

4-21-2010

# Narrative Distance in the Works of George Gordon, Lord Byron, and Jonathan Swift, or "A Digression in Praise of Digressions"

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## Recommended Citation

Cash, Samantha M. and Taylor, E. Derek Ph.D., "Narrative Distance in the Works of George Gordon, Lord Byron, and Jonathan Swift, or "A Digression in Praise of Digressions"" (2010). *Theses, Dissertations & Honors Papers*. Paper 36.

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Narrative Distance in the Works of George Gordon, Lord Byron, and Jonathan Swift; or, "*A  
Digression in Praise of Digressions*"

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21 April 2010

This research project is dedicated to:

Dr. Taylor, for his patience and guidance, and for threatening to curse me “in this world and the next” if I didn't get things submitted;

Kuhfuss and Paula, for being the best flatmates and friends a person could ask for: I hope we all live together again some day when our future husbands are dead;

Jake, for his unwavering support throughout this process: Words failed me, so I tried to find a quotation to do you justice, only to realize there aren't any quotations good enough;

And, finally, my aunt Lisa, who will probably never read this all the way through, but who, more than anyone else, has made the writing of it possible: You've been a better mother than I could have ever deserved.

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“Hiatus in MS”: On finding and not finding Lord Byron and Jonathan Swift

George Gordon, Lord Byron (1788-1824), has long been viewed as a figure withdrawn from the heated fixation of his fans and detractors. Critical analysis of Byron often relies upon an image of the poet as a man apart, uncomfortable and wary of the attention he received. In “Byron So Full of Fun, Frolic, Wit, and Whim,” Howard O. Brogran credits Byron with a “shyness with strangers” (172) and other sources speak of a “self-imposed exile,” eager to escape the confines of a “public appetite for everything Byron” (“On the trail of the real Lord Byron”). This much we know of the elusive Byron, or we think we know.

Corin Throsby of Oxford University is the first scholar to study a set of recently discovered, never-before-published epistles to Byron. The letters—dated from 1812 to 1814—are a selection from hundreds of fan letters sent to the famous Romantic poet that he himself hoarded. A recent newspaper account of the discovery reads as follows:

Dr Jane Stabler, a reader in Romanticism at the University of St Andrews and herself a Byron scholar, said the anonymous fan letters have never been investigated in detail, and may give yet more credence to the theory that Byron was heavily preoccupied with his image. He often requested that Mr Murray [Byron's publisher] send him reviews from Europe, and was deeply affected by what was written about him. Dr Stabler said: “The fact that Byron kept [the letters] is important. He was absolutely fascinated by his own reception and the way he was perceived. He even mingled poetry with his own self-creation. He pretended not to care about his reader while at the same time making huge efforts

to keep track of what his readers thought about him.” (Akbar)

The revelation of the letters, in other words, challenges the long-held portrait of Byron “as an aloof and reclusive poet who did not invite public adoration” (Akbar). Why would a reluctant literary and public figure work so assiduously, so jealously, to maintain a collection of letters, the authors of many of which specifically requested that he destroy their missives after reading them?

Readers have long noted that Byron's poetry—particularly the mock epic *Don Juan*, published in sixteen cantos between 1819 and 1824—contains a multitude of thinly veiled autobiographical references, teasing a contemporary audience who recognized the references so well. Of course, to read Byron's works as strictly autobiographical is to lose sight of the poems in their own right. Yet to read Byron's works *without* making connections to Byron's personal history is equally limiting. Byron deliberately infused his poems with biographical—or, at least, *ostensibly* biographical—material. I say “ostensibly” because the “Byron” that emerges in a close study of his poems both does and does not comport with the author of them.

*Don Juan*, a sprawling piece of literature (the seventeenth canto was left unfinished at the time of Byron's death), contains both the story of the eponymous lover-hero and an increasingly overwhelming number of digressions by the narrator from Don Juan's tale. The narrator of *Don Juan* makes note of these digressions, mocking himself through repeated apologies to the reader, but simultaneously drawing the reader's attention to the digressions through his recognition of them. Indeed, the tangents, as *Don Juan* progresses, begin to dominate the poem; and, significantly, for my argument, it is often in these digressions that readers are presented with the most lucid flirtations with biographical possibility on the part of Byron. The line between Byron,

the self-conscious artist, Byron, the celebrity, and Byron, the playful narrator, becomes increasingly nebulous in these sections of the poem.

That Byron would take on multiple roles in his poetry, and wear a variety of masks, is fitting; even in his personal life, as evidenced by the still conflicting conceptions of Byron's opinion of his own fame, Byron does not play a single part but seems instead to be multiple incarnations of himself. The result, unsurprisingly, has been a veritable glut of contradictory critical accounts of Byron's poetry and—invariably—of Byron. *Don Juan*, Byron's most prolific literary effort, has especially inspired fervid debate amongst literary critics. In *The Structure of Byron's Major Poems*, William H. Marshall proposes that Byron's employment of “myriad” speakers in *Don Juan* renders the work inextricably, purposefully, complex. Marshall writes:

What was serious now appears ludicrous. On occasion two speakers may be juxtaposed. . . . The use of various speakers, ironic and among each other inconsistent, to comment upon the method and structure of the poem is perhaps too abundant and in many cases too obvious to require illustration. (176-177)

Certainly, Marshall's comments sound decisive. However, in “The Mode of Byron's *Don Juan*,” George M. Ridenour argues that there is no “serious question as to the poet's value and allegiances, no collapse into a terminal irony” (444) and, furthermore, there there is, undeniably, “the presence of a single speaker” (442). Meanwhile, Martin Maner, in “Pope, Byron, and the Satiric Persona,” suggests two major, distinguishable personae with clearly defined purposes in *Don Juan*: “the literary naif and the naïve moralist” (564), each constructed to convey a “definite moral stance” (565). As is evidenced by just these several examples, the multiplicity of voices within the poem itself, the complexity of the satire employed, the seemingly contradictory

digressions, and Byron's own tangled public history converge in *Don Juan*, making critical analysis difficult and critical consensus seem impossible.

There is, nevertheless, one important fact on which essentially all sides agree: Byron, although writing in the age of Romanticism, significantly and unflinchingly sought distance between himself and other Romantic figures. A self-proclaimed admirer of Augustan literary figures, Byron writes—or, at least the narrator *states*—in *Don Juan* that “thou shalt believe in Milton, Dryden, Pope; / Thou shalt not set up Wordsworth, Coleridge, Southey; / Because the first is crazed beyond all hope, / The second drunk, the third so quaint and mouthy” (1.1633-1636). Byron's personal sense of connection with Augustan writers, to which the narrator here gives voice, has often been remarked upon by scholars of his works. As George Cheatham notes in “Byron's Dislike of Keats's Poetry,” Byron's “long-standing antipathy for the Lake School” led him on a search “for a poetic theory and an ideal to ‘the one literary loyalty of his life—his loyalty to the school of Pope and Johnson’” (20).<sup>1</sup>

Literary critics, like Cheatham and Calvert, have tended to focus upon Alexander Pope as the primary exemplar of the Augustan tradition animating Byron's theory and practice of poetry. A prolific reader by all historical accounts, Byron received a copy of the works of Pope—“the poet Byron most admired and most often emulated,” according to Fiona MacCarthy in her acclaimed biography, *Byron: Life and Legend*—early in his days at Harrow School. “On the flyleaf of volume 2, he added his mark: ‘Harrow on the Hill, Middlesex—AD 1803—Given me by my friend Boldero.’” “Assuming the schoolboy's protective stance of disdain,” writes MacCarthy, “Byron found satiric poetry central to his taste” (41). As early as 1805—his final year at Harrow—Byron began employing satire to further his own vituperative goals. Certainly,

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<sup>1</sup> Cheatham is quoting William J. Calvert's *Byron: Romantic Paradox*.

his poetic endeavors to discredit Harrow's new headmaster, the Reverend Dr. George Butler, pale in comparison to the broad social commentaries made in Pope's *The Rape of the Lock* or *The Dunciad*. Nevertheless, Byron's childish "On a Change of Masters at a Great Public School" and "Portraits of Pomposus" reveal a vital and primal satiric impulse in him that was to affect his poetry for the remainder of his life.

That satiric impulse was to find full culmination in Byron's last work, *Don Juan*. But what were Byron's—as a poet, again, ensconced in Romanticism—reasons for employing satire at this late stage in his career? They certainly cannot be attributed any longer to a "schoolboy's . . . disdain." What, more importantly, does "satire" mean to Byron? In *Satire: A Critical Reintroduction*, Dustin Griffin writes, "Satire has traditionally been considered a form that cultivates obscurity, using elliptical syntax, cryptic or abrupt allusiveness, brevity, and roughness of rhythm" (52). As Griffin sees it, misdirection and hidden intent are intrinsic to the genre of satire—they confuse the sensibilities of the reader, upending preconceived opinions, certainly regarding the subject matter itself, but, more pertinently in the case of Byron, concerning the narrative voice. Griffin notes of *Don Juan*, "Hardly a page passes without some knowing, self-conscious, or even self-mocking remark from the Byronic narrator. . . . [H]e is working in a long satiric tradition of self-conscious rhetoric and display (83). Satire lends itself to disguise, in other words, and Byron, as we shall see, found this much to his liking.

It is this aspect of satire as mask that calls for a reexamination of Alexander Pope as Byron's primary Augustan master. Byron's early satiric efforts may indeed have found root in Pope's Horatian soil, delightfully poking fun at political enemies and civilized society. These Horatian underpinnings even appear in the *Don Juan* narrator's attack on Romantic poets and



concomitant exoneration of the pre-Romantic greats, as noted in the example above. On the whole, however, *Don Juan* is a work of premeditated disorientation, lulling the reader into security with its humorously deflating rhymes and bawdy biographical implications, all the while refusing to align with any consistent rhetorical position. Pope's narrator is subject to few of the Byronic narrator's satiric inconsistencies. He is predictably, uniformly Horatian—reforming his errant subjects through tight narrative. The narrator, as Griffin describes Horace's own theory of satire, by “speaking out freely, seeks to laugh men out of their follies” (6-7). In this respect *Don Juan* rings less of Pope and more of Pope's friend and fellow Scriblerian, Jonathan Swift.

In *A Manner of Correspondence: A Study of the Scriblerus Club*, Patricia Carr

Brückmann writes:

Swift is perhaps most properly described as the founder, at least in so far as the group that finally emerged in 1714 came from his desire for a congenial society of friends with common and preferably literary interests. . . . At this point Pope entered the scene with a project for a publication of the works of the unlearned, as a parody of the monthly *Works of the Learned*, an abstract of scholarly contribution. (3)

In addition to Pope and Swift, the Scriblerus Club's progenitor and informal leader, the group claimed as its members John Gay, John Arbuthnot, Henry St. John, and Thomas Parnell. The literary ramifications of the Scriblerus Club's efforts have been far-reaching, reshaping classical satire to suit different purposes, and providing models for later writers to draw on. The group, bonded by their similar literary tastes, also shared a common goal for their work: satirical reproach of what they viewed as intellectualism run amok. There is a sense in which the

Scriblerians were the very embodiment of satire as “*grinning* tragedy,” to borrow Wyndham Lewis' phrase for describing the peculiar tendency of satire to “stand half-way between Tragedy and Comedy” or to “be a comedy full of dangerous electrical action, and shattered with outbursts of tears” (48). The Scriblerus Club's methods were certainly playful and, yet, their intentions deadly serious.

The *Memoirs of Martinus Scriblerus*, the eponymous protagonist of which is a vain and stupid pedant, was to be the culmination of the Club's efforts, and “its spin-offs, *The Dunciad*, the *Beggar's Opera*, and . . . *Gulliver's Travels*, are central eighteenth-century satiric texts” (Brückmann 4). As “spin-offs,” they do indeed share several common tenets with the germinating work of the Scriblerians as a group. In “Scriblerian Self-Fashioning,” Brean S. Hammond writes of the *Memoirs*, “[T]he Scriblerian enterprise is identified by its epidemic pseudonymity. The name of the Scriblerians are legion, although all are to an extent controlled by the master disguise of Martinus Scriblerus” (118). Martinus Scriblerus, in other words, offers the Scriblerians a mask, a way of publishing under the pretense of anonymity; the works following afterwards, in many ways continuations of or digressions from the work of the Club, operate, particularly in the case of Swift, in a similarly reclusive manner.

The Scriblerus Club, a short-lived endeavor, fell apart in 1715 following the death of Queen Anne, but Swift's later works reflect his continuing interest in the club's adoption of “pseudonymity.” Indeed, these works reflect that interest in a way the later works of Pope, such as *An Essay on Man* (1734) and *Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot* (1734) markedly do not. In the *Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot*, for example, the narrator is a comical representation of the real Pope, bearing his name and exaggerating his personality, in true Horatian form, but in ways that are

nevertheless consistently more stable than either Swift's or Byron's narrators. Pope creates a version of himself, but a controlled one. The *Don Juan* narrator, while often referred to in critical literature as “the Byronic narrator,” is frequently placed at great distance from Byron, the man; he may at times adopt stereotypical aspects of his author's public persona, but he also espouses philosophies Byron certainly would not have ascribed to himself. Byron's narrator—whether Byronic or not—is, in this respect, much more suggestive of Swift's narrators in such selections as *Gulliver's Travels* and *A Tale of a Tub*.

A few critics have likewise recognized a sense of parity between Byron's works and those of Swift. In “Religion in Byron's *Don Juan*,” C.N. Stavrou writes, “Byron manipulates and utilizes Don Juan very much as Swift does Lemuel Gulliver” (568). To be sure, Swift is, much like Byron, especially fond of using equivocal, even enigmatic, narrators in his various literary compositions. Swift's sophisticated deployments of narrative voice have long confused readers. The famous *A Modest Proposal* (1729), for instance, continues to baffle those who are tricked into believing that the sincere narrator is a representation of Swift himself—that Swift, the author, wants to sell babies for food. And yet it *is* the case that, at least in part, Swift detested the Irish, as his letters make evident. Swift certainly resented his forced existence in Ireland and was not immune to the stereotypes surrounding his adopted people. (The red-haired Yahoos in *Gulliver's Travels* are particularly lascivious, one notes.) And Swift certainly does not always stand on ceremony with regards to his treatment of the Irish people in his letters. He repeatedly disparages Ireland, stating in a letter—rife with unintentional dramatic irony—of 30 October 1709, “I reckon no man is thoroughly miserable unless he be condemned to live in Ireland” (Williams 1: 154) and referring to it as “a dirty obscure nook of the world,” in a post-

condemnation letter of 30 January 1722 (2: 417). For the Irish people themselves, Swift reserves such descriptions as “a thievish race of people” (3: 60) in a letter of 27 May 1725 and “odious” in a letter of 20 July 1726 (3: 146). Taking these letters into consideration, the naïve, mistaken, literal reading of *A Modest Proposal* takes on a certain authority. How much of the satiric voice, in other words, might belong to Swift after all?

In other words, even when the Swiftian narrator seems to be comprehensively straightforward things are far from simple. For example, the narrator of Swift's *A Tale of a Tub* (1704)—a spectacular amalgamation of digression and “traditional” story—conspicuously employs a set of asterisks at particularly salient points in the tale. A footnote—also written by Swift, but in the voice of an editor—following one such “Hiatus in MS” explains:

[H]ere is a pretended defect in the manuscript; and this is very frequent with our author either when he thinks he cannot say anything worth reading, or when he has no mind to enter on the subject . . . or perhaps to amuse his reader (whereof he is frequently very fond) or lastly, with some satirical intention. (90)

Swift provides his readers with an exhaustive answer to the clearly implied questions: What has been replaced with asterisks and why? But he simultaneously manages to avoid answering the question at all by providing the reader with such a multiplicity of responses that there is almost no way to clearly discern Swift's true intention or meaning. Similarly, *Gulliver's Travels* (1726), Swift's own mock travel narrative, follows the gormless Lemuel Gulliver and is told in the first person; as in *A Modest Proposal*, the relationship between Swift as a biographical figure and Gulliver as a narrative voice seems hopelessly, and quite deliberately and carefully, muddled. Gulliver is, by turns, an embodiment of Swift's ideals and a mockery of Swift's enemies.

Considering the ways in which Swift's deployment of narrative voice adumbrates Byron's efforts in *Don Juan* provides answers to several nagging enigmas surrounding the poem. For one thing, Byron's connection with and reverence of the Augustan period—when he himself was a figure solidly ensconced in the second generation of Romanticism—comes clear. It is apparent from his correspondence that Byron's understanding of the natural world differed intrinsically from that of Wordsworth; he writes in a letter of 29 September 1816 of his early attempts at modeling a Wordsworthian approach to nature, explaining, “[It has not] enabled me to lose my own wretched identity in the majesty” (Marchand 134). Byron's disenchantment with Wordsworth extended to the full system of Romanticism, as he saw it. As he puts it in a letter of 15 September 1817, shortly before beginning work on *Don Juan*:

I am convinced the more I think of it—that he and *all* of us—Scott—Southey—Wordsworth—Moore—Campbell—I—are all in the wrong—one as much as another—that we are upon the wrong revolutionary poetical system—or systems—not worth a damn in itself. (167)

On the one hand, then, the Augustan style provided Byron a definitive strategy for breaking with a “poetical system” with which he had grown completely disenchanted. On the other hand, Byron viewed *Don Juan* as a contribution to his legacy, insofar as he knew, even hoped, that readers would make biographical assumptions based on the poem. Rather than adopt something resembling Wordsworth's “egotistical sublime,” Byron discovered in the Augustans in general, and in Swift in particular, just the sort of ironic, elastic deployment of narrative voice he needed for his *magnum opus*—a “song of myself” of a very different kind.

\* \* \*

Certainly, Swift was not far from Byron's mind as he was working on *Don Juan*. Byron was well-acquainted with the story of Swift's life and with his writings. James Hamilton Browne, a personal acquaintance of Byron's as he traveled to Greece aboard the *Hercules* from 13 July 1823 to 3 August, related that “[o]n the passage to Cephalonia, Byron chiefly read the writings of Dean Swift, taking occasional notes, with the view of possibly gleaning from that humorous writer something towards a future canto of *Don Juan* (Lovell 387). Edward John Trelawny, another of Byron's companions aboard the *Hercules* to Cephalonia—the Greek city where Byron was soon to lose his life in pursuit of Greek independence—and the eventual author of *Recollections of the Last Days of Shelley and Byron* (1859), credits Byron as saying:

Whilst our literature is domineered over by a knot of virulent bigots and rancorous partisans, we shall have no great or original works. When did parsons patronize genius? If one of their black band dares to think for himself he is drummed out, or cast aside, like Sterne and Swift. Where are the great writers the Reviewers predicted were to the leviathans of our literature? Extinct: their bones hereafter may be grubbed up in a fossil state with those of the reptiles that puffed them into life. If this age has produced anything good or great, which I doubt, it has been under every possible discouragement. (Lovell 396)

Byron's sense of disconnection from his contemporaries, his disillusionment with Romanticism, and his impression of Swift as an individual—much like himself—maligned for “think[ing] for himself” is apparent and potent.

Salient, too, is Byron's reference to Laurence Sterne, author of *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* (1759-1767), a satirical, comedic novel. According to Melvyn New,

in *Telling New Lies: Seven Essays in Fiction, Past and Present*:

Sterne seems to have placed himself in comparison with certain forebears—Rabelais, Cervantes, Montaigne, and Swift. . . . [W]hile he could pretend that Warburton was the boundary limiting his free play of wit, the far more likely boundary was Sterne's sense of himself “at the end of the line,” a latecomer to the tradition he considered a precious and potent legacy. (14)

If Byron chooses to align himself with a figure like Sterne, who viewed himself as a late continuation of the line of Augustan satire, there is a sense in which Byron's choice marks him out as the successor to the tradition. In linking Swift and Sterne to himself, Byron is essentially saying not only, “I'm next,” but also, trumping Sterne, “I'm last.” His intellectual break from other major figures of Romanticism—arguably Byron's most persistent endeavor—seems at this point, mere months before his death, complete.

Not that Byron, so ready to defend Swift, was immune to anxiety—of the Harold Bloom variety. In Bloom's account of poetic influence:

A poet swerves away from his precursor, by so reading his precursor's poem as to execute a *clinamen* [poetic misreading] in relation to it. This appears as a corrective movement in his own poem, which implies that the precursor poem went accurately up to a certain point, but then should have swerved, precisely in the direction that the new poem moves. (1160)

Byron, who admits admiration for Swift on several separate occasions, at times denigrates the poetry of Swift, perhaps in an attempt to carve out his own satirical poetic niche. In response to criticism of *Don Juan's* alleged salaciousness, Byron writes to his reluctant publisher John

Murray in a letter of 15 May 1819, “Mr Hobhouse is at it again about indelicacy—there *no indelicacy*—if he wants *that*, let him read Swift—his great Idol—but his Imagination must be a dunghill with a Viper's neat in the middle—to engender such a supposition about this poem” (Marchand 195). Byron is almost certainly referencing Swift's scatological poems, like “A Beautiful Young Nymph Going to Bed” and “The Progress of Beauty,” which contain a cornucopia of grotesque descriptions. For example, in the former poem, the narrator details the bedtime rituals of “Corinna, pride of Drury Lane,” (1) who “explores / Her chancres, issues, running sores / . . . And then applies to each a plaster” (29-32). Byron here seems to seek distance from Swift. Yet Byron was surely aware, from his purposeful attention to the subject within *Don Juan* from the voice of the narrator, that his poem was *rife* with these Swiftian “indelicacies,” like his humorously deflating description of Juan's seasickness as he leaves Spain (“But worst of all is nausea, or a pain / About the lower region of the bowels,” [2.177-178] declaring “[s]ea-sickness death” [182] to Juan's love for Julia), inserted precisely to provoke, and amuse, his prim English audience.

For all of Byron's attempts to separate himself on this point, he certainly was not able to convince his own friends. Leigh Hunt, a critic, writer, and companion of Percy Shelley and Lord Byron during Byron's years in Italy, writes, circa 1822, “If at any time, therefore he [Byron] ceased to love a woman's person, and found leisure to detect in her the vanities natural to a flattered beauty, he set no bounds to the light and coarse way in which he would speak of her. . . . He said to me once of a friend of his, that he had been spoilt by reading Swift. He himself had certainly not escaped the infection” (Lovell 318). The description seems almost as if it has been pulled directly from Swift's most famous scatological poem, “The Lady's Dressing Room,” with



Byron assuming the role of the disenchanted lover Strephon, disgusted after learning that his paramour “*Celia, Celia, Celia* shits!” (118) Hunt's astute recognition of Swift's influence on Byron's social interactions is telling; Byron disavows Swift in what would seem today to be a classic case of projection—not himself, but “a friend of his.”

Evidence gleaned from transcripts of Byron's conversations and letters suggests a more than tenuous link between Swift and Byron's composition of *Don Juan*. Byron was, by many accounts, including his own textual references in *Don Juan* (which include an allusion to *Gulliver's Travels* [6.222] and a direct, though passing, reference of Swift by name [7.25]), extremely familiar with Swift's works. Moreover, he is known to have been reading biographies and compilations of Swift while working on his poem, particularly the later cantos, as noted previously.

Byron displays more than mere critical admiration—as evidenced in *Don Juan*—of Swift as a model of Augustan satire and style. In his letters and transcripts of personal conversations, there is evidence of a deep, sometimes morbid sense of personal connection with the biographical Swift. Both Swift and Byron were figures firmly ensconced—Byron as a peer, Swift as an Anglican clergyman—in political climates fraught with partisan bickering. Significantly, both men have defied easy political categorization. Byron, though sympathetic ostensibly to the Whigs, generally used his peership in an effort to champion unpopular, underrepresented minority causes. “Byron,” according to MacCarthy, “was never a committed member of the Whig or indeed of any other organized party. He was always to consider himself an independent, taking the wider internationalist view, speaking for humanity” (83). Byron both was and was not part of the establishment, and he was undoubtedly unpopular in the House. In particular, Byron's

second speech—on the subject of Irish Catholic emancipation—was dismissed as a failure (157). During his time abroad in exile, Byron became heavily involved in the Greek War of Independence—devoting upwards of £4,000 of his personal money (482), financing a private army of roughly five hundred Greek men (496), not to mention, ultimately, offering up his health and life to the cause.

Swift and his political alignment remain equally inscrutable. In the preface to his book, *Swift's Politics: A Study in Disaffection*, Ian Higgins writes, “Whether or not Swift was a Jacobite cannot be determined. He claimed in private and in print to be a Whig” (ix). Yet Higgins' study precisely does offer a portrait of Swift as a Jacobite. That is, against Swift's *own* private and public declarations of belonging to the Whig party, scholarship obviously still continues to debate his preferences. Indeed, even during Swift's own day, debate proliferated about his political loyalties, and as Robert Mahony notes in *Jonathan Swift's Irish Identity*, “The perception grew that Swift was a high-flying Tory” (27).

Both men's philanthropic efforts—Swift's to unburden the Irish and Byron's to free the Greeks—are marked by dark humor. As we have already seen, Swift detested the Irish and resented his existence in Ireland. Byron, meanwhile, an aristocratic elitist to the end, often suffered under his belief that he alone was the key to Greek salvation—after all, “none of the Greeks know a problem from a poker,” he lamented to the London Greek Committee, shortly after his arrival in Greece (MacCarthy 494). Nevertheless, both became heroes to their respective countries. Swift, as recently as 1993, appeared on the Irish £10 banknote; a statue of Byron remains at Missolonghi. These tokens are by turns utterly appropriate—Byron and Swift did devote enormous energy to their respective causes—and inappropriate—both men, in part,

loathed the people they championed.

The sense of parity between Byron and Swift is not limited to the similar, though obviously not identical, course of their political pursuits. Indeed, Swift resonated with Byron, in part, because he was a fellow “exile.” Following the fall of the Tory government, Swift, who had anticipated a high appointment to a church in England, perhaps even a bishopric, was shunted sideways to effectual exile in Dublin, taking up residency on 16 August 1714—roughly the same period during which the Scriblerus Club formed. From his displaced position in Ireland, Swift produced his most enduring works of satire: *The Drapier Letters* (1724) and *A Modest Proposal*, along with *Gulliver's Travels*, Swift's great—and bitter—satire on British politics.

Byron himself endured an even more dramatic “exile” from England. Byron's wife, Annabella, began legal proceedings to separate from Byron following persistent, and not unfounded, rumors of adultery, incest with half-sister Augusta Leigh, and sodomy. Byron was all but forced legally to separate and to resign the bulk of his property in the process as public opinion turned from the glowing adoration he had grown accustomed to in the years following the success of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* (1812-1818) to resentment and disgust. Mary Godfrey, a member of the London aristocracy, wrote in a letter of February 1816 to Tom Moore, “The world are loud against him, and vote him a worthless profligate.” She continues: “He is completely lost in the opinion of the world; and I fear he is the sort of character never to make an effort to recover it. So I look on him as given up to every worthless excess for the rest of his life” (MacCarthy 273). Byron fled England on 25 April 1816 (279). What followed was a transitory lifestyle as Byron, rendered something of tourist attraction, moved from Switzerland to Italy to Greece.

To a certain extent, even Byron's death takes on the macabre weight of Swift's biographical burden. In Dublin, Swift grew increasingly preoccupied with his own mortality, publishing *Verses on the Death of Dr. Swift*, a sort of ironic poetic epitaph, in 1731. His letters and accounts of his personal interactions paint a dark portrait of Swift's final years. Swift muses to Henry St. John, Viscount Bolingbroke, in a letter of 31 October 1729, "I was 47 Years old when I began to think of death; and the reflections upon it now begin when I wake in the Morning, and end when I am going to Sleep" (Williams 3: 354). Again to Bolingbroke, in a letter of 21 March 1730, Swift states, "When I was your age, I often thought of death, but now after a dozen more years, it is never out of my mind. . ." (3: 382). And in a letter of 30 March 1733 to Pope, Swift writes, "As to Mortality, it hath never been out of my head eighteen minutes these eighteen years . . . I have Suffered already, and am likely to suffer as long as I live" (4: 134).

Leslie A. Marchand, in her collection, *Lord Byron: Selected Letters and Journals*, notes:

Edward Young, in his *Conjectures on Original Composition* (1759) recorded that while he was walking with Swift near Dublin, the Dean "earnestly gazing upward at a noble elm, which in its uppermost branches was much withered, and decayed," pointed to it and said: "I shall be like that tree, I shall die at top." (242)

Swift's final years, indeed, were marked by a considerable decline in both his physical health and his mental capacities. Will Durant, in *The Story of Civilization*, writes:

Definite symptoms of madness appeared in 1738. In 1741 guardians were appointed to take care of his affairs and watch lest in his outbursts of violence he should do himself harm. In 1742 he suffered great pain from the inflammation of his left eye, which swelled to the size of an eye; five attendants had to restrain him

from tearing out his eye. He went a whole year without uttering a word. (8: 362)

Swift, so prolifically verbose, so famed for his wit, was ironically and tragically rendered mute before his death on 19 October 1745.

Swift's gloomy future predictions to Edward Young find their way into no less than four of Byron's letters, spanning from 1816 to 1821; Swift's decline was a trope, in other words, from the very outset of Byron's exile, one evidencing his close knowledge of Swift's biography before work on *Don Juan* began. In a letter of 28 October 1816 to Augusta Leigh, Byron writes, "My health is good, but I have now & then fits of giddiness, & deafness, which make me think like Swift—that I shall be like him & the *withered* tree he saw—which occasioned the reflection and 'die at top' first" (Marchand 136). In a journal entry of 6 January 1821 in Ravenna, Byron reflects, ". . . I feel a something, which makes me think that, if I ever reach near to old age, like Swift 'I shall die at top' first" (242). Trelawny, now writing to Mary Shelley, relates:

He [Byron] often mentioned that he thought he should not live many years. . . .

And on our voyage we had been reading with great attention the life and letters of Swift edited by Scott and we almost daily or rather nightly talked it over, and he more than once expressed his horror of existing in that state—and expressed some fears that it would be his fate. (Lovell 433)

The biographical Swift, for Byron, was intrinsically linked to the biographical Byron. Swift provided Byron a model for how to negotiate the boundaries of fictional self-fashioning and biographical revelation—that is, for how to inhabit his fictional worlds without giving himself away. Byron's technique of presenting a version of himself within *Don Juan* while simultaneously maintaining narrative distance is distinctly Swiftian in nature, I maintain.

Although tenuous links have been drawn between the two figures, a full analysis of Byron's implementation of Swift's narrative style has yet to be performed. The analysis that follows is meant to show more fully the degree to which the narrative of one hapless exile, Don Juan, reveals the link between those other hapless exiles, Byron and Swift.

Hiding in Plain Sight: Jonathan Swift, Lord Byron, and “Biography”

The dominant critical narrative surrounding Jonathan Swift's *A Modest Proposal* has always centered on satire. Swift, as countless secondary school teachers have tried to impress upon their horrified, literal-minded students, is merely adopting a satirical persona to draw attention to the plight of the impoverished Irish people. He doesn't *really* want his audience to eat babies, though that is precisely what the narrative voice suggests:

I do . . . humbly offer it to *public consideration*, that of the hundred and twenty thousand children, already computer, twenty thousand may be reserved for breed, whereof only one fourth part to be males, which is more than we allow to *sheep, black-cattle, or swine*; and my reason is that these children are seldom the fruits of marriage, *a circumstance not much regarded by our savages*; therefore *one male* will be sufficient to serve *four females*. That the remaining hundred thousand may at a year old be offered in sale to the *persons of quality and fortune*, through the kingdom, always advising the mother to let them suck plentifully of the last month, so as to render them plump and fat for a good table. A child will make two dishes at an entertainment for friends, and when the family dines alone the fore or hind quarter will make a reasonable dish, and seasoned with a little pepper or salt will be very good boiled on the fourth day, especially in *winter*. (494)

Surely, nothing seems more self-evident than the fact that it is not Swift—a distinguished clergyman and social reformer—speaking, but rather a narrative persona designed to deepen the impact of Swift's social criticism by adopting a disturbingly earnest, and callous, viewpoint.

But the disconnect between Swift, the biographical individual, and the satirical narrator of *A Modest Proposal* is not necessarily as gaping as it might appear. While it is tricky to identify any reliable steady biographical information in Swift's works, it is equally difficult to separate the works from biography because of Swift's frequent insertion of "himself" and his experiences into them. Even in what would seem a self-evidently ironic work—and, indeed, it has been taught as such for decades—Swift defies compartmentalization of any kind. Dustin Griffin writes:

If we take into account that in the years before he published *A Modest Proposal* Swift had worn himself out with unheeded practical advice . . . if we know that Swift (hardly a sentimental or modern liberal) was not opposed to hard measures for Irish beggars . . . and if we remember that in his letters he often looked upon the Irish poor with both compassion and contempt then we may be forced into a reading quite different. . . .

That is, he suggests, "perhaps the speaker is *not* ironic after all. Perhaps he gives voice to Swift's anger and despair" (67). For example, the narrator of *A Modest Proposal* claims:

The question . . . is, how this number shall be reared and provided for, which, as I have already said, under the present situation of affairs is utterly impossible by all the methods hitherto proposed, for we can *neither employ them in handicraft, or agriculture*; we neither build houses (I mean in the country) nor cultivate land. . . .  
(493)

All of the methods the narrator mentions as impossible are methods Swift himself earnestly suggested as alternatives to the "Irish Problem" in such treatises as *A Proposal for the Universal*



*Use of Irish Manufacture*. As Keith Crook writes in *A Preface to Swift*:

. . . England moved to pass a Bill which protected its own manufacture of wool and silk. Swift countered with (May 1720) *A Proposal for the Universal Use of Irish Manufacture*, as a riposte 'to persuade the wretched people to wear their own Manufactures instead of those from England.' . . . (95)

By mentioning his “actual” suggestions, albeit in the context of a satirical work spoken in a voice seemingly meant to be heard as distinct from Swift's own, Swift blurs the ostensibly clear line between himself and the narrator of *A Modest Proposal*.

From this starting point, it is easy to draw even more biographical connections between the narrator and Swift; Swift did, after all, detest and deride the Irish people on multiple occasions (several of which we have seen in the prior chapter) even while he championed their rights. Certainly, Swift does on occasion defend the Irish, as in a letter of 4 April 1720 to Charles Ford:

I believe myself not guilty of too much veneration of the Irish H. of L<sup>ds</sup>, but I differ from you in Politicks, the Question is whether People ought to be Slaves or no. . . . You fetter a Man seven years, then let him loose to shew his Skill in dancing, and because he does it awkwardly, you say he ought to be fettered for Life. (Williams 2: 342)

But for every such instance, there are at least two instances of undisguised contempt, wherein Swift refers to his existence in Ireland amongst the Irish as, quite literally, an imprisonment. In a letter of 2 November 1724 to the Earl of Oxford, Swift broods, “[A]fter all, to return back again into this enslaved Country to which I am condemned during Existence, (for I cannot call it Life)

would be a Mortification hard to support” (3: 40); he writes in a similar vein to Pope in a letter of 27 November 1726, “Going to England is a very good thing, if it were not attended with an ugly circumstance of returning to Ireland” (3: 189). *A Modest Proposal*, thus, confronts the reader with a narrative persona that is strangely resonant of Swift, though it seems designed, at first glance, to be utterly distinct from the man himself.

Meanwhile, narrative voices that are seemingly supposed to be direct reflections of their author are not so easily discernible as instances of purposeful autobiography, forcing readers to grapple, not with “Swift,” but with “Swifts.” Swift’s tendency to utilize the masks he creates for himself in order to create ironies he can then exploit for satiric purposes. To read *Gulliver’s Travels*, for example, requires constant awareness of the expansion and contraction of narrative distance between Swift and his characters and of the possibility that “Swift” is somewhere other than we think.

Gulliver, Swift’s chosen narrator, alternately seems to represent both his author and his author’s political enemies. He is often a ridiculous buffoon through whom Swift makes cutting social critiques of travel narrative, the English, and humanity at large. The most glaring example is, arguably, Gulliver’s conversation with the king of Brobdingnag on “*the State of Europe*” (114), wherein Gulliver “artfully eluded many of his Questions, and gave to every Point a more favourable turn by many Degrees than the strictness of Truth would allow. For, I have always born that laudable Partiality to my own Country. . .” (122), but which the king, nevertheless, dismisses as a history of “Conspiracies, Rebellions, Murders, Massacres, Revolutions, Banishments; the very worst Effects that Avarice, Faction, Hypocrisy, Perfidiousness, Cruelty, Rage, Madness, Hatred, Envy, Lust, Malice, and Ambition could produce” (120). Swift, here, is

clearly on the side of the king, while Gulliver haplessly defends the Yahoos in Europe. But Gulliver also shares striking instances of solidarity with his author. While in Lilliput, Gulliver relates the following occurrence:

[T]he next time I had the Honour to see our Emperor, I desired his general Licence to wait on the *Blefusculian* Monarch, which he was pleased to grant me, as I could plainly perceive, in a very cold Manner; but could not guess the Reason, till I had a Whisper from a certain Person, that *Flimnap* and *Bolgolam* had represented my Intercourse with those Ambassadors, as a Mark of Disaffection. . . . (48)

Of course, Gulliver's immersion in the political machinations of the Lilliputian court are a source of satire in and of themselves as he begins to identify himself more and more as a Lilliputian; but there is a secondary level that is not so immediately apparent to the modern reader at work in this passage, one that a contemporary audience would readily have recognized. *Gulliver's Travels* functions at times as a *roman à clef*, literally “a novel with a key,” wherein the purportedly fictional characters represent specific people in real life.

Flimnap, the Treasurer, first appears in Gulliver's description of the “Diversions of the Court of *Lilliput*”:

*Flimnap* . . . is allowed to cut a Caper on the straight Rope, at least an inch higher than any other Lord in the whole Empire. I have seen him do the Summerset several times together, upon a Trencher fixed on the Rope, which is no thicker than a common packthread in *England*. (33)

In a note accompanying the Oxford World Classics edition of the text, Ian Higgins states:

[T]his satiric paradigm of a Royal favourite and first minister was seen by contemporaries as alluding to the Whig statesman Robert Walpole. . . . Swift opposed him on religious, political, economic, and Irish issues. In an explicit, unpublished allegory, *An Account of the Court and Empire of Japan* (written in 1728), Swift satirized Walpole's government as arbitrary and corrupt and referred to Walpole as 'perfectly skilled, by long practice' in parliamentary management 'and dextrous in the purchasing of votes', recalling the references to Flimnap's skill and dexterity in *GT*. (291-292)

Edward W. Rosenheim, in *Swift and the Satirist's Art*, similarly notes, “[I]t has always been agreed that Gulliver's account of the rope-dancing agility of Flimnap . . . is a satiric thrust against Sir Robert Walpole” (15). Plainly, Swift's political enemy—Walpole—is embodied in Flimnap, who, in turn, is Gulliver's political enemy, placing Gulliver in the same political sympathies as the Tory Swift. Gulliver here speaks for, almost as, Swift.

Throughout *Gulliver's Travels*, Swift alternately seems to align his own perspectives and opinions with those of the Houyhnhnms, the Brobdingnagians, and the Lilliputians, not to mention the Portuguese ship captain Gulliver encounters at the conclusion of his narrative. The instability of the narrative makes it difficult for readers clearly to discern at any given moment Swift's position in the story.

*Verses on the Death of Dr. Swift* offers another prime example of how these *Swifts* often proliferate *Swift's* works. The poem, a literal, first-person imagining of what people will say about the author after his death, presents such a multiplicity of Swifts that it becomes impossible to know for sure which is the “true” one—which one represents, if at all, the “real” Swift. For

instance, Swift imagines, near the poem's conclusion, what other individuals will say when remembering him, both in the persona of a first-person narrator, seeming to represent Swift himself, and an unnamed second narrator, speaking about Swift after his “death”:

'Perhaps I may allow, the Dean  
Had too much satire in his vein,  
And seemed determin'd not to starve it,  
Because no age could more deserve it.  
Yet malice never was his aim;

He lash'd the vice, but spared the name. . . .' (455-460)

Swift's claim that his satire is merely intended to have a morally corrective purpose—that he is simply a moralist taking the satiric low road—as opposed to causing offense purposefully, is distanced through the unnamed second narrator, the imagined individual speaking about Swift, but seeming to say what Swift “really” thinks. Of course, Swift must have been aware that his second narrator was saying “the thing which was not,” because this image of Swift is powerfully contradicted by what we have already seen from Swift in *Gulliver's Travels*. Rosenheim writes, “Swift's attacks on Walpole, in the *Travels* and elsewhere, are plainly the product of partisan zeal and personal aggrievedness rather than of a moralist's desire to display, in Walpole or any other individual, a specimen of the vices which are the true object of his hostility” (223). That is to say, Swift is quite consciously lashing the name.

Underneath the complicated layering effect present in *Verses on the Death of Dr. Swift*—Swift creating a second Swift to operate as speaker in addition to other speakers speaking about this second Swift—it is increasingly difficult to discern where Swift himself actually is in a

poem professedly all about him! Whether or not Swift's contradictions, purposeful as they must have been, are themselves a sort of mockery is indiscernible, just as the legitimate Jonathan Swift is indiscernible in the poem, though "he" speaks directly to the reader—about "himself."

Similar biographical links have been drawn between Swift's life and his poem *Cadenus and Vanessa*. Analysis of the poem has often relied on knowledge of a relationship—fittingly ambiguous in nature—between Swift and Esther Vanhomrigh. Vanhomrigh, more than twenty years Swift's junior, pursued her tutor, Swift, much to his apparent chagrin. David Nokes writes, in *Jonathan Swift: A Hypocrite Reversed*, "[Swift] allowed himself to enjoy the flattering, exciting company . . . as tutor, father, and mock-gallant, without ever committing himself to any one of these roles" (159-160). The resulting poem, wherein Swift is typically understood to represent Cadenus, the old tutor, and Esther to represent Vanessa, his young pupil, was sent personally to Vanhomrigh and appears to have been Swift's attempt to clarify, and to distance himself from, their relationship after she declared her love to him in 1712 (161). *Cadenus and Vanessa* marks Swift's attempts to regain authority and control in a relationship where his multiple identities were no longer tenable.

The publishing history of the poem is as dramatic as its subject matter. Following a bitter fight, Swift cut off communications with Vanhomrigh and her health declined steadily until her death shortly thereafter in 1723. Nokes explains:

As a final act of retaliation Vanessa [Esther] 'laid a strong injunction upon her executors that immediately after her decease, they should publish all the letters which passed between Swift and her, together with the poem *Cadenus & Vanessa*.' Manuscript copies of the poem were already in circulation in the months before

Vanessa's death. . . . (264)

Though it is clear that Swift sent the poem privately to Esther, it is unknown whether or not he had rhetorical designs on public opinion of what appears to have been a very private matter. It is safe to assume, however, that no matter his intentions, Swift probably expected the poem to achieve publication at some juncture, and the narrator's lengthy musings on Cadenus' worries about his image seem to indicate the awareness, as in the following excerpt:

Appearances were all so strong,  
 The world must think him in the wrong;  
 Would say, he made a treach'rous use  
 Of wit, to flatter and seduce;  
 The town would swear he had betray'd  
 By magic spells the harmless maid . . .  
 'Five thousand guineas in her purse?  
 The doctor might have fancied worse.' (658-671)

Cadenus' concerns seem to be the mirror of Swift's concerns, but, of course, with Swift, nothing is so simple.

Swift's seems to have enjoyed playing with readers by revealing himself biographically—as it would appear he has done in the passage above—leading the reader almost to the point of sincere revelation, before drawing back and leaving the reader once again uncertain and disoriented. Fittingly, *Cadenus and Vanessa* ends on a decidedly ambiguous note. The narrator concludes:

But what success Vanessa met

Is to the world a secret yet.  
 Whether the nymph, to please her swain,  
 Talks in a high romantic strain;  
 Or whether he at last descends  
 To love with less seraphic ends;  
 Or to compound the business whether  
 They temper love and books together;  
 Shall never to mankind be told,  
 Nor dares the conscious Muse unfold. (836-846)

Peter Ohlin notes, in “‘Cadenus and Vanessa’: Reason and Passion”:

The ten crucial lines in the poem appear in some editions but are absent in others, although, as Harold William's edition shows, they have Swift's approval. . . .  
 These lines seem to have prompted [Ricardo] Quintana's statement that 'to its full meaning only two people have held the key'. . . . (485)

Swift, paradoxically yet predictably, refuses as narrator—“*conscious* Muse,” here, indicating that the move is carefully thought out—to reveal the “truth” of the character that symbolizes himself, but he suggests an alarming sexual possibility that was certain to tantalize any potential reader with biographical implications. After all, why would he be ambiguous with regards to this particular point if Esther—who presumably knew the answer—were the only intended audience?

It is in instances like these that Swift's influence on Lord Byron's construction of *Don Juan* is most acutely felt. From the very outset of *Don Juan*, Byron flirts with biographical possibilities, seemingly fully expecting readers to conflate him with both his narrator and his



hero. Even before Juan himself is introduced, Byron's depiction of the marriage between Juan's parents—the lascivious Don José and the pragmatic, prudish Donna Inez—draws on Byron's memories of his own overbearing mother, Catherine Gordon, to whom he refers in letters to half-sister Augusta as “his 'domestic Tyrant' . . . 'this female Tisiphone,' one of the furies; his 'tormentor' with the '*diabolical* disposition’” (MacCarthy 53) and of his own disastrous marriage to Annabella Milbanke, who, as is noted in the previous chapter, sought legal separation from Byron in 1816 following accusations of his adultery, incest, and homosexuality. The *Don Juan* narrator describes Don Juan's parents as follows:

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 earliest 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. (1.137-144)

The narrator continues to describe the unhappy union which finally culminates thus:

. . . Inez call'd some druggists and physicians,  
 And tried to prove her loving lord was *mad*,  
 But as he had some lucid intermissions,  
 She next decided he was only *bad*. (1.209-212)

The use of italics to emphasize the words “mad” and “bad” immediately evoke Lady Caroline

Lamb's very famous account of Byron as “mad, bad, and dangerous to know,” in her journal of 1812 upon first meeting him (Blyth 88) and the extreme lengths she went to to publicly discredit him following the explosive demise of their love affair—even going so far as to impart knowledge of Byron's sexual liaisons to Annabella prior to their separation (MacCarthy 269-270). Moreover, Lady Byron, before taking legal steps to separate from Byron, attempted to have him declared insane (262). The English public, who closely followed the dramatic interludes of Byron's ostensibly private life—through “London gossip” perpetuated by Lady Byron's hasty separation, Caroline Lamb's scornful invectives, and, partly, Byron's own careless boasting about his conquests (269)—would certainly not have missed the references.

And yet, the reader is left with the sense that the biographical possibilities are dissipating into impossibilities. Inez, a character not mentioned again after Canto II, is, by turns, Byron's estranged wife, his mother, and his abandoned lover, Lamb. This proliferation of interpretive possibilities extends as well to Byron's insertion of himself (or *himself*) into his poem. There are a glut of references that link meaning to biography, and yet Lord Byron is, as Swift had done before him, decisively embodied in no single character. Instead, all of the material forms a composite picture; he is giving the reader not himself, but *versions* of himself.

As with Swift's inability—or, rather, unwillingness—to set himself down consistently on the side of either Gulliver, the Houyhnhnms, the Brobdingnagians, or the Lilliputians, Byron adopts the sympathies of multiple characters, oftentimes in a single passage. The result is a cluster of confusion, as Byron invites the reader to draw tenuous, and invariably temporary, links between “Byron” and multiple characters. The most blatant example of this technique in *Don Juan* can be found in Canto III, which details the return of Lambro to find his daughter, Haidee,

living with Juan.

Arriving at the summit of a hill  
 Which overlook'd the white walls of his home,  
 He stopp'd.—What singular emotions fill  
 Their bosoms who have been induced to roam!  
 With fluttering doubts if all be well or ill—  
 With love for many, and with fears for some;  
 All feelings which o'erleap the years long lost,  
 And bring our hearts back to their starting-post. (3.161-168)

Note the shift from “*their* bosoms” to “*our* hearts.” The narrator moves to include himself in this small digression on the feelings occasioned by returning home after a long journey. Byron is, cleverly, playing with the perception of himself as a shiftless, carefree wanderer in Europe, because he is aware the reader will no doubt conflate the image of Lambro—a traveler long at sea, who left behind his wife and daughter—with the idea of Byron himself.

Significantly, Byron is clearly not afraid to align himself with “bad” characters in *Don Juan*. Lambro is, without the narrative insight into his emotions, a stereotypically brutal, thievish pirate, and yet Byron occupies the character seamlessly and without hesitation, much as Swift does not hesitate to occupy the narrative voice in *A Modest Proposal* when it suits his rhetorical purposes. Simultaneously, however, Byron continues, at times, to occupy the role of Juan, as he has done intermittently from the beginning of the poem. The image of Juan in Canto III, in “a shawl of black and gold . . . [h]is turban, fur'd in many a graceful fold,” (3.609-13) recalls Byron's famous portrait in Eastern garb. Byron's incarnation as Juan draws even more startling

biographical parallels than his incarnation as Lambro. In Canto IV, the narrator states [emphasis added]:

Juan and Haidee gazed upon each other  
 With swimming looks of speechless tenderness,  
 Which mix'd all feelings, friend, child, lover, *brother*,  
 All that the best can mingle and express  
 When two pure hearts are pour'd in one another,  
 And love too much, and yet can not love less. . . . (4.201-206)

Byron's scandalous expulsion from England was, in no small part, a result of Lady Byron's (justifiable) accusations of incest on the part of Byron and his half-sister Augusta. Here Juan, though obviously not actually related to Haidee, seems to operate as the embodiment of Byron's feelings for Augusta. Surely, the fusion of love between siblings of the opposite sex and Juan and Haidee's passionate sexual desire for one another was evocative of the charges leveled against Byron over his love for Augusta.

How, one many wonder, is it possible for Byron to occupy both Juan and Lambro, totally antipodal characters set in narrative juxtaposition with one another? Lambro literally *enslaves* Juan and sells him. As with Swift, Byron's purpose is not about attaining and maintaining consistency in a single character. Instead, he occupies as many roles as possible in order to *avoid* giving the reader a stable point of reference to point to as "Byron."

As for Byron's incarnation as the narrator, it is even more complex, as he sometimes distances and sometimes fully embodies the narrative persona. On multiple occasions in *Don Juan*, Byron ironically distances himself from his narrator. For instance, in Canto I, the narrator

claims that one of his mottos is “read your Bible, sir, and mind your purse” (1.1760). It is, of course, purposefully difficult for any reader with knowledge of Byron to imagine him, profligate philanderer that he was, doing either of these things. But Byron is not immune to fully usurping the voice of his narrator in such a way that it becomes impossible to separate the narrator as a character from Byron, the man behind the poem. For example, the following passage from *Don Juan* is both another digression on the narrator's part, and, Byron seems to hope, something much more interesting:

The other evening ('twas on Friday last)—  
This is fact and no poetic fable—  
Just as my great coat was about me cast,  
My hat and gloves still lying on the table,  
I heard a shot—'twas eight o'clock scarce past—  
And running out as fast as I was able,  
I found the military commandant  
Stretch'd in the street, and able scarce to pant.  
. . . The man was gone: in some Italian quarrel  
Kill'd by five bullets from an old gun-barrel.  
I gazed upon him, for I knew him well;  
And though I have seen many corpses, never  
Saw one, whom such an accident befell,  
So calm; though pierced through stomach, heart, and liver,  
He seem'd to sleep, for you could scarcely tell

(As he bled inwardly, no hideous river  
 Of gore divulged the cause) that he was dead:  
 So as I gazed on him, I thought or said—  
 'Can this be death? then what is life or death?' (5.257-282)

Byron's footnote on this passage states, "The assassination alluded to took place on the eighth of December, 1820, in the streets of Ravenna, not a hundred paces from the residence of the writer. The circumstances were as described." Byron likewise attempts to attest to the veracity of the account in a letter of 10 December 1820 to Lady Byron. That is, Byron has blatantly, unflinchingly—by his own testimony, at least—inserted biographical material into the text of his poem. The proliferation of *I*'s—ten, in fact, over the course of three stanzas—draws attention to the link between Byron and his narrator in such a way that is impossible to ignore.

Nevertheless, Byron's earnest insistence is itself noteworthy. His claim, at the beginning of the passage that "[t]his is fact and no poetic fable," in addition to his footnote and letter to Annabella, ring distinctly of the poet who cried Byron. Byron is fully cognizant that by this stage in the narrative of *Don Juan*—five cantos in—he needs to work to convince the readers, when he wants to speak in his own voice, that it is indeed his own voice.

Byron's predicament is highly reminiscent of Swift's in his apology to *A Tale of a Tub*. The apology, added of necessity in 1710 to the fifth edition, followed substantial criticism from religious authorities; as Claude Rawson notes, in *The Character of Swift's Satire: A Revised Focus*, "The *Tale* was to be a stumbling block in his career as a clergyman" (16). The apology was meant, Swift writes, to "excuse 'several youthful sallies' in the *Tale*, 'which from the grave and wise may deserve a rebuke'" (Nokes 43). Swift writes of his *Tale* in the apology: "It

celebrates the Church of England as the most perfect of all others in discipline and doctrine; it advances no opinion they reject nor condemns any they receive” (63). However, as we will see, Swift's attempt to say, “No, really—*this* is the real me,” (just as Byron does in his account of the commandant's death) is more complicated than perhaps he would have liked.

Tubs within tubs: Byron, Swift and Digression

Swift's first major satire, *A Tale of a Tub*, written during “the phase of [Swift's] political apprenticeship under [Sir William] Temple” from 1689-1699 (Crook 35), was printed anonymously in 1704. In the *Tale*, “considered by many to be Swift's greatest achievement” (36) as a satirist, the nascent Swiftian narrator—already proving himself nearly immune to compartmentalization—divides his narrative between alternating sections of (ostensibly) plot-driven storytelling, each bearing the title “*A Tale of a Tub*,” that follows three brothers, Peter, Martin, and Jack, and five labeled digressions, including “*A Digression concerning Critics*,” “*A Digression in the Modern Kind*,” “*A Digression concerning the Original, the Use, and Improvement of Madness in a Commonwealth*,” and “*A Digression in Praise of Digressions*.”

William Wotton—a contemporary of Swift—understood correctly that, “By these three sons, Peter, Martin, and Jack; Popery, the Church of England, and our Protestant dissenters, are designed” (95). Each takes his name from a key religious figure: Peter from St. Peter; Martin from Martin Luther; and Jack from John Calvin. At the death of their father—understood to represent God—the brothers are each given a coat that, according to his will, “with good wearing . . . will last you fresh and sound as long as you live” and “will grow in the same proportion with your bodies, lengthening and widening of themselves so as to be always fit” (95). Proper care and treatment of the coats—symbolizing Christianity—is dictated in the father's will, i.e., the Bible, which the three brothers—to varying degrees—more and more disregard as they embellish their garments with various trimmings—symbolic of the accretion of rituals, doctrines, and heresies in the centuries after Christ's death.



Peter, the allegorical representation of Catholicism, is a target of derision for his pompous self-importance:

He told his brothers he would have them to know that he was their elder, and consequently his father's sole heir; nay, a while after he would not allow them to call him *brother*, but *Mr. PETER*; and then he must be styled *Father PETER*; and sometimes, *My Lord PETER*. (111)

Jack comes under attack for substituting enthusiasm for vision and understanding, taking the Calvinist doctrine of predestination to its absurd logical end:

He would shut his eyes as he walked along the streets, and if he happened to bounce his head against a post, or fall into a kennel . . . he would tell the gibing prentices who looked on, that he submitted with entire resignation as to a trip, or a blow of fate. . . . 'It was ordained', said he, 'some few days before the Creation, that my nose and this very post should have a rencounter, and therefore nature thought fit to send us both into the world in the same age, and to make us countrymen and fellow-citizens.' (155)

Martin, meanwhile, the representative of the Anglicanism Swift wishes to endorse, receives little treatment at all. He is described as possessing “*patience*” (129) and as capable of “deliver[ing] an admirable lecture of morality, which might have exceedingly contributed to my reader's *response both of body and mind* (the true ultimate end of *ethics*)” (128); but he is never provided with the opportunity to prove the narrator's glowing descriptions of him.

Over the course of the approximately 101-page work (Oxford World Classics edition, including the preface, introduction, accompanying letters, apologia, and conclusion), the

digressions gradually subvert and eventually consume both the structure of the tale and the plot itself. Nearly 70 pages are devoted to digression, while a mere 31 consist of the anticipated narrative. Sections labeled “*A Tale of a Tub*” become fewer and farther between as the pages pass—indeed, one such section is actually a digression in disguise, focusing on Æolists instead of Peter, Jack, and Martin!

In the preface of the *Tale*, the narrator offers an explanation of the at-first perplexing title, which seems to have nothing to do at all with the tale's proposed religious allegory of the three brothers. He writes:

The wits of the present age being so very numerous and penetrating, it seems the grandees of Church and State begin to fall under horrible apprehensions lest these gentlemen . . . should find leisure to pick holes in the weak sides of Religion and Government . . . [T]he danger hourly increasing by new levies of wits, all appointed (as there is reason to fear) with pen, ink, and paper . . . it was judged of absolute necessity that some present expedient be thought on, till the main design can be brought to maturity.

That is, in order to protect the Church, which apparently cannot protect itself, the “wits of the present age” must be diverted into lampooning some other target. The narrator continues:

To this end, at a Grand Committee some days ago, this important discovery was made by a certain curious and refined observer: that seamen have a custom when they meet a *whale*, to fling him out an empty *tub* by way of amusement, to divert him from laying violent hands upon the ship. (79)

In other words, *A Tale of a Tub* is itself a tub, intended to distract away from the “ship,” i.e., the

the Church and Christianity. In this way, the text is already a digression away from “the thing” itself.

Yet the allegory *is* about Christianity. Swift is, perplexingly, both pulling toward the ship and away from it in his efforts to offer up a sacrificial tub. Certainly, Swift, at the outset of the *Tale*, as we have already seen in the examples above, seizes gleefully upon the opportunity to lambast Catholicism and Calvinism. The narrator notes, with regards to the coats the brothers inherited from their father, again, understood to represent true, pure Christianity, or “primitive Christianity”—that is, Christianity in its original form:

I ought in method to have informed the reader, about fifty pages ago, of a fancy Lord Peter took, and infused into his brothers, to wear on their coats whatever trimmings came up in fashion; never pulling off any, as they went out of mode, but keeping on all together . . . to a degree that upon the time of their falling out there was hardly a thread of the original coat to be seen. . . . (126)

After a “falling out” between the brothers (the Protestant Reformation), Jack pulls at the additions to his coat with such fervency that “he rent the *main body* of his *coat* from top to bottom” and, frustrated with his attempt to repair the coat with his clumsy needlework, “in a great rage he tore off the whole piece, cloth and all, and flung them into the kennel” (128), thereby effectively throwing Christianity itself out with the trappings of popery.

But if Swift's goal is to present Martin as a positive alternative to Jack and Peter—that is, to defend Anglicanism and the Church of England—the attempt surely fails. Unfortunately for Swift, his allegory in defense of the Church of England and its precepts, in a purported effort, he belatedly claims in his apology, to “celebrat[e] the Church of England,” steadily unravels around

his narrator. Martin, in his efforts to restore his coat to its original state, fares thus:

. . . where he observed the embroidery worked so close as not to be got away without damaging the cloth, or where it served to hide or strengthen any flaw in the body of the coat contracted by the perpetual tampering of workmen upon it, he concluded the wisest course was to let it remain, resolving in no case whatsoever that the substance of the stuff should suffer injury; which he thought the best method for serving the true intent and meaning of his father's Will. (127)

Swift is here obviously straining to defend the Anglican system, but he is forced to admit that Anglicanism is precisely *not* primitive Christianity. If the best that can be said for the Church of England amounts to its removal of some allegedly sinister Catholic adornment, and its avoidance of Calvinism's supposedly barren alternative, Swift's defense does not amount to much. Irvin Ehrenpreis concludes, in his biography *Swift: The Man, His Works, and the Age*:

. . . in its literary aspect, the treatment of Martin is weak because it clashes with the programme of the book as a whole. This programme is for the author to imply a virtue which he desires to recommend, but to state it either not at all or else ironically—by pretending to depreciate it. . . . Swift would have accomplished his aim best by leaving Martin out. (1.188)

Indeed, it is worth noting that the father's "everlasting curse," (Swift 103) should any of the sons embroider their coats, would still seem to apply to Martin.

As a result of his recognition of the inherent problem with his portrayal of Martin, Swift begins to offer more and more of Jack and Peter; they become tubs, as it were, to distract the reader from Martin. As Melvyn New writes in his essay "Jonathan Swift, Thomas Mann, and the

Irony of Ideology,” “Swift was too self-conscious a writer, too dramatic a portrayer of voices, not to have had his own glimmer of insight into the gulf opening around him” (179). By the conclusion of the narrative portion of *A Tale of a Tub*, Martin has all but disappeared, appearing only cursorily in two sentences, and then only within the context of action on the part of Jack and Peter. But this is simply not enough to do the job. The allegory itself is no longer serving Swift's purpose of distracting from the flaws of the Church of England and is, instead, one imagines horrifyingly for Swift, actually bringing those flaws into sharper relief.

Swift's recognition that his tub is rapidly sinking early on in the *Tale* forces him to find another alternative—another tub. He finds that tub in what was to become one of his favorite satirical targets—false learning. The narrator of the *Tale* writes, shortly after the account of Martin and Jack's break from Peter, in “*A Digression in Praise of Digressions*”:

I think the commonwealth of learning is chiefly obliged to the great modern improvement of *digressions*: the late refinements in knowledge running parallel to those of diet in our nation, which among men of a judicious taste are dressed up in various compounds, consisting in *soups* and *olios*, *fricassees*, and *ragouts*. 'Tis true there is a sort of morose, detracting, ill-bred people, who pretend utterly to disrelish these polite innovations; and as to the similitude from diet, they allow the parallel but are so bold as to pronounce the example itself a corruption and degeneracy of taste. They tell us that the fashion of jumbling fifty things together in a dish was at first introduced in compliance to a depraved and *debauched* appetite, as well as to a *crazy constitution*: and to see a man hunting through an *olio* after the *head* and *brains* of a *goose*, a *widgeon*, or a *woodcock* is a sign he

wants a stomach and digestion for more substantial victuals. Further, they affirm that *digressions* in a book are like *foreign troops* in a *state*, which argue the nation to want a *heart* and *hands* of its own, and often either *subdue* the *natives* or drive them into the most *unfruitful* corners. (130)

Certainly, the digressions that proliferate exponentially in *A Tale of a Tub* would seem “unfruitful” to the readers who look fittingly upon the digressions as disruptive to the course of the actual narrative. But the digressions for Swift serve a clear purpose: they are tubs to save his original tub from utter destruction. The passage reproduced above is a perfect example of Swift's powers of distraction. He offers a complicated, verbose metaphor and then continues to digress from the story of Jack, Peter, and Martin for a solid twenty-two pages that also contain the misnamed “*A Tale of a Tub*,” section VIII. Unable to critique Catholicism and Calvinism in his original allegory without also bringing Anglicanism under fire, Swift finds himself an easier target—“the commonwealth of learning” in modern times—which provides a wealth of satirical opportunities and which draws attention away from the holes in his first tub.

Critical analysis has followed according to Swift's design, with suggestions that “the real object of Swift's satire in the *Tale* is the corruption he saw in English letters during the latter half of the seventeenth century” (Rosenheim 139) or that each digression purposefully mimics the style of contemporary writers, such as John Dryden, Richard Bentley, and William Wotton, in order—ostensibly, at least—to instruct by delighting (Ehrenpreis 1. 204-205). But I would note that by shifting topical focus within *A Tale of a Tub*, Swift is essentially abandoning confrontations with the dangerous questions his allegory has raised. As New writes, “The validity of revelation weighs heavily on Swift's mind . . . because it is the fundamental

question left unanswered by the *Tale*—culpably unanswered, since the failure to do so undercuts Swift's desire to hold the middle ground without irony" (179). The turn toward satirizing "the commonwealth of learning," in other words, amounts to a turn away from a religious allegory that has by this point spun out of control.

However, the distance between Swift and the narrative persona he adopts in *A Tale of a Tub* does collapse on two distinctly telling occasions within the conclusion of the digressive passage and the *Tale* itself. The narrator writes what seems to be a reward for the reader who has cautiously followed the extensive digressions and complicated deployments of voice in the *Tale*:

I have one word to say upon the subject of *profound writers*, who are grown very numerous of late and I know very well the judicious world is resolved to list me in that number. I conceive therefore, as to the business of being *profound*, that it is with *writers* as with *wells*—a person with good eyes may see to the bottom of the deepest provided any *water* be there, and that often when there is nothing in the world at the bottom besides *dryness* and *dirt*, though it be but a yard and half underground it shall pass, however, for wondrous *deep*, upon no wiser a reason than because it is wondrous *dark*. (163)

This seems at last to be Swift speaking, offering caution—albeit too late, as he is less than a page away from concluding his *Tale*. But only a few lines later, the narrator implores:

I have one concluding favor to request of my reader; that he will not expect to be equally diverted and informed by every line or every page of this discourse, but give some allowance to the author's spleen and short fits or intervals of dulness, as well as his own. (164)

This might seem a reasonable enough request until one realizes that a full two-thirds of *A Tale of a Tub*—not including the extensive apologia, introductions, and notations preceding the actual substantive exposition, which is littered with faux footnotes and “hiatuses in MS” at the most critical junctures—is devoted entirely to such attentions to “spleen” and “dulness.” It is difficult, under the burden of these realizations, to see how, over the course of the book, Swift has “celebrate[d] the Church of England,” as he claims in the apology he added—after the fact. The ship is all but lost amidst the tubs within tubs. Why, after all, would Swift have needed to add an apology if the original satire had worked?

The apparent reluctance of the Swiftian narrator to return, so to speak, not to the ship, but to the original tub finds its Romantic counterpart in the increasingly pressing, prominent foot-dragging of the Byronic narrator in *Don Juan* when pressed to turn again to Juan's narrative. The narrator's sense—utterly facetious though it may be—that his digressive flights of fancy are a hinderance to Juan's story does not deter him from those digressions. By the concluding canto of *Don Juan* (which should not be confused with the *conclusion* of the work which is, as aforementioned, unfinished as a result of Byron's early death), the narrator seems to avoid Juan's story, returning to it only cursorily in acknowledgement of his apparent incipient intentions.

If Christianity was the ship for Swift, *A Tale of a Tub* his tub, and the digressions with the *Tale* his tubs to save the first tub, what then is Byron's parallel in *Don Juan*? I would suggest, in a move not altogether surprising for such a self-aware poet as Byron, that he himself becomes his own ship, throwing out the tub of *Don Juan* to protect himself from the insatiable public appetite for all things Byron. The necessity of such a move on Byron's part is rendered abundantly clear from a single example of Byron's time in Geneva with the Shelleys. Byron recollects, “[T]here is



no story so absurd that they did not invent it at my cost. I was watched by glasses on the opposite side of the Lake, and by glasses too that must have had very distorted optics. I was waylaid in my evening drives. . . .” It seems “telescopes [were] hired out by the proprietor of the Hôtel d'Angleterre . . . to give his guests a better view of scandalous events at the Villa Diodati directly across the lake” (MacCarthy 295). Byron, partly by his own ostentation, finds his privacy spectacularly violated. His response to the public's increasingly unwelcome intrusion into his “private life” is to offer the public just what it wants, but in a venue where Byron himself is in control. By offering up a stylized persona in *Don Juan*, in the form of Juan, the narrator, and other minor characters, Byron attempts, initially, to distract the reader from his ship—himself—just as Swift had done before him. But—as Byron's ever-increasing digressions show—his tub, the Juan narrative, like Swift's allegory, ultimately fails to satisfy. Juan's narrative, having adopted a life of its own, no longer fully serves the purpose of allowing Byron to present himself as he would like; and, like Swift, he finds a solution to his problem in increasingly lengthy digressions.

It is in these digressive moments that the narrator most ostentatiously flirts with biographical possibilities between himself and the author. Indeed, much of the ostensibly biographical material discussed in the prior chapter finds its expression in the form of miniature or extended digression. As early as Canto I, the narrator begins to allow himself these deviations, though he does not name them yet as such to the reader. At the climactic moment of Juan and Julia's affair—she “whispering 'I will ne'er consent'—consented” (1.936) to Juan's amorous advances—the narrator abruptly begins a tangent:

'Tis said that Xerxes offer'd a reward

To those who could invent him a new pleasure;  
 Methinks, the requisition's rather hard,  
 And must have cost his majesty a treasure:  
 For my part, I'm a moderate-minded bard,  
 Fond of a little love (which I call leisure);  
 I care not for new pleasures, as the old  
 Are quite enough for me, so they but hold. (1.937-944)

Byron, through the narrator, already begins to open ironic gaps and play with readers' expectations of the “Byron” they think they know. He begins with Xerxes of Persia, conjuring images of the opulent East Byron himself was so connected with in the public mind, from his journeys to Athens, Greece, and Constantinople—an image Byron himself encouraged by posing for portraits in Eastern dress. The narrator's description of himself as a “moderate-minded bard, / Fond of a little love” are set in juxtaposition with the image of Byron as a contemporary Wilt Chamberlain, anything but moderate and fond of rather more than a *little* love.

The narrator continues:

Oh Pleasure! you're indeed a pleasant thing,  
 Although one must be damn'd for you, no doubt;  
 I make a resolution every spring  
 Of reformation, ere this year run out,  
 But, somehow, this my vestal vow takes wing,  
 Yet still, I trust it may be kept throughout:  
 I'm very sorry, very much ashamed,

And mean, next winter, to be quite reclaim'd. (1.945-952)

Byron both is and is not in these two excerpted stanzas. Byron, as he would be perceived by his audience, plays with the picture of himself as a wanton pleasure-seeker and offers a barbed joke at the end about his narrator's intentions to be "quite reclaim'd," which the audience would certainly not expect of "mad, bad, dangerous" Byron himself. But there are notable hints of a more serious, *real* Byron in the last stanza. While living in Venice, Byron made "daily expeditions to the monastery" on the Isola San Lazzaro and "promised himself that he would turn devout when he turned thirty" (MacCarthy 321).

Nevertheless, the interruption itself is for no more reason, apparently, than to taunt the reader's desire to read autobiography into Byron's work and thereby craft the narrator into a caricature of the public portrait of a dissipated, hedonistic Byron. They would not at this stage have had access to his personal letters on his stated hopes for reform. The digression is particularly salient as it comes at such a critical juncture in the narrative, when, presumably, the reader's interest would be most aroused by the proceedings in Juan's story. The narrator continues to delay the progress of the plot, returning briefly to Julia and Juan in stanza 121 before concluding, "We'll talk of that anon," (1.969) and continuing a twelve-stanza digression.

Byron continues his climactic interruptions in Canto II, breaking into an extended digression following the consummation of Juan's relationship with Haidee that stretches to the end of the canto. The departure is linked lazily to the Juan narrative—"But Juan! had he quite forgotten Julia?" (2.1657)—and begins:

I hate inconstancy—I loathe, detest,  
Abhor, condemn, abjure the mortal made

Of such quicksilver clay in his breast  
 No permanent foundation can be laid;  
 Love, constant love, has been my constant guest,  
 And yet last night, being at a masquerade,  
 I saw the prettiest creature, fresh from Milan,  
 Which gave me some sensations like a villain. (2.1665-1672)

It is both the Byron of the public, who was viewed as supremely inconstant, and it is the Byron who, finding out the affairs of servants with whom he had engaged in sexual affairs, was deeply hurt by what he viewed as “inconstancy” (MacCarthy 154). His interest in these digressions seems to be striking a balance between what the people viewed as the “true” Lord Byron and what Byron himself thought of himself. He is, again, protecting his ship by offering an ambiguous version of himself up to the public.

The Byronic narrator's digressive inclinations expand as the narrative “progresses” at an increasingly slow rate. Canto III marks the most significant of the digressions to this point. The narrator describes the various individuals found in Juan and Haidee's menagerie-like love-nest, drawing particular attention to a poet:

Which made their new establishment complete;  
 The last [the poet] was of great fame, and liked to show it:  
 His verses rarely wanted their due feet—  
 And for his theme—he seldom sung below it,  
 He being paid to satirize or flatter,  
 As the psalm says, 'inditing a good matter.' (3.619-624)

Byron's tendency to commentate on the nature of poets and poetry in *Don Juan* is rather closely mirrored, it is worth noting, in Swift's penchant for satirizing fellow writers, as clearly seen in *A Tale of a Tub*. After a three-stanza digression on the poet's personality, past, and "genius" (3.641), the narrator starts, as if coming to himself: "Oh!—the third canto—and the pretty pair— / Their loves, and feasts, and house, and dress, and mode / Of living in their insular abode" (3.646-648). But by the beginning of the next stanza—a single line later—the narrator has seamlessly digressed once again to the poet, indicating that while his superficial intention is to continue the tale of Juan and his various paramours, his interests lie elsewhere. The narrator, in a move reminiscent of the "digressions on digressions" in *A Tale of a Tub*, decides to even include one of the poem's poet's poems—a full sixteen-stanza affair—after his style of writing while "[i]n Greece" (3.688)!

After a lengthy exposition on the nature of fame and legacy, running over twenty stanzas past the poem within a poem, the narrator offers a startlingly morose rumination:

When Nero perish'd by the justest doom  
Which ever the destroyer yet destroy'd,  
Amidst the roar of liberated Rome,  
Of nations freed, and the world overjoy'd,  
Some hands unseen strew'd flowers upon his tomb:  
Perhaps the weakness of a heart not void  
Of feeling for some kindness done when power  
Had left the wretch an uncorrupted hour. (3.961-968)

Following lines that state that "paper—even a rag like this, / Survives himself, his tomb, and all

that's his" (3.799-780) and glory "[d]epend[s] more upon the historian's style / Than on the name a person leaves behind," (3.811-812) the narrator's sympathetic casting of Nero rings tenderly, or pathetically, of self-sympathy on Byron's part. On the one hand, he is certainly posturing himself, as on multiple other occasions in *Don Juan*, as the villain. On the other hand, the stanza carries an air of Byron trying to convince himself that *someone* will view him sympathetically after his "just doom," and is uncharacteristically unfunny for what the reader has seen from the narrator thus far.

A mere line later, however, the narrator deflates the stanza, admonishing himself: "But I'm digressing; what on earth has Nero, / Or any such like sovereign buffoons, / To do with the transactions of my hero. . ." (3.969-971)? These amorphous reflections on the part of the narrator—so seemingly unsuited for the romantic tale the author supposedly sets out to record—reflect Byron's most pressing concern in *Don Juan*: To simultaneously afford himself some protection from his public persona, carving out a self-fashioned space of anonymity by hiding Byron in "Byron," while still "selling" his most valuable commodity—"himself."

These "'digressive' cantos," as M.K. Joseph refers to them in "The Artist and the Mirror," eventually subvert the narrative process altogether, as in *A Tale of a Tub*, with the narrator seemingly only reluctantly returning to his duty as storyteller. Joseph writes, "Leave out the narrative element, and *Don Juan* becomes an indefinitely extensible medium for personal apologia and topical commentary." Joseph goes on to state that "the narrative is a considerable asset in itself: it is the sustaining element which makes the whole poem possible" (36). Joseph's ultimate point appears to stand thus:

In *Beppo*, Byron had already identified and practised the device of comic

digression. In *Don Juan*, he exploits it to the full, and one of the features of the poem that may strike us at first as merely comic or even whimsical is the whole technique of commenting on the writing as it goes, digressing about digressions, apologising or explaining, and generally teasing the reader by involving him in the fiction, and then withdrawing from it with the reminder that it *is* only fiction after all. (29)

Joseph's analysis of Byron's method in *Don Juan* is redolent of Swift's practices in *A Tale of a Tub*. There is much more at stake here, however, than simply "teasing the reader." As with Swift, each of Byron's digressions represents yet one more tub, one more distraction, for those readers eager to have a go at the ship.

Nevertheless, while it cannot be denied that "the interplay between" the narrative and digressions is certainly an important critical consideration, the digression for Byron and his narrator in *Don Juan* seems to surpass the narrative in importance in such a way as to become more like the true narrative exposition itself after a certain point. As opposed to thinking of the Byronic narrator as consistently returning to the narrative because it is the grounding element, it is helpful to view him in terms of Swift's narrator in *A Tale of a Tub*; he is constantly fleeing from the strictures of a narrative structure that, on its own, can no longer serve his purpose. Digressions become the place where Byron and Swift, if they cannot succeed at defending their respective ships, can at least stanch a few leaks.

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