A STUDY OF BYRON'S APPROACHES TO REALITY IN DON JUAN

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A STUDY OF BYRON'S APPROACHES TO REALITY IN DON JUAN

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CHAPTER I

BYRON'S PRESENTATION OF REALITY

IN DON JUAN

Lord Byron's last major work was Don Juan, a poem which represented his uncompromising effort to displace the poetry of sentiment with the poetry of honesty, factuality, and truth. Byron rebelled against the basic dishonesty which pervaded his society; hypocrisy and cant, and the social stimulus which nourished these unrealistic attitudes, were the targets of his private revolution. Don Juan was Byron's effort to come to terms with the reality of his own environment, and he demanded the liberty to try to understand life and to present his conclusions without editorial or social oppression. Byron realized that the reality for which he was searching could be approached only when man honestly attempts to see life exactly as it is, when he comprehends appearances and the fiction of custom. Don Juan is an examination of the problem of appearance and reality; as a satire, the poem attacks appearances maintained by hypocrisy by placing them against the background of reality which is apparent to Byron:

But then the fact's a fact--and 'tis the part Of a true poet to escape from fiction
Whene'er he can; for there is little art
In leaving verse more free from the restriction
Of truth than prose, unless to suit the mart
For what is sometimes called poetic diction,
And that outrageous appetite for lies
Which Satan angles with, for souls, like flies.
Without, or with, offense to friends or foes,
I sketch your world exactly as it goes.
(viii, 86, 89)

A study of the thought in this digressive poem reveals Byron's ubiquitous skepticism and doubt and his belief in man's incapacity to arrive at certain knowledge. Byron does not attempt to find one reality; his focus is a wider scope of several interdependent realities, stripped of appearances and distilled from life. Byron's satire uncovers the reality which society has conveniently forgotten and replaced with hypocrisy in their marriages and unnatural concept of love, in their patriotic approval of aggressive wars and military heroes, in their sanction of tyranny and despotism and suppression of revolution, and in the English self-approval of their morality, freedom, and social superiority among the higher classes.

With Beppo and Don Juan, Byron returned to the satiric poetry by which he had first won recognition with English Bards and Scotch Reviewers in 1809. This satire was the angry response to the

unfavorable critical reviews of his first volume of poetry, *Hours of Idleness*, published two years earlier. After taking his seat in the House of Lords in 1809, Byron departed with John Cam Hobhouse on a tour of the Near East, and it was during this period that Byron turned from satire to sentiment. He began the composition of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* which was the major production of the middle years of his poetic career, that time prior to his unfortunate marriage and during the first years of his self-imposed exile in Italy after the scandalous separation. Cantos I and II of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* were published in 1812; Canto III was published in 1816, the year of his second, and final, departure from England; Canto IV was published in 1818. This year marked a significant point in Byron's career, for *Beppo* was also introduced in 1818, with Cantos I and II of *Don Juan* following a year later. The concurrence of satire and sentiment in 1818 reveals not only Byron's versatility but perhaps some critical indecision concerning which was the better style for his particular poetic genius. In a letter of September 15, 1817, he wrote to his publisher, John Murray:

> I look upon *Childe Harold* as my best; and as I begun, I think of concluding with it. But I make no resolution on that head . . . However, I fear that I shall never do better; and yet, not being thirty years of age, for some moons to come, one ought to be progressive as far as Intellect goes for many a good year. But I have had a devilish deal of wear and tear of mind and body in my time, besides having published too often and much
already. God grant me some judgment! to do what may be most fitting in that and every thing else, for I doubt my own exceedingly. 2

Byron apparently could not be satisfied with sentiment, and when he returned to satire, he was armed with a greater maturity and objectivity than had been present in his youthful English Bards and Scotch Reviewers.

He retained his anger, directed this time at his former society, and channeled it, with his continuing passion for reality and freedom from oppression, into a production which took him to the height of his poetic career with Don Juan:

His main achievement lies . . . in his satires in ottava rima, for his discovery of the Beppo style transformed him, almost overnight, into a major poet, and he retains this status only so long as he confines himself to that style—it was an essential condition of his greatness, the one medium that allowed his genius its full scope.

Within the scope of his genius came a satire on the abuses of society which had their roots in the unreality of hypocrisy.

Don Juan represents not only a change in style for Byron but a new emphasis on his responsibility as a poet. The thoughts Byron expresses in this poem are not in themselves essentially new, as they


have appeared in his earlier works. He denounced wars of oppression and praised wars of liberation in the third canto of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* with the same vigor, and for the same reasons, that one finds in especially the seventh and eighth cantos of *Don Juan*. However, the manner in which he presents his ideas is significantly different in his later work. *Childe Harold's* rather general disapproval of the destruction that is a part of war and despotism, even though presented with realism, could not have the impact that a combatant's view of the same destruction occurring around him would have on Byron's readers. His condemnation of social evils is aided in *Don Juan* by a new synthesis of his earlier styles which makes the reality he portrays not simply a creative exercise but a necessary and integral part of his constructive satire:

In *Don Juan* are perfectly blended for the first time in Byron's poetry the several elements of the seriocomic strain--the cool sarcasm, the serious reflection, the bizarre wit--which had appeared singly or in unfused combination in some of his earlier poetry.  

His newest production is a fusion of earlier thoughts and satiric styles, and he approaches the reader with the detached sophistication of maturity or the passion of a revolutionist, sometimes humorous, sometimes serious, but always with a skeptic and doubting attitude which insists on a realistic appraisal of everything.

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Edward Marjarum's *Byron as Skeptic and Believer* offers a judicious account of Byron's doubt and skepticism, its sources, and its influence on *Don Juan* and other works of his later productive period. His careful examination of Byron's thought reveals the same contradictions and paradoxes which are so common in his life. "The uncertain light of his 'versified aurora borealis' shines momentarily from almost every quarter, and nothing remains long in sharp relief..." However, the sincerity of Byron's conflicting statements must be accepted as mutually valid if one is to come to a proper understanding of his poetry and his ideas.

Byron's skepticism began early, and it centered most often on religious doctrines and the conflicts among the differing sects. As he matured, Byron's search for truth was marked by various forms of skepticism, leading to an increased preoccupation with the theory of knowledge. "Byron was not becoming a critical epistemologist; but intellectual maturity had brought with it a more acute and persistent attention to the problems of knowledge than is elsewhere evident in his poetry." His epistemological theories correspond, according to Marjarum, to those of Berkeley, Kant, and the German philosophers who followed them. Byron's examination of various theories of knowledge led him steadily

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6 Ibid.

7 Ibid., p. 41.
"toward the evolutionary concept that truth is not static but dynamic or developmental."\(^8\) Therefore, man is incapable of comprehending absolute knowledge; even his ideas of time and space are conditions of perception, not objective reality. \(^9\) "Human ideas have only a subjective validity. From specific skepticism of religious tradition he has come to a skepticism which implies that the fruits of human reasoning are only suggestive or symbolic, not final."\(^10\)

Man sees what society demands that he see, and he accepts that virtual world. Byron asks man to look through a different set of prisms, and as the prisms are changed, reality and truth give off different colors or appearances. These manifestations, superimposed, should enable man to find, through skepticism and doubt, a whiter light:

> Therefore I would solicit free discussion  
> Upon all points—no matter what, or whose—  
> Because as Ages upon Ages push on,  
> The last is apt the former to accuse  
> Of pillowing its head on a pin-cushion,  
> Heedless of the pricks because it was obtuse:  
> What was a paradox becomes a truth or  
> A something like it—as bear witness Luther!\(^11\)

\(^8\) Ibid., pp. 41-42.  
\(^9\) Ibid., p. 42.  
\(^10\) Ibid., p. 44.  
\(^11\) Don Juan, III, 564-565.
"'Paradox,' 'truth or something like it'--these became Byron's latest definitions of knowledge.\textsuperscript{12} Doubt and skepticism, far from being negations, become instead "a necessary component of belief... [and they serve rather a] corrective or purgative function."\textsuperscript{13} When Byron is skeptical, it is his attempt to discriminate from among the several appearances which confront him; he looks for truth knowing he cannot find it, and he searches for knowledge, suspecting that it does not exist for man. He believes strongly because he doubts with equal strength; he accepts the possibility of everything and the certainty of nothing. The reality which Byron presents in \textit{Don Juan} is prepared of many prismatic rays, a "versified Aurora Borealis" (vii, 2),\textsuperscript{14} and the philosophical basis for this reality is his doubting and skeptical thought.

A study of the reality which Byron presents his reader in the narration of events in \textit{Don Juan} is emphasized and illuminated in his digressive material which is so infused into the poem that it becomes ambiguous which, narration or digression, is the vehicle for the other. The apparent carelessness of the composition of \textit{Don Juan} has attracted criticism,\textsuperscript{15} but it is through this rather loose construction that Byron

\textsuperscript{12} Marjarum, \textit{Byron as Skeptic and Believer}, p. 41.

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., p. 42.

\textsuperscript{14} \textit{Don Juan}, III, 67.

can so easily compound both narration and his philosophical and musing commentary, each adding to the other's strength or illustrating blatant contradictions. Much of this accompanying digression into philosophical problems may be resolved into the general theme of the impossible acquisition of truth and certain knowledge once the distillation of reality begins in the presence of the catalyst, skepticism and doubt:

Apologue, Fable, Poesy, and Parable, Are false, but may be render'd also true, By those who sow them in a land that's arable: 'Tis wonderful what Fable will not do! 'Tis said it makes reality more bearable: But what's reality? Who has its clue? Philosophy? No; she too much rejects. Religion? Yes; but which of all her sects? (xv, 89)

Byron's quest for elusive reality finds its way into many stanzas, but the search, as he suspects, can only end in frustration; however, he is never satisfied to end his search for reality of a certain purity among the dregs of social hypocrisy and cant. His companion for the search in Don Juan is doubt, which adds a necessary objectivity to his sensory survey of appearances, for there is "Nothing more true than not to trust your senses; / And yet what are your other evidences?" (xiv, 2).

Byron will not even allow himself to be entirely certain of the objectivity of doubt as a means of filtering truth or reality:

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17 Don Juan, III, 495.

18 Ibid., p. 411.
So little do we know what we're about in
This world, I doubt if doubt itself be doubting.

(ix, 17)\textsuperscript{19}

"The positive results of all Byron's pondering are slight. He has
attained no new truth, nor has he adopted any satisfactory system. His
only advance is a surer knowledge of the limits of human understanding."

If Byron questions the validity of philosophical doubt and skepticism,
surely he must condemn as invalid the hypocrisy of certainty in society's
customs. These philosophical concepts illustrate the foundation upon
which \textit{Don Juan} has been built, and they are the rationale for Byron's
attack on the affectations and sophistries of his society.

The freedom with which he wielded his weapons of doubt and
skepticism, chipping away at sacred customs, soon brought the wounded
society to its feet in open opposition. That Byron was perhaps expecting
this reception is indicated in a letter to his friend Thomas Moore,
September 19, 1818, in which Byron offers one of his early commentaries
on his intentions for the new poem:

\begin{quote}
I have finished the first canto (a long one, of about 180
octaves) of a poem in the style and manner of \textit{Beppo},
encouraged by the good success of the same. It is called
\textit{Don Juan}, and is meant to be a little quietly facetious
upon every thing. But I doubt whether it is not--at least,
as far as it has yet gone--too free for these very modest
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{19} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 191.

\textsuperscript{20} Marjarum, \textit{Byron as Skeptic and Believer}, p. 44.
days. However, I shall try the experiment, anonymously; and if it don't take, it will be discontinued. It is dedicated to Southey in good, simple, savage verse, upon the Laureat's politics, and the way he got them. 21

The hypocrisy and cant of London's society, undoubtedly including religious bigotry and political prejudice, 22 winced under the attack and struck back in almost immediate criticism of the immorality of both poem and poet when Cantos I and II were finally published on July 15, 1819. The critical reviews were generally quick to recognize the poetic merits of Don Juan, as were Byron's friends, but they deplored what they saw as the prostitution of his talents in producing this poetry which was permeated with the "spirit of infidelity and libertinism." 23 Byron's friends, John Murray, and Murray's advisors expected just this reaction and had delayed the publication for almost a year. 24

During this period, and for many months after publication, Byron wrote often and passionately, defending the moral sincerity of his purpose and appealing for an honest evaluation of the realism in his poetry. On February 1, 1819, he wrote to Murray:

21 Letters and Journals, IV, 260.


I have written to you several letters, some with additions and some upon the subject of the poem itself, which my cursed puritanical committee have protested against publishing. . . . I have not yet begun to copy out the second Canto, which is finished, from natural laziness, and the discouragement of the milk and water they have thrown upon the first. . . . If they had told me the poetry was bad, I would have acquiesced; but they say the contrary, and then talk to me about morality--the first time I ever heard the word from any body who was not a rascal that used it for a purpose. I maintain that it is the most moral of poems; but if people won't discover the moral, that is their fault, not mine. 25

John Murray thought that some careful editing of the cantos he had received for printing would make the poem more acceptable to the public who were sensitive to the material with which Byron dealt and the way in which he presented it. Byron would not tolerate such "mutilations," however, and on April 6, 1819, Murray received Byron's thoughts on this subject:

> You sha'n't make Canticles of my Cantos. The poem will please, if it is lively; if it is stupid, it will fail; but I will have none of your damned cutting and slashing. If you please, you may publish anonymously; it will perhaps be better; but I will battle my way against them all, like a Porcupine. 26

After the July, 1819, publication, the public reacted violently to the reality in Don Juan, and Murray's worst fears were realized. Thinking perhaps to humor Murray, Byron attacked the problem of immorality from a new direction in a letter of August 12, 1819:

25 *Letters and Journals*, IV, 279.

But a truce with these reflections. You are too serious and eager about a work never intended to be serious. Do you suppose that I could have any intention but to giggle and make giggle? --a playful satire, with as little poetry as could be helped, was what I meant: and as to the indecency, do, pray, read in Boswell what Johnson, the sullen moralist, says of Prior and Paulo Purgante.  

The charges of the immorality of the poem were met often during the next months with lists of precedents, authors whose morality was not so indignantly questioned. He wrote to Richard Belgrave Hoppner on October 28, 1819:

I understand the outcry was beyond everything--pretty Cant for people who read Tom Jones, and Roderick Random, and the Bath Guide, and Ariosto, and Dryden, and Pope, to say nothing of Little's Poems. Of course, I refer to the morality of those works, and not to any pretension of mine to compete with them in anything but decency.

In a letter to John Murray on March 29, 1820, Byron was still defending his position. It was not he who was immoral, he insisted, but the society he had depicted in the first cantos:

You talk of refinement: --are you all more moral? Are you so moral? No such thing. I know what the World is in England, by my own proper experience of the best of it--at least of the loftiest. And I have described it everywhere as it is to be found in all places.

Byron was not particularly encouraged by the cold reception of his first publication of 1819, but he continued to work on the poem.

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27 Ibid., p. 343.  
28 Ibid., pp. 366-367.  
29 Ibid., p. 427.  
30 Ibid., p. 368.
Cantos III and IV were written during the winter months of 1819 and 1820; at the close of the summer of 1820, he returned to the composition of Don Juan and wrote Canto V in October and November of 1820. The fourth canto illustrates how Byron's sensitive ego had been pricked by the hypocritical outrage of his readers, and it contains several stanzas directed to his detractors. Without allowing himself the liberty of expression with which he attacked Murray and his cautious friends, Byron puts his case before these readers with some spirit:

Some have accused me of a strange design
Against the creed and morals of the land,
And trace it in this poem every line:
I don't pretend that I quite understand
My own meaning when I would be very fine;
But the fact is that I have nothing planned,
Unless it were to be a moment merry,
A novel word in my vocabulary.

(iv, 5)

He refers again to his critics at the end of this canto, placing the blame for the unpopularity of Don Juan upon the hypocrisy of society toward its own immorality and his truthfulness:

Here I might enter on a chaste description,
Having withstood temptation in my youth,
But hear that several people take exception
At the first two books having too much truth;
Therefore I'll make Don Juan leave the ship soon,
Because the publisher declares, in sooth,
Through needles' eyes it easier for the camel is
to pass, than those two cantos into families.

'Tis all the same to me; I'm fond of yielding, And therefore leave them to the purer page Of Smollett, Prior, Ariosto, Fielding, Who say strange things for so correct an age... (iv, 97-98)

Byron's conception of truth in these first, and following, cantos was only his insistence on reality in the face of great opposition from all quarters. The ladies were especially incensed by his truth, much preferring his sentiment. Speaking, no doubt, of the Countess Guiccioli, Byron related one example of this prevailing attitude to John Murray on November 12, 1820:

I don't feel inclined to care further about Don Juan. What do you think a very pretty Italian lady said to me the other day? She had read it in the French, and paid me some compliments, with due drawbacks, upon it. I answered that what she said was true, but that I suspected it would live longer than Childe Harold. "Ah but (said she) I would rather have the fame of Childe Harold for three years than an immortality of Don Juan!" The truth is that it is too true, and the women hate every thing which strips off the tinsel of sentiment; and they are right, as it would rob them of their weapons.

Byron does not lose sight of his original intentions to "giggle and make giggle," but as he gathers power in the later cantos, his laughter--directed at himself, the sentiments he almost allows, and the sentiments his readers expect--becomes a more intense chastisement of the society...

32 Ibid., p. 397.

he is observing. Their accepted appearances are exposed, and Byron
laughs at their nakedness; however, his laughter often paradoxically
sounds like weeping:

And if I laugh at any mortal thing,
'Tis that I may not weep; and if I weep,
'Tis that our nature cannot always bring
Itself to apathy. . . .

(iv, 4) 34

Don Juan is a crusade, and Byron's continuing to do battle with the
social windmill, despite his being misunderstood, must illustrate his
conviction that what he was doing was not only right but necessary.

Byron remarked in a letter to Thomas Moore on February 28, 1817,
about a year and a half before beginning Don Juan, that he would some-
how insure that his life would be important after all:

If I live ten years longer, you will see, however,
that it is not over with me--I don't mean in literature,
for that is nothing; and it may seem odd enough to say,
I do not think it my vocation. But you will see that I
shall do something or other--the times and fortune
permitting . . . . 35

Byron attempted to make his life important by actively engaging himself
in the Italian resistance against Austrian domination and by aiding the
Greeks in their struggle for independence from the Turks. Neither of
these attempts to "do something" was particularly successful; his

34 Don Juan, III, 346.
35 Letters and Journals, IV, 62.
ambition to right wrongs, to abolish tyranny and the oppression of man, met with general defeat when he attempted to be a man of action. Yet, his insistence on moral reality as a replacement for social hypocrisy in Don Juan is another mode of action. Don Juan is a moral crusade, and skeptical and doubting realism are Byron's weapons.
CHAPTER II

THE APPEAL FOR REALITY IN

LOVE AND MARRIAGE

In the first five cantos of Don Juan, which may be called the
product of Byron's first extended period of composition on the poem,
"the emphasis is primarily upon incident and the mood is sportively
satirical."¹ Byron's narration of events leads his hero through the
scandal of his first, adulterous affair with Donna Julia, resulting in his
exile from Spain. From the horror of the shipwreck sequence in Canto
II, Byron rescues Don Juan and places him in the care of the beautiful
Haïdée, the only daughter of the pirate Lambro. In the Greek Cyclades
Juan is initiated into the bliss of a natural love with Haïdée who is unen-
cumbered by the customs of society. When the lovers are discovered,
Don Juan is shipped into slavery and purchased by a Sultan's fourth wife,
Gulbeyaz. Juan is promptly dressed as one of the harem girls and
escorted to the seraglio as a precaution against his discovery by the
watchful husband. The treatment of these incidents is marked by humor,

¹ Paul G. Trueblood, The Flowering of Byron's Genius (Stanford,
1945), p. 3.
and the tone is not unlike Fielding's, both in temper and moral purpose. Byron admits that he has often been "voluptuous" in incident and description, but his purpose, as noted in Chapter I, must never be questioned:

I therefore do denounce all amorous writing,
   Except in such a way as not to attract;
Plain--simple--short, and by no means inviting,
   But with a moral to each error tacked,
Formed rather for instructing than delighting,
   And with all passions in their turn attacked;
Now, if my Pegasus should not be shod ill,
This poem will become a moral model.

(v, 2)

As is perhaps suggested by the incidents of this first section of Don Juan and by the preceding extraction, Byron's satiric strictures are organized to place heavy emphasis on the hypocrisy of love and the abuses of the institution of marriage. The period of his separation from his wife had not advanced quite three years at the time of the composition of the first canto in September, 1818, and his wounds were still smarting.

Byron's examination of the appearances in which society had veiled love and marriage reveals his distaste for insincerity and deception and his demand for a more realistic view of the social phenomenon of

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2 Elizabeth F. Boyd, Byron's "Don Juan": A Critical Study (New Brunswick, New Jersey, 1945), pp. 34, 38.

marriage and of the conception of love. The motivation for this search may be narrowed to his continuing passion for stripping everything of hypocrisy and perhaps a need for an investigation of the debacle of his own short marriage. It is generally acknowledged that writing was a mental and emotional catharsis for Byron, and in Canto I of Don Juan, he places many of his marital problems on exhibition. His attitude, however, reveals none of the self-pity that is often embarrassingly evident in Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, and he attempts to examine his unhappy year with Lady Byron with enough objectivity that even he can see the humor in some of the episodes which were once so painful to him. His personal experience and his propensity for keen observation of the English society which rejected him and the Italian society into which he gravitated enabled Byron to draw certain notable conclusions about love and marriage which are exposed by his satiric scalpel: any love not sanctioned by marriage is condemned by society without regard for its quality, while marriage without love seems universal:

'Tis melancholy, and a fearful sign
Of human frailty, folly, also crime,
That love and marriage rarely can combing . . .
(iii, 5)


5 Don Juan, II, 277.
Since this is the case, as he has observed it to be, Byron's satire of these social customs is designed to examine the hypocrisy which covers the undesirable reality of love (according to society) and marriage (a product of society):

Thus Byron's attack on marriage is directed against its mercenary aspect, its perfunctoriness, its want of romance and love and consequent infidelity, and its bondage. But that he was able to conceive of the true marital happiness of two sincerely devoted persons can be readily substantiated by his attitude toward Teresa Guiccioli as well as by his own emphasis of the distinction between true marriage and loveless wedlock in his poetry and in his conversations. 6

Byron illustrates this unfortunate reality through a comparison with the more desirable examples of love and marriage according to nature, as in his description of the Juan-Haidée episode.

The social deceit of infidelity, and the reasons for it, draw much of Byron's critical attention in his examination of loveless marriages. Of particular narrative importance are the families of Don Alfonso and Don José, and they provide the examples Byron needs to expose the reality of this connubial state. His description of the marriage of Don José and Donna Inez, Don Juan's parents, illustrates the common hypocrisy of constancy which maintains respectability while one engages in adultery. Gossip in Seville attributed to Donna Inez and Don Alfonso an affair of long duration, and during this time Donna Inez

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had developed an outwardly affectionate friendship with Don Alfonso's wife, Donna Julia, to maintain her reputation. Donna Inez's affectation of prudery and perfection made her seem a paragon of virtue, and her masquerade was so convincing that her amorous husband necessarily sought love elsewhere:

Perfect she was, but as perfection is
Insipid in this naughty world of ours,
Where our first parents never learn'd to kiss
Till they were exiled from their earlier bowers,
Where all was peace, and innocence, and bliss,
(I wonder how they got through the twelve hours).
Don José, like a lineal son of Eve,
Went plucking various fruit without her leave.
(i, 18)

With mock seriousness, Byron asserts that this affectation of fidelity is not necessary in the "moral" north (meaning England, no doubt) where the climate is more conducive to chastity and "they knead two virtuous souls for life/Into that moral centaur, man and wife" (v, 158).

Yet, he must question this hypocrisy:

Happy the nations of the moral north!
Where all is virtue, and the winter season
Sends sin, without a rag on, shivering forth;
('Twas snow that brought St. Anthony to reason);
Where juries cast up what a wife is worth
By laying whate'er sum, in mulct, they please on
The lover, who must pay a handsome price,
Because it is a marketable vice.
(i, 64)

7 Don Juan, II, 277.
8 Ibid., p. 502.
9 Ibid., p. 57.
The social concept of marriage demands constancy even when love no longer remains; inconstancy, therefore, seems unavoidable. Byron does not, however, advocate sexual license; he merely suggests an honest appraisal of the state of marriage: it should be maintained only so long as love demands constancy of itself, which is the natural condition. He condemns inconstancy for the hypocrisy which necessarily attends it, and he condemns the custom of marriage because it promotes inconstancy. In a late canto, Byron offers a reasonable explanation for this tendency of pervasive infidelity in society:

Love bears within its breast the very germ
   Of change; and how should this be otherwise?
That violent things more quickly find a term
   Is shown through nature's whole analogies;
And how should the most fierce of all be firm?
   Would you have endless lightning in the skies?
Methinks Love's very title says enough:
How should "the tender Passion" e'er be tough?

(xiv, 94)

Byron denounces the hypocrisy of false chastity which attempts to cover the obvious reality of inconstancy that is given tacit approval through practice but virtuously condemned through social necessity.

The Platonic hypocrisy of spiritual love, traditionally excluding any need for physical love, draws vigorous attacks, for it is this appearance which often serves to cloud the reality of marital inconstancy.

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Byron illustrates the false nature of this concept by comparing it unfavorably with what is real and natural in love. The affair engaging Donna Julia and Don Juan offers a clear example of the hypocrisy of Platonism as a substitute for adultery. Encouraged, perhaps, in their love by Donna Inez "to open Don Alfonso's eyes, /In case he thought his wife too great a prize" (i, 101), Donna Julia was determined to remain virtuously true to her marriage vows:

Poor Julia's heart was in an awkward state;  
She felt it going, and resolved to make  
The noblest efforts for herself and mate,  
For honour's, pride's, religion's, virtue's sake...  
(i, 75)

Her security in her decision to be strong was shaken during her frequent and exciting visits to Donna Inez' home, and her resolution against loving Don Juan became a compromise to love Platonically:

Her plan she deem'd both innocent and feasible,  
And, surely, with a stripling of sixteen  
Not scandal's fangs could fix on much that's seizable,  
Or if they did so, satisfied to mean  
Nothing but what was good, her breast was peaceable--  
A quiet conscience makes one so serene!  
(i, 83)

The circumstances which would put her virtue and Platonic resolution to the test were provided by the amused Byron to show his canting readers what would be the normal course in this hypothetical situation. With an

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11 Don Juan, II, p. 75.  
12 Ibid., p. 62.  
13 Ibid., p. 66.
attitude of mock horror, he narrated the ensuing events with estro:

She thought of her own strength, and Juan's youth,
And of the folly of all prudish fears,
Victorious virtue, and domestic truth,
And then of Don Alfonso's fifty years . . . .

Julia had honour, virtue, truth, and love,
For Don Alfonso and she inly swore,
By all the vows below to powers above,
She never would disgrace the ring she wore,
Nor leave a wish which wisdom might reprove;
And while she pondered this, besides much more,
One hand on Juan's carelessly was thrown,
Quite by mistake--she thought it was her own;

The hand which still held Juan's, by degrees
Gently, but palpably confirm'd its grasp,
As if it said, "detain me, if you please";
Yet there's no doubt she only meant to clasp
His fingers with a pure Platonic squeeze . . . .

(i, 107, 109, 111)

The reader is led dramatically to the moment just preceding Juan's success and Julia's downfall, and maintaining this tabloid of a succumbing Julia, Byron vents his disgust toward the appearances which have been responsible for bringing Julia to this social destruction in a scathing attack on the Platonic pretense:

Oh Plato! Plato! you have paved the way,
With your confounded fantasies, to more
Immoral conduct by the fancied sway
Your system feigns o'er the controllable core
Of human hearts, than all the long array
Of poets and romancers:--You're a bore,
A charlatan, a coxcomb--and have been,
At best, no better than a go-between.

(i, 116)

14 Ibid., pp. 78, 80-81.  
15 Ibid., p. 84.
Byron had been accused of writing seductive and immoral verse which no decent woman would think of reading when *Don Juan* was published. He declares his own innocence and insists that if any poet is to be blamed, it is the one who spread the insidious philosophy which found many devotees in his society, probably including many of those who would not read his poem:

"When amatory poets sing their loves
   In liquid lines mellifluously bland,
And pair their rhymes as Venus yokes her doves,
   They little think what mischief is in hand;
The greater their success the worse it proves,
   As Ovid's verse may give to understand;
Even Petrarch's self, if judged with due severity,
Is the Platonic pimp of all posterity."  
(v, 1)

Byron's satire of the hypocrisy of marriage centers on the appearance of affection and constancy—when love no longer binds the couple—and inconstancy which is practiced with disconcerting universality, and he parries the blows of an apparently virtuous society while delineating their vices. Their opposition included a personal attack on his liaison with Teresa Guiccioli, which was material for scandal among those cant-ridden individuals who, though perhaps engaged in some "chaste" liaison themselves, were protected by the convention of

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17 *Don Juan*, II, p. 411.
marriage. Lady Blessington recorded Byron's conception of true marital happiness as distinguished from loveless, though socially-respectable, wedlock:

Were the Contessa Guiccioli and I married, we should, I am sure, be cited as an example of conjugal happiness, and the domestic and retired life we lead would entitle us to respect; but our union, wanting the legal and religious part of the ceremony of marriage, draws on us both censure and blame.... When passion is replaced by better feelings--those of affection, friendship, and confidence--when, in short, the liaison has all of marriage but its forms, then it is that we wish to give it the respectability of wedlock. 18

The opposites of true love--intrigues and petty passions--established the pace of Canto I, but as he moves into Canto II, Byron shows his regard for true love, for love according to nature. From Platonic pretense, Byron maneuvers Don Juan through the shipwreck which seems to prepare his hero, by obliterating the past, for the new experience in love awaiting him on the Grecian isle.

The hypocrisy of love, in and out of marriage, is sharply contrasted with the more natural and unaffected love which Juan finds with Haidée. With no need for social pretense--neither Platonism, chastity, virtue, nor honor--Haidée was capable of giving Don Juan the reality of love.

18 Countess of Blessington, A Journal of Conversations with Lord Byron (Boston, 1859), p. 133.
Haidée spoke not of scruples, ask'd no vows,
Nor offer'd any; she had never heard
Of plights and promises to be a spouse,
Or perils by a loving maid incurr'd;
She was all which pure ignorance allows,
And flew to her young mate like a young bird;
And, never having dreamt of falsehood, she
Had not one word to say of constancy.

(ii, 190)

None can doubt his sincere approval of this natural and uninhibited love
as Byron rises above sentiment to passionate description:

Both were so young, and one so innocent,
That bathing pass'd for nothing; Juan seem'd
To her, as 'twere, the kind of being sent,
Of whom these two years she had nightly dream'd,
A something to be loved, a creature meant
To be her happiness, and whom she deem'd
To render happy; all who joy would win
Must share it. --Happiness was born a Twin.

(ii, 172)

Haidée's realistic, natural expression of her love for Don Juan is
nurtured in a setting of fantasy--caves, deserted beaches, and lush
vegetation--which emphasizes not the basic unreality of this love but
perhaps the barrenness of the social soil in which love so often decays.

In this setting, Nature can be followed more easily. The purity of
Haidée's affection for Don Juan is illustrated with many superb stanzas;
together they form a telling comment on the hypocrisy of love which
society has been taught to call "romantic":

19 Don Juan, II, 257.
20 Ibid., p. 247.
This is in others a factitious state,
An opium dream of too much youth and reading,
But was in them their nature, or their fate:
No novels e'er had set their young hearts bleeding... (iv, 19)

Although Byron's admiration for this special kind of natural and unaffected love is unquestioned, a part of the fatalism in his psychology, together with his understanding of the world, prompts him to maintain that this love is somehow fragile and easily shattered when handled by the none-too-gentle society:

Years could but bring them cruel things or wrong,
The world was not for them, nor the world's art
For beings passionate as Sappho's song;
Love was born with them, in them, so intense,
It was their very spirit—not a sense. (iv, 27)

And when Lambro returned to the island, he brought with him the means to destroy this love and the lovers—his paternal need to protect his daughter and his uncompromising character. Don Juan was sold into slavery against Haidee's remonstrances, and she, overcome with grief, withered gradually and died, carrying with her to the grave their unborn child:

She died, but not alone; she held within
A second principle of life, which might
Have dawn'd a fair and sinless child of sin;
But closed its little being without light,

\[21^2\] Ibid., p. 354.
\[22^2\] Ibid., p. 358.
And went down to the grave unborn, wherein
Blossom and bough lie withered with one blight;
In vain the dews of Heaven descend above
The bleeding flower and blasted fruit of love

(iv, 70)

It is unlike Byron to indulge in mere sentiment in Don Juan. This stanza is an impassioned plea for a more realistic attitude toward lovers and their love, whatever their marital status. Don Juan and Haidée were not married, but, Byron asks, what possible significance could this have since they loved? He attacks prudish censure, and he defends the morality of this love and of his poetry for presenting its realism:

Haidée and Juan were not married, but
The fault was theirs, not mine: it is not fair,
Chaste reader, then, in any way to put
The blame on me, unless you wish they were;
Then if you'd have them wedded, please to shut
The book which treats of this erroneous pair,
Before the consequences grow too awful;
'Tis dangerous to read of loves unlawful.

(iii, 12)

From the oasis of Haidée's love, Don Juan is sent on a slave ship to the human market in Constantinople, where he is purchased by Gulbeyaz. The theme of infidelity is presented again but with a different conclusion. For Byron's purposes, Don Juan was now realistically married and Gulbeyaz was not, as her attitude had divorced her spiritually from the Sultan. As noted previously, Byron insinuates that love, whether society

23 Ibid., p. 382.
24 Ibid., p. 282.
calls it marriage or liaison, makes one constant, while marriage
without love creates no ties of constancy:

She now conceived all difficulties past,
And deemed herself extremely condescending
When, being made her property at last,
Without more preface, in her blue eyes blending
Passion and power, a glance on him she cast,
And merely saying, "Christian, canst thou love?"
Conceived that phrase was quite enough to move.

(v, 116) 25

Don Juan, whose image--both historically and in Byron's present
narration--made society stamp him "rake," surprises both Gulbeyaz
and Byron's hypocritical readers:

But Juan, who had still his mind o'erflowing
With Haidée's isle and soft Ionian face,
Felt the warm blood, which in his face was glowing,
Rush back upon his heart, which filled apace,
And left his cheeks as pale as snowdrops blowing:
These words went through his soul like Arab-spears,
So that he spoke not, but burst into tears.

Juan's [reputation] was good; and might have been still better,
But he had got Haidée into his head:
However strange, he could not yet forget her,
Which made him seem exceedingly ill-bred.

(v, 117, 124) 26

Don Juan had learned the lesson Byron continually tried to instill in his
readers: he knew the difference between loving and making love. Byron
had gone through a period of debauchery after arriving in Italy, 27 and

25 Ibid., p. 478.
26 Ibid., pp. 478, 483.
he understood the differences between the love he had in marriage with Lady Byron, licentious love with several, and the mature love which had developed between Teresa Guiccioli and himself without society's sanction. Passion alone, without the "affection, friendship, and confidence" characterizing his love for the Countess, Byron condemns heartily and sincerely, and this condemnation extends to the society which practices, but virtuously denounces, passionate infidelity:

I know Gulbeyaz was extremely wrong;  
I own it, I deplore it, I condemn it;  
But I detest all fiction even in song,  
And so must tell the truth, howe'er you blame it.  

(vi, 8)

Byron does not finish his attack on the hypocrisies surrounding love and marriage with Canto V, and he often digresses into a new attack, especially in the latter cantos. When Juan creates a disturbance in the seraglio with Dudu, Gulbeyaz sends him to be drowned. He manages to escape with Johnson, his English friend, to the Russian army which is marshalled for an attack on the Turkish city of Ismail. After giving an impressive performance during the siege, Don Juan is sent to Petersburg with the message of victory, and Catherine the Great, impressed by his youthful masculinity, makes him the reigning court favorite. Don Juan, having experienced love in adultery and love

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28 Blessington, A Journal of Conversation with Lord Byron, p. 133.
29 Don Juan, III, 10.
according to nature, now engaged in self-love and the satisfaction of
a sovereign's lust:

... the Sovereign was smitten,
Juan much flattered by her love, or lust;--
I cannot stop to alter words once written,
And the two are so mixed with human dust,
That he who names one, both perchance may hit on:
But in such matters Russia's mighty Empress
Behaved no better than a common sempstress.
(ix, 77)

The hot-house environment of the court exhausted Don Juan, and the
court physicians suggested travel as the surest means of preserving
his life. It was determined that he should go to England as Catherine's
ambassador, and when the time for parting arrived, "So much did Juan's
setting off distress her, / She could not find at first a fit successor"
(x, 47). Byron's humor is tempered with bitterness. This is an
attack on self-indulging monarchs, but it is also a condemnation of the
veil of lust which so often passes as love.

Once in England, Don Juan is initiated into society, and as a
guest at Lord Henry Amundeville's country residence, he meets
Aurora Raby:

Juan knew nought of such a character--
High, yet resembling not his lost Haidée;
Yet each was radiant in her proper sphere:
The Island girl, bred up by the lone sea,

30 Ibid., p. 221.
31 Ibid., p. 247.
More warm, as lovely, and not less sincere,
Was Nature's all; Aurora could not be
Nor would be thus: --the difference in them
Was such as lies between a flower and gem.

Rutherford suggests that Byron has now abandoned his ideal of Nature, and, with Aurora Raby, he must have considered describing an "ideal of womanhood attainable within society, though free from all its vices and illusions."\(^{33}\) Byron's work on the poem was, of course, ended before he was able to delineate her character. The change of tone between his presentations of Catherine the Great and Aurora Raby does, however, indicate a decided change in attitude. While he seems to shrink from Catherine as from a disease, he evinces an undeniable affection, or at least admiration, for the cool, self-possessed Aurora. Don Juan seems about to fall in love with this example of civilized perfection\(^{34}\) when the poem ends abruptly with Lady Fitz-Fulke, another guest, seeking, no doubt, an adulterous assignation with the handsome ambassador from Russia. The cycle appears never-ending; Don Juan seems just settled into love when a degraded and degrading form of the social hybrid--affected and hypocritical love--asserts itself.

\(^{32}\) Ibid., p. 461.


\(^{34}\) Ibid.
The major theme of the problem of appearance and reality in *Don Juan* is illustrated by Byron's treatment of love and marriage. Although his criticism of all that is false in these socially-oriented customs extends throughout the lengthy poem, his position never wavers:

Byron's view of marriage is uncompromisingly unfavorable; some of the bitterest verses of *Don Juan* are reserved to condemn this, to him, uncomfortable and artificial state of being. Love is an institution of nature, but marriage of society, and the two are rarely compatible.

The events which Byron narrates are designed to carry the burden of the reality he is determined to present to his society. His opinions about marriage and the abuses of this institution most probably are not so objective as they might have been had he never been hurt by marriage. Byron will not allow absolutes in any form, however, and he does state that the realism he has presented in *Don Juan* is indicative only of the general level of hypocrisy. His views on love are similarly colored by his experience, and while Byron shows little more than bitterness toward marriage, his relations with the Countess Guiccioli must have had an ameliorative effect on his concept of love. His understanding of the more natural aspects of love produces the praise that is especially noticeable in Canto II, but it is the same understanding which promotes

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36 Ibid., p. 64.

37 *Don Juan*, III, 444.
the sharp condemnation of love that is hampered and constricted by social affectation. As his attitude toward marriage remains constant, so might his various attitudes toward love be distilled to an essential position:

Especially he condemns the hypocrisy of society and individuals toward love. He begins in Canto I attacking the hypocrisy of parents and husbands toward love and marriage, and in the last cantos he is still spurring to the charge. All hypocrisy in love is wicked and one of the prime evil effects occasioned by love, especially the hypocrisy of "Platonics" and other forms of self-deception. . . . He thought the duty of the poet is to speak out plainly and with full responsibility, and he tried in the various and successive love episodes of Don Juan to exemplify his conception of the truth about love. 38

Byron attempts to present a realistic description of love, and his purpose is two-fold. He illustrates love's adulterated substitute, which amorous verse and novels foist on an accepting society— for whom hypocrisy passes as reality; and, he wishes to show the heights which love might attain when stripped of the weight of appearance. Marriage of the kind achieved by Juan and Haidée, or by Teresa and himself, receives Byron's approbation, but his denunciation of that degraded form of marriage which is usually practiced in society is occasioned by the same emotions "which evoked his satire of other institutions—his love of liberty and his

38 Boyd, Byron's "Don Juan": A Critical Study, pp. 64-65.
detestation of insincerity. . . . And he pours out sarcasm upon
marriage because to him it spells hypocrisy and bondage."

CHAPTER III

A REALISTIC APPRAISAL OF
WAR AND DESPOTISM

When Canto V was completed in November, 1820, Byron ended the first uneven period of composition of Don Juan. He had received much opposition to his morally realistic portrayal of society and its appearances of love and marriage; his feeling of disappointed frustration is understandable. It is not so surprising then that his spirit of attack wavered momentarily, and one month before the August, 1821, publication of Cantos III, IV, and V, Byron appended a note to a letter he had written to John Murray on July 6, 1821 stating that "at the particular request of the Contessa G. I have promised not to continue Don Juan. You will therefore look upon these 3 cantos as the last of that poem."¹ It does not seem probable that Byron would have been so amenable to Teresa's pleas to quit his work on Don Juan, and one should search for other, more significant, motives which might have delayed his continuing to do

literary battle with social vices. Rutherford offers the explanation that "for the greater part of 1821 . . . Byron was less interested in satire than in his experiments in drama." Even so, writing was still only a substitute form of action, and when the Italian political barometer indicated revolution against the Austrian oppressors, Byron was anxious to involve both himself and his financial resources in the movement for liberty.

From the spring of 1820 until the spring of the following year, Byron's letters to England are filled with excited news as the fortunes of the liberation movement developed momentum. On April 16, 1820, he wrote to John Murray:

The Spanish and French affairs have set the Italians in a ferment; and no wonder: they have been too long trampled on . . . I shall, if permitted by the natives, remain to see what will come of it, and perhaps to take a turn with them . . . in case of business; for I shall think it by far the most interesting spectacle and moment in existence, to see the Italians send the Barbarians of all nations back to their own dens.

By September, Byron had thought that the fighting must begin immediately, but when he wrote to Murray on December 28, 1820, no significant,
concerted military offensive had yet been precipitated. The Italians were not united and moved too slowly for Byron, who was impatient for action. His passionate involvement in the cause for Italian liberty is illustrated with the entry of January 9, 1821 in his diary:

They mean to insurrect here, and are to honor me with a call thereupon. I shall not fall back; though I don't think them in force or heart sufficient to make much of it. But, onward! -- it is now the time to act, and what signifies self, if a single spark of that which would be worthy of the past can be bequeathed unquenchedly to the future? It is not one man, nor a million, but the spirit of liberty which must be spread.  

Byron was optimistic in spite of the declining spirits of his co-revolutionaries; he felt that "the king-times are fast finishing." His optimism was tempered with pessimism regarding the success of the present battle with tyranny, but that the Italians, and all mankind, would surely be freed of oppression from despots some day was continually uppermost in his mind. The entry in his diary for February 18, 1821 is worthy of notice:

To-day I have had no communication with my Carbonari cronies; but, in the mean time, my lower apartments are full of their bayonets, fusils, cartridges, and what not. I suppose that they consider me as a depot, to be sacrificed, in case of accidents. It is no great matter, supposing that Italy could be liberated, who or what is sacrificed. It is a grand object -- the very poetry of politics. Only think -- a free Italy!!!

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6 Ibid., pp. 145-146.  
7 Ibid., p. 163.  
8 Ibid., p. 173.  
9 Ibid., p. 205.
When the movement collapsed, Byron's disappointment was obvious. "The plan has missed—the Chiefs are betrayed," he wrote in his diary on February 24; "I always had an idea that it would be bungled..." His frustration over the loss of the people's opportunity to liberate themselves, and his opportunity to participate actively, was relieved in his usual manner, as he wrote to Thomas Moore on April 28, 1821:

And now let us be literary:—a sad falling off, but it is always a consolation. If "Othello's occupation be gone," let us take to the next best; and, if we cannot contribute to make mankind more free and wise, we may amuse ourselves and those who like it.

In June, 1822, Byron announced that Teresa had lifted her ban against his continuing Don Juan, and he returned to his poem after an interval of almost two years. However, a new spirit of seriousness seems to pervade the work from this point forward. It was perhaps the revolutionary activities of the previous year which determined the spirit of especially his newest cantos exposing "the horrible realities that lie behind glib talk about fame, glory, and heroic deeds." In July, he wrote to Moore, asking for the return of the fragments he had previously

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10 Ibid., p. 208.  
11 Ibid., p. 272.
written against Wellington, and on August 8, 1822, he wrote again to explain his purpose for the most recent section of his poem:

I have written three more cantos of Don Juan, and am hovering on the brink of another (the ninth). The reason I want the stanzas again which I sent you is, that as these cantos contain a full detail (like the storm in Canto Second) of the siege and assault of Ismael [sic], with much of sarcasm on those butchers in large business, your mercenary soldiery, it is a good opportunity of gracing the poem with xxx. With these things and these fellows, it is necessary, in the present clash of philosophy and tyranny, to throw away the scabbard. I know it is against fearful odds; but the battle must be fought; and it will be eventually for the good of mankind, whatever it may be for the individual who risks himself.

It is not difficult to see a similar seriousness of purpose motivating both Byron's participation in the Italian liberation movement and in the satire of his latest addition to Don Juan. "His metaphors here serve ... to remind us that he now saw poetry as an alternate mode of action, as another means by which he could help humanity ... by forcing them to see the truth, and rousing them to indignation and rebellion." 16

Byron's attack on war is representative of the liberal thought of his age:

This was the period when the ideas of isolated philosophers, poets, and groups, who for centuries past had inveighed against war, began, under the stress of current events, to

14 Letters and Journals, VI, 96.
spread to the multitudes and to take shape in political and social organizations for world peace, and the outlawing of wars.  

There is an apparent paradox, however, between his attack on war in Don Juan and his participation in the Italian Carbonari. An examination of Byron's philosophy on war reveals that he was opposed first to tyranny and stifled freedom, both individual and national, and he saw that war was often the product of this tyranny. This concept was presented earlier in the third canto of Childe Harold's Pilgrimage:

While Waterloo with Cannae's carnage vies,  
Morat and Marathon twin names shall stand;  
They were true Glory's stainless victories,  
Won by the unambitious heart and hand  
Of a proud, brotherly, and civic band,  
All unbought champions in no princely cause  
Of vice-entailed Corruption; they no land  
Doomed to bewail the blasphemy of laws  
Making Kings' rights divine, by some Draconic clause.

Consequently, his attack is directed against the despot whose ambition stirs them to engage in aggressive wars for self-aggrandizement.

Considering his position, it seems logical that he would sanction, and participate in, wars fought in the defense of national and individual liberty. Byron's open advocacy of wars of liberation or revolution

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17 Elizabeth F. Boyd, Byron's "Don Juan": A Critical Study (New Brunswick, New Jersey, 1945), pp. 76-77.

against despotic powers, such as Austria and Turkey, and against unsympathetic sovereigns is the result of his philosophical inquiry into the problem of despotism. When he returned to the composition of Don Juan, his sense of what was just and necessary made him equally steadfast in his determination to present the appeal for revolution and a realistic appraisal of war and the oppression of despotism. "Plot, incident, description, character-portrayal, and the poet's own attitude to his narration, were all to be governed by the fidelity to truth--by his knowledge of things as they really are."  

In Canto II Byron had presented a realistic description of a shipwreck, taking his factual material from Sir G. Dalzell's Shipwrecks and Disasters at Sea and successfully making it his own: the details he used were "designed to express and emphasise his own vision of reality."  

In much the same way, he turned to the Essai sur l'Histoire Ancienne et Moderne de la Nouvelle Russie by De Castelnau as a military source-book in general and for the account of the Siege of Ismail specifically. Byron's purpose, of course, is to present an accurate narrative, and his success in converting these facts into an engrossing tale of horror is well acknowledged;  

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20 Ibid.

to Rutherford, rival even those of Tolstoy. Any number of examples cannot fully illustrate the total effect of these cantos on war, but one stanza might be cited as representative of the naked realism he is able to achieve:

Thus on they wallowed in the bloody mire
    Of dead and dying thousands, --sometimes gaining
A yard or two of ground, which brought them nigher
    To some odd angle for which all were straining;
At other times, repulsed by the close fire,
    Which really poured as if all Hell were raining,
Instead of Heaven, they stumbled backwards o'er
A wounded comrade, sprawling in his gore.  

(viii, 20)

Byron's condemnation of aggressive wars in Cantos VII and VIII arises from his conclusion that they are spawned by corrupted man and his society which condones or tolerates despotism and the fallacy of military glory:

"Let there be light! said God, and there was light!"
    "Let there be blood!" says man, and there's a sea!
The fiat of this spoiled child of the Night
    (For Day ne'er saw his merits) could decree
More evil in an hour, than thirty bright
    Summers could renovate, though they should be
Lovely as those which ripened Eden's fruit,
For war cuts up not only branch, but root.  

(vii, 41)

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24 Ibid., p. 86.
Byron's reference to Eden is noteworthy, for he often opposes Civilization and Nature. He speaks of the joys and solitude of nature to illustrate, with shocking contrast, the undeniable link war has with its parent, society:

So much for Nature: --by way of variety,
Now back to thy great joys, Civilization!
And the sweet consequence of large society,
War, Pestilence, the despot's desolation,
The kingly scourge, the Lust for Notoriety,
The millions slain by soldiers for their ration . . . .
(viii, 68)

His realistic descriptions have received their just praise, but praise was not Byron's aim. The reality pervading these cantos is a tool which he uses in an attempt to open minds and to encourage participation in his personal condemnation of war and its destruction:

History can only take things in the gross;
But could we know them in detail, perchance
In balancing the profit and the loss,
War's merit it by no means might enhance,
To waste so much gold for a little dross,
As hath been done, mere conquest to advance.

Cockneys of London! Muscadins of Paris!
Just ponder what a pious pastime war is . . . .
(viii, 3, 124)

Don Juan is, by nature, a constructive poem with a moral purpose.

Byron's horror of aggressive war is a part of his denial of every destructive force, including the acceptance of any of the countless appearances forced on society by religion, the customs of love and

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25 Ibid., p. 146.
26 Ibid., pp. 113, 174.
marriage, the sovereigns and their supporters, and by those who cannot comprehend or will not admit the disaster of war. To insure a supporter of these wars that his energies are misguided, Byron reaches for the ultimate description of all that is evil and vile in war to shake him into comprehension and admission:

All that the mind would shrink from of excesses;
All that the body perpetrates of bad;
All that we read, hear, dream, of man's distresses;
All that the Devil would do if run stark mad;
All that defies the worst which pen expresses;
All by which Hell is peopled, or as sad
As Hell--mere mortals who their power abuse, --
Was here (as heretofore and since) let loose.

Canto VII devotes much attention to the hypocrisy surrounding military glory, both personal and national, as a prelude and as a counterpoint to his drama of the Siege of Ismail and its chilling results. Byron had noted previously that the acclaim a hero received was as mutable as fashion, since "every year and month sends forth a new one. . ." (i, 1). A far more important reason for Byron's distaste of the idea of military glory and its social respectability was that, when achieved in aggressive conflicts, he could find no basic difference between heroism and what society most abhorred, between "glory"

27 Ibid., p. 173.
and "murder" (vii, 26). Just as Byron condemns his society for its acceptance of an unreal, romanticized love as it is presented in novels, so he chastizes them as heartily for accepting an equally unrealistic and romanticized view of "glory":

Medals, rank, ribbons, lace, embroidery, scarlet,
Are things immortal to immortal man,
As purple to the Babylonian harlot:
An uniform to boys is like a fan
To women; there is scarce a crimson varlet
But deems himself the first in Glory's van.
But Glory's glory; and if you would find
What that is--ask the pig who sees the wind!  (vii, 84)

Man seeks military glory and the fame which accompanies it for the obvious reasons of prestige, but youth are often encouraged to follow the wind "to have the sacking of a town; / A pleasant thing to young men at their years" (vii, 18). Byron demands a realistic attitude toward the attainment of glory from his readers, presenting most often, for their consideration, the reality of the mutability of fame and the slaughter which accompanies society's concept of glory. Sometimes Byron uses homily to awaken reality in the sleeping conscience of society:

And almost every day, in sad reality,
Some sucking hero is compelled to rear,
Who, when we come to sum up the totality
Of deeds to human happiness most dear,
Turns out to be a butcher in great business...

(vii, 83)33

At other times he uses logic to extract reality from appearance, a not always painless operation:

I wonder (although Mars no doubt's a God I
Praise) if a man's name in a bulletin
May make up for a bullet in his body?
   I hope this little question is no sin...34
(vii, 21)

But whatever his method, Byron's conviction that the ambition for glory is one stimulus among many which are responsible for the horrible reality of war is stated with a force that is difficult to ignore.

Although Byron realizes that society's admiration of military heroism is surely responsible for a part of the respectability which aggressive wars enjoy, he asserts that it is the respectability of despots and the toleration of despotism which must receive most of the blame for war, for it is the despot's ambition which instigates this destruction without regard for human clay.35 After the successful destruction of Ismail, Byron and his readers accompany Don Juan on his trip to Russia and watch as he gives the happy news to a jubilant Catherine:

33 Ibid., p. 108.
34 Ibid., p. 77.
35 Don Juan, II, 491.
Great joy was her's, or rather joys; the first

Was a ta'en city—thirty thousand slain.

Glory and triumph o'er her aspect burst,

As an East Indian Sunrise on the main.

These quenched a moment her Ambition's thirst—

So Arab Deserts drink in Summer's rain:

In vain!—As fall the dews on quenchless sands,

Blood only serves to wash Ambition's hands!

(ix, 59)

Yet, Catherine's influence must have its ambassadors, and Byron does not fail to realize their significance in the total picture of desolation he had determined to paint "when things called sovereigns think it best/ To kill, and Generals turn it into jest" (ix, 60). As Catherine's general, Suwarrow must accept his part of the blame for Ismail, and consequently, a part of Byron's contempt (although he recognizes Suwarrow's efficiency):

Suwarrow ... but saw things in the gross,

Being much too gross to see them in detail,

Who calculated life as so much dross,

And as the wind a widowed nation's wail,

And cared as little for his army's loss

(So that their efforts should at length prevail)

As wife and friends did for the boils of Job,

(vii, 77)

Never allowing a chance escape him to apply the moral of his poem to England, Byron was quick to vent his disgust on Castlereagh, as a representative of these death-dealing middle-men, calling him "The

36 Don Juan, III, 212.
37 Ibid.
38 Ibid., p. 105.
vulgarest tool that Tyranny could want . . ."("Dedication," 12). Of Wellington's victory over Napoleon, he says:

Never had mortal Man such opportunity,
   Except Napoleon, or abused it more:
You might have freed fall'n Europe from the Unity
   Of Tyrants, and been blest from shore to shore:
And now--what is your fame? Shall the Muse tune it ye?
   Now--that the rabble's first vain shouts are o'er?
Go! hear it in your famished Country's cries!
Behold the World! and curse your victories!
   (ix, 9)

And finally, the soldiers themselves come under his attack, as representatives of the despots and their ambition. After the Russian army had entered Ismail, crimes of every nature were engendered; and although Byron condemns any personal ambition for glory which might momentarily destroy a man's sympathy for others, he understands that even their militaristic emotions, as their leaders', are only a part of the total desolation born of, and planned by, despotism:

Two villainous Cossacques pursued the child
   With flashing eyes and weapons: matched with them,
The rudest brute that roams Siberia's wild
   Has feelings pure and polished as a gem, --
The bear is civilized, the wolf is mild:
   And whom for this at last must we condemn?
Their natures? or their sovereigns, who employ
All arts to teach their subjects to destroy?
   (viii, 92)

39 Don Juan, II, 16.
40 Don Juan, III, 187.
41 Ibid., p. 152.
42 Ibid., p. 157.
With moral indignation and hope for the future, Byron swears his utter contempt for those who abuse their powers of kingship and any who aid them in spreading their disease:

And I will war, at least in words (and—should My chance so happen—deeds) with all who war With Thought; —and of Thought's foes by far most rude, Tyrants and Sycophants have been and are. I know not who may conquer: if I could Have such a prescience, it should be no bar To this my plain, sworn, downright detestation Of every despotism in every nation. (ix, 24)

The purpose of the realism in Cantos VII, VIII, and IX of Don Juan is not only to promote a sympathetic distaste for aggressive wars but to arouse an apathetic public from its lethargy into open rebellion against the despotism he has exposed. His revolutionary creed could not be more explicit than when he shouts at the giants that he "will teach, if possible, the stones/To rise against Earth's tyrants . . . " (viii, 135).

He makes no attempt to veil his revolutionary indoctrination, and for Byron, any fear of reprisal must take a position of secondary importance. Byron probably sounds least like an English peer when he foresees a time when revolution has rid the earth of the last vestiges of despotic monarchy:

\[43\] Ibid., p. 194.

\[44\] Ibid., p. 179.
Never let it
Be said that we still truckle unto thrones; --
But ye--our children's children! think how we
Showed what things were before the world was free!
(viii, 135)\textsuperscript{45}

Byron's praise of individual and national defense against the oppression of despotism is revealed in his reverence for such men as Wilberforce, "Thou moral Washington of Africa" (xiv, 82),\textsuperscript{46} who was successful in promoting the abolition of slave trade in the British Empire in 1807.\textsuperscript{47}

His warm praise of wars of defense illustrates his sympathy for oppressed people and their cause; he calls Washington's battlefield "holy ground, /
Which breathes of nations saved, not worlds undone" (viii, 5).\textsuperscript{48} Byron's appeal for revolution evokes images of tyrants as spiders, and as one can easily remove the threat of these creatures, Byron pleads:

\begin{quote}
Raise but an arm! 'twill brush their web away,
And without that, their poison and their claws
Are useless. Mind, good People! what I say--
(Or rather Peoples)--go on without pause!
The web of those Tarantulas each day
Increases, till you shall make common cause:
None, save the Spanish Fly and Attic Bee,
As yet are strongly stinging to be free.
(ix, 28)\textsuperscript{49}
\end{quote}

Being a member of a politically liberal group of thinkers and "born for opposition" (xv, 22),\textsuperscript{50} Byron used Don Juan for his other

\textsuperscript{45}Ibid. \textsuperscript{46}Ibid., p. 445. \textsuperscript{47}George M. Trevelyan, History of England (New York, 1932), p. 599. \textsuperscript{48}Don Juan, III, 114. \textsuperscript{49}Ibid., p. 196. \textsuperscript{50}Ibid., p. 466.
means of championing liberty and fighting despotism once the Italian liberation movement collapsed. His actions made his literary attack on aggressive wars and despotism, and his literary praise of defensive wars and revolution, somehow more impressive. In action as in deed, his philosophy on war and despotism, as stated primarily in Cantos VII, VIII, and IX, did not waver. Byron would again leave his work on Don Juan after beginning Canto XVII and enter another national fight for freedom from oppression; sailing for Greece, he became active in the Greek war of independence from Turkey. Although his tangible aid to either Italy or Greece, if judged solely by objective standards, was not of significant value, he is still remembered in Greece not as a poet but as the man who came to do something. 51

CHAPTER IV

A REALISTIC APPRAISAL OF ENGLISH FREEDOM AND MORALITY

Although Lord Byron was continually aware of his English heritage and station and expected to receive preferential treatment in Italy commensurate with both his nationality and title, he understood and detested the hypocrisy and cant pervading the institutions and customs of the nation. The scandalous rumors which preceded his separation had been promoted by the hypocritical morality of this society, and it was the social oppression by members of his own and other classes that led him to seek exile. Even though it is unlikely that his marriage would have long remained intact, he never quite forgave England for its part in the painful memories he associated with his separation from Lady Byron. It could not be argued, however, that Byron's satire of


3 Ibid., pp. 555-559.
England's hypocrisies throughout Don Juan is little more than defensive revenge against the society which had scorned him; some stanzas are indeed written in defense of the morality of the poem—and consequently, of the poet—but Byron has a more important motive for directing his satire at his country. He is able to view the insults of his society from the maturity of experience; and, without real bitterness, he is determined to use that experience and knowledge to hold a mirror up to England and show Englishmen the reality their hypocrisies have been hiding too long.

In the last section of Don Juan, Cantos X through XVI, Byron discards his previous method of denouncing England's "wretched affectations and systematized Sophistry" indirectly, as in his satire of Don Juan's education in Cantos I and II, or by occasional direct reference. Don Juan's introduction into English society as Catherine's ambassador at last offers Byron the opportunity to turn his cannon directly against the foe. Toward the end of Canto X, Byron announces his purpose to his English readers:

He [Don Juan] paused—and so will I; as doth a crew
Before they give their broadside. By and bye,


My gentle countrymen, we will renew
    Our old acquaintance: and at last I'll try
To tell you truths you will not take as true,
    Because they are so: --a male Mrs. Fry,
With a soft besom will I sweep your halls,
And brush a web or two from off the walls.

(x, 84)

The portrayal of reality as he understands it, as in the earlier cantos, enables Byron to expose quite naturally the truth suppressed beneath the appearances upholding English institutions and social customs. However, in the last cantos, his attack against English hypocrisy and oppression often takes a different approach in a frank and unveiled assertion of existing evils, a method not so commonly used in the first six cantos of Don Juan. Byron now depends less upon plot when it obstructs his more important purpose of showing his society an undistorted reflection of itself. He does not, however, lose sight of the importance of narration to his satiric intentions, and this section contains some of his most amusing and cutting ridicule, "the only weapon," he told the Countess of Blessington, "that the English climate cannot rust." It is to be expected, therefore, that, as in his cantos


7 Countess of Blessington, A Journal of Conversations with Lord Byron (Boston, 1859), p. 46.
on war and despotism, Byron's assertion of reality will take a significant place alongside narrative satire as he makes a critical evaluation of the extent of English hypocrisy.

Byron's tone, although serious, is not quite so indignantly moral as in the earlier cantos on war. His denunciation of the hypocrisy of English freedom and morality is vigorous; but when Byron takes his hero inside London's fashionably aristocratic life, his position is often uncertain, and his narration exhibits both approval and disapproval:

The satire is thus curiously unstable, based as it is not on any firm belief or principle, but on Byron's fluctuating feelings, partly critical and hostile, partly tolerant and sympathetic, towards English aristocratic life: as a reformed rake, but not altogether a repentant one, he obviously found it difficult to decide on any definite satiric attitude.

If there is an uncertainty in his satiric attitude, it might be argued that there is concurrently an ambivalent presentation of reality. Although his intimate experience with the Great World, "that microcosm on stilts . . ." (xii, 56) does enhance his appraisal of their attitudes and activities, this experience does not necessarily make his portrait an objective one. Consequently, it must be expected that his realistic examination of English hypocrisies will be colored with subjectivity in other cases, as in his appraisal of English freedom and morality, which

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9 Don Juan, III, 342.
must illustrate his own prejudices. Even his ability to organize this reality seems to vary indirectly with his experience, for Cantos VII and VIII, the material for which came almost entirely from his reading, do not exhibit the "tendency to formlessness"\(^\text{10}\) of the last cantos. It seems obvious that Byron's purpose for bringing Don Juan to England must have arisen from a desire to instigate a revolution against the vices which England, as he saw it, chose to ignore, if the world could not. As Byron brings his hero in sight of the Dover cliffs, he draws back from either sentiment or bitterness and is now able to declare, in honest evaluation:

> I've no great cause to love that spot of earth,
> Which holds what might have been the noblest nation;
> But though I owe it little but my birth,
> I feel a mixed regret and veneration
> For its decaying fame and former worth.
> Seven years (the usual term of transportation)
> Of absence lay one's old resentments level,
> When a man's country's going to the devil.
> (x, 66)\(^\text{11}\)

One of the first English hypocrisies to come under Byron's ridicule is the English attitude toward their own freedom. Don Juan's arrival in London is preceded by Byron's appraisal of the much-cherished hypocrisy to underscore the irony of Juan's subsequent attitude. Byron is not to


\(^{11}\) *Don Juan*, III, 257.
be convinced that England is really free, as she has "butchered half the earth, and bullied t'other" (x, 81):12

Alas! could She but fully, truly, know
How her great name is now throughout abhorred;
How eager all the earth is for the blow
Which shall lay bare her bosom to the sword;
How all the nations deem her their worst foe,
    That worse than worst of foes, the once adored False friend, who held out freedom to mankind,
And now would chain them—-to the very mind; --

Would she be proud, or boast herself the free,
    Who is but first of slaves? The nations are
In prison, --but the jailor, what is he?
    No less a victim to the bolt and bar.
Is the poor privilege to turn the key
    Upon the captive, freedom? He's as far
From the enjoyment of the earth and air
Who watches o'er the chain, as they who wear
    (x, 67-68)13

Byron's sympathy with the Irish, who had been subjected to what he would surely call English tyranny, is illustrated often in Don Juan. As a representative of English freedom, Byron had portrayed Castlereagh as a "Cold-blooded, smooth-faced, placid miscreant!/Dabbling its sleek young hands in Erin's gore . . ."("Dedication," 12).14 Byron would not add his voice to the apology for tyranny which England clothed in the hypocrisy of freedom, and his indignation over the oppression of the Irish was one factor which must have promoted the

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12 Ibid., p. 265.  
13 Ibid., p. 258.  
14 Don Juan, II, 16.
criticism he hurled at the kind of freedom England allowed. The comments of George Trevelyan reveal that Byron's realistic assessment of at least one aspect of English "freedom" was not far wrong:

The island itself, twice conquered by Cromwell and by William, lay quiet under British and Protestant ascendancy, and under the iniquitous and partly enforced Penal Laws against Catholics.

In the last thirty years of the [eighteenth] Century [sic] the old bones in that valley of desolation began to stir under the reviving winds of a new age. . . . against a system of tyranny that sacrificed Ireland as a whole to English trading interests, and all other Irish denominations to Anglican ascendancy.

Even in England, the oppression of the government was not less severe on occasion. After the military success of 1815, England was left suffering from an enormous debt, and the economy was not capable of raising the farm laborers and factory workers out of their extreme poverty. When the poor demanded reforms, they were only accused of rebellion. Finally in 1819, during a peaceful meeting in Manchester to continue the demand for reform, "a company of soldiers charged them, killing a few and injuring hundreds. The 'Peterloo massacre' was applauded by those in power as praiseworthy repression of an attempt at insurrection."  

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However, Don Juan could not be in greater rapture over the idea of English freedom as he arrives on Shooter's Hill overlooking London. He sees this land as the preserver and protector of freedom for mankind, and in a naive burst of enthusiasm for this appearance, Juan expounds the virtues of this nation:

"And here," he cried, "is Freedom's chosen station; here peals the people's voice, nor can entomb it Racks, prisons, inquisitions; resurrection Awaits it, each new meeting or election."[17]

(xi, 9)

Byron will not allow this sentimental display to proceed longer than is necessary for his satiric purpose, and with obvious delight, he interrupts Juan's ecstasy and confronts him with a somewhat more realistic example of England's "freedom." As Don Juan reaches the climax of his praise of the morality and self-discipline of the English people, he hears some of England's "freeborn sounds" (xi, 11):

"Here are chaste wives, pure lives; here people pay But what they please; and if that things be dear, 'Tis only that they love to throw away Their cash, to show how much they have a-year. Here laws are all inviolate; none lay Traps for the traveller; every highway's clear: Here" -- he was interrupted by a knife, With "Damn your eyes! your money or your life!".  

(xi, 10)[19]

17 Don Juan, III, 272.
18 Ibid., p. 273.
19 Ibid.
Byron's apparent conviction that England was neither free herself nor would allow freedom for others is convincing. It is true that England was responsible for Ireland's oppression and the "Peterloo massacre," but it must also be remembered that she was responsible for turning the destructive Napoleonic tide away from Europe. Byron would not, however, give England credit for even this attempt to return a balance of power to Europe. 20 Byron's political liberalism 21 colors his view of English freedom, and the reality he presents in dealing with the problem bears the mark of his own subjectivity and must be accepted skeptically.

The humorous and unflattering Shooter's Hill episode is realistic, however, and it presents Byron with the opportunity to question the validity of English morality. Don Juan had praised England for its "chaste wives" and "pure lives" (xi, 10), 22 and Byron's illustrations of the general lack of morality in England's society will establish the irony of this accolade. The appraisal of England throughout this section of Don Juan ultimately brings Byron back to this ubiquitous problem of immorality. Don Juan, whose education is not quite complete, is not so easily convinced as Byron that the English are not a particularly moral


22 Don Juan, III, 273.
people. Juan apologetically surmises that this is only their somewhat unusual way of welcoming foreigners; even so, he admits that "I recollect some innkeepers who don't differ, except in robbing with a bow..." (xi, 15). Upon entering the city, Don Juan is escorted to a hotel specializing in victimizing wealthy, foreign guests who "cannot find a bill's small items costly" (xi, 31). As they approach the hotel through London's well-lighted streets, Byron ponders the false morality of the city's canting millions:

But London's so well lit, that if Diogenes
Could recommence to hunt his honest man,
And found him not amidst the various progenies
Of this enormous city's spreading spawn,
'Twere not for want of lamps to aid his dodging his
Yet undiscovered treasure.

(xi, 28)

Byron's severe attack on the hypocrisy of morality and virtue is closely associated with his thorough condemnation of the cant of England's society, and especially of its social elite, "Whose virtue lies in never being detected" (xiv, 61). On the Continent a lapse in the careful protection of the appearance of virtue can be forgiven, but in moral England, the detection of lost virtue brings immediate scorn and total social exile:

23 Ibid., p. 275.
24 Ibid., p. 283.
25 Ibid., p. 281.
26 Ibid., p. 437.
27 Ibid., pp. 350-351.
... when a young bride errs,
Poor thing! Eve's was a trifling case to her's.

.......
Society, that china without flaw,
(The hypocrite!) will banish them like Marius,
To sit amidst the ruins of their guilt:
For Fame's a Carthage not so soon rebuilt.

(xii, 64, 78)

But as much as "good society/Is no less famed for tolerance than piety..." (xii, 80) Byron recognizes, and remembers, that English society is tolerant only of undetected vice and is consequently forced to wear the appearance of piety:

But they who blunder thus are raw beginners;
A little genial sprinkling of hypocrisy
Has saved the fame of thousand splendid sinners...

(xii, 66)

Byron can only sigh with disgust and recommend to Don Juan that he do the only acceptable thing when in England: he must follow its peculiar moral code with great care and "Be hypocritical, be cautious, be/Not what you seem, but always what you see" (xi, 86).

Thomas B. Macaulay's article on Moore's Life of Lord Byron, appearing in 1831 in the Edinburgh Review, illustrates the hypocrisy of English morality that drew Byron's understandable criticism in particularly the last seven cantos of Don Juan:

28 Ibid., pp. 345, 352.
29 Ibid., p. 396.
30 Ibid., p. 346.
31 Ibid., p. 310.
We know no spectacle so ridiculous as the British public in one of its periodical fits of morality. In general, elopements, divorces, and family quarrels, pass with little notice. We read the scandal, talk about it for a day, and forget it. But once in six or seven years our virtue becomes outrageous. We cannot suffer the laws of religion and decency to be violated. We must make a stand against vice. We must teach libertines that the English people appreciate the importance of domestic ties. Accordingly some unfortunate man, in no respect more depraved than hundreds whose offences have been treated with lenity, is singled out as an expiatory sacrifice... We reflect very complacently on our own severity, and compare with great pride the high standard of morals established in England with the Parisian laxity. At length our anger is satiated. Our victim is ruined and heart-broken. And our virtue goes quietly to sleep for seven years more.32

Macaulay's bias is obvious; his implications, however, may be applied to the general level of hypocritical virtue and false morality in the English society. E. Beresford Chancellor's Life in Regency and Early Victorian Times reveals that "Although so many ameliorations gradually took place as regards public morals and manners during the first half of the century, its earlier years did not give very marked evidence of this..."33 Marchand acknowledges, however, that Byron's friends were in general agreement on his being "unaware of the growing moral temper of the bulk of the reading public, a development which was in part


a general reaction to the profligacy of the court under the Regent..."  

If Byron's assumption that England was not a moral nation is incorrect, he cannot have been as far from the truth, at least concerning the moral laxity of the upper classes, as some might have wished him to be. Byron's experience with England's moral hypocrisy when he was scorned must have given emphasis to his concept of the extent of false morality, and his portrayal of this pervasive hypocrisy is probably not exempt from subjectivity. Nevertheless, his contempt is exhibited with high-voltage ridicule:

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Oh for a forty-parson power to chant  
    Thy praise, Hypocrisy! Oh for a hymn
Loud as the Virtues thou dost loudly vaunt,  
    Not practise!...
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(x, 34)  

His essentially realistic appraisal of this fantasy of English morality is sometimes veiled in satire and ridicule, but he often steps to the footlights and speaks plainly:

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But how shall I relate in other Cantos  
    Of what befell our hero in the land,
Which 'tis the common cry and lie to vaunt as  
    A moral country? But I hold my hand--
For I disdain to write an Atalantis;  
    But 'tis as well at once to understand,
You are not a moral people, and you know it,  
    Without the aid of too sincere a poet.
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(xi, 87)  

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34 Marchand, Byron, II, 765.  
35 Don Juan, III, 241.  
36 Ibid., p. 311.
It is with obvious relish that Byron approaches the canvas upon which he will paint, with realistic strokes, the Great World of the elite, that virtuously immoral, pampered, and "polish'd horde, /Form'd of two mighty tribes, the Bores and Bored" (xiii, 95).  

Byron's descriptions of this select group reveal a recurring cycle of basically unimportant but impressive social intercourse, of marrying, unmarrying, and remarrying, of unrest and dissatisfaction, and of virtuous affectations and hidden vices. The social exchange is not progressive but merely repetitive:

When we have made our love, and gamed our gaming,
   Drest, voted, shone, and, may be, something more;
With dandies dined; heard senators declaiming;
   Seen beauties brought to market by the score;
Sad rakes to sadder husbands chastely taming;
   There's little left but to be bored or bore.

(xiv, 18)

His evaluation of this cyclical monotony often reminds the reader of biographical details of Byron's life in London, when he was a fashionable addition to any ball, or of his early months in Italy. His descriptions often underscore the essential futility of the fashionable life:

They are young, but know not youth--it is anticipated;
   Handsome but wasted, rich without a sou;
Their vigour in a thousand arms is dissipated;
   Their cash comes from, their wealth goes to a Jew;
Both senates see their nightly votes participated
   Between the tyrant's and the tribunes' crew;

37 Ibid., p. 402.  
38 Ibid., p. 308.  
39 Ibid., p. 418.
And having voted, dined, drank, gameed, and whored,
The family vault receives another lord.
(xi, 75)\(^{40}\)

There is a uniformity among these people, apparently produced by the necessary conformity to a standard of superiority, that is made evident by Byron's ridicule. "Society is smooth'd to that excess, /That manners hardly differ more than dress" (xiii, 94);\(^{41}\) therefore, no one concerned with the maintenance of his envied status dares differ to the point of individuality in a society in which "manners now make the men . . ." (xv, 26).\(^{42}\)

The hypocrisy of social superiority is shattered primarily in Cantos XIII through XVI when Byron's satire is aimed at Lord Henry and Lady Amundeville and their houseguests at Norman Abbey. The arrival of the short summer season brings with it the departure from London of its elite coterie, and the Amundeville party join the yearly pilgrimage:

. . . The world was gone;
The twice two thousand, for whom earth was made,
Were vanished to be what they call alone . . .\(^{43}\)
(xiii, 49)

With Don Juan as a member of the party, Byron has the chance to illustrate the affectations of this group against the background of Juan's

\(^{40}\) Ibid., p. 306. \(^{41}\) Ibid., p. 402. \(^{42}\) Ibid., p. 468. \(^{43}\) Ibid., p. 381.
sensibility and warmth, the gentry's formal familiarity, and the peasants' natural conduct. Byron's purpose, however, is not to proclaim the inferiority of the Great World; he only wishes to show that they have the same vices, emotions, and fallibilities as their less prominent fellows. In the country environment, a daily round of dining, hunting, reading, walking, or writing letters provides the entertainment in keeping with the station of these elite, and "all was gentle and aristocratic/In this our party; polish'd, smooth and cold . . ."(xii, 110).

In contrast with the disciplined urbanity of the guests at Norman Abbey, those members of the gentry invited to the campaign dinner which would send Lord Henry back to Parliament clearly illustrate that the fallacy of superiority is maintained both from above and below:

   But of all nature's discrepancies, none
   Upon the whole is greater than the difference
   Beheld between the country and the town,
   Of which the latter merits every preference
   From those who have few resources of their own,
   And only think, or act, or feel with reference
   To some small plan of interest or ambition--
   Both which are limited to no condition.
   (xvi, 85)

In the gentry's desperation to emulate even the attitudes of their social examples at Norman Abbey, Don Juan's preoccupation, and consequent

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44 Ibid., p. 409.
silence, during the extravagant feast met with their heartiest disapproval, and "They wondered how a young man so absurd, Lord Henry at his table should endure..." (xvi, 89).\(^{46}\)

In few other places is the superior attitude of even the middle class exposed to more ridicule than when Byron introduces Lord Henry in his role as resident justice, examining the cases of a poacher and an unwed, but very pregnant, country girl. As expected, Byron is in obvious sympathy with the poacher and his natural rights, although the accepted hypocrisy of superiority demands that shooting partridges and pheasants is "no sport for peasants" (xiii, 75).\(^{47}\)

\[\text{Lord Henry was a justice, and that Scout} \]
\[\text{The constable, beneath a warrant's banner,} \]
\[\text{Had bagged this poacher upon Nature's manor.} \]
\[\text{(xvi, 62)} \]

It is, however, the penchant of all classes for claiming moral superiority over a discovered transgressor which enrages Byron, and he interprets this attitude with caustic ridicule designed to arouse his reader's indignation over this prostitution of reality. He is primarily concerned with presenting the girl's reactions to the examination which Lord Henry hopes will expose the man responsible for her distasteful condition.

\(^{46}\) Ibid., p. 543.

\(^{47}\) Ibid., p. 394.

\(^{48}\) Ibid., p. 531.
Not "insolent enough to scorn the scorners..." (xvi, 65), 49 she waits patiently for the interview to proceed:

The present culprit was extremely pale,
   Pale as if painted so; her cheek being red
By nature, as in higher dames less hale
   'Tis white, at least when they just rise from bed.
Perhaps she was ashamed of seeming frail,
   Poor soul! for she was country born and bred,
And knew no better in her immorality
Than to wax white--for blushes are for quality.  
   (xvi, 64) 50

If Byron is to be believed, it would seem that the lower classes are usually expected to wait patiently, expected to accept their inferiority, and expected to order their lives according to the wishes of their betters. If Byron is not incorrect, his readers must question the validity of the social or moral superiority of any class.

Byron's realistic appraisal of England's inhabitants and the hypocrisies pervading their institutions and customs is rather complete. His satire of the English government with its taxes and oppression, of politicians and their lies, deceit, and general inefficiency, of "royal itch and loyal scratching" (xi, 78), 51 of lawyers, doctors, and poets is marked throughout by an insistence on the presentation of a realistic evaluation of England as his surest means of ridicule. The coldly

49 Ibid., p. 532.
50 Ibid.
51 Ibid., p. 307.
methodical, even commercial, nature of the marriage marts of the beau monde startles Don Juan and prompts Byron to indignant, and humorous, assault. The cool and unemotional English character, personified by Lord Henry Amundeville, also merits and receives Byron's disapproval. The hypocrisies inherent in the English concept of their own freedom and morality and the hypocrisies which keep the social elite aloof in self-assurance are all attacked because their foundations are imbedded in falsehood instead of the reality which is obvious to Byron.

His purpose is not to level the English institutions and customs he satirizes; Byron is not a nihilist. Rather, his satire is noticeably constructive; he recommends, both directly and indirectly, that man accept nothing on faith and evaluate honestly the appearances of his society. Byron recommends a realistic appraisal of social and moral attitudes. He remembered the hypocrisy which was England, and he understood the security and content of a conscience assuaged by hypocrisy. His constructive satire is designed to cut to the quick of his reader's conscience--to make him insecure by stripping him of his hypocrisies. Byron received opposition from his friends, his publisher, Teresa Guiccioli, and his readers; his realistic portrait of social evils was not always pleasant, and he knew it. Yet, he would not seek their
applause by assuring his society as he felt Southey was doing. 52

Instead, he chose to continue his apparently futile task of beating his satiric head against their "moral" doors:

But now I'm going to be immoral; now
I mean to show things really as they are,
Not as they ought to be: for I avow,
That till we see what's what in fact, we're far
From much improvement with that virtuous plough
Which skims the surface, leaving scarce a scar
Upon the black loam long manured by Vice,
Only to keep its corn at the old price. 53

(xii, 40)

53 Don Juan, III, 335.
CHAPTER V

THE FUNCTIONAL REALITY

IN DON JUAN

Although Byron exhibited some critical uncertainty about the merits of his own work as late as the time when he turned temporarily from satire to drama in 1821, it is apparent that, by the time he had completed the twelfth canto of Don Juan, Byron was firmly convinced of the poetic strength of his developing satire and was determined to devote more attention to this literary chastening of society. He indicated in Canto XII that the previous cantos were only introductions to the body of the poem, and these somewhat terse statements are among several hints in his letters and in the poem itself that this work was far from finished at the time of his death in April, 1824. A significant reason for the satiric strength of Don Juan was made obvious to Byron by the


reaction of his readers: 'The truth is that it is TOO TRUE....'\(^3\)

he told his publisher. With Don Juan, Byron attempted to make a realistic assessment of the traditions, prejudices, and hypocrisies of his society as a means of adding emphasis to his satiric strictures, and this attempt reveals the comprehensive scope of Byron's interests, the nature of his philosophical thought, and even his own prejudices.

Byron's various and often conflicting attitudes regarding the abuses of his society are the product of his skeptic and objective evaluation of his experience and observation. He addresses the reader who has equally strong prejudices, and as he questions the validity of his own opinions, he must also doubt his reader's traditions. Byron's satiric dice are loaded, and he expects his reader to recognize this fact. However, he also wants the reader to comprehend that they are loaded with something more significant to his freedom than society's oppressive hypocrisies:

And that's the moral of this composition,
If people would but see its real drift;--
But that they will not do without suspicion,
Because all genteel readers have the gift
Of closing 'gainst the light their orbs of vision ....
(vi, 88)\(^4\)

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\(^4\) Don Juan, III, 50.
Byron had discarded many of the unreasonable demands made upon man by society through an objective examination of the merits of such requirements, and he replaced them with attitudes more congenial to his personality when he felt they were conducive to releasing man's natural impulses that were inhibited by unnatural social requisites:

Man's a phenomenon, one knows not what,
And wonderful beyond all wondrous measure;
'Tis pity though, in this sublime world, that
Pleasure's a sin, and sometimes Sin's a pleasure . . .

(i, 133)

The theme of appearance and reality, which is ubiquitous in Don Juan, may be seen as the conflict between Civilization or Society and Nature. Byron's appeal for a realistic examination of all aspects of life is almost invariably an appeal for what is natural—that man follow his own nature as his best guide—as a substitute for the traditions and customs society offers man:

But all [emblems of Emotion] are better than the
sigh suppress,
Corroding in the cavern of the heart,
Making the countenance a masque of rest,
And turning human nature to an art.
Few men dare show their thoughts of worst or best;
Dissimulation always sets apart


7 Ibid., pp. 58, 70. See Don Juan, III. 146.
A corner for herself; and therefore Fiction
Is that which passes with least contradiction.
(xv, 3)

Byron's examination of social customs is designed to expose the appearances, upon which the respectability of these customs depends, as being contrary to man's natural impulses and to suggest more acceptable alternatives by implication or editorial commentary. When Byron advocates naturalism, he seems to indicate a desire for an attitude that is free from affectation or conventional restraint. Haidee was natural because affectation and restraint were not a part of her personality, and as she was natural, Haidee was capable of knowing and giving what Byron felt to be a more realistic form of love than society allows or comprehends. This progressive, liberal thought was not received with as much understanding as Byron might have hoped, and ironically the society he attempted to portray realistically, through fidelity to his cognition of factuality, condemned him for writing immoral verse.

Although he was sometimes discouraged, he did maintain a certain optimism that perhaps his purpose for writing *Don Juan* was not abortive. "*Don Juan* will be known by and bye," he wrote to John Murray, "for what it is intended, --a Satire on abuses of the present states of Society,

8 *Don Juan*, III, 457.
and not an eulogy of vice . . . . "9 The sentiments expressed in this letter of December 25, 1822 are repeated often in the poem:

But politics, and policy, and piety,
Are topics which I sometimes introduce,
Not only for the sake of their variety,
But as subservient to a moral use;
Because my business is to dress society,
And stuff with sage that very verdant goose.
(xv, 93)10

He continued to attack social abuses, and from this satire of society comes the poet's understanding of certain realities hidden beneath centuries of tradition and usage. These interdependent realities are the distillations of his comprehension of the difference between what society accepts as absolute and immutable and that which he understands to be only a temporary hypocrisy or custom. Byron's conception of reality is a product of his skeptical relativism 11 which maintains that nothing is certain and that even his conception of reality is necessarily relative to his individuality. His Pyrrhonism bears a striking

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10 Don Juan, III, 497.

resemblance to Renaissance libertine thought, which demanded a realistic examination of the authority of customs. Byron asserts through Don Juan that nothing, not even man's most sacred customs, merits recognition as absolute reality, as absolutes do not exist in a world of appearances. Consequently, man's feeble attempt at an honest evaluation of what is real or eternal must, of necessity, be encumbered with human subjectivity, preventing him from comprehending even the essence of his own immediate environment:

And yet 'tis very puzzling on the brink
Of what is called Eternity, to stare,
And know no more of what is here than there . . . .

(x, 20)

For the purpose of satirizing his society, Byron employed his comprehension of what was real as opposed to what bore the appearance of reality as a means of questioning the customs he felt to be oppressing man's natural inclinations. He saw that man had suppressed his own nature by adhering to hypocritical codes of conduct that had come to demand obedience. For this reason, Don Juan is insistent that these

13 Ibid., pp. 495-497.
14 Don Juan, III, 234.
customs have no ethical authority over man. Byron surely recognized that the social realities he presented in the poem were not exempt from his own subjectivity and were, consequently, only an interpretation of reality; however, he must have considered his comprehension of reality to be superior to the versions of those who allow social tyranny to war with Thought. Byron's revolutionary attitudes are evident throughout Don Juan, and the purpose of portraying the horrible actuality of war in Cantos VII and VIII was to enrage man's sensibility and make him rise to rebellion against the civilized custom of oppression. Similarly, the function of Byron's concepts of reality through all sixteen cantos of Don Juan is to encourage man to an awareness of the traditions of pervasive social oppression in the society to which he belongs through adherence to its commands. Byron does not assert that the realism he has contrasted with social appearances is a panacea; he will not claim to have found valid solutions to the problem of appearance and reality or to the conflict between Society and Nature. Byron's purpose for satirizing society by exposing its hypocrisies to the ridicule of his assessment of what is natural and skeptically realistic was to encourage man to think and to assert his own social freedom:

\[15\] Ibid., p. 194.
It is not that I adulate the people:
   Without me, there are Demagogues enough,
And Infidels, to pull down every steeple
   And set up in their stead some proper stuff.
Whether they may sow Scepticism to reap Hell,
   As is the Christian dogma rather rough,
I do not know; --I wish men to be free
As much from mobs as kings--from you as me.
   (ix, 25)\textsuperscript{16}

Marchand has indicated Byron's affinity for contradiction, \textsuperscript{17} and this attitude is exhibited throughout \textit{Don Juan}. Byron emphasizes that even the reality he has incorporated into this sceptical satire can and must be contradicted by other equally basic realities. This is to be expected and necessary if there is to be any truth to his poem:

But if a writer should be quite consistent,
   How could he possibly show things existent?

If people contradict themselves, can I
   Help contradicting them, and everybody,
Even my veracious self?  --But that's a lie;
   I never did so, never will--how should I?
He who doubts all things nothing can deny;
   Truth's fountains may be clear--her streams are muddy,
And cut through such canals of contradiction,
That she must often navigate o'er fiction.
   (xv, 87-88)\textsuperscript{18}

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., p. 195.
\textsuperscript{17} Leslie A. Marchand, \textit{Byron: A Biography} (New York, 1957), I, 395.
\textsuperscript{18} \textit{Don Juan}, III, 194-195.
Byron has insisted that his Muse tries not to deal in fiction but in truth; yet, as Byron is human, he is forced to deal in fiction. Fiction is one avenue to truth and reality, however, as it is often truth's virtual image. The streams are indeed muddy, and the reality of the disorder and contradictions in life is asserted, according to Brian Wilkie, even by his refusing to be consistent in an attempt to present the realities of this fictional disorder:

Without such undercutting of skepticism itself, Byron's attitude would emerge as a kind of consistent position after all . . . And this vein is only one of a dozen Byron wants to exploit in the poem, since it is only one of many mutually incongruous elements in life. Byron wants to write so comprehensive a poem . . . that it will have no message except to assert a radical disorder. 20

Don Juan is an "endless series of particular truths which . . . [do] not add up to any Truth." 21 The poem is "a little quietly facetious upon every thing . . ." 22 including Byron's own attempt to present the reality--the essence--of society's abuses. Don Juan is an attempt

19 Ibid., p. 416.

20 Wilkie, Romantic Poets and Epic Tradition, p. 190.

21 Ibid., p. 191.

to replace the poetry of sentiment with the poetry of honesty, factuality, and truth. Yet, even Byron's own prejudiced distinctions between appearance and reality cannot be taken, by himself or by his readers, as an absolute or final truth. Ultimate truth and reality are beyond man's comprehension, and Don Juan asserts that they are unattainable. Byron's crusading effort to present approaches to reality in the poem is, thus, only an encouragement to the thoughtful reader to seek his own imperfect realities from among the hypocrisies permeating the customs and institutions of the society man has created.
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