CHAPTER - III

BEppo. The Vision of Judgement
AND DON JUAN
If we have a look at the poems discussed in the previous chapter in the chronological order we shall be able to trace the development of Byron's maturity and genius. *The Bride of Abydos* and *The Corsair* and the other earlier tales like, *The Giaour*, *Lara* etc. come from his imagination; The characters are highly strung, style and composition have a touch of the grandiose and they are rather melodramatically. But *The Siege of Corinth*, *Parisina* and the other later tales like, *Mazeppa*, *The Island*, *The Prisoner of Chillon* etc. and the satires are either based on history or they come from his own experience of life. The characters, inspite of their strong emotions, are more sober and mature and their treatment shows a real understanding of life. We shall now enter into the third and last phase of Byron's poetic career and propose to go through three of his important satires, the experimental *Poppe*, the shocking *The Vision of Judgement* and the classic *Don Juan*.

*Poppe*

*Background.* At dinner on 26th August, 1817, Pietro Segati, husband of Byron's mistress Marianna Segati, told Byron a story which is the basis of *Poppe*. A lady who kept an inn had lost her husband many years ago, at sea. One day a Turk appeared at the inn and claimed that
he was her husband. He had become rich and offered her three alternatives; that she should leave her lover and go with him or, she might live with her lover or, she might accept a pension and live alone. The wife refused to leave her lover.

The story is built on the lines indicated above, only it ends differently. Laura, a Venetian lady, had a husband named Giuseppe, shortly called Beppe, who went out to trade in foreign countries. She does not hear of him for a long time and takes up a Count as her 'Cavaliere Servente'. One day she meets a Turk in the carnival who turns out to be her long-lost husband. She accepts him and the Count and the husband become good friends, rather a tame end.

However, as things stand, the story becomes of secondary interest. The very interesting incident, the meeting between the husband and the wife in the carnival, might have been made dramatic, but it is not. Again, the encounter of the husband with the Count might have had some interesting developments, but again Byron lets this chance go by. The husband is politely invited into the house, "don't let us make ourselves absurd/ In public, by a scene, nor raise a din." (BO), and the matter is settled over a cup of coffee and everything goes well. This is
not a simple plot treated dramatically but a dramatic plot treated plainly, rather a debunking of plot construction.

The reason is, in 'Beppe' Byron gives little thought to make it a well constructed story. Here he is experimenting on the possibility of a poem's survival which is mainly sustained by digression. Out of 89 stanzas 41 tell the story and the rest are digressions and even in the 41 telling the story, brief digressions occur. To a great extent it is like 'Childe Harold' which contains but little story, but unlike 'Childe Harold' it is neither personal nor does it talk of anything serious, or if serious, not in a serious manner, the style and language being entirely different. By its character it is a kind of medly poem on the Italian model that points towards 'Don Juan'.

The story does not begin until we have finished 20 stanzas which are devoted to give an idea of the Venetian Carnival. The descriptions are not only brief and vivid but also pleasant and humorous,

"And there are dresses splendid, but fantastical, Masks of all times and nations, Turks and Jews, And harlequins and clowns, with feats gymnastical, Greeks, Romans, Yankee - doodles, and Hindoos; All kinds of dress, except the ecclesiastical". (33).
And why not the least? Because,

"A single stitch reflecting upon the friars
Although you swore it only was in fun;
They'd haul you over the coals, and stir the
fires of Phlegathon" (4).

The Venetian women are very pretty but to steal
a glance at them may lead to unexpected consequences,

"For glances begat ogles, ogles sighs,
Sighs wishes, wishes words, and words a letter",

Though there is a touch of humour the sequence is quite
logical and romantic. But then the whole thing is turned
upside down for it may lead to,

"Vile assignations, and adulterous beds,
Elopements, broken vows, hearts and heads". (16)

This is the advantage that Byron derives from his new
form, the 'ottava rima', to deflate the idea of the first
six lines in the last two. The rhyme of the couplet is
not taken from the previous lines, hence the impact. This
also suits his satiric temperament and gives him a proper
vehicles to express his attitude, the attitude to look at
the oddities and hollowness of all conventional standards
and values. By using the same verb 'broken' for the three
nouns 'vows', 'hearts' and 'Needs', he not only achieves
brevity but also a superb anti-climax.
He talks of serious things but now with a grain of humour. Coming to the Turks he speaks of the miserable condition of women in their society.

"They lock them up, and veil, and guard them daily.
They scarcely can behold their male relations,
... ...
... ...

And as the Turks abhor long conversations,
Their days are either pass'd in doing nothing,
Or bathing, nursing, making love, and clothing"

(71).

By using the same verb 'making' for both 'love' and the very prosaic 'clothing' he deflates the former completely. The pinch of irony cannot be missed.

"They cannot read, and so don't lisp in criticism;
Nor write, and so they don't affect the muse;
Were never caught in epigram or vitriolism,
Have no romances, sermons, plays, reviews".— (72).

In these four lines Byron covers the entire grounds of an educated, literary society current in his times, and his satirical tone shows how little he values them.

The liveliest scene is perhaps when Laura overcomes her first surprise and starts her interminable enquiries of her husband,
"And are you 'really', 'truly', now a Turk?
With any other women did you live?
Isn't true they use their fingers for a fork?
Well, that's the prettiest shawl - as I'm alive!
You'll give it me? They say you eat no pork.
And how so many years did you contrive
-To - Bless me! did I ever? No I never
Saw a man grown so yellow! How is your liver?

This brings out her rather petty, vain and foolish character. As she jumps from topic to topic which are not remotely related and as Beppo covers under the hail of questions, the reader is greatly amused.

In 'Beppo' Byron celebrates his life in Italy. He loves Italy but this love goes together with a dispassionate view of the object he loves. He talks of the pretty women and mentions their 'Cavalier Servants', the 'vice-husbands' - their easy morals. He is pleased with the Italian blue sky and sets it in contrast with the rain and smog of London. Like Laura he leaps from topic to topic: Turks and amorous women, Literature and Masks, Carnivals and natural scene, Napoleon and Muslim women; but does this with such an easy grace and gay humour, with a pinch of satire, here and there, that gives 'Beppo' its unique taste, something new in English literature. In his
conversational style, his cheerfulness, and the use of familiar language he reminds the Tales of Chaucer. These is a penetration into things beyond the apparent which shows his keenness of observation and a first hand experience of life. He talks much and thinks little and carefully avoids all philosophy, conventional poetic language, deep emotions and weighty phrases, which clearly reveals his intentions - which is to entertain.

The Vision of Judgement.

Background: 'The Vision of Judgement' is a traveesty of Southey's 'A Vision of Judgement'. In the preface to his poem Southey attacked Byron's works, calling them "Those monstrous combinations of horrors and mockery, lawlessness and impiety" and accused him of belonging to the "satanic school" of poetry. In his poem Southey celebrates the occasion of George the Third's entry into heaven. In 'The Vision of Judgement' Byron not only attacks Southey viciously but also ridicules his subject matter, George the Third.

The poem contains no story in the conventional sense, yet there is something of a story. The story is about the trial of George III to consider his worthiness to enter into heaven. The denouement consists of an attack on Southey who eulogised the king in his poem and made
him a worthy inheritor of the kingdom of God. "The Vision of Judgment" strikes at the very root of Southey's "A Vision of Judgment".

St. Peter is guarding the gate of heaven with a rusty set of keys, which is suggestive of his idleness. The angel recording the vice and misery of the earth is so much overburdened with work that he has to clip both his wings and turn them into quills and engage a host of clerks. But still unable to cope with the work they fling down their pens in 'divine disgust'. This sets the mock-serious tone of the poem. Then the king is introduced,

"In the first year of freedom's second dawn
Died George the Third, although no tyrant, one
Who shielded tyrants, till each sense withdrew
Left him nor mental nor external sun:
A better farmer ne'er brush'd dew from lawn,
A worse king never left a realm undone:
He died— but left his subjects still behind,
One half as mad — and t'other no less blind."

A single sentence of eight lines and very brief, considering the number of informations that we get about the late king. It tells us the time of his death, his tacit support of the oppression on the people by his ministers, his madness and blindness, his love of farming, his extremely
bed rule, and the character of the people of his time. Everything is said in a plain, straightforward manner and there is no imagery which is much involved.

The king arrives at the gate and St. Peter is curious to know if he is wearing his head, a reference to the French king who lost his head in the Revolution. Michael arrives and Satan confronts him claiming the king for himself. Here Byron lets go his first direct broadside against the king. Satan claims him on the ground that,

"From out the past
Of ages, since mankind have known the rule
Of monarchs - from the bloody rolls amassed
Of sin and slaughter - from the Caesar's school,
Take the worst pupil; and produce a reign
More drench'd with gore, more cumber'd with the slain (44).

"He ever war'd with freedom and the free;
Nations as men, home subjects, foreign foes,
So that they utter'd the word "Liberty";
Found George the Third their first opponent".

He of course, gives the devil his due,

"I grant his household abstinence; I grant
His neutral virtues, which most monarchs want;"
I knew he was a constant consort; own
He was a decent sire, and middling lord,
All this is much", But these personal virtues of
the king did in no way benefit his subjects,
"And this was well for him, but not for those
Millions who found him what oppression chose"

(46)

But Michael does not grant his claim outright,
he requests Satan to produce his witnesses. This, on the
one hand, makes the trial impartial, and on the other,
considering the scene of action and the protagonists, it
makes the whole thing amusing and humorous. At once the
sky becomes evercast with the number of ghosts and spirits
who come rushing on the scene at Satan’s cell, to stand
witness. Their number makes Michael turn pale which is
described in Byron's own peculiar style of imagery,
"he first grew pale,
As angels can; next like Italian twilight,
He turn'd all colours - as a peacock's tail,
Or sunset streaming through a Gothic skylight
In some old abbey, or a trout net stole,
Or distant lightning on the horizon 'by night,
Or a fresh rainbow, or a grand review
Of thirty regiments in red, green and blue". (61)
The objects of comparison are familiar and of ordinary experience which makes it forceful, but when they are related to the object compared, they seem so odd. The temperament of Byron which enables him to look at a thing from an absurd angle not only makes it amusing, it also softens the harshness of his satire.

Seeing the impossibility of taking the evidence of them all, which will take an 'eternity', Michael decides to call 'two honest, clean' of them and gives the choice to Satan. In his poem Southey brings the Devil and John Wilkes, the renowned political agitator, to arraign the king, both are discomfited and the king comes out of the ordeal more worthy than ever. Here Satan also calls Wilkes his first witness who seems to turn hostile. He refuses to rip up 'old stories' and votes 'his habeas corpus into heaven'. This gives the trial a dramatic turn and a touch of worldly reality.

The next witness is Junius, the pseudonym of an anonymous political letter writer whose identity has never been properly established, even now. His evidence seems to go in favour of Satan. Without so much as a thought he says, "My charges upon record will outlast! The brass of both his epitaph and tomb", and washes his hands off the matter by saying, "I loved my country, and I hated him". (83) "What I have written, I have written" (84).
In Southey's poem Washington is the last witness on the strength of whose testimonial the door of heaven is opened to George the Third. But here before Washington is brought in the events take an unusual turn.

The devil Asmodeus brings some one on his back, breathing heavily,

"Confound the renegade! I have sprain'd
My left wing, he's so heavy; one would think
Some of his works about his neck were chain'd"

(86).

This is Southey and with this Byron opens his first round of attack. Southey should be the best defense of his own work and hence he is given the chance. Byron thinks it illegal and unethical to judge a man 'in absentia'. So he puts him on the dock and opens his magazine.

It appears that Southey has been brought before his time - he was still alive when Byron wrote this - but for what offense? Satan replies, "A sillier fellow you will scarce behold, /Or more conceited in his petty sphere" (88) but concedes, "But since he's here, let's see what he has done" Asmodeus answers, "he anticipates/The very business you are now upon, /And scribbles as if head clerk to the Fates, /Who knows to what his rebeldry may rum /When such an ass as this, like Balaam's, Prates?" (89). Southey
anticipated the king's entry into heaven in his poem, which is still a point to be decided by Satan and Michael here.

In his poem Southey experimented with a new metrical innovation, the hexameter, and Byron does not spare him this also. Michael gives Southey an audience when he, "Began to cough, and hawk, and hem, and pitch/... But stuck fast with his first hexameter,/Not one of all whose gouty feet would stir" (90). And this savage attack continues until it ends with the pitiless satire we have already referred to and discussed in Chapter I, p. 129. Byron, however, concedes the king's entry into heaven, in the end—it is indecent to carry one's quarrel beyond the grave.

In 'The Vision of Judgement' Byron is not concerned with telling a story, though the story of the trial is quite well constructed. Byron did not like the reign of George the Third for many reasons; his war against the war of liberty of the American people, his hostile attitude towards the French Revolution, his religious tyranny on the Catholics, the economic and political tyranny on the common people and so on. He took him to be a symbol of a power that by its incompetence and acquiescence tacitly abetted the destruction of all the values that Byron valued most, liberty and human rights. He could not
like Southey for his conceit and his so called noble ideas of chastity, morality and decorum. The poem is a merciless attack on both, only relieved by his wit and humour achieved by his language and style.

Don Juan

Cantos I and II, July, 1819;
Cantos III, IV and V, August, 1821;
Cantos VI, VII and VIII, July, 1823;
Cantos IX, X and XI, August, 1823;
Cantos XII, XIII and XIV, December, 1823;
Cantos XV and XVI, March, 1824.

When we come to 'Don Juan', we come entirely onto a different ground. The melodramatic, theatrical outpourings and the Gothic, enigmatic heroes of the 'Tales' are gone; the gloomy, brooding, passive Romantic hero of the first two Cantos of 'Childe Harold' and the meditative, self-analytic hero of sensibility of the last two Cantos make their exit. He writes with a freedom and license which is free from inhibitions of all kinds and throws all poetic conventions; whether of imagination, or manner of composition or, language and style, to the devil.

Even in the Fragment, which makes the beginning, he sets the pace and the mock-serious tone of the poem,
(But I write this reeling,
Having got drunk exceedingly to-day,
So that I seem to stand upon the ceiling)
I say - the future is a serious matter -
And so - for God's sake - hock and soda water!¹

This he wrote on the back of the manuscript of the 1st
Canto as an afterthought, meant to be printed in the begin­ning, with the deliberate intention of informing the
reader of what he is about and what they will get in the
poem and how they will get it.

In his 'Dedication' to Southey he has his first
round with him and the 'Lakers' who are, "A nest of
tuneful persons, to my eye/ Like four and twenty Black­
birds in a pye";² The imagery of the last line, taken from
a nursery rhyme, is suggestive of the satirical and light
hearted humorous tone of the poem. The narrow confines
in which the lake poets moved is subtly ridiculed, "makes
me wish you'd change your lakes for ocean"³. For Castler­
eagh, the tyrant and political bungler, he has reserved
a special phrase, "The intellectual eunuch Castleragh"⁴,
which suggests that to drive his point home he will go
to any length and will not spare any one.

¹ Ox By. P - 635 ² Ox 3y - P - 635
³ Ibid. P - 636 ⁴ Ibid.
He begins, "I want a hero" (1/1) and recalls quite a few of the great names of history, Buonaparte, Lafayette, Danton, Nelson, Agamemnon to name only a few - but he chooses none of them and gives his reasons.

So, as I said, I'll take my friend Don Juan" (1/V).

His choice of Don Juan as his hero, the hero of the Spanish legend, is significant. He does not want his hero to be great, like the heroes of history; he wants him to be an ordinary human being with all the ordinary human weaknesses, with those real human virtues which will give him a normal human stature. The speech like quality is also to be noticed.

The story is introduced by the family background of Don Juan. The conjugal life of the parents is briefly but effectively told,

"Don Jose and the Donna Inez led for sometime an unhappy sort of life, wishing each other, not divorced, but dead;"

(1/26)

Donna Inez is built on the combined image of Byron's wife, the humourless, mathematical Annabels, and the strictly
formal, calvinist mother, Catherine,

"Some women use their tongue - she "looked" a lecture, / Each eye a sermon, and her brow a homily" (I/15), "In short she was a walking calculation" (I/16) and brings it to a climax "Perfect she was, but as perfection is/Insipid in this naughty world of ours". (I/18).

The satirical dig is pungent and quite overt and with the single word 'insipid' he turns the whole image upside down.

The rigidly formal mother plans Juan's education in such a way that, "half his days were pass'd at Church, the other, / Between his tutors, confessor and mother" (I/49). Such chaste and moral education, which Byron hits obliquely, is unrealistic and impractical and it boomerangs, leading to the inevitable; Juan falls in love with a married woman Julia. One day when the two young people sit embracing, "A little she strove, and much repented/And whispering, 'I will ne'er consent' - consented". (I/117). Juan reaches adulthood and his education gets the first touch of real life. By this Byron makes Juan a normal person who responds to natural human emotions and also proves the emptiness of Donna Inez's idea of education.

Julia's marriage is unnatural, she is only twenty three but married to a gentleman of fifty for social
reasons, his nobility. Was Byron having in his mind Teresa Guiccioli - his last and only love - who was only twenty but married to the sixty-year old Count Guiccioli, for social status? Juan's education is also unnatural. Both are victims of rigid social conventions and nature takes revenge by making them fall in love.

But the love idyll can't go on indefinitely, the story must move. So one day Juan is found out in Julia's bedroom by her husband resulting in a scandal and Byron lets go at the English snobbery,

"The nine days' wonder which was brought to light, 
And how Alfonso sued for a divorce,
Were in the English newspapers of course (I/188)."

The scandalized society takes action against this outrage; Julia is sent to a convent and Juan is shipped off by his mother, "To mend his former morals, and get new", (I/191), since his former pattern of education miscarried. The episodes of the 1st Canto deals with an attack on the social conventions of marriage and formal education. The finding of Juan in Julia's bedroom, apart from being an amusing incident in itself, is a narrative technique which takes the story on to the next stage.

Speaking out his objective in 'Don Juan' which he means to be an epic he parodies the Ten Commandments
giving his own poetical commandments in stanzas 105-106.

"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:" He speaks about his love, ambition,
fame, hope etc. but all proved to be illusory, he has
lost even the will to hit back at the critics. The ulti-
mate refuge is philosophy, but there also he finds
written as large as life, "Alas !/All things that have
been born were born to die,/And flesh (which Death moves down
to hay) is grass". (1/220) The last plank is washed away
from under his feet. Yet Byron will not draw, he will
evolve his own philosophy, "Thank your stars that matters
are no worse,/And read your Bible, Sir, and mind your
purse". (1/220). As things stand life is not so bad as it
seems; it should be taken in one's stride with a sort of
careless daring and the future can abide its time. Religion
may soothe the soul but in a worldly life ready money is
more important - a down - to-earth, realistic philosophy.
The importance of ready money he reiterates often, "Yes !
ready money 'is' Aladdin's lamp" (XII/12). Apart from the
usefulness of money in practical life Byron realised the
power of money as a key to power in his age and bitterly
remarks like a modern Marxist, "The fact is riches are
power, and poverty is slavery all over the earth", 5 and

this has become a universal truth.

As the ship gets under way Juan goes through the gilt-edged love letter of Julia and begins daydreaming of his romantic love,

"And oh! if e'er I should forget, I swear —
But that's impossible, and cannot be" (II/19)

But he gets a jolt and is brought back to reality,

"(Here the ship gave a lurch and he grew sea-sick) (II/19).

The description of his sea-sickness is a brilliant piece of conversational poetry in a wonderful colloquial language. He continues,

"Sooner shall heaven kiss earth — (here he fell sicker)

Oh, Julia what is every other woe? —
(For God's sake let me have a glass of liquor; Pedro, Battista, help me down below).

Julia, my love — (You rascal Pedro, quicker) —
Oh, Julia — (This cursed vessel pitches so), —
Beloved Julia, hear me still beseeching!
(Here he grew inarticulate with retching)

(II/20).

Every romantic outburst of love hits against reality and is snubbed and is ultimately put out of the way by the crude feet of retching. Not even once Byron will allow
romance to get the better of reality. To get this point home he comes out in the open and hits romantic love directly,

"Love, who heroically breathes a vein,
Shrinks from the application of hot towels,
And purgatives are dangerous to his reign,
Sea-sickness death" (II/23).

Romantic love shatters when brought in contact with the hard realities of life. He wrote to Lady Melbourne,
"— besides marriage goes on better with esteem and confidence than romance".

The ship falls into a violent storm and is wrecked.

There follows a wonderful description of the storm-scene where Byron lives up to his own opinion of himself, "Description is my forte" (V/52). Of this Shelley wrote, "What a strange and terrible storm is that at sea, and the two fathers, how true and yet how strong a contrast! (a father who having lost his son bore the grief stoically, and another who also lost his son but was borne down by the loss). Dante hardly exceeds it ... of human nature laid with the eternal colours of the feeling of humanity. Where did you learn all these secrets?"

The tailors are set adrift and the cutter carrying
the biscuit casks and a keg of butter capsizes with the
loss of nine lives. Byron with a perfect sense of realism
writes, "They grieved for those who perish'd in the cutter,
/And also for the biscuit - casks and butter." (II/81).
This and the cannibalism to which the sailors are driven
outraged the critics as something unkind and almost inhu-
man. What they could not know and only Byron knows with
his practical sense and knowledge of the world that for
ship-wrecked sailors struggling for life in a drifting
boat, survival is the most important thing, food is of
paramount consideration and mourning for their dead com­
des is almost a luxury. Of the cannibalism a modern critic
writes, "He wants here to find out and to display what
happens when human beings are driven to the edge of
life".8
His affair with Julia taught him the physical
basis of love, his experience of the storm and the ship­
wreck toughens him and brings out the man in him. The
incident turns the story in a new direction and it enters
into the next stage.
Juan is the sole survivor of the disaster and is
picked up in an unconscious state by Holdee, the only
daughter of the local pirate chief. The Juan - Holdee

8. Bell P.M. "Byronic reorientation", Twentieth Century,
Idyll is a sort of romantic interlude in which nothing of serious import happens. The story moves rather leisurely and the digressions are more worth noticing than the story itself.

"Man being reasonable, must get drunk;
The best of life is but intoxication;
Glory, the grape, love, gold, in these are sunk
The hopes of all men, and of every nation;

And then ironically,
Without their sap, how branchless were the trunk
Of life's strange tree, so fruitful on occasion!
But to return, - Get very drunk; and when
You wake with a headache, you shall see what then".

What an odd way of presenting one's case! But the case is all right,

"Man is a phenomenon, one knows not what,
And wonderful beyond all wondrous measure;
'Tis pity though, in this sublime world, that
Pleasure's a sin, and sometimes Sin's a pleasure;
Few mortals know what end they would be at,
But whether glory, power, or love, or treasure,
The path is through perplexing ways and when,
The goal is gained, we die, you know - and then -
Life is strange because it is full of contradictions, worldly things are transient, the sameness of things brings weariness and boredom and to forget this nightmare one must have some sort of intoxication if one wants life to be reasonably happy. The prescription is unconventional and hence seems odd but it rings with truth.

Juan is revived, fed, clad and sheltered and the two teenagers fall passionately in love which makes him digress on it. All great men were subject to it, it makes philosophers and also cuckolds, women turn dangerous when frustrated in it, and it ends with typical Byronic debunking,

"Tis the perception of the beautiful,
A fine extension of the faculties,
Platonic, universal, wonderful,
Drawn from the stars, and filtered through the skies
Without which life will be extremely dull;
In short, it is the use of our own eyes,
With one or two small senses added, just
To hint that flesh is formed of fiery dust".

(II/212)

The romance of the happy lovers is rudely broken by the sudden arrival of the pirate father. Byron sees nothing wrong in his piracy and defends his profession in a humorous and realistic manner,
"Let not his mode of raising cash seem strange,
Although he fleeced the flag of every nation,
For into a prime minister but change
His title, and 'tis nothing but taxation;
But he, more modest, took an humbler range
Of life, and in an honester vocation
Pursued o'er the high seas his watery journey,
And merely practised as a sea-attorney" (III/14)

In society standards of right and wrong are not judged by
any real and moral worth of the thing, but by its face
value, in most cases, by selfish motives. Theft is hated
but spoils of war are taken with pride. Only a shift of
the ground changes the picture entirely. So from Byron's
point of view there is no basic difference between a pirate
and a prime minister, both steal the people. But the Prime
minister does it under a legal cloak and hence he is what
he is.

Byron tries to analyse the transformation of his
poetic ideals, his fall from the world of romance of the
early and middle period to his attaining the stage of
mature sensibility which has turned him into a satirist.

"Now my sere fancy 'falls into the yellow
Leaf', and Imagination droops her pinion,
And the sad truth which hover o'er my desk
Turns what was once romantic to burlesque".

(IV/3).
Life is neither a romance nor is it serious, for all serious things, in conventional standards, are found to be worthless at the bottom. This world situation makes him sad. But whereas this sadness makes the other Romantics sadder and makes them take refuge in their different worlds; it makes Byron laugh. It is no use being sad when you can't mend the thing, which Shelley tried to do fruitlessly, and then sadness becomes only an escape. So, 'wipe your hand across your mouth and laugh' (Eliot/Prelude), for them only you can live inspite of the 'hell' that surrounds you.

For sometime Byron holds his satirical pen in check when he describes the intense and passionate love of Juan and Haidee. He is full of compassion for the young, unsophisticated lovers who are still unspoiled by the vicious society,

"like two beings born from out a rill,
A nymph and her beloved, all unseen
To pass their lives in fountains and flowers,
And never know the weight of human hours"

(IV/15).

But no one can escape the 'weight of human hours' and Byron's dream children are hit by reality in the shape of Haidee's father. They have been misinformed that the father is dead and are enjoying themselves grandly when he springs a surprise on them. Juan resists, is injured
in a scuffle, then arrested and shipped off to be sold as a slave. Haidee is struck down with grief, withers away and dies. This incident sets Juan off to his next scrape with life.

Juan, "wounded, and fetter'd, cabin'd, cribb'd, confined", wakes up in ship, "sailing six knots an hour before the wind" (IV/75). Leaving Juan in the company of some captive Italian singers he digresses on himself as a poet, on the poets, Past and Present and comes to the question of fame and glory. The sense of predestination which haunts him like a stricken conscience leads him to draw the same conclusion, the transience and worthlessness of all human endeavours.

"Where are the epitaphs our fathers read? 
Save a few glean'd from the sepulchral gloom 
Which once-named myriads nameless lie beneath, 
And lose their own in universal death".

(IV/102)

Back in 1808 he wrote in, "To a youthful friend", "Such is the common lot of man; Can we then escape from folly free? Can we reverse the general plan, Nor be what all inturn must be?" Hence Gleckner observes, "His constant
theme is the misery and lostness of man, the eternal death of love, and the repetitive ruination of paradise."10

Juan strikes up an acquaintance with an English soldier of fortune, Johnson, and when they are put up for sale, they are examined by a 'personage of the third sex' - a eunuch -

"to discover
If they were fitted for the purpos'd cage:
No lady is e'er ogled by a lover,
Horse by a blackleg, broadcloth by a tailor,
Fee by a counsel, felon by a jailor, (V/26).
As is a slave by his intended bidder (V/27).

A deliberate use of colloquial words so that they may mean exactly what they stand for. The Romantics always tried to extend the meaning of their words or to impose a new meaning to them. As a narrative poet Byron knows that words having a flexible meaning will only make the images ambiguous and involved resulting in a loss of clarity. So he not only does not change the meaning of the words, he uses words which are familiar to all. It is his earthly temperament, developed by his background, and by the hypocrisy of the social conditions of his time, that makes him run counter to his contemporaries. One does not have to scratch one's head to dig up a meaning and so it goes straight

home and when it goes home we understand that though he talks lightly, he talks weightily. Harsh truths must be told in harsh words. There is no trace in him of that indefinable something which makes his contemporaries famous and which is also the cause of his simultaneous notoriety and fame.

When Byron was writing this 5th Canto he was in Italy helping the Neapolitan uprising against the Austrians. One evening an Italian army officer, whom Byron knew personally, was assassinated near his residence. He was greatly moved by this and recalls the incident. The eternal mystery of Life and Death which has puzzled and baffled the philosophers of all ages also puzzles Byron. He asks, "Can this be death? then what is life or death? Speak! but he spoke not" (V/36). Man has always been baffled by the riddle of death but it has remained unsolved. He wonders,

"And is this blood, then, form'd but to be shed?
Can every element our elements mar?
And air - earth - water - fire live - and we dead?
"We" whose minds comprehend all things".

(V/39).

Here is a problem before which the all-comprehending intellect of man runs aground. After the death of his daughter Allegra he wrote to Shelley, "But it is a moment when we are apt to think that if this or that had been done, such
event might have been prevented — though every day and
ever shows us that they are the most natural and inevi-
table. I suppose time will do his usual work — death has done
his. The tone of fatalism is unmistakable.

Juan and the English soldier are bought by Baba, an agent of Guibeyaz, the queen of the Pacha. Juan is
dressed up like a woman under threat and is taken inside
the harem surreptitiously through the back door. The
disguise introduces an element of suspense which deepens
as Baba tells Juan before their entry into the harem that
if he is found out he will be stiched up in a sack and
thrown into the sea, "A mode of navigation/A good deal
practised here upon occasion" (V/92). The reason of the
disguise is that Guibeyaz became infatuated about Juan
as he was passing on his way to sale and had him directly
bought by her agent. Juan, in whose young heart the
memory of Haldee still lingers, refuses her advances
contemptuously, "The prison'd eagle will not pair, Nor I/
Serve a sultana's sensual phantasy" (V/126). This incenses
her almost beyond control and Byron describes the rapid
changes of her angry mood in a wonderful logical sequence.

Her first thought was to cut off Juan’s head;
Her second, to cut only his acquaintance;
Her third, to ask him where he had been bred;
Her fourth, to rally him into repentance;
Her fifth, to call her maids and go to bed;
Her sixth, to stab herself, her seventh, to sentence
The lash to Baba: but her grand resource
Was to sit down again, and cry of course" (V/139)

The levity of the expression does not lessen the weight
of truth. It at once reveals the two extreme moods of a
woman frustrated in love, her cruelty and her ultimate
resource in tears.

This moves Juan but before he can stammer out his
excuses the Sultan is announced. Three lines are suffici­
ent to draw the Sultan,

"His highness was a man of solemn port,
Shawl’d to the nose, bearded to the eyes,
Snatch’d from a prison to preside at court
(V/147)

Speaking of the joys and sorrows of life in conn­
nection with the conjugal life of the Sultan and Gulbeyaz
he says,

"Our least of sorrows are such as we weep;
’Tis the vile daily drop on drop which wears
The soul out (like the stone) with petty cares".
(VI/20).
Great sorrows are least painful for we can vent them in
tears and let them out, but it is the small cares of
every day life that make our life miserable. But Byron is
not happy, he thinks he has talked with an un-Byronic
seriousness. He must make the thing clear and in his own
way. So here goes,

"A scolding wife, a sullen son, a bill
To pay, unpaid, protested or discounted
At a percentage; a child cross; a dog ill,
A favourite horse fallen lame just as he is
mounted,
A bad old woman making a worse will,
Which leaves you minus the cash you counted
As certain; these are petty things, and yet
I've rarely seen the man they did not fret"

(VI/21)

The things in themselves may be insignificant but their
collective weight is too great for man to bear. Each of
the images goes home for each of them is a part of our
life. "He talks to us across a century and a half like
none of his contemporaries, expressing in his letters and
Don Juan a wit, a relaxation, a tolerance which we need
no mental adjustment to understand. His verbal dexterity
astounds us still but not as much as, perhaps his moder-

12. Brent, P. 'Lord Byron' Weidenfeld and Nicolson.1974
P - 219.
social and political views and in the use of colloquial, homely words and images taken from everyday life, without the modern poets' extreme subjectivity.

At night Juan has to share the bed of Dudu, a harem-maid. She finds out Juan's identity and wakes up with a scream bringing the whole house upon her with a rush. She concocts a fictitious story—a dream—to explain her scream. This is a moment of great suspense, for the reader knows that if Juan is found out by the maids it will be the 'sack and the sea' for him. Fortunately Dudu keeps her head and everything goes well. But when Gulbeyaz hears that Juan and Dudu were paired at night she becomes suspicious and her feminine jealousy is aroused to an intense pitch. She orders Baba, "Let the boat/Be ready by the secret portal's side; You know the rest" (VI/113). The sack and the sea for both and the reader waits in suspense if the hero will survive this cruel verdict.

The story has stayed too long within the confines of a Turkish harem and it is time to take it out into the world. But this is not just an amusing episode of the story, it is quite purposeful. Juan comes in contact with the life of a people other than his own, he gets life's education, not a formal, conventional education. The Asiatic way of life in general and the Turkish way of life in particular, of which Byron had a first hand experience,
is described vividly and faithfully. Juan goes through his scrapes which enlightens him and matures him. Uptil now he has met four women from whom he learns four different facets of love. His love for Julia is an instinctive love of the body, in Haidee he finds the genuine, unsullied, first love of the young heart, Gulbeyaz teaches him that love may be an infatuation and from Dudu he learns the secret of guilty love.

Byron now prepares the ground for the next stage of the story, the siege of Ismail, the subject matter of Cantos VII & VIII. The sultan is very anxious about the Russian victories and the movement of the Russian army advancing towards his territory. So,

"his highness had to hold
His daily council upon ways and means
Have to encounter with the martial scold
The modern Amazon and queen of queens" (VI/86).

Byron has dug up the old English word 'queen' meaning a 'hussy' for Catherine the great of Russia, which undergoing a semantic change has become queen.

Canto VII opens with a defense of his objective in 'Don Juan' which was accused of ridiculing all the great and good things of life in a shabby, underhand manner. In defense he says,

"I hope it is no crime
To laugh at all things - for I wish to know
'What' after 'all', are 'all' things - but a show". (VII/2)

Then citing examples from history of the great men of the past all of whom disserted on the vanity and emptiness of life and temporal things, he says, "Must I restrain me, through the fear of strife,/From holding up the nothingness of life?" (VII/6). He then comes at the critics a little too unkindly but makes his objective clear,

"Dogs, or men! - for I flatter you in saying
That ye are dogs - your betters far - ye may
Read, or read not, what I am now essaying
To show ye what ye are in every way". (VII/7).

Having finished with the critics he gets back to his story, the siege of Ismail, the materials of which he got from a French work, "Histoire de la Nouvelle Russie".13

As the siege begins Byron observes on the uselessness and the utter cruelty of war except when it is fought for the, "Defence of freedom, country or of laws", (VII/40), which have been referred to in Introduction - B.

At first victory sways in the balance for the Russian defences are weak. But when Suvarrov is appointed the new commander the spirit of the army gets back on the rails. Suvarrov's ruthless command and his total indifference

to the loss of human life is condemned with great irony,

"And lecturing on the noble art of killing, —
For deeming human clay but common dirt,
This great philosopher was thus instilling
His maxims, which to martial comprehension
Proved death in battle equal to a pension",

(VII/58),

Yet he acknowledges his efficiency as a general, giving
the devil his due, "When but to storm a fortress, Harlequin
in uniform". (VII/55).

In the meanwhile Juan and Johnson have escaped
in the guise of Turks and they join the Russian army to
take their chances against their enemy, As the battle in­
tensiﬁes his lines also begin to breathe ﬁre,

"And in the Danube's waters shone the same —
A mirror'd hell! The vollying roar, and loud
Long booming of each peal on peal, 'o'er came
The ear far more than thunder;" (VII/6).

"While the whole rampart blazed like Etna,
when

The restless Titan hicups in his den". (VIII/7).

When he thinks of the insensible cruelty of war he brings
his mock-serious tone into play, which is steeped with
sadness,

"Mortality! thou hast thy monthly bills;
Thy plagues, thy famines, thy Physicians, yestick
Like the death-watch, within our ears the ills
Past, present and to come; - but all may yield
To the true portrait of a battle field" (VIII/12).

When he remembers the fate of the common soldiers who die
in thousands so that a victory may be won his heart goes
out to them,

"The groan, the roll in dust, the all 'white' eye
Turn'd back within its socket, these reward
Your rank and file by thousands", (VIII/13).

But for the war makers and the generals who shift at the
cost of thousands of common soldiers, who make war and
death their means of livelihood, he is ruthless in his
irony, "besides enjoying/ Half-pay for life, make mankind
worth destroying", (VIII/15).

The Russians make a breakthrough and Byron avoids
the question of who were in the lead for it may lead to
a quarrel among friends. This reminds him of the possible
controversy between the English and the Prussians as to
who were responsible for the victory of Waterloo. This
logically brings him to the Duke of Wellington, but swep­
ing aside everything with a wide gesture he speaks about
his political ideals.

"But never mind; - 'God save the King :' and

'Kings !'

For if 'he' don't, I doubt if 'man' will longer -
"I think I hear a little bird, who sings
The people by and by will be the stronger
... ... ... ...
and the mob

At last fall sick of imitating Job". (VIII/50)
Job in the Bible took all misfortunes of life stoically
explaining them to be God's will; the bird sings the
ideals of political democracy and a people's government.
He also says how the people will win in the end, only
through blood shed. Though Byron detests blood-shed but
he thinks it to be inevitable and welcomes it for it is
the lesser of the two evils,

and I would fain say, 'fie on't'!

If I had not perceived that revolution
Alone can save the earth from hell's pollution" (VIII/51)

The town is entered and its ruined looks set him
off on a digression where he nostalgically imagines
how men lived an unsullied happy life before the corrupt
man-made civilization made its appearance.

"And tall and strong, and swift of foot were they,
Beyond the dwarfing city's pale abortions,
Because their thoughts had never been the prey
Of care or gain!" (VIII/65).

"Corruption could not make their hearts her soil;"
Serene, not sullen, were the solitudes
Of this unsighing people of the woods" (VIII/67).

The Turks fight valiantly but are overwhelmed in
the end. Juan appears briefly in these two Cantos, fighting
with daring and honour and taking his due share in the
battle. He learns the horror of war and is hardened by
it. Byron concedes that this theme of blood and thunder
is not a very pleasant one but he is helpless in the
circumstances,

"Without or with, offence to friends or foes,
I sketch your world exactly as it goes",

(VIII/89).

Juan's share in the siege earns him the signal honour of
being sent with a despatch to the Russian Court at St.
Petersburg. The story moves on to the next stage.

To the great riddle of life, its uncertainty and
man's puzzlement in the face of it, Byron's answer is
prosaic and concrete. He must have a firsthand knowledge
of everything and for any solution of life's problems he
will not join any group unless he knows what the side is
about.

' 'To be or not to be ?' - Ere I decide,
I should be glad to know that which 'is being';
...
For my part, I'll enlist on neither side,
Until I see both sides for once agreeing". (IX/16).

Towards all sorts of speculative philosophy he is cynically scornful,

"It is a pleasant voyage perhaps to float,
Like Pyrrho, on a sea of speculation;
But what if carrying sail capsizes the boat?
Your wise men don't know much of navigation;
And swimming long in the abyss of thought
Is apt to tire; a calm and shallow station
Well nigh the shore, where one stoops down
and gathers
Some pretty shell, is best for moderate bathers". (IX/18).

All this shows Byron's worldliness, his fact-based view of life, his preference for the concrete to the abstract.
Yet the image of Death haunts him constantly proving the 'nothingness of life',

"And thus Death laughs, - it is sad merriment,
But still it 'is' so; and with such example
Why should not Life be equally content
With his superior, in a smile to trample
Upon the nothings which are daily spent
Like bubbles on an ocean much less ample
Than the eternal deluge, which devours
Suns as rays - worlds like atoms - yours like hours". (IX/13).
But whereas the thought of Death which devours life’s fruits, makes all philosophers abandon worldly life, it makes Byron live life on the double, and he gathers his flowers while it is May. The image of Death does not unman Byron, it makes him more of a man. He is unwilling to forego his ‘hock and soda water’ despite the certainty of having a headache.

The absolute monarchy in Russia where Juan is now going, invites his direct attack, “I deem an absolute autocrat/’Not’ a barbarian, but much worse than that”. (IX/23). This leads him to a vehement assertion of his objective of life, which is to fight, for liberty of thought and actions, and against despotism and injustice at all levels. As a modern poet and a Romantic liberal he desires the emancipation of Thought and as a man of Society he desires the total emancipation of the people from all injustice and tyranny, “I wish men to be free/ As much from mobs as kings - from you as me” (IX/26).

Juan arrives in the court of Catherine and Byron mockingly hints at her lascivious character,

“She could repay each amatory look you lent
With interest, and in turn was wont with rigour
To exact of Cupid’s bills the full amount
At sight, nor would permit you to discount”.

(IX/62).
And the two fall in love which makes him degress on it. So, love is 'vanity', it is 'selfish' except where it is mere 'insanity', it is the 'main spring of the universe' as deemed by philosophers, and so on, but,

"The noblest kind of love is love Platonical
To end or to begin with; the next grand
Is that which may be christen'd love cannonical,
Because the clergy take the thing in hand;
The third sort to be noted in our chronicle
As flourishing in every Christian land,
Is, when chaste matrous to their other ties
Add what may be call'd marriage in disguise".

(IX/76).

First elaborate inflation then a cynical deflation with a quick thrust is his technique to shock the world out of its complacency. No wonder that the keepers of the seal of public morals were incensed at his 'perverted' genius, but the truth should be judged by our own conscience.

From Canto IX to the middle of Canto X, so long as Juan stays in Russia, the Pace of the story slows down and drags a little. Byron had never been to Russia so whatever he writes here he writes from imagination and what little facts he could gather from history books. And because he knows that description based on imagination may not corroborate with facts, they are leisurely and not pointed.
Juan goes through his new experience with perfect aplomb and sang-froid. He grows into a 'polished Russian', becomes 'a little dissipated' by the unrestrained easy life, and becomes the 'Cavalier Servante' of Catherine, from whom he learns the fifth facet of love, that, it is also a lust.

He wanders from topic to topic which is his method to keep the story interesting, but sometimes he does it so quickly that the readers are astounded by its variety and movement. He begins with Catherine,

"But one who is not so youthful as she was
In all the royalty of sweet seventeen,
Sovereigns may sway materials, but not matter,
And wrinkles, the d (amng)d democrats won't flatter". (X/24).

And death the sovereign's sovereign, though the great
Gracchus of all mortality, who levels
With his 'Agrarian' laws, the high estate
Of him who feasts, and fights, and roars and revels,

To one small grass-grown patch (which must await
Corruption for its crop) with the poor devils
Who never had a foot of land till now, -
Death's a reformer, all men must allow". (X/25)
He refers to Catherine's middle age, through her wrinkles comes to the image of Time and Death, refers to the wealthy landed gentry who by the Agrarian Law squeezed the small farmers out of their holdings, and ends sarcastically by remarking that Death is a reformer. What is undone by the Agrarian Law is righted by Death alone, only Death gives the poor people a few feet of land which was denied to them in their lifetime.

After sometime Juan falls sick and the doctors decide that he must travel to recoup his run-down health and reluctant Catherine sends Juan off to England as a sort of diplomatic courier. Juan's humanitarian impulse caused him to save one little Turkish girl, Leila, from the slaughter of Ismail, who now accompanies him. Byron had the same impulse and once intended to adopt one Turkish girl, Hataje, who was rendered orphan by the murder of her relatives. Juan is also accompanied by,

"A bull-dog, and a bull-finch, and an ermine, /All private favourites of Don Juan;" (ML). Byron himself was a great lover of animals. While in Italy he kept a menagerie in his home, even a monkey and a crow in a cage.

Juan is taken sweeping across Poland, Germany, Holland and Denmark wherefrom he embarks for England. He arrives at Dover and starts for London in a chaise. Coming at the turnpike gate he has to pay the toll. Byron uses this occasion to hit men's lust for wealth,
"Alas: how deeply painful is all payment! 
Take lives, take wives, take aught except men's 
Purses. 
... ... ... ... ...
Kill a man's family, and he may brook it,
But keep your hand out of his breeches' pocket".

(X/79)

The great industrial city of London is described very briefly with realistic, concrete images,

"A mighty mass of bricks, and smoke, and shipping,
Dirty and dusky, but as wide as the eye
Could reach, with here and there a sail just skipping
In sight, then lost in the forestry
Of masts; a wilderness of steeples peeping
On tiptoe through their sea-coal canopy;
A huge, dun capola, like a fedora crown
On a fool's head—and there is London town".

(X/82)

As Juan arrives in London Byron prepares himself to deliver his broadside at the hypocrisy of the English high society. He says directly,

"Tell them, though it may be perhaps too late
On life's worn confines, jaded, bloated, sated,
To set up vain pretences of being 'great',
'Tis not so to be 'good'." (X/87).
He will destroy those 'vain pretences', but how? "And wear my head, denying that I wear it". (XI/1) He will put them on stilts and take the support away with one sweeping blow. We will show that what 'is' is not always true.

Walking behind the carriage, enjoying the scene, Juan begins to contemplate on the greatness of 'so great a nation', her 'chaste wives', 'Pure lives' etc. But just as when he comes to think, "her laws are inviolate; noneley/Traps for the traveller; every highway's clear", he is ambushed by four bandits who accost him, "Damn your eyes! your money or your life" - (XI/10). This is Juan's first encounter with London and as he is still on the road it is with the underworld, and it knocks some of the big ideas about 'so great a nation' out of his head.

As Juan enters the big sprawling metropolis Byron gives a glimpse of it.

"Through coaches, drays, choked turnpikes, and a whirl
Of wheels, and roar of voices, and confusion;
Here taverns wooing to a pint of 'Purl',
There mails fast flying off like a delusion;
There barbers' blocks with periwigs in curl
In windows; here the lamp lighter's infusion
Slowly distill'd into the glimmering glass
(For in those days we had not got to gas - )
(XI/22)
This realistic imagery down to the very minute detail invited the admiration of no less a person than Goethe, "Here Lord Byron was great, his pictures have an air of reality ... especially the sea-scenes, with a sail peeping here and there, which are quite invaluable, for they make us feel the sea breeze blowing.

"He is not very scrupulous whether an object is poetical or not; he seizes and uses all just as they come before him, down to the wigs in the hair-cutters' window and the men who fill the lamps with oil... ... at bottom no real object is unpoetical if the poet knows how to make use of them properly".14

Juan is gradually brought into contact with the different strata of the society; first with the underworld, then the politicians who are having a "double front/who live by lies and yet dare not boldly lie" (XI/36), their insolent office clerks, and also with the authors and poets. Of the last two Byron observes through Juan, who, "Had seen the world - which is a curious sight,/And very much unlike what people write" (XI/47). Juan's days in London pass in a desultory fashion. As he goes through his different experiences the real character of the English aristocratic society gradually begins to unfold. His own business is a 'laborious nothing', than visits, luncheons,

Lounging, and boxing* (a favourite sport of Byron), and a ramble in the park in the afternoon.

But London wakes to real life only in the evening after dinner. Then the halls glitter with light and waltz goes on the chalked floor and the senseless talk which makes all sensible people", "Yawning a little as the night grows later" (XI/69). Who are the participants in this grand show?

"They are young, but know not youth - it is anticipated,

Handsome but wasted, rich without a son;
Their vigour in a thousand arms is dissipated;
Their cash comes 'from' their wealth goes 'to' a

And having voted, dined, drank, gamed, and who'd,
The family vault receives another lord". (XI/75).

Uptil now Byron has not bothered much about the question of morality. He has taken Juan through a number of experiences to teach him the lesson of real life. His reliance on experience as the real educator of life is plain enough.

"Adversity is the first path to truth: He who hath proved war, storm, or woman's rage, Whether his winters be eighteen or eighty, Hath won the experience which is deemed so weighty". (XII/50).
"Experience is the chief philosopher". (XV/17)

But as Juan has now come to England, "a moral country", Byron proposes to deal with the question in his own way,

"But now I'm going to be immoral; now
I mean to show things as they really are,
Not as they ought to be; for I know,
That till we see what's what in fact, we're far
From much improvement with that virtuous plough
Which skims the surface, leaving scars a scar
Upon the black loam long manured by vice".

(XII/40).

For Byron there are no shoulds in life, only facts, what actually happens. And when he tells the world what it actually is, it accuses him of blasphemy, bawdiness, irreligion, immorality and all the other weapons in the 'moral-arsenal' of the critics. So before the critics can put him on the dock he disarms them by the mocking innuendo of the first line. The polished attempt to reform the society with the 'virtuous plough' of dignified poetry which leaves the rotten core untouched is derided point blank.

Juan is received into the best of society and one Lady Adeline Amundeville is introduced. But while talking about the lady he suddenly begins to talk about the present state of the English nobility,
"And is there not religion, and reform,
Peace, war, the taxes, and what's called the
nation?
The struggle to be pilots in a storm?
The landed and the monopolied speculation?
The joys of mutual hate to keep them warm".
(XIII/8).

This mutual hate among the English nobility for personal
callesty makes him look at hate from another angle,
"Rough Johnson, the great moralist, profess'd,
Right honestly, he 'liked on honest hater!'
(XIII/7).

Byron also thinks himself an honest hater. He attacks
but without malice, for he is not out to punish but to
open our eyes to our follies and weaknesses. It is better
to remove the causes that create criminals than to
punish them after they are created, "I should be very
willing to redress Men's wrongs, and rather check than
punish crimes". (XIII/8).

He refers to 'Don Quixote', "Of all tales 'tis
the saddest—and most sad,/Because it makes us smile;"
(XIII/8). Byron's tale is also very sad indeed for it
tells us the unpleasant story of a society which is vainly
proud of its imagined greatness. But how to tell a sad
story without making people unhappy? How to tell a man
that he is vain without offending him? Only by making him laugh at his own folly. "Like Voltaire, Byron is attacking human folly rather than human nature, and like Voltaire again he is sometimes not attacking anything in particular, but merely being naughty and funny. ... ... and it is easier to laugh men out of folly than to scold them out of it," and because he does not scold the poem is so humane.

In 'Don Quixote' Cervantes does this very thing, "Cervantes smiled Spain's chivalry away; A single laugh demolished the right arm of his own country" (XIII/11). In 'Don Juan' Byron is doing the same thing. He is laughing away the veneer of the English high society to expose the stale, worn out structure within. He wants to demolish its established code of honour once and for all.

The winter over, Lord Henry, husband of Lady Amundeville, proposes to give a party in his country mansion where Juan is also invited. The description of the mansion continues for seventeen stanzas which corresponds with Byron's own ancestral home, The Newstead Abbey, and in its details we discern a nostalgic tone. The guests are described with a few sure strokes where he is only trying to be naughty. There are the ladies, 'Scilly,

Buscy, Miss Eclat and "the honourable Mrs. Sleep/ who looked a white lamb, yet was a black sheep" (XIII/79); there is the young poet Rackrhyne, 'four Honourable Misters, whose Honour was more before their names than after"; (XIII/86); there is 'Dick Dubious, the metaphysician," and 'the Reverent Rodoment precision,/Who did not hate so much the sin as sinner'. (XIII/87). And the general character of the party is, "But all was gentle and aristocratic/In this our party; polish'd, smooth and cold,../...gentlemen in stays, as stiff as stone". (XIII/110).

The 14th Canto is opened with a subtle dig at philosophy,

"If from great nature's or our own abyss
Of thought we could but snatch a certainty,
Perhaps mankind might find the path they miss -
But then 'twould spoil much good Philosophy"
(XIV/1).

All philosophies promise certainty by developing into a rigid formula but in the end they prove to be endlessly controversial. This only shows the uncertainty or the relative certainty of all things. And so, "One system eats another up". (XIV/1) without end. Philosophers tell us, "Nothing more true than 'not' to trust your senses", but Byron thinks otherwise, "And yet what are your other evidences?" (XIV/2). None, according to Byron. The realist
Byron always trusts his own senses, the true begetter of life's philosophy. He is against all systems for their rigid character and wants to enjoy an open mind, "For me, I know nought; nothing I deny, admit, reject, contain!" (XIV/3). This is a very modern and progressive outlook for the mind does not move in a rut. He never walks with the herd but alone.

The story is put into gear as the Duchess of Fitz-Fulke, who is already having an affair with Lord Augustus Fitz-Placentia, falls for Juan's youth and carriage, and as is natural in such aristocratic society the incident arouses its usual reaction,

"The circle smiled, then whispered, and then sneer'd; The noses bridled, and the extract from'd; Some hoped things might not turn out as they fear'd; Some would not deem such women could be found;" (XIV/44).

What about the duke, the husband, who wore the horn of a cuckold twice? But the duke has, "But small concern about the when, or where, or what his consort did"; because, "Their's was that best of unions, past all doubt, / Which never meets, and therefore can't fall out". (XIV/45)

Such were the true morals of the English society which accused Byron of immorality.
The situation gets complicated as Adeline—who is only six weeks older than Juan—"fired with an abstract love of virtue", takes upon herself the responsibility of protecting Juan having a sort of 'maternal fears' for him. The near equality of Juan and Adeline's age having been hinted at, the reader may suspect a motive in her steps about Juan. But Byron with a feigned lunacy does not wish to impute any motive in her action, "I hate a motive like a lingering bottle" (XIV/68); "To trace all actions to their secret springs/ Would make indeed some melancholy sight" (XIV/68). Having quelled the reader's suspicions he proceeds to tell us about her married love,

"Our gentle Adeline had one defect—
Her heart was vacant, though a splendid
sensation (XIV/68).
She loved her lord, or thought so; but that love
Cost her an effort, which is a sad toll,
The stone of Sisyphus". (XIV/68).

The mention of Adeline's vacancy of heart and her frustrated married life after asserting that she is apparently having no motive in her action is a clever twist of the plot that keeps the reader in suspense about the Juan-Adeline affair.

Thinking it over Adeline conceives a plan to avert a scandal. She, "morally decided, the best state
In her mind, she seriously advised him to get married. (XV/29). She has a number of possible matches on her mind like Miss Reading, Miss Rev, Miss Flaw, Miss Showman, Miss Knowman, the co-heiress Miss Giltbedding and so on. She, however, omits one Aurora Raby who seems to be the only girl of character among the motley of Ravs and Flaws, quite reserved and dignified. It is not difficult to guess that the omission is deliberate, for though the Knowmans and Showmans can be put out of the way and she can enjoy 'marriage in disguise', Aurora will be difficult to tackle. So when Juan wonders at this omission Adeline replies with disgust trying to put off Juan, "What he saw in such a baby/As that Prim, silent, cold, Aurora Raby ?" (XV/49). Juan is also confused by Aurora, for, "Juan knew nought of such a character-/High, yet resembling not his lost Haldee". (XV/58). He is inevitably led to compare the polished and sophisticated dignity of Aurora with Haldee, the unblemished child of nature, his first tender love, and it appears to him, "the difference between them/ was such as lies between a flower and a gem". (XV/58).

There is a long description of the dinner but Byron never describes anything for its own sake. It shows how the wealthy, aristocrats gorged themselves on the choice food and vintage picked up from the world market. At the table Juan is placed between Adelina and
Aurora which is told in typical Byronic imagery, "Like a good ship entangled among ice". (XV/77). Aurora who, at first remains cold and distant, yields to Juan's 'gay nothings' in the end. Aurora's transition from aloofness to condescension is only apparently inconsistent, but Byron insists that this is ingrained in human nature and as a writer he can't avoid showing it. "But if a writer should be quite consistent, / How could he possibly show things existent" (XV/87). This is a very subtle and effective defense of his inconsistency in his work.

The talk about existing things brings him to the question of reality when he leaps from topic to topic and gives his comments on philosophy, religion and politics. Neither Philosophy nor Religion can offer a clue to reality for there are so many of them all quarrrelling with one another. Both in the long run become authoritarian dogmas having no relation with the contemporary situation, when it requires a thorough overhauling,

"'Tis time that some new prophet should appear,  
Or 'old' indulge man with a second sight.  
Opinions wear out in some thousand years,  
Without a small refreshment from the spheres".  
(XV/90).

And then openly, "Why will I thus entangle  
Myself with metaphysics? None can hate  
So much as I do my kind of wrangle;"  
(SV/91).
And of politics, "In politics my duty is to
shew John/Bull something of the lower
world's condition./It makes my blood boil
like the springs of Aeolus;/To see men
let these saundrel sovereigns break law"

(XV/B2)

From story to digression, from digression to
commentary and back to story is not simply a narrative
technique that keeps the reader wondering what is going
to come next; it is a well conceived plan to tell us in
'Don Juan' life's infinite variety and the stuff we are
made of. "Byron is constantly bringing together physical
reality and the other aspects of life, so that his poem
is a continual celebration of the union which constitutes
humanity. 'Don Juan' in all its episodes and its odd
episodes is governed by this imaginative principle.
It restates the basic equation, mind (or spirit) plus
body equals man, but it does not satirise man for being
so constituted". 16

He ends the XV Canto,

"Between two worlds life hovers like a star,
'Twixt night and morn, upon the horizon's verge.
How little do we know that which we are!

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16. Ball, P.N. "Byronic Reorientation". Twentieth
The eternal surge of time and tide rolls on, and bears afar our bubbles; as the old burst, new emerge. Look'd from the face of ages; while the graves of empires heave but like some passing waves.

(XV/93).

It is not simply a trite comment on the cosmic flux of life and death, or growth and decay. The uncertainty of human conditions, the puzzling unpredictability of human nature, decay and growth of new ideas, the transience of all temporal things; in short, a cosmic picture of men in relation to himself, in relation to his own time, and in relation to the cosmic time, is told within a span of eight lines.

Having dwelt rather long on the business of exposing the enthralls of the English high society Byron now decides, "We are going to try the supernatural" (XV/93), ostensibly for variety but really to show the moral character of the guests.

Juan retires but feeling restless goes out into the hall for fresh air. There he sees a figure dressed in a gown and head, like a monk. In the pale moonlight streaming through the windows it looked like a visitant from the next world. The figure stops before him, looks at his head and suddenly vanishes, apparently into one of the rooms opening out from the hall. Though not super-
stitious Juan is confused and sorely shaken and shows it the next morning at the breakfast table. The three women react differently to Juan's discomfiture. Adeline blushes and looks down, Aurora looks with a 'calm surprise', the Duchess, "Play'd with her veil,/And look'd at Juan hard, but nothing utter'd" (SVI/31). Lord Henry enquires if Juan was visited by the Black Friar the previous night. Juan is then told the legend of the Black Friar who haunts the old castle. It is obvious to the reader that someone took advantage of the legend to change rooms at night. But who? Adeline or the Duchess?

The story now moves into the daily life of Lord Henry which may be taken as a representative picture of a contemporary English aristocrat. There is to be a race of grey-hounds, a pedigree race-horse to be paid a visit to, an art-dealer who wants to sell some pictures, an architect who wants to restore and modernise the old castle, a discussion with two lawyers on property problems etc. He being a sort of local justice has to deal with two poachers, and a village girl, pregnant but unmarried. Once in a week or a fortnight he keeps an open house when the country gentlemen are invited to discuss politics and the next election. Byron sarcastically observes, "You see here was/Enough occupation for the Lord Henry, linked with dogs and horses./There was much bustle too" (SVI/68). But, "Heaven, and his friends knew that a private life/
Had been his sole and whole ambition" (XVI/74). Here is a true picture of the apparently busy public life, but the really self interested life of an English aristocrat of Byron's times.

On the home front Adeline presents herself to be an epitome of a model host and the guests praise her in one voice. But after the guests leave she indulges,

"In a most edifying conversation,
Which turn'd upon their late guests' miens and faces,
And families, even to the last relation;
Their hideous wives, their horrid selves and dresses,
And truculent distortion of their tresses"
(XVI/113)

This keeping up a hypocritical sweet front in society and abusing the guests behind their back is the typical character of the English high-society ladies.

That night at dinner Juan is very much preoccupied, the business of the supernatural lying heavy on his mind, and he resolves to see it through. Hearing a sound at night he goes out to enquire. A door creaks and the figure of the monk is seen standing in the door way. Juan is mystified but not quite shaken as before, for, "eager now the truth to pierce, /Followed, his veins no longer cold,
but heated". (XVI/119). As Juan advances the figure retreats until he stands against the wall. Juan puts forth a hand and touches a heaving bosom and then,

"Back fell the sable frock and dreary cowl,
And they revealed - alas! that ever they should!
In full voluptuous, but 'not ov'r' grown bulk,
The phantom of her frolic grace - Fitze-Fulke". (XVI/123).

With this shocking climactic revelation the story ends here rather abruptly.

He professes his poem to be epic but his, "Hail Muse! etuctera (III/1) is a perfunctory invocation in epic manner and proceeding in complete indifference to all its rules he turns the poem into a mock-serious one. This deliberate pretension of following the epic form sets in relief the improvisational manner of composition that lends 'Don Juan' its unique character. His treatment of the usual supernatural machinery in a conventional epic is also cynical.

Yet 'Don Juan' is an epic, a modern epic. The epics of the old,

"revell'd in the fancies of the time,
True knights, chaste dames, huge giants, kings despotic &
But all these, save the last, being obsolete,
I chose a modern subject as more meet." (IV/6).
But the modernness of 'Don Juan' does not lie only in its subject and characters but also in their modern treatment. And when we consider the language, diction and style we should call it ultra modern. His hero is not a man of extraordinary qualities and has nothing to do with anything beyond the visible world. Byron felt a sense of void in the life of men, "this scene of all-confessed insanity" (VII/6). But this is not a philosopher's insanity. This insanity arises from the uncertainty of world conditions, the inconsistent and unpredictable nature of man and above all men's ignorance about his own self. These are the lapses of life which has to be lived inspite of them and the sense of void has to be purged. In 'Don Juan' the void is purged with fun, but the fun is steeped with sadness. Byron is not happy of the lapses but what can he do? "The time is out of joint; - and so am I" (IX/41) "For checker'd as is seen our human lot/With good, and bad, and worse, alike prolifer/Of melancholy merriment... I sketch your world exactly as it goes". (VIII/88).

The goings-on of the world, however, make him sad and Byron, the zestful lover of life, shoves off the burden with his mocking humour. So 'Don Juan' is prolific in 'melancholy merriment'. Whenever the sense of melancholy tries to get an upper hand he turns it upside down with a sweeping tone of burlesque. The heroic ideal was gone, religion or philosophy offered no shelter and going
to the opposite extreme Byron shows the power of the human heart to mock at all things even at himself. The spirit of man will remain unbowed because he can laugh at his own destiny.

'Don Juan' is episodic, a series of events are fused together to make it a whole. The continuity of the poem is maintained by the presence of the hero in all those events which just overlap and also by the temper and tone of the narration. But all the events are distinctly separate from one another which means that Byron is more interested in the series that together make the whole - Life. A single set of characters is not present throughout the narrative. As events change a whole new set of characters is brought in, as one scene appears, the other fades out. So it is a poem that does not develop in the conventional manner, but is continuously added to. The peculiar character of this type of narrative is that it can end anywhere or it can end nowhere. He intends his poem to consist of 12 Cantos (I/200), but by the 12th Canto he changes his opinion, "I think to canter gently through a hundred" (KII/55).

To say that the narrative is held together by the presence of the hero is only a part of the truth. Upto the 6th Canto Juan acts like a hero and causes all actions. But after that he is less and less involved and Byron uses
his more as an observer than as a hero. Nevertheless throughout the story Juan develops, matures and grows in stature. But he learns his lesson of life inductively, through his own experiences, from the realities of the world. Byron is a poet of the hero - and now, "there was no home, not hope, nor life, save what is here". (CH/IV/105). But in the vast panorama of the hero - and now he sees vaster incongruities, the sublime and the pointless are mixed up in a heterogeneous motley, "I perch upon a humbler promontory, / Amidst life's infinite variety". (XV/19). Hence in 'Don Juan', 'From the sublime to the ridiculous there is but one step'. It is a poem of continuous transition, shifting from mood to mood, from events to events which are apparently disjointed, with astonishing effortlessness, like oil pouring out of a bottle. "And yet he makes us feel that this glitter of inconsistencies, this mixture of crude impulse and tender idea, is the very stuff of life; 'blood, imagination, intellect, running together' - the famous ideal fits Byron far better than Yeats. By burying himself, as it were, in imperfections both of the life and of the work, he makes us feel that life and poetry have never been more triumphantly identified, perhaps never will be". 

In 'Don Juan' Byron is not after any truth that 'philosophers allow' but the hard truth of man's existence. To arrive at that truth he has to accumulate all the evidences of life, sift them, sort them out, but even then truth may elude, everything being relative. So, "Truth's fountains may be clear, - her streams are muddy/ And cut through such canals of contradiction,/That she must navigate over fiction". (XV/88). Hence truth must also be taken as a temporary explanation until in the changing world some new values appear and truth itself shifts its ground. If we can accept Byron's opinion of the relativity of truth, which requires some courage, we can explain all the uncertainties, contradictions, inconsistencies and unpredictabilities that beset human life.