's protean behavior:¹⁴ one, the classic concept of the golden age, and the other, a ruthless naturalism represented by Hobbes's *Leviathan*. Nature was innocent, assumed the Cynics, both Antisthenes and Diogenes; and that the natural appetite of sex as part of the bodily appetite should be gratified freely, if not excessively.¹⁵ Hence Molière's hero only exaggerated this ancient claim in the unlimited pursuance of his supposedly innocent desire. The libertines used the theory, though disillusioned at the prolonged wars of religion they believed no more the myth of the golden age nor in natural innocence of man than any Calvinist. Hobbes's unabashed distrust of a man was no exception in Etherege's comedies, where all men are rakes and all women are liars, as if the fashionable people all agreed to the ruthless Hobbesian view that "the condition of man... is a condition of Warre of every one against every one."¹⁶ A principle of the survival of the fittest prevails in the Restoration Comedies in general, and the fittest are always those who fight through the battle of the sexes properly without being indulged in what Romantics would call the sincere concept of love.¹⁷ Having the mythical idea of the innocence of nature on one hand, and Hobbes's disillusioned view of the beastly nature on the other, the libertine's concept of nature is like the two-headed Janus: the two contradictory ideas of the primitive innocence and the primitive fight for survival joined together. The nimble foot work of Molière's *Don Juan* consists of light steps jumping from one head to the other too quickly to be detected by honest but heavy-witted audience, sometimes asserting the innocence of nature to justify his polygamy, sometimes resorting to the primitive fight in nature to justify his pretending a hypocrisy for attacking hypocrisy. The libertines were even blessed with a philosopher to defend their combining together the two contradictory views of nature freely. Pyrrho, another Greek skeptic, assured them that for the relativity

of all truths a wise man should balance any two contradictory ideas in order to arrive "at the happy state of imperturbability (*ataraxia*)."¹⁸

Thomas Shadwell, whom Byron pointed out as his source, according to Harriet Margaret MacKenzie,¹⁹ well reflects such libertine concept of nature in their reciprocal contradictions. Shadwell's Don John, the hero that the minor Restoration playwright imitated from Rosimond's *Le nouveau festin de pierre*²⁰ in *The Libertine* (1676), is no accomplished gentleman of Faust-like universality as only Molière could portray, but a coarse villain who loudly argues for the right of nature to defend his rape, murder and polygamy:

Nature gives us our Senses, which we please:
Nor does our Reason War against our Sense.
By Nature's order Sense should guide our Reason,
Since to the mind all the objects Sense conveys,
For idle tales abandon true delight,
And solid joys of day, for empty dreams at night.²¹

While the villain defends his villainy because his nature orders him to let the pleasure of senses guide his reason, shepherds in the rustic pleasure attack temperance as part of art quite unfit for the innocence of the peace they live in:

Some subtle and ill men chuse Temperance,
Not as a Vertue, but as Bawd to Vice,
And vigilantly wait to ruin those
Whom luxury and Ease have lull'd asleep.²²

Yet right away in the same scene the innocence of nature libertines claim to justify their libidinous passion proves by no means identical with the peace the shepherds celebrate for their own. Don John and his cronies attack the shepherds in the dance, and killed them for robbing the country maidens. The lewd song some maidens sing before they are seduced by Don John reflects the beastliness of nature that libertines are slyly reticent of and that the shepherds fondly neglected:

Woman who is by Nature wild,
Dull bearded man incloses;
Of Nature's freedom we're beguil'd
By Laws which man imposes:

Who still himself continues free,
Yet we poor Slaves must fetter'd be.²³

Crude as Shadwell's characters are, they prove how skilfully Dale Underwood disentangled the confused ideas of nature prevailing on the stage in the latter half of the seventeenth century on both sides of the Dover.

It was the Earl of Rochester, however, who embodied the libertine's tactic in England to attack religion by twisting the weapon of the enemy. For Rochester, the enemy was the greatest Puritan poet who justified the ways of God to men. This representative rake and court wit in the Restoration parodied Milton's concept of "right reson," the reason that works with the love of God (*PL*, VI, 29-43). A sort of empirical necessitarianism was entertained by libertines in those days, and Shadwell's rakes in *The Libertine* defend themselves to a pious hermit that they cannot help behaving as they do, for the will must be dictated by reason which is again dictated by the senses.²⁴ On this empirical necessitarianism Rochester depends in "A Satire against Mankind" and insists that his own reason leads him to a happy innocence of nature whereas the Christian humanist's right reason merely chases the will-o'-the-wisp, for it ignores the sovereignty of the senses and resorts to thoughts:

...thoughts were giv'n for Action's Government;
Where action ceases, thoughts's impertinent.
One sphere of action is life's happiness,
And he that thinks beyond, thinks like an ass.²⁵

Interestingly enough, Milton's prelapsal man learns from the angel Raphael to realize the limit of human thought and reflects in the very term of Rochester:

But apt the mind or fancy is to rove
Unchecked, and of her roving is no end;
Till warned, or by experience taught, she learn,
That not to know at large of things remote
From use, obscure and subtle, but to know
That which before us lies in daily life,
Is the prime wisdom, what is more, is fume....²⁶

So clearly Rochester parodies Milton that the former's conclusion is the very reversal of *Paradise Lost*. The Christian humanist's reason, as Roch-

ester argues, leads to "Pathless and dangerous wandering ways," through which "the misguided follower climbs with pain," till he "falls headlong down/Into doubt's boundless sea" (11.14-19). So it is the Christian humanist who falls like Satan into the perfidious abyss, and not the libertine sinner! The parallelism of Milton and Rochester can extend further. If Milton in his "Augustinian" meditation searched into his inner vision to find the primal, prelapsal innocence in the "paradise within," as Louis Martz wrote,²⁷ the Earl of Rochester effected his mockery of piety by claiming the innocence of the golden age where all indulgences are permissible. Libertinism was actually an inverted religion whose God is pleasure and whose Satan is a puritan moralist that hinders enjoyments.

Rochester's intense, deliberate blasphemy is greatly moderated in Byron's gentle irony, partly because Byron's idea of nature's innocence is rather Rousseauistic than Cynic. The underlying structure of Byron's satire, nevertheless, inherited much of the libertine tradition, to the surprise of modern readers, retaining both the contradictory views of nature and the shifting of ground from one view to the other. The praise of Juan and Haidée's innocent love is truly a Rousseauistic hymn to the beauty of nature within innocent youth:

They had not spoken, but they felt allured,
 As if their souls and lips each other beckoned,
 Which, being joined, like swarming bees they clung—
 Their hearts the flowers from whence the honey sprung (III , 187).

Yet the same nature drives the starved, ship-wrecked sailors to frightening cannibalism. They cast lots to decide who should be eaten in the boat:

'Twas Nature gnawed them to this resolution,
 By which none were permitted to be neuter—
 And the lot fell on Juan's luckless tutor (II , 75).

Here Etherege and Hobbes's idea of *homo lupus* is given the most shocking image. In another passage Byron rhymed "Misanthropy" with "*Lykanthropy*" indicating the very cause of human misery (IX, 20). The libertine pattern of Janus's heads remains alive, representing, by one same word, "nature," the original innocence of man and the original depravity of

man.

Unlike Rochester, however, Byron never conceals his own contradiction. Rather, he meditates on his gay step to jump from the Rousseauistic nature to the Hobbesian nature. His muse is a real butterfly which "flits through ether without aim" (X III, 89). After the tragic love with Donna Julia and even after witnessing the cannibalism just cited, Juan completely forgets the cruelty of nature and plunges into the glorious love with Haidée, probably because, Byron observes, the moon "does these things for us" (II, 208), as the embodiment of nature. From the second tragic end of the second innocent love, then, Juan dashes into "a brain spattering, windpipe-slitting art" of war (IX, 4) at the siege of Ismail, for "He hated cruelty, as all men hate/Blood, until heated—" (VIII, 55). Nature is a treacherous, lovely "Chameleon" (II, 92), and Don Juan the seducer can change with nature²⁸ even in Byron's Rousseauistic version as his predecessors in Molière's and Shadwell's works. Having just enough reason for action like Rochester's libertine, Juan can live in the dizzy shifting of his own nature from innocence to cruelty serenely and comfortably, "Like saints" (XIV, 31), Byron says of Don Juan, and such he is to his libertine god of pleasure.

How Byron has penetrated into the tradition of libertinism in developing over again the Don Juan legend! This devilish lucidity of insight is the very characteristic of Byron, and the success of *Don Juan* depends much on the author's giving a free display to the libertinism which he inherited from the English nobility in the eighteenth century in general. The aristocratic libertinism as an inverted religion was sufficiently alive in the beginning of the nineteenth century, and as such a rebellion against God and man *Don Juan* frightened an anonymous reviewer in *Blackwood's* in 1819.²⁹ Witness, for instance, Lord Melbourne, the aged but charming beau of the young Queen Victoria whom Lytton Strachey portrayed.³⁰ Even Rochester's mockery of piety by replacing Heaven with pleasure is seen to a suspicious eye, though in a far milder form:

Ave Maria! 't is the hour of prayer!
Ave Maria! 't is the hour of love!

Ave Maria! may our spirits dare
Look up to thine and to thy Son's above!
Ave Maria! oh that face so fair!

Those downcast eyes beneath the Almighty Dove—
What though 't is but a pictured image?—strike—
That painting is no idol,—'t is too like (III , 103).

The continuity of tradition, however, by no means entirely explains the complexity of Byron's double-edged satire. Libertinism clarifies why Byron attacks, agreeing with Rousseau, the establishments in the eighteenth-century society, while simultaneously attacking the naiveness of Rousseauistic pedagogists who believe in the original innocence of man (I , 16, 39-44). Yet how should we dissect his unique self-mockery which is absolutely non-existent with Molière's and Shadwell's heroes? The answer is found in *Don Juan*, too. Note the opening passage of Book IV:

For oftentimes when Pegasus seems winning
The race, he sprains a wing, and down we tend,
Like Lucifer when hurled from Heaven for sinning;
Our sin the same, and hard as his to mend,
Being Pride, which leads the mind to soar too far,
Till our own weakness show us what we are (IV , 1).

The figure of Lucifer falling, together with Byron's reference to Satan's monologue ("Till pride and worse ambition threw me down...", *PL*, IV, 40), recalls Rochester's impudence that hurls the Puritan Moralizer into the depths like Satan. Evidently Byron the libertine is disillusioned from his own libertinism here, and this is certainly why our poet has acquired the third viewpoint besides the libertine's two, the viewpoint of detached self-mockery.

Byron's "Satanism" is inseparable from his Romantic ecstasy which the poet likens to the soaring of Pegasus. Unlike other Romantics' the ecstasy of Byron is uniquely accompanied with a torturing despair which was simply the result of his ruthless insight. Of all personae of Byron, *Manfred* most clearly analyzes the despair he chose rather than to reconcile with the petty, mundane evils of his fellow creatures and of himself, knowing that the heroic despair is caused by the pride, the greatest evil of all:

The innate torture of that deep Despair,

Which is Remorse without the fear of Hell,
 But all in all sufficient to itself
 Would make a hell of Heaven—can exorcise
 From out the unbounded spirit the quick sense
 Of its own sins—wrongs—sufferance—and revenge
 Upon itself; there is no future pang
 Can deal that justice on the self-condemned
 He deals on his own soul.⁸¹

Thus in the play Manfred defies even Satan to whom he pledges his soul, asserting his alleged freedom to dispose of his own damnation, freedom from the divine law as well as the heaven-sanctioned earthly laws. Here is Byron's version of the inverted religion in which the poet kept creating his "Byronic" heroes. All these varied portraits of the invertedly idealized self were produced as avatars of Satan which Mario Praz carefully outlined⁸²—until suddenly Byron confessed in *Don Juan*,

Now my sere Fancy "falls into the yellow
 Leaf," and Imagination droops her pinion,
 And the sad truth which hovers o'er my desk
 Turns what was once romantic to burlesque (IV, 3).

The reference to *Macbeth*, "...my way of Life/Is fall'n into the sere, the yellow leaf" (V, iii, 22-23), proves that the disillusioned poet finds himself in the same hell as before. *Don Juan* is filled with the suggestions that this present world is utterly condemned wherever the hero goes. London is smoked like "the Devil's drawing room" (X, 81); where Juan travels to arrive at St. James's "Hells" or gaming houses besides St. James's Palace (XI, 29). The war at Ismail is of course "Hell...let loose" (VIII, 123), where Juan fought with all good intentions, with "such meaning" that "should pave Hell" (VIII, 25). If the Danube's waters are "mirrored Hell" (VIII, 6), Russia is ruled by the Royal harlot (X, 26), the Empress Catherine, like Babylon in the Book of Revelation. The country houses of the British peerage are the "Gothic Babel of a thousand years" (XIII, 50), where guests in waltzes "let the Babel round run as it may" (XI, 69). Wide awake from any illusion now Byron falls back upon the well-trodden track of libertinism, but knowing its tricks inside out.

Thus all the aspects of the protean metamorphoses in Byron's satire

are separately observed. In addition to the already double-edged satire of libertinism which attacks the established morality and the Rousseauistic innocence together, Byron turns upon the attacker, pointing out the Satanic impudence of libertinism. Sometimes like Rochester and Molière's Dom Juan, Byron defies piety with the mock piety to pleasure:

Some call thee [woman] "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! (IX, 56)

The blasphemy is evident in the terms of religious implications, such as "From thee we come, to thee we go," and "Replenish the world." Yet he never fails to see the infernal void accompanying the libertine's heaven of pleasure. The sultana who purchased Juan at the slave market for pleasure wears

...all the sweetness of the Devil,
When he put on the Cherub to perplex
Eve... (V, 109).

Pleasures and their punishment in death are always inseparably united. "All-softening, overpowering knell/The Tocsin of the Soul" (V, 49) is just a dinner bell. A superb irony brightens up the scene of the Empress Catherine's court when Juan is first presented to her. There Juan is compared to Cupid approaching to Psyche (IX, 44-45) in order to honor the wisdom of the celebrated sovereign called "Semiramis of the north," now "at the prime of her life" (IX, 72), for she was 62 years old!⁸⁸ Juan the Cupid feels honored and contented, not with love of Catherine, but with "no less imperious passion,/Self-love" (IX, 68). In this hell of vanity, naturally Juan's health fails, and he is sent away to the *ennui* of the British high society, another form of condemnation.

Faithful or overfaithful to the tradition that libertines balanced the two antagonistic views of nature in dependence on Pyrrho, Byron counter-balances even this Pyrrhonism with its opponent, the rationalism of

Newton:

It is a pleasant voyage perhaps to float,
Like Pyrrho, on a sea of speculation;
But what if carrying sail capsize the boat?
Your wise men don't know much of navigation;
And swimming long in the abyss of thought
Is apt to tire: a calm and shallow station
Well nigh the shore, where one stoops down and gathers
Some pretty shell, is best for moderate bathers (IX, 58).

Newtonian reason is no more reliable than Pyrrhonian unreason, for the champion of the enlightenment makes a distinction merely in being "the sole mortal who could grapple,/Since Adam—with a fall—or with an apple" (X, 1). Byron has no objection to either orthodoxy or heterodoxy. With Bishop Berkeley he would "shatter/Gladly all matter down to stone or lead,"

Or adamant, to find the World a spirit,
And wear my head, denying that I wear it (XI, 1).

Or with trinitarians he "devoutly wished the three were four—/On purpose to believe so much the more" (XI, 6). This perenial balancing and counterbalancing make the poem certainly "an endless series of particular truths which did not add up to any Truth," as Brian Wilke says.³⁴ Yet they supplies irony alert under the surface like invisible nerves. The words underlined in the following passage should be read all reversed in the sense, for instance,

Men 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 (X, 2).

The irony is sad and poignant. The memory of a lost paradise, even the memory of Milton's *Paradise Lost* itself echoes and re-echoes all along the poem. How else can a dweller in hell laugh at himself? The irony in the stanza just quoted above implies the memory of Satan's

voyage from hell to the newly-created world and the memory of the Omnipresent and Omniscient God who looks down with his stern disapproval (*PL*, III, 56-106). Byron's Rousseauistic nuptial hymn for Juan and Haidée on the lone shore most likely follows the first parents' wedding in Milton's Paradise. Note how Byron's passage,

...the stars, their nuptial torches, shed
Beauty upon the beautiful they lighted:
 Ocean their witness, and the cave their bed,
By their own feelings hallowed and united,
 Their priest was Solitude, and they were wed:
And they were happy—for to their young eyes
 Each was an angel, and earth Paradise (II, 204),

resembles Milton's,

 Here in close recess
With flowers, garlands, and sweet-smelling herbs
Espoused Eve decked first nuptial bed,
And heavenly choirs the hymenean sang,
What day the genial angel to our sire
Brought her in naked beauty...(*PL* IV, 708-713).

Like Milton's Eve, Haidée is rudely deprived of the paradise through a serpent. Lambro, Haidée's pirate father who cruised among the islands when Haidée wedded Juan, hides himself cautiously before approaching the new couple's feast, "coiled like the Boa in the wood" (III, 48), just as Satan does, having stolen into the Garden. Experience justifiably takes this figure for it will devastate the perfect innocence of pleasure if such can be. Haidée's nightmare while she dozes in the feast, without knowing her father is looking down on her, strongly recalls Satan's troubling Eve with dreams as he crouches "like a toad, close at the ear of Eve" (*PL*, IV, 800). When Lambro's arm seizes Juan again like a serpent's coil (III, 53), this paradise on the island is forever lost.

These Miltonic images of paradise, serpents and hells consistently reappear, even though Byron teases his contemporary poet's didacticism: "The Muses upon Sion's hill must ramble/With poets almost clergymen or wholly..." (IX, 57; *PL*, I, 1-6). Expelled from the Rousseauistic paradise of Haidée, Juan is sold to the sultana's palace whose doors are

opened by two dwarfs "With shrinking serpent optics" (V, 90). There arises the sultana, real she-devil (VI, 3), haughty with so supernatural a passion (V, 134). When Juan disguised as a maid is put into bed together with another child of nature, another dream of paradise blesses this captive maid in the sultana's harem, with a golden apple falling to her and the inevitable sting of a bee (VI, 76). The ever-present teeth of serpents are thus metamorphosed sometimes. In the battle-field of Ismail, a dying Moslem soldier seizes a Russian's heel, being another serpent "Whose fangs Eve taught her human seed to feel" (VIII, 83; *PL*, X, 179-181). Snake society loudly rattles about Juan in London (XIV, 46). Byron's description of London,

...bee-like, bubbling, busy hum

Of cities, that boil over with their scum... (XI, 8),

recalls how Milton's numerous fallen angels built their Pandemonium (*PL*, I, 670-717) by leading molten metals into holes, while flying above the scums on their wings.

The memories and echoes of *Paradise Lost* in *Don Juan* witness that the poem is not merely a witty improvisation, but a product of long reflections on faith and skepticism together. A centuries old antagonism between cynics and Christian mystics, with all their meditations, raileries, savage persecutions and even the massacre on St. Bartholomew's Day nourished the laughter of Molière's *Dom Juan*. As a parody Byron follows the Don Juan legend closer to its original didacticism than the seemingly flippant digression beguiles. After a scandal in Seville, the hero takes a ship to escape to innocent country people. There having disturbed the innocent folks' pleasures, or in Byron's work, having destroyed the happiness of Haidée, the hero enters a Gothic church, where he is led into damnation after inviting a stone statue to dinner. Byron's Don Juan instead enters a country house which was once a Gothic monastery, where cold, flawless nobles invite him to dinners. The original ghost of a stone statue is divided into two ladies: the Duchess of Fulke, who actually comes to seize Don Juan disguised as a ghost, and the icy-cold girl, Aurora Raby. The joke is perhaps that since Byron's Don Juan was merely a lady-killer and no murderer of Governor Pedro, the

avenging ghosts are only ladies. Yet Byron's parody is even more serious than the original, for right after the idyllic love with Haidée, Juan is caught into successive hell situations of slavery, war and *ennui*, whereas the original hero is burnt in hell-fire only at the end of the play.

The theme of Byron's *Don Juan*, however, is no punishment of rakes, but considering all Byron's balancing and counterbalancing we can most justifiably summarize it to be human inconsistency. Byron does not even present the theme to the readers' attention. As the author continues his acrobatic somersaults, shifting his ground on the fallen states of man, his alert awareness on human errors and contradictions sparks wits and all evaporate into laughter. The laughter is incomparably daring, sophisticated and sad. The scene that Juan in a maiden's petticoat scorns the sultana's love is comic. "Love is for the free!" (V, 117), declares Juan proudly, but alas, who is free? Juan has been sold as a slave, and the sultana is doubly enslaved by her sexual greed and by her being the fourth queen of the land. Historically, however, it was the same inconsistency that saved men whenever rigid consistency raved and inhumanized people in the most idealistic rage. Libertinism itself was a useful rebellion when history had to witness that consistency daggered Henri IV in France and beheaded Charles I in England, burning thousands of martyrs besides. Inconsistency of course will not absolve human sins, but it will change the sights of sins and provide laughter. In England, notices Byron,

...one by one in turn, some grand mistake

Casts off its bright skin yearly like the snake (V, 21).

Laughter is as treacherous as anything human, for death laughs in the form of a skull, "Turns life to terror, even though in its sheath" (IX, 11). Yet man can stand on the level of humanity because of laughter if only while laughing. Laughter also reduces any inconsistency to harmless void just as any consistency, for "Cervantes smiled Spain's chivalry away" (XIII, 11). So Byron laughs away his theme with the result that he can remain in the human toleration. "You have so many '*divine*' poems, is it nothing to have *human* one?"⁸⁵ wrote Byron to his publisher, Murray.

"The days of Comedy are gone, alas!" says Byron, "When Congreve's

fool could vie with Molière's *bête* ..." (XIII, 49). The terrific, tragic laughter of Molière that reveals the abyss of human condition can be laughed only when the author realized the fallen state of man thoroughly. In the moving scene that Done Elvire, now repented and austere, comes to persuade Dom Juan into contrition with genuine love, Molière makes his rake hero amorously charmed again with her negligent dress.⁸⁶ Forever incongruous attraction between fellow human creatures and their unalterable isolation can be expressed only in such frightening laughter, and some of Byron's digressions are as frightening as Molière's dialogues. The brilliance of the Comedy *dans le grand siècle* had to be preceded also by Montagne's tough skepticism and Pascal's mature intelligence, which after enjoying Pyrrhonism sufficiently denies it calmly on the very ground of Pyrrhonism.⁸⁷ It was to his eternal credit that Byron could embody the heritage of the mature intelligence and the daring insight of Molière's age, and that he could join miraculously together the Romantic truths of heart and the very laughter of Molière, which is nothing but a victory of humanity.

NOTES

1. John Dryden, "A Discourse Concerning the Origin and Progress of Satire," *Of Dramatic Poesy and Other Critical Essays*, Everyman's Library 569, ed. George Watson (London, [1962]), II, 114-130.
2. Compare *Don Juan*, I, 123-127 and *Paradise Lost* IV, 641-656.
3. Lady Byron wrote to Byron's half-sister, Augusta Leigh on February 14, 1816, "I deem it *my duty to God* to act as I am acting." Bernard Grebanier, *The Uninhibited Byron* (New York, 1970), p. 271. Elizabeth French Boyd compared Byron's laughter to that of Democritus, Dr. Johnson's "laughing philosopher." *Byron's Don Juan: A Critical Study* (New York, 1958), p. 56. A fitting comparison, certainly. However, besides human vanity and inconsistency which Dr. Johnson satirizes in "The Vanity of Human Wishes," Byron had something else for his satire that Johnson never laughed at, that is, his own and his characters' Romantic heart. Note how Byron teases Don Juan and Donna Julia in their embarrassment of the innocent love affair, as if Byron could never spare his own Romanticism from the targets of his attack.
4. A letter to John Murray, July, 1819. *Letters and Journals, The Works of Lord Byron*, ed. Rowland E. Prothero (1898-1901, rpt.; New York, 1966), IV, 366.
5. *The Plot of Satire* (New Haven, 1965), p. 203.
6. *The Art of Satire* (New York, 1960), p. 104.
7. Thomas Shadwell wrote in his *Libertine* that he actually saw the play staged in churches, entitled *Atheisto Eulminato*. See "Preface," *The Libertine: A Tragedy Acted by His Royal Highness's Servants* (London, 1676), [vii].
8. Robert Jouanny, "Notice" to *Dom Juan ou le festin de pierre*, Molière, *Théâtre complet*, Classiques Garnier (Paris, 1962), I, 708.
9. Molière, *Théâtre complet*, I, 719.
10. *Ibid.*, I, 725.
11. *Ibid.*, I, 771.
12. *Ibid.*, I, 720.
13. André Maurois is certainly right when he detects a lurking Calvinistic idea of predestination in Byron's perennial sense of being doomed. "The worst of it is I do believe!" says Byron after a violent argument

- with his wife. See Maurois, *Byron*, tr. Hamish Miles ([London], [1930]), p. 226.
14. *Etherege and the Seventeenth-Century Comedy of Manners*, Yale Studies in English, vol. 135 (1957, rpt.; [New Haven], 1969), pp. 16-31.
 15. Underwood, pp. 18-19.
 16. "And because the condition of man...is a condition of Warre of every one ageinst every one...everyman has a Right to everything: even to one another's body, and therefore, as this natural Right of every man to everything endureth, there can be no security to any man..." *Leviathan* (New York and London, 1950), p. 107.
 17. See how the mistress of Dorimant is dismissed with disgrace in Etherege's *Man of Mode*.
 18. Louis I. Bredvold, *The Intellectual Milieu of John Dryden* (Ann Arbor, 1934), p. 18.
 19. *Byron's Laughter in Life and Poetry* (Los Angeles, Calif., 1973), p. 204.
 20. Underwood, p. 11.
 21. Shadwell, Act I, p. 2.
 22. *Ibid.*, Act IV, p. 64.
 23. *Ibid.*, Act III, p. 46.
 24. *Ibid.*, Act III, p. 40.
 25. "A Satire against Mankind," *The Norton Anthology of Poetry*, ed. Arthur M. Eastman and Others (New York, [1970]), p. 414.
 26. *Paradise Lost*, VIII, 188-194. *The Poems of John Milton*, Longmans Annotated English Poets, ed. John Carey and Alastair Fowler ([London and Harlow], [1968]), p. 825. Subsequent quotations from this book will be referred to only by the numbers of books and lines in parentheses after *PL*.
 27. *The Paradise Within* (New Haven, 1964), pp. 105-170, and *Paradise Lost*, XII, 574-587.
 28. Peter L. Thorslev, Jr., in *The Byronic Hero: Types and Prototypes* (Minneapolis, [1962], 30-34) discusses how Byron's *Childe Harold* belongs to the type called "Child of Nature", who weathers greed, hypocrisy and snobbery of the social world with natural goodness of heart, like Tom Jones, for instance. If Byron twisted Juan's portrait deliberately from that of the "Child of Nature," what irony he must have enjoyed!
 29. "The moral strain of the whole poem is pitched in the lowest key—and if the genius of the author lifts him now and then out of his pollution, it seems as if he regretted the elevation, and made all

haste to descend...But to lay bare to the eye of man and of woman all the hidden convulsions of a wicked spirit—thoughts too abominable, we would hope, to have been imagined by any but him that has expressed them—and to do all this without one symptom of pain, contrition, remorse, or hesitation, with a calm careless ferociousness of contented and satisfied depravity—this was an insult which no wicked man of genius had ever before dared to put upon his Creator or his Species.” “Remarks on Don Juan,” *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* (August, 1819), V, 513. The scandalized reviewer's alarm is very amusing today. How could he read *Don Juan* without detecting so remarkable irony?

30. Lord Melbourne, who was a calm, indifferent husband to Lady Caroline Lamb all through her notorious affair with Byron makes an interesting example, with his deep-rooted skepticism, his record of being involved twice in divorce actions and his incongruous love of theology. See *Queen Victoria* (New York, 1921), pp. 83-89. Concerning the Melbourne family see Grebanier, pp. 103-106.
31. Act III, Scene i, 70-78. *The Works of Lord Byron*, ed. Ernest Hartley Coleridge (1898-1904, rpt.; New York, 1966), IV, 123. I am not mistaking the author's character for the author. Lady Byron testifies;

He was in the habit of sitting up writing till near one in the morning. Having been annoyed by a large fire in the small room when he was thus occupied he threw a quantity of water on the coals, and some kind of gas was produced by which he was nearly suffocated. When he came into the bedroom, he staggered, and was in a state of stupor. I did not then know the cause, but lost no time in taking him to an open window, using Eau de Cologne & to revive him. As soon as he recovered his consciousness, the idea that he was dying presented itself to his imagination, and he broke forth into the wildest ravings of despair, saying that he knew he was going to Hell, but that he would defy his Maker to the last with other expressions of a revengeful nature...

Ethel Colburn Mayne, *The Life and Letters of Anne Isabella, Lady Noel Byron* (London, 1929), p. 172.
32. *The Romantic Agony*, tr. Angus Davidson (2d ed.; New York, 1956), pp. 81-100.
33. Leslie A. Marchand wrote that if Juan arrived in St. Petersburg in 1791, Catherine was sixty-two years old. “Notes,” to *Don Juan by Lord Byron*, ed. Leslie A. Marchand (Boston, [1958]), p. 482.
34. *Romantic Poets and Epic Tradition* (Madison and Milwaukee, 1965),

p. 191.

35. *Letters and Journals*, IV, 284.

36. Molière, *Théâtre complet*, I, pp. 764-767. Note how Dom Juan, driven by his demoniac desire, understands nothing of her charity and self-sacrifice, and how pathetically sorrow-stricken is this young woman whose intelligence and sense of integrity can make her an abbess in future.

37. *Pensées*, 384. "Le Pyrrhonisme est le vrai. Car, après tout, les hommes, avant Jésus-Christ, ne savaient où ils en étaient, ni s'ils étaient grands ou petits. Et ceux qui ont dit l'un ou l'autre n'en savaient rien, et devinaient sans raison et par hasard; et même ils erraient toujours, en excluant l'un ou l'autre." *Pascal, Oeuvres complètes*, Edition Gallimard ([Paris], [1954]), p. 1189.

All the quotations of the text, *Don Juan*, are taken from *The Works of Lord Byron*, ed. Ernest Hartley Coleridge (1898-1904, rpt.; New York, 1966), VI.