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Renunciations of Rhyme in Byron's *Don Juan*

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"Carelessly I sing," George Gordon, Lord Byron proclaims near the midpoint of *Don Juan*, epitomizing the casual air that marks so many of the hundreds of ottava rima stanzas in his monumental mock-epic.¹ As the poem unfolds, Byron continues to harp on this spontaneous inventiveness, explaining that "note or text, / I never know the word which will come next," that "I cannot stop to alter words once written" (9.41.327–8; 9.77.612). He "write[s] what's uppermost, without delay," and

never straining hard to versify,
I rattle on exactly as I'd talk
With any body in a ride or walk.

(14.7.53; 15.19.150–2)

He thus affiliates himself with the "Improvisatore" tradition in Italian letters, affecting to write less for vocation than for avocation (15.20.160).²

Is this apparent spontaneity truly the mark of an amateur? Several have concluded as much. One contemporary periodical, *The British Critic*, dismissed *Don Juan* as a work of "flippant dog-grel."³ Robert Southey, hardly lacking for reasons to begrudge Byron, denigrated the "foul blot" and "act of high treason" that he found the poem to be, condemning the "very easy" quality of its "Hudibrastic rhymes."⁴ Personal vendettas aside, the notion of Byron-as-amateur persisted well beyond the Romantic period. Among the Victorians, Matthew Arnold thought Byron's style "so slovenly, slipshod, and infelicitous" as to suggest "bad workman-

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ship.”⁵ In the twentieth century, John Churton Collins found in Byron “so bad an ear” as to betray an “ingrained coarseness” replete with “jarring notes” and “cacophonies” that were “often horrible,” while T. S. Eliot decried Byron’s “schoolboy command of the language.”⁶

Separated by generations, these more recent critiques nevertheless retain certain elements of the *ad hominem* attack that plagued Byron throughout his life. These latter dismissals, so often proceeding on aesthetic grounds, also betray an implicit reaction against Byron’s favored literary pose, described by Alan Bold as that of “a devil-may-care man-of-action who knocks off cantos with effortless ease in his spare time.”⁷ If this affectation of indifference has occasioned considerable offense, it was also, for the Byron of *Don Juan*, a version of self-defense. As Truman Guy Steffan concluded, “one does not expect a Donny Johnny in a bedroom farce to cause a Byron to worry with a word or phrase.”⁸

Yet, as W. H. Auden knew, rhyming is a much more arduous and worrisome (and therefore absurdly comic) task in English than in Italian. Thus, the Improvvisatore who manages to rhyme in English for pages and pages on end evokes a curious mixture of admiration, astonishment, and envy, especially when able to win a fair share of guffaws in the process.⁹ If Byron therefore succeeds in his attempts to “giggle and make giggle,” he does so precisely because of the considerable efforts he has invested into the elaborate formal apparatus of *Don Juan*.¹⁰ In keeping with its “calculation of carelessness,” it is a poem replete with subterranean revisions—if less and less thoroughly so—from first to last.¹¹ Even as it presents an easy façade characterized by “the Byronic arbitrary,” the deeper strata of *Don Juan* reveal that Byron’s method was anything but arbitrary and was, in fact, the product of many careful choices and complex motivations.¹²

BYRON THE RHYMER

Renouncing some draft cantos entirely, renouncing bits and pieces of other draft lines, only then to renounce the very act of revision itself in the later movements of the poem, Byron’s renunciations, in their many forms, prove to be the paradigmatic gesture of *Don Juan*. What, specifically, does Byron think to renounce in his magnum opus? A partial list would include authority in its various guises: starting with authorship itself and moving on to bourgeois morality, the classicizing impulse, classical liberalism, the Enlightenment, the empire and its metropolis, the institutions

of marriage and the monarchy, the literary establishment, and, more generally, the dominant modes in culture, politics, religion, and society. These renunciations, ranging in tone from the satirical to the bitter to the resigned, prove consistently articulate—as Peter Graham explained of Byron, “he was the most eloquent of haters”—and never more effective than when communicated via rhyme.¹³

Yet, if Byron staked much of his poetic claim on a facility with rhyme, as the self-appointed “grand Napoleon of the realms of rhyme,” he also took a rather skeptical and at times deprecating stance toward the very practice of rhyming (and, by extension, toward the practice of poetry) (11.55.440). At the outset of his poetic career, in a preface to *Hours of Idleness* (1807), Byron acknowledged that the challenge “to produce any thing entirely new, in an age so fertile in rhyme, would be a Herculean task.”¹⁴ A few years later, passing through his middle twenties, he professed to prefer action over and above writing, for which he claimed to care little, and “least of all, rhyme.”¹⁵ Sensing that “no one should be a rhymers who could be anything better,” Byron here considered renouncing rhyme altogether, declaring that there would be “no more rhyme for—or rather, *from*—me. I have taken my leave from that stage, and henceforth will mountebank it no longer.”¹⁶

Nevertheless, Byron saw fit to renege repeatedly on this renunciation, and the rhymes of *Don Juan* come down to posterity as both the proof and the pudding of his most majestic inconsistency. Jerome J. McGann has traced this tendency to embody an “opposing mind and will” that “refuses to accept or assent” to its poetic roots in the concluding movement of *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage* (1816).¹⁷ Thereafter, Byron’s refusals of acceptance were so complete that he would assent to nothing, not even to his refusal to assent. In his later works, Byron’s “opposing mind and will” grew ever more resolute, from *Beppo* (1818) to *Mazeppa* (1819) to *Marino Faliero* (1821), and finally to the unbounded set of opposing forces that became *Don Juan*.

As his anti-career unfolded, Byron’s sense of rhyme evolved from a perspective at once fundamental and Manichean (rhyme functioning variously as a Herculean achievement and / or a worthless endeavor) to a stance that was finally—how else to put it—Byronic. No longer compelled toward orthodoxy in rhyme, Byron justified his looser approach by asserting that one “might as well want a Midnight *all stars*—as rhyme all perfect.”¹⁸ Byron, therefore, *more or less* rhymes throughout *Don Juan*, a poem he describes as containing a “given quantity of rhyme,” by employing

what he terms an “irregularity of chime” (11.90.715; 15.20.158). Predisposed toward imperfect rhymes, Byron displayed a progressively greater openness toward feminine rhyme in his final years, until, in *Don Juan*, it came to prove the rule rather than the exception.¹⁹

Refusing to paper over his poetics in mock-epic mode, Byron instead acknowledges—and even emphasizes—the very artifice of the rhyming function. That which he alluded to in a pair of cancelled marginal notes as the “wicked necessity of rhyming” works in many instances to drive the narrative arc of *Don Juan*, whose details are thus limited by the strictures of its form.²⁰ Byron confesses as much in a late stanza of the poem, describing the very act of poetic composition as an unstable practice “at hazard as the rhyme may run” (13.83.662).

This hazard emerges with particular clarity in Byron's enumerations of military heroes, valorized less for their bravery than for their sonority. Gallantry aside, Byron acknowledged the legions of omitted French patriots with awkward monikers to be “Exceedingly remarkable at times, / But not at all adapted to my rhymes” (1.3.23–4). Likewise, the conjured Russian patriots whose names proved “discords of narration,” which could never be “tune[d] . . . into rhyme” were therefore left unmentioned (7.16.121, 121–2).

With sense subordinated to sound, Byron's poetic mellifluousness tends to teeter on the brink of meaninglessness, the poem's significance all but trumped by its grandiloquence. This dynamic is further fueled by Byron's ostensible indifference toward certain rhyming pairs in the course of a poem wholly given over to virtuosity in rhyme.²¹ When confronted with an objectionable situation, Byron describes it as “a shame, / A libel, or whate'er you please to rhyme on,” implicitly confessing that judgment depends to some greater or lesser extent on a linguistic exigency not necessarily of his own making (6.94.747–8). In a more authoritative moment, he reiterates the same theme even more explicitly in his apology for cynicism, explaining that

If I sneer sometimes,
It is because I cannot well do less,
And now and then it also suits my rhymes.

(13.8.58–60)

In a poetics where reason can be renounced in favor of rhyme, not even grammar is sacred. So, when Byron casually and incorrectly describes a situation in which the “enemy is beat,” he quali-

fies his usage with the parenthetical "(Or *beaten*, if *you* insist on grammar, though / I never think about it in a heat)" (7.42.32–4). Here as elsewhere, the formalities of the Queen's English give way to the felicities of vernacular usage.²² In the current of *Don Juan*, so often moving against the standards of conventional wisdom, rhyme functions as a "good old steam-boat which keeps verses moving / 'Gainst Reason" (9.74.588–9).²³ As such, for Byron, sound functions not so much as "an echo to the sense," after Alexander Pope's injunction, but rather, in line with W. K. Wimsatt Jr.'s precept, as a potential inversion of sense, if not, even more radically, as the very nullification of sense.²⁴

BYRON THE RENOUNCER

In ideological terms, Byron's renunciations in *Don Juan* are rampant and unrepentant, a fact allowed by Byron himself, who described his poem as one that was "bitter in politics."²⁵ His later critics have echoed this notion. George M. Ridenour described *Don Juan* as "a poem of reaction," and McGann styled it as a poem that "repudiates formality" in both literary and societal terms.²⁶ Philip Hobsbaum, meanwhile, labeled Byron as the greatest and last "exponent of the subversive mode in verse," whose poetic practice equals a "debunking process" accomplished through "an extent of wild rhyming."²⁷ Finally, according to Jenni Calder, Byron's reaction, his repudiation, and his subversion necessarily evolved from his sense that "decent citizenship within the limits of a hypocritical society was not acceptable."²⁸

To renounce, then, became natural for Byron—but to openly repudiate was never a simple affair.²⁹ While sometimes inclined to open disputation, an elliptical implication of dissent often proved the more expedient path. Among Byron's favored methods of implied renunciation, equivalent rhyme served as a particularly common (though not always subtle) technique, joining words that sound more or less alike in order to enjoin more or less similar meanings.³⁰ This theory of equivalent rhyme emerges most clearly in Byron's argument that "'Kiss' rhymes to 'bliss' in fact as well as verse," simultaneously suggesting the actuality and the artificiality of the associative echo between the rhyming pair (6.59.471).³¹

Byron pursues these rhymes of "fact as well as verse" throughout *Don Juan*, using verse as a coded index to advance the fact of his renunciation toward society's most venerable establishments and its most venerated institutions. Thus, Byron wryly mocks antiquity and enlightenment alike, via such equivalent rhymes as

"intellectual" / "hen-peck'd you all," "Plato" / "potato," "illumination" / "hallucination," "Pooh!" / "True," and "schools" / "fools" (1.22.175, 176; 7.4.26, 28; 7.44.346, 348; 15.1.7, 8; 15.17.135, 136).³² Such encoded renunciations reinforce Byron's more explicit renunciations of classical antiquity—to the effect that "time will doubt of Rome" and in the suggestion that "Were things but only call'd by their right name, / Caesar himself would be ashamed of Fame" (4.101.8; 14.102.815–6).

Equivalent rhymes also work to reinforce Byron's disavowal of religion. In what must be an unprecedented predilection among English poets, Byron tends to rhyme "God" most frequently with "odd" (1.27.215, 216; 8.104.826, 828; 10.32.249, 251), irreverently pairing "resurrection" with "dissection" (1.31.247, 248). The most blasphemous sets of Byron's triple rhymes include "Missal" / "this all" / "kiss all" and "Vanity" / "Christianity" / "inanity" (1.46.361, 363, 365; 7.6.41, 43, 45). Lest these sets seem coincidental, consider Byron's running satire on scriptural tropes, as in the enumeration of Don Juan's lineage translated into the language of Genesis or in the comparison of Haidée's piratical father to Simon Peter, as "a fisher . . . of men" (1.9.71–2; 2.126.1001).

If Byron's enthusiasm for the church's orthodoxies was never more than lukewarm, he felt even more coolly disposed toward the morals of the respectable, polite society from which he emerged.³³ Thus Julia, Juan's first paramour, by turns saint and sinner, is sized up in the rhyme "repented" / "consented," and Byron's ongoing satire of matrimony finds its culmination in the late rhyme "marriage" / "miscarriage" (1.117.935, 936; 14.56.447, 448). Nobility fares little better, given Byron's penchant for rhyming "lord" with "abhorred" and, even more pointedly, with "whored" (1.65.513, 515; 6.90.714, 716; 9.54.425, 427; 11.75.7–8). Other occasional rhymes that bash the aristocracy include "trouble" / "noble," "asses" / "high classes," and "good society" / "moral inebriety" (11.74.591, 592; 11.84.671, 672; 13.35.279, 280).³⁴

Such disavowals of polite society did not stop with the petty nobility, but extended even unto royalty itself. Byron's send-up of the Russian monarch Catherine is best summed up in the leveling rhyme "Empress" / "Sempstress"—a leveling echoed in the English cantos via the rhyme "underlings" / "kings" (9.77.615, 616; 11.40.313, 315). Suggesting that monarchs shrink from rhymes "Save such as Southey can afford to give," Byron casts himself as the very antipode of the Court and its courtiers, declaring "So much the better!—I may stand alone, / But would not change my free thoughts for a throne" (10.37.292; 11.90.719–20).

From the distance of exile, Byron also took aim at the vain-glorious seat of empire. Styling the capital as a “mighty Babylon,” he employs the equivalent rhyme “Foolsap crown” / “London Town,” mapping the vain city and its landmarks even more precisely through disdainful pairings such as “War” / “Trafalgar,” “Hell” / “Pall Mall,” and “Charing Cross” / “dross” (11.23.178; 10.82.655, 656; 1.4.25, 27; 8.26.207, 208; 11.26.201, 203).³⁵ England, too, was worth a sass: thus “John Bull” twice meets his rhyme in “fool” (7.44.345, 347; 11.85.679, 680). Even the very notion of the “nation” is met by rhymes such as “intoxication,” “taxation,” “degradation,” “vexation,” “self-approbation,” “desolation,” “violation,” “temptation,” and “hallucination” (2.179.1426; 3.14.108; 3.55.440; 5.7.53 and 10.33.261; 8.4.25; 8.126.1005; 8.129.1026; 10.55.433; 13.6.46).³⁶ The draft rhyme “one tree” / “country,” perhaps seeming too patriotic or sentimental, shifts to the more scathing “effrontery” / “country” (13.91.n727, 728; 13.91.727, 728). These and other equivalent rhymes serve to cast aspersions on a nation Byron saw as having “butchered half the earth, and bullied t’other” (10.81.648).

Yet, for all his excoriations toward aristocratic, ecclesiastical, and imperial bulwarks, Byron’s vitriol was perhaps fueled as much by contrarianism as by radicalism.³⁷ Though striking a noncommittal pose at the outset of *Don Juan*, claiming that “my politics, as yet, are all to educate,” he later asserted that “being of no party, / I shall offend all parties,” finally proclaiming that with respect to politics, “I was born for opposition” (Dedication.17.133; 9.26.201–2; 15.22.176).³⁸ Thus, even in revolutionary mode, he stops short of articulating (and thus associating with) revolution, employing the term (or any variant thereof) only once in all of *Don Juan*. Even in this lone instance, Byron undermines his ostensible endorsement of revolutionary politics—which “Alone can save the Earth”—by encoding the equivalent rhyme “Revolution” / “Hell’s pollution” (8.51.407, 407, 408).³⁹

While Byron may have equivocated regarding political revolution, he was more plainly opposed to the notion of literary revolution. Well before he took to composing *Don Juan*, he had come to the conclusion that his contemporaries were bent “upon a wrong revolutionary poetical system.”⁴⁰ How odd that Byron should be classified as a Romantic alongside the very poets he so roundly abuses in *Don Juan*: Southey most prominently, William Wordsworth no less vituperatively, and John Keats more occasionally. Yet, here again, the classification makes sense when one understands Byron’s poetic trajectory as consistently oppositional over

time, working in parallel with the Romantics as they struggled to establish themselves, and working at a perpendicular against them once they had gained literary fame.⁴¹

Ultimately, Byron's position as poet remained open to self-critique, with the very act of "composition" paired with "perdition" (13.11.87, 88). Late in *Don Juan*, Byron again rues his role as rhymers, insisting that "Gainst rhyme I never should have knock'd my brows" (15.24.189). At this advanced stage, vilified in England, and never quite at home in Italy, Byron's renunciatory style finally began to wear thin. Steffan, attempting to explain Byron's perennial underrating, speculated that Byron "might have worn out his fame by knocking his rhyme against the entrenched fact of convention and authority."⁴² Driven into exile, a man without a country, seemingly aimless, singularly cosmopolitan, renouncing to the very end, Byron occupied a cultural space apart, whose several languages are everywhere apparent in the spaces of *Don Juan*.

BYRON THE POLYGLOT

How to say the "Juan" in *Don Juan*? While precedent suggests a Romance pronunciation resembling "Hwan," Byron most frequently rhymes "Juan" with "new one" and "true one," implying an anglicized pronunciation resembling "Joo-uhn" (8.29.232, 14.91.726).⁴³ In a couple of instances Byron departs from this pattern, as when rhyming "Juan" with "drew on" and "threw on" (2.146.1162, 1164; 7.60.475). In these cases the pronunciation shades toward an intermediate formulation resembling "Joo-wan." Taken together, these variations do not quite prove any given rule of pronunciation: rather, they indicate Byron's fundamental concerns with morphology and with imperfect rhyme.⁴⁴ On balance, then, the indeterminate sonic structure of *Don Juan*'s very name rests somewhere between the traditionally ascribed English mispronunciation "Dahn Joo-uhn" and the more conventional Spanish pronunciation, "Don Hwan."

More generally, in any given example of a polyglot rhyme, Byron's meter cues the reader to pronounce a non-English word or phrase in one way or another, but such indications almost always work against the reader's inclination as to how that word *should be* pronounced. Byron cleverly inscribes this indeterminacy of pronunciation into the poem's very conceit, ambiguously styling his narrator in a long unpublished preface to *Don Juan* as "either an Englishman settled in Spain—or a Spaniard who had travelled

in England."⁴⁵ Presumably, such a distinction would make a significant difference in that narrator's own pronunciation. Thus, to the extent that readers are unable to resolve this ambiguity, they remain uncertain of their own internal soundings and may be inclined to gloss over them. Yet, there is no escaping the problem, for Byron employs an aggressively polyglossic approach from the very first, placing French, Greek, and Latin words in rhyme positions within the first six stanzas of canto 1. Indeed, as if in recognition of the intractable complications of polyglossic verse, Byron coyly describes Juan himself as one who "knew several languages" but "did not rhyme" (11.53.417, 420).

Unlike his accidental protagonist, Byron knew several languages and *did* rhyme, and his polyglossic approach has had both champions and detractors. McGann has praised *Don Juan* for its ability to "'speak many languages,' both in the everyday and in the philosophical sense."⁴⁶ Eliot, by contrast, paid Byron a rather backhanded compliment in declaring himself unable to "think of any other poet of his distinction who might so easily have been an accomplished foreigner writing English."⁴⁷ With this praise Eliot grew more damning still, asserting that Byron "added nothing to the language . . . discovered nothing in the sounds, and developed nothing in the meaning, of individual words."⁴⁸ That such an accomplished poet could proffer such a thorough dismissal suggests nothing so much as Eliot's own perverse and willful blindness to the morphological genius of Byron's ottava rima.

Nevertheless, in more than one respect, Byron *was* an accomplished foreigner writing in English. As Tom Scott has observed of comic rhymes such as "pas" / "Eclât" / "squaw," Byron might be more accurately judged on the basis of his "Scots lug" than on the basis of his English lilt (13.79.626, 628, 630).⁴⁹ Moreover, *Don Juan* itself was the work of an exile in Italy, which assuredly impacted its author's sense of English as a spoken and written language. "'Tis pleasing to be school'd in a strange tongue," Byron exclaims early in *Don Juan*, concluding—from Scottish pride, perhaps—that "Much English I cannot pretend to speak, / Learning that language chiefly from its preachers" (2.164.1305; 2.165.1315, 1316). Juan, on the other hand, "did not understand a word / Of English, save their shibboleth, 'God Damn!'" (11.12.89–90).

With a mixture of indifference and irreverence toward the English language, Byron speaks and acts to renounce an unquestioning promotion of its ascendancy. In this respect (or rather, disrespect), Byron's linguistic ambivalence, which aims to demote the relative importance of the English language, mirrors his

ideological ambivalence, which aims to discredit English political ideals.⁵⁰ As Charles LaChance observed, Byron's purposefully "bad English" proves symptomatic of his oppositional worldview, culminating in a nihilism that wills "the subversion of all received ideologies."⁵¹ Thus, where Byron points to the competing styles of the English and the French—as, for instance, in recognizing the "Wellington" / "Vilainton" divide in pronunciation across the English Channel—he reinforces his political critique through the use of a rhyme that is polyglossic in both linguistic and ideological terms (9.1.1).

As for "the service of the goût," Byron explains that one is best to

pronounce it as inclines
 Your stomach! Ere you dine, the French will do;
 But *after*, there are sometimes certain signs
 Which prove plain English truer of the two.
 (15.72.570, 571–4)

The anglicized pronunciation "gout," while mentioned in a passing jest, holds no place within the actual rhyme scheme, where the francophone "goût" completes the triple rhyme "goût" / "do" / "two." Thus, Byron has his cake *and* eats his goût, for he simultaneously insists on the validity of the dual pronunciation and the superiority of the French pronunciation, even while managing to issue a qualified argument for the English pronunciation by way of spleen.⁵²

The polyglossic rhymes of *Don Juan* are so manifold that an index and interpretation of their nuances would fill a slim volume.⁵³ In most of these instances, Byron's intentions remain unclear: does he wish to imply an Anglicized pronunciation of the non-English word, a de-Anglicized pronunciation of the English word, or, indeed, something in between, in the best interests of the rhyme pair? The most prominent examples of such ambiguous dynamics include: in canto 1, "river" / "Guadalquivir," "so fine as" / "Donna Inez," "Seville" / "devil," and "hopes" / "Cheops" (1.8.63, 64; 1.11.87, 88; 1.203.1623, 1624; 1.219.1751, 1752). In canto 2, the instances include "Cadiz" / "trade is" / "ladies," "a Volley" / "Fazzioli," "portmanteau" / "canto," "die once" / "Gulf of Lyons," and "scanty" / "Dante" (2.5.33, 35, 37; 2.7.55, 56; 2.16.127, 128; 2.39.311, 312; 2.83.663, 664). In later cantos, one can take but ten of the finest instances: "pukes in" / "Euxine," "forte" / "short," "swore on" / "Koran," "attack" / "Cossacque" /

“can lack,” “more glad in her” / “St. Vladimir,” “Niger” / “oblige her” / “*bos piger*,” “thick sought” / “Quixote,” “Modest way” / “*sine quâ*,” and “quibble, he” / “*quia impossibile*” (5.5.39, 40; 5.48.383, 384; 6.102.815, 816; 7.14.105, 107, 109; 8.140.1119, 1120; 12.70.554, 556, 558; 13.10.79, 80; 15.86.687, 688; 16.5.39, 40).

Beyond those polyglossic rhymes in which English and non-English words ambiguously abut, thereby destabilizing the linguistic hierarchy, Byron also employs instances of polyglossia that transcend English, such as “flotilla” / “*Bis Millah!*” (7.13.103, 104). In other instances, ostensibly monoglossic moments suggest ambiguities of their own, as with the presumptively English “shoulder” / “solder” / “colder,” the similarly Spanish “Salamanca” / “Sancho Panca,” and, finally, the faux Russian “Yesouskoi” / “Polouzki” (8.94.745, 747, 749; 2.37.295, 296; 8.76.607, 608).⁵⁴ In the presence of such audacious, dexterous, and inventive rhyming, one might be led to wonder if Byron ever came across a rhyme that he didn’t like.

BYRON THE REVISER

The variorum edition of *Don Juan* prepared by Steffan and Willis W. Pratt suggests that, while Byron was quite likely to revise any given line within any given canto, he was much less inclined to revise in the rhyming positions of those lines. Since his narrative arc had no given rules, the content of *Don Juan* proved eminently revisable: a fortunate circumstance, since his formal apparatus was rather constricting and sometimes called for revision. Yet, within these formal strictures, Byron arranged for additional breathing room by relaxing his attitude toward the notion of a legitimate rhyme. Announcing himself rather loathe to alter a rhyme, if not a line, once written, many of his revised lines retained little of their original form apart from the rhyming word itself.⁵⁵

Nevertheless, on occasion, Byron did elect to renounce a rhyme rather than rattling on. As might be expected, problems of sense led Byron to spurn some rhymes, and problems of sound led him to spurn others. In a few cases, problems of both sound and sense led Byron to revision. For example, in his critique of British policy toward Ireland, whereby “Gaunt Famine never shall approach the throne— / Though Ireland starve, great George weighs twenty stone,” Byron’s renunciation of the draft “forty stone” for “twenty stone” improves the line’s consonance while

exchanging satirical hyperbole for satirical credibility (8.126.1007, 1008, n1008). For all his self-fashioned brashness, Byron was no stranger to redaction or to the self-tempering of his polemical edge.⁵⁶ Yet, on at least one occasion, Byron thought better of thinking better. When he revised "Virgin Mary" out of the rhyme position in canto 1, Byron inserted the more agreeable couplet "grace" / "case" in its stead (1.75.n599, 599, 600). But, in the very next canto, perhaps regretting a missed opportunity, he restored the Blessed Mother to the rhyme position via the pairing "martyrs hairy" / "Virgin Mary" (2.149.1191, 1192). Impressive as this hirsute coupling may have been, Byron seems to have repented somewhat in its aftermath, subsequently redacting possibly offensive draft rhymes including "wine" / "Swine" / "divine" and "Solomon" / "hollow man" (3.unincorporated stanza.2, 4, 6; 7.unincorporated stanza.7, 8).

In this vein, toward the beginning of the *Don Juan* dedication (initially renounced, but later reclaimed), Byron canceled the highly unorthodox couplet ending in "Laureat" / "Iscariot" (Dedication.11.n87–8). He justified the decision with an explanatory note:

I doubt if *laureate* and *Iscariot* be good rhymes; but
must say as Ben Jonson did to Sylvester, who chal-
lenged him to rhyme with

I, John Sylvester,
Lay with your Sister.

Jonson answered, "I, Ben Jonson, lay with your wife."—
Sylvester answered, "that is not *rhyme*"—"No," said Ben
Jonson; "but it is *true*."⁵⁷

Unlike "kiss" and "bliss," which seem alike partially because they sound alike, "Ben Jonson" and "your wife" need not rhyme in verse to rhyme in fact. The "Laureat" / "Iscariot" rhyme, jarring in both verse and fact, thus found its replacement in the tongue-in-cheek lockstep of "obey" / "Castlereagh" (Dedication.11.87, 88). Thus, Southey was spared, for once . . . or was it Judas who was spared? It is unclear which traitor Byron wished to spare in sparing the couplet.

In a couple of places in *Don Juan*, Byron also bowdlerizes, or rather, feigns bowdlerization, exposing the censor's ineffectual-

ity and discrediting his own impulse to suppression by retaining the intended slur via the vehicle of rhyme. For instance, in canto 11, Byron revised the draft rhyme “riches” / “b—tch—s” to read “riches” / “b—s” (11.41.327, 328). Though the better part of the slur is excised, the profanity is yet retained by virtue of the suggested echo. The most pronounced instance of this technique occurs in the couplet describing “Catherine’s reign, whom glory still adores / As greatest of all sovereigns and w—s” (6.92.735–6). Mary Shelley wanted to purge “still adores” and “w—s” entirely, leaving the reader no clue as to the implied rhyme or to Byron’s attendant aspersion. To her likely chagrin, in a concession conceding nothing, Byron retained the extremities of the offending term, even while gesturing toward (and thus mocking) discretion, preserving enough of the rhyme to get the hint across.⁵⁸

Scatological rhymes form another minor set worth consideration. For example, the expurgation of the draft couplet rhyme “curing” / “urine”—with its proximity to “stool,” also perched in rhyme position—probably had as much to do with sense as with sound (2.10.n79–80; 2.10.78). The replacement couplet rhyme, “education” / “generation,” was not nearly as apt to raise a stink, and it shifted the sense of “stool” from the sample to the seat (2.10.79, 80). A vestigial sense of decorum probably also led to the revision of the draft couplet rhyme “water closet” / “rare deposit,” which Byron altered to the less specific—and much less fecund—“a closet” / “rare deposit” (3.89.n807, 807, 808). Hence the majestic argument that “words are things,” initially undermined by the explicitly scatological implications of the “water closet,” finds itself ennobled through the sanitation of the revision (3.88.793). The author’s name and his “dull MS.,” no longer enplaced in a would-be cesspool, are elevated to the status of an unsullied archaeological find (3.89.805). This is not to suggest, however, that all of Byron’s renunciations of rhyme were forged in the dialectic of censorship and transgression. At times, it was merely an unconvincing rhyme that prompted revision. Thus “Rough” / “cuffs” was abandoned for “oath” / “both,” and “wears” / “despairs” was abandoned for “wears” / “cares” (4.93.n743, n744; 4.93.743, 744; 6.20.159, n160, 160). In other cases, unwieldy rhymes were streamlined, as in the revision of “lazy” / “amaze ye” to “lazy” / “crazy” or in the revision of “floodshed” / “bloodshed” to “flood” / “blood” (6.41.327, n328, 328; 7.80.n639, n640; 7.80.639, 640). Elsewhere, Byron revised overly simplified rhymes into more complex formations, as in the rejection of “escape” / “shape” / “scrape” for “escape” / “shape” / “step” and

in the rejection of “pillory” / “artillery” for “pillar! He” / “artillery” (7.72.570, 572, n574, 574; 9.44.n351, 352, 351).

BYRON THE REVELATOR

As the above examples demonstrate, Byron's rhyming practices were anything but arbitrary, and his motivations for deploying rhymes proved just as conflicted as his motivations for renouncing them. Above all, Byron's increasingly daring rhyming style was of a piece with the increasingly audacious political stance that eventually proved to be his undoing. Byron had intended to complete *Don Juan*'s tour of Europe by having him “finish an *Anacharsis Cloots* in the French revolution.”⁵⁹ However, he embarked on his own tour of Europe—leading to his own finish at Missolonghi—before bringing his own plan for the poem (such as it was) to its completion. Nevertheless, the anarchic qualities of Byron's rhymes have survived him, perhaps best exemplified in a pair of late passages that characterized indignation via anaphora.

The first of these breathless, prophetic renunciations comes in a half-comic, half-desperate diatribe against the lords of “hardened and imperial sin” (10.85.676). Therein, Byron implores the genteel reformer Mrs. Fry to “teach them” and “tell them” and “tell them” and “tell them” (10.86.681, 683, 685; 10.87.689). Having rebuked them this far, he thinks to continue, then truncates the thought, forsaking *poiesis* for *aposiopesis*, pleading “and tell them—but you won't, and I have prated / Just now enough” (10.87.694–5).⁶⁰ Set to speak truth to power, Byron instead shuts up and breaks off, despairing of a fair hearing, and disgusted with the hypocrisy of the so-called opposition. Beyond the pale of the establishment, he also found himself beyond the ken of its reforming flank. Just as his complaints about the lords fell on deaf ears, so too were those same complaints, when directed toward the liberals, met with obligatory silence.

The second instance of anaphoric castigation comes in Byron's famed attempt to determine “Who hold the balance of the world?,” followed by a series of “who” questions: “Who reign,” “Who rouse,” “Who keep,” and “Who make” (12.5.33, 35, 37, 38). The ghostly “who,” like its conspiratorially minded answer—“Jew Rothschild, and his fellow Christian Baring”—finds its latter-day analogue in Amiri Baraka's post-9/11 jeremiad “Somebody Blew Up America” (12.5.40). With its own litany of “who” questions, Baraka's poem also contains its own set of conspiracy theories and its own ghoulish concluding lines, which, at once accusatory

and elliptical, cry out “Who and Who and WHO (+) who who / Whoooo and WhoooooOOOOOOooooOoooo!”⁶¹

Byron, like Baraka after him, may well have felt spooked by the bankers, by the king makers, and by his own quixotic quest against them, and yet the concluding fright of *Don Juan* can only be communicated in the spectral howl of rhyme itself. In his final invocation of the rhyming function, Byron links the very practice of rhyming to the ghostly friar who haunts Don Juan at Norman Abbey. Preparing for bed, and expecting the ghost to arrive, Don Juan hears a sound first labeled as “the wind” (16.113.945). However, the noise is subsequently identified as

the sable Friar as before,
With awful footsteps regular as rhyme,
Or (as rhymes may be in these days) much more.
(16.113.946–8)

Whether regular or extraordinary, rhyme for Byron had evolved in the late cantos of *Don Juan* into a most unnerving prospect. Spooked by the airs of those who would link rhyme to rhyme in step, Byron finds little solace in the thought of those who would rhyme askance, for in most hands such an unorthodox approach tends to yield even more awful results.

In its dialectic of attraction and repulsion to rhyme, *Don Juan* served as a harbinger of things to come for the rhyming function in the remainder of the nineteenth century, throughout the twentieth century, and beyond. From the cusp of the modern era, Byron’s ambivalence toward rhyme and his insistence on its freer, looser possibilities remain symptomatic of a persistent yet peripheral tradition within modern and contemporary poetics. Thus, the ghoulish ending of *Don Juan* prefigures the comic yet haunting presence that rhyme has come to play for Byron’s many poetic followers, from immediate inheritors such as George Canning, Marie-Victorin Frère, Thomas Hood, Winthrop Mackworth Praed, Richard Harris Barham, and Edward Lear to more recent exemplars, including Kenneth Koch and James Merrill.⁶² Even today, the unconventional traces of this rhyming countertradition continue to shadow those who have yet to renounce rhyme fully, cutting against the grain, in spite of themselves and others, in an age when most have found themselves content to make do without rhymes, Byronic or otherwise.

NOTES

I wish to thank J. Paul Hunter and Jerome J. McGann for their encouragement and their help in the preparation and revision of this essay.

¹ George Gordon, Lord Byron, *Don Juan*, ed. Jerome J. McGann, vol. 5 of Byron, *The Complete Poetical Works*, ed. McGann and Barry Weller, 7 vols. (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1980–93), p. 407, canto 8, stanza 138, line 1104. Subsequent references to *Don Juan*, hereafter *CPW*, are from this edition and will appear parenthetically in the text and notes by canto number (or section number where necessary), stanza number, and line number (line numbers indicate the line's place within the canto).

² Lindsay Waters placed Byron's "desultory rhyme" (15.20.2) within this Italian tradition, declaring *Don Juan* to be among the "great imitations of improvised poetry" ("The 'Desultory Rhyme' of *Don Juan*: Byron, Pulci, and the Improvisatory Style," *ELH* 45, 3 [Autumn 1978]: 429–42, 438). Nevertheless, as Kurt Heinzelman notes, Byron assumed an increasingly vocational aspect as he progressed with *Don Juan* ("Byron's Poetry of Politics: The Economic Basis of the 'Poetical Character,'" *TSL* 23, 3 [Fall 1981]: 361–88, 374–5).

³ *The British Critic*, n.s. 12 (August 1819): 195–205, 202, rpt. in *The Romantics Reviewed: Contemporary Reviews of British Romantic Writers*, ed. Donald H. Reiman, 3 parts (New York: Garland, 1972), part B, vol. 2, p. 299.

⁴ Robert Southey, *The Life and Correspondence of Robert Southey*, ed. Charles Cuthbert Southey (New York: Harper, 1851), p. 384.

⁵ Matthew Arnold, "Byron," in Arnold, *Complete Prose Works*, ed. R. H. Super, 11 vols. (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 1960), 9:217–37, 222–3, 225.

⁶ John Churton Collins, "The Collected Works of Lord Byron," in *Studies in Poetry and Criticism* (London: G. Bell and Sons, 1905), pp. 78–123, 120; T. S. Eliot, "Byron," in *On Poetry and Poets* (New York: Noonday, 1964), pp. 223–39, 233.

⁷ Alan Bold, introduction to *Byron: Wrath and Rhyme*, ed. Bold (Totowa NJ: Barnes and Noble, 1983), pp. 7–14, 9.

⁸ Truman Guy Steffan, *The Making of a Masterpiece*, vol. 1 of *Byron's "Don Juan": A Variorum Edition*, hereafter *DJV*, ed. Steffan and Willis W. Pratt, 2d edn., 4 vols. (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1971), p. 104.

⁹ W. H. Auden observes in "Notes on the Comic" that rhymes in "incongruous" or "irrelevant" combinations tended to register greater comedic effects ("Notes on the Comic," in *The Dyer's Hand* [New York: Random House, 1962], pp. 371–85, 380). He also notes in his essay on *Don Juan* that the structural characteristics of English were such that "the majority of double or triple rhymes are comic," simply by virtue of their linguistic unlikelihood—an effect that surely intensified with accretion ("*Don Juan*," in *The Dyer's Hand*, pp. 386–406, 398).

¹⁰ Byron to John Murray, Bologna, 12 August 1819, in *Byron's Letters and Journals*, ed. Leslie A. Marchand, 12 vols. (London: John Murray, 1973–82), 6:208, abbreviated hereafter as *L&J*. For the hard data concerning Byron's revisions in pursuit of giggles, see Steffan's "Appendix B: Tables on the Extent of Revision" (pp. 311–25).

¹¹ Bernard Beatty, "Continuities and Discontinuities of Language and Voice in Dryden, Pope, and Byron," in *Byron: Augustan and Romantic*, ed. Andrew Rutherford (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990), pp. 117–35, 132. Steffan, via Mary Shelley, attests to Byron's hasty composition of the last eleven cantos (pp. 51–2). Additionally, Steffan finds it "ironic that he had exercised most care with the manuscripts of the first period when he pretended to take *Juan* lightly," whereas "when opposition later drove him to protest his seriousness he then proceeded to dash off canto after canto with extraordinary facility" (p. 114).

¹² William Keach, *Arbitrary Power: Romanticism, Language, Politics, Literature and History* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 2004), p. 18.

¹³ Peter Graham, *Don Juan and Regency England* (Charlottesville: Univ. Press of Virginia, 1990), p. 10.

¹⁴ Byron, preface to *Hours of Idleness*, in *CPW* 1:32–4, 33. For additional commentary on Byron's early attitudes toward rhyme and his later practice in *Don Juan*, see Jane Stabler, *Byron, Poetics and History* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2003), pp. 77–8.

¹⁵ Byron, "Journal: November 14, 1813–April 19, 1814," *L&J* 3:204–58, 220. On the tension between "development" and "normalization" in Byron, see Tom Mole, *Byron's Romantic Celebrity: Industrial Culture and the Hermeneutic of Intimacy* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave, 2007), p. 134.

¹⁶ Byron, "Journal," 3:217; Byron to Thomas Moore, Albany, 9 April 1814, *L&J* 4:91–3, 92.

¹⁷ McGann, *The Beauty of Inflections: Literary Investigations in Historical Method and Theory* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1988), p. 270.

¹⁸ Byron to Murray, Ravenna, 23 April 1820, *L&J* 7:82–5, 84.

¹⁹ By Paul West's reckoning, the incidence of feminine rhymes in the concluding couplets of Byron's stanzas grows from twenty-five percent in *Morgante Maggiore* to over fifty percent in *Beppo* and to greater than seventy-five percent in *Don Juan* (*Byron and the Spoiler's Art* [London: Chatto and Windus, 1960], p. 68). For more on Byron's later writing habits, see West, pp. 130–4. From *The Corsair* (1814) forward, Byron's experiments with feminine rhyme dovetail with his increasingly fluid conceptions of gender and sexuality, as per the argument of Susan J. Wolfson (*Formal Charges: The Shaping of Poetry in British Romanticism* [Stanford CA: Stanford Univ. Press, 1997], pp. 149–63).

²⁰ Byron, *DJV*, 3:348n5–6, 3:392n4a.

²¹ Timothy Webb, in noting that Byron sometimes offered Murray multiple draft variations, leaving the final choice up to editorial rather than authorial intuition, suggests that while "this slightly surprising renunciation of authorial privilege may have been designed to provide Murray with the illusion of editorial license . . . Byron watched sharply over his own rights and was prepared to be outraged when they were ignored" ("Free Quills and Poetic Licenses: Byron and the Politics of Publication," in *Liberty and Poetic License: New Essays on Byron*, ed. Beatty, Tony Howe, and Charles E. Robinson [Liverpool: Liverpool Univ. Press, 2008], pp. 219–232, p. 228).

²² Indeed, *Don Juan* is replete with varieties of slang, with registers ranging from the dandified to the homosocial. For example, whereas "beat" may signal an aristocratic register, it may also function as a queer register of the

type Gary Dyer identifies as “flash dialect” (“Thieves, Boxers, Sodomites, Poets: Being Flash to Byron's *Don Juan*,” *PMLA* 116, 3 [May 2001]: 562–78, 564).

²³ A. B. England usefully identified this particular mode in Byron with what he termed “the ‘burlesque style,’ a poetry that manifests a high degree of tolerance for disorder, impurity, and discontinuity of rhetoric and diction” (England, *Byron's Don Juan and Eighteenth-Century Literature: A Study of Some Rhetorical Continuities and Discontinuities* [Lewisburg PA: Bucknell Univ. Press, 1975], pp. 15–6).

²⁴ Alexander Pope, *An Essay on Criticism* (London: W. Lewis, 1711), part 2, line 365. W. K. Wimsatt Jr. argues that rhyme generally tends to present, contrary to the rhetorical argument of the poem, “a counter-pattern of allogical implication” that inverts sense, describing Byron's “mahogany”/“philogyny”/“dog any” rhyme, in *Beppo* (70.561, 563, 565), as a comedic parry pushed “to the point of disintegration and mad abandon” (*The Verbal Icon: Studies in the Meaning of Poetry* [Lexington: Univ. of Kentucky Press, 1954], pp. 153, 164–5).

²⁵ Byron to John Cam Hobhouse, Venice, 11 November 1818, *L&J* 6:76–8, 76.

²⁶ George M. Ridenour, *The Style of “Don Juan”* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1960), p. 145; McGann, “*Don Juan*” in *Context* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1976), p. 3.

²⁷ Philip Hobsbaum, “Byron and the English Tradition,” in *Byron: Wrath and Rhyme*, pp. 37–56, 51, 44, 49.

²⁸ Jenni Calder, “The Hero As Lover: Byron and Women,” in *Byron: Wrath and Rhyme*, pp. 103–24, 118.

²⁹ Such erratic renunciation, as opposed to systematic repudiation, may in fact have redeemed the poem in the eyes of its publisher, Moore, who likely concluded, as James Chandler speculates, that “the poem poses no case against the reigning normative framework it superficially seems to flout” (*England in 1819: The Politics of Literary Culture and the Case of Romantic Historicism* [Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1998], p. 351). Likewise, Malcolm Kelsall explains that, in political terms, there is a “retention in *Don Juan*, however vestigially, of the ideals of the Whig Constitution and the great country house,” signaling that “there is no other society, no other political discourse available to the poet” (*Byron's Politics* [Brighton UK: Harvester Press, 1987], p. 192).

³⁰ For an opposing view, see England's claim that Byron's “similarities of sound dramatize dissimilarities of ordinarily assumed meaning” (England, p. 108). West, meanwhile, posits that Byron's use of dissonant rhyme led to sets of “ill-matched concepts” that nevertheless formed “a statement *both* coherent and apposite” (West, p. 62, emphasis mine). Whereas Jacques Derrida has held that rhyme generally functions as “the folding-together of an identity and a difference,” Rachel Mayer Brownstein finds that Byron's particularly flamboyant rhymes, at their most daring and polyglossic, gesture toward neither like nor unlike meanings, but rather “suggest great abysses of meaninglessness” (Derrida, *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson [Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1981], p. 277; Brownstein, “Byron's *Don Juan*: Some Reasons For the Rhymes,” *MLQ* 28, 2 [June 1967]: 177–91, 190–1).

³¹ As a counterpoint to Byron's use of equivalent rhyme, consider his nonequivalent rhyme "virtue"/"thirty," which works to suggest *dissonance* in fact as well as verse (1.62.495, 496).

³² McGann observed that Byron "distrusted Systematic Enlightenment thought because he saw all systematic philosophy not as a tool for exploring difficult problems but as a device for settling matters" (*Context*, p. 148). In this respect, the insistent uncertainty of Byron's rhymes functioned analogically with respect to his insistently uncertain worldview. As W. W. Robson explained, "*Don Juan* is the work of a mature mind, but not one with an integral vision" (*Critical Essays* [London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966], p. 186).

³³ Paradoxically, Byron's contempt for the aristocracy was in itself thoroughly aristocratic. In this respect, his brand of dissent was related to, but ultimately removed from, the more marginal form of dissent practiced by John Keats—which may do something to explain Byron's famous dismissal of Keats as one who had been "snuffed out by an Article" (11.60.480). For more on Byron and Keats as dissenters of differing temperaments, see the arguments made by Nicholas Roe in his *John Keats and the Culture of Dissent* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1997), pp. 17–8.

³⁴ Byron's hostility toward nobility was quite apparent to his contemporaries. As Byron's renunciation of his class position unsettled most reviewers, they tended to prefer *ad hominem* attacks and literary carping to anything approaching a socioeconomic analysis of his politics. An exception to this rule came with the *Examiner*, which saw fit to praise Byron, writing that "he, a nobleman, has burst the enthrallment of rank and station; nay, more, the stronger ligatures of an aristocratic bias, and declared for the Many against the Few" (*Examiner* [5 July 1823], pp. 6–12, qtd. in Pratt, *Notes on the Variorum Edition*, vol. 4 of *DJV*, p. 307).

³⁵ The "Hell"/"Pall Mall" rhyme proves especially rich, since it rhymes more to the ear than to the eye. Byron thus suggests that there is more to infernal London than immediately meets the eye. For more on this particular turn of language see Graham, pp. 172–3. For a more general discussion, see Michael Gassenmeier's "Augustan Satires and Panegyrics on London and Byron's Image of the City," in *Byron: Augustan and Romantic*, pp. 136–64. Gassenmeier takes up Byron's depiction of London vis-à-vis those earlier champions and critics of what he deems "the metropolis under rising capitalism" (p. 147).

³⁶ It must be noted that Byron also rhymes "nation" with more positive terms such as "exultation," "approbation," "salvation," and "veneration" (8.126.1003; 10.33.257; 10.55.433; 10.66.524). Yet, the main drift of his equivalent rhymes approximates his stated "plain, sworn, downright detestation / Of every despotism in every nation" (9.24.191–2).

³⁷ Perhaps, if he had been born in a more secular backwater such as St. Louis, he might have turned Anglo-Catholic and Royalist, as did the occasionally contrarian Eliot. Bertrand Russell has suggested that Byron's contrarianism was fundamentally conservative, styling him as the "exemplar" of a type called "the aristocratic rebel" (*A History of Western Philosophy* [New York: Simon and Schuster, 1972], p. 747). For Russell's full treatment of Byron see pp. 746–52.

³⁸ For more on Byron's political ambivalence, see Richard Cronin's *The Politics of Romantic Poetry: In Search of the Pure Commonwealth* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), pp. 156–80. Regarding Byron's oppositional ideology, see Peter A. Schock's article, which notes Byron's resolution to "war, at least in words" against "Tyrants and Sycophants" (9.24.185, 188; Schock, "I will war, at least in words': Byron and the Rhetoric of Opposition," in *Contemporary Studies on Lord Byron*, ed. William D. Brewer, *Studies in British Literature* 54 [Lewiston NY: Mellen, 2001], pp. 95–120). John Lauber, meanwhile, describes Byron as a political truth teller—that is, per Byron's own description, as one who "mean[s] to show things really as they are" (12.40.314; Lauber, "Truth-Telling As Politics: Byron and Pound," in *Byron: Poetry and Politics*, ed. Erwin A. Stürzl and James Hogg, *Salzburger Studien zur Anglistik und Amerikanistik* 13 [Salzburg: Institut für Anglistik und Amerikanistik, Universität Salzburg, 1981], pp. 323–44). For the arc of Byron's growing alienation and his increasingly radical worldview, see Stephen Cheeke's *Byron and Place: History, Translation, Nostalgia* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), pp. 142–56.

³⁹ Byron's ambivalence toward revolution emerges in his description of the "the tug of war" that "twill come again," to which he "would fain say 'fie on't,'" (8.51.405, 406). That "'fie on't'" functions as condemnation both of the general potential for revolution and of Byron's specific potential as revolutionary.

⁴⁰ Byron to Murray, 15 September 1817, *L&J* 5:264–6, 265. The rest of this letter provides Byron's full critique of his contemporaries. Byron's general aversion for William Wordsworth and his circle led many subsequent critics to question Byron's place within what is today established as the Romantic tradition. See, for example, Hobsbaum, pp. 37–8.

⁴¹ Thus McGann saw Byron as one who "assumes an adversary relationship, and institutes a sharp critique of the sort of poetry he himself—as he well knew—had helped to advance" (*Context*, p. 159).

⁴² Steffan, p. 287. Byron himself recognized the role that rhyme played in his increasing obscurity. Conflating his penchant for dissent with his penchant for rhyme, he explained in another late canto of *Don Juan* that "I was rather famous in my time, / Until I fairly knock'd it up with rhyme" (14.9.71–2).

⁴³ For a discussion of the peculiar pronunciation of "Don Juan" ("Hwan" or "Joo-un"), along with commentary on Byron's other polyglossic flourishes, see Graham, pp. 11–4 and 59–60.

⁴⁴ These subtleties and variances work against the claims of Charles Donelan, who simply presumes that the "pronunciation, 'Joo-en,' with the emphasis on the first syllable, is something the poem dictates," arguing that its "rhymes demand that the reader hear and recite the word this way" (*Romanticism and Male Fantasy in Byron's "Don Juan": A Marketable Vice* [New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000], p. 31).

⁴⁵ Byron, "Preface," in *CPW* 5:81–5, 83. Graham deems this unincorporated introduction "a verbal gesture that cancels all it creates" (p. 16).

⁴⁶ McGann, *Context*, p. 134.

⁴⁷ Eliot, p. 232.

⁴⁸ Eliot, pp. 232–3. "It may be bawdy," Byron conceded, as though anticipating such objections, "but is it not good English?" (Byron, qtd. in Auden,

"*Don Juan*," p. 404). The ironically understated question simultaneously asserts and disavows Byron's capacity to adjudicate in such matters, while seeming to mock those who would presume to judge.

⁴⁹ Tom Scott, "Byron as a Scottish Poet," in *Byron: Wrath and Rhyme*, pp. 17–36, 36. One of the best instances of Byron's Scots lüg comes with his replacement of the English term "which" with the Scottish term "whilk," functioning here to complete the triple rhyme "silk"/"milk"/"whilk" (5.77.610, 612, 614). The switch suggests a latent preference for Scottish as the more musical of the two languages.

⁵⁰ Wolfson observes that Byron's mere emphasis on rhyme works contrary to "the Restoration and post-Miltonic prejudice against rhyme as a Frenchified effeminacy" (p. 277n23).

⁵¹ Charles LaChance, "Byron's Bad English," *English* 50, 197 (Summer 2001): 111–25, 111.

⁵² For more on Byron's attitude toward rhyme as a function of his spleen, see Beatty, pp. 119–20. For a French perspective on Byron's general approach to the lyrical mode, see Robert Escarpit, *Lord Byron, un tempérament littéraire*, 2 vols. (Paris: Cercle du Livre, 1955–57), 1:203–39.

⁵³ These complexities are partly due to Byron's wide-ranging literary influences. M. K. Joseph's partial list included authors as diffuse as Ariosto, Miguel de Cervantes, Homer, Horace, Pope, and Voltaire (*Byron the Poet* [London: Victor Gollancz, 1964], pp. 184–5).

⁵⁴ This last example serves as a charming precedent to the Byronic lim-ricks and lyrics of Edward Lear. See, for example, "There was an old man of West Dumpet" and "There was an old man of Messina," in Lear's *Nonsense Books* (Boston: Little and Brown, 1888), pp. 275, 299.

⁵⁵ Steffan, who presented authoritative statistics on Byron's tendency toward the preservation of rhyme words, notes that "wherever he could do so, even when recasting a whole line, he retained the original final word or at least the same rhyme" (Steffan, p. 170). In canto 1 alone, nearly eighty revised lines retain their original rhyming words. For examples of such retention in canto 1 and elsewhere, see Steffan, p. 133.

⁵⁶ Consider, for example, the metrical tempering in the line "Death's a reformer, all men must allow," revised from the draft line "Death's a radical, all men must allow" (10.25.200, n200). Not only does "reformer" make for a milder term than "radical" here, but it also makes for a more balanced metrical insertion. In another example the draft rhyme "forces"/"corpses" is revised to read "forces"/"corses" so as to avoid the internal sight rhyme of "corpses" with "corps," which appears at an earlier point in the same line (8.30.239, n240, 240).

⁵⁷ McGann, "Commentary," in *CPW* 5:672n87–8. See the rest of this commentary for the full history of this most complicated (and most likely apocryphal) instance of revision, along with notes on its associated marginalia.

⁵⁸ Similarly, there are those later instances in which Byron renounces a rhyme not for fear of being overly transgressive, but rather for fear of failing to be sufficiently transgressive, as with the rejection of "blue eyes"/"chastities" for "bluer stockings"/"double knockings" (12.67.n535–6, 535, 536).

⁵⁹ Byron to Murray, Ravenna, 16 February 1822, *L&J* 8:77–9, 78. For more on Byron's plans for the completion of *Don Juan*, see McGann's *The Beauty of Inflections*, pp. 264–71.

⁶⁰ Jonathon Shears has posited aposiopesis as “something of a modus operandi for the narrator of *Don Juan*” (“Byron’s Aposiopesis,” *Romanticism* 14, 2 [July 2008]: 183–95, 183).

⁶¹ Amiri Baraka, “Somebody Blew Up America,” in *Somebody Blew Up America and Other Poems* (Philipsburg, St. Martin: House of Nehesi, 2003), pp. 41–50, 50.

⁶² The list of “immediate inheritors” is from Auden, “*Don Juan*,” p. 398.