

**BYRON AND THE TIMES:
OR AN APOLOGY FOR
"DON JUAN:" A SATIRICAL
POEM, IN THREE CANTOS**

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Byron and the Times: Or an Apology For "Don Juan:" a Satirical Poem, in Three Cantos by John W. Thomas

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AN APOLOGY, &c.

CANTO I.

I.

I sing Don Juan, and his Author, who
Are so deserving our profound attention :
I do it with the deference that's due
To brilliant wit, and eminent invention ;
Though some have thought, and have asserted too,
That there is ground for serious reprehension ;
The Bard assures us 'tis a moral poem,*
And claims that credit which the public owe him.

II.

This claim is just, as I shall quickly show,
To every reader's perfect satisfaction :
First, his nobility will prove it so— [action
High birth and blood, of course, would scorn an
So base as falsehood ; furthermore you know,
(And this must surely silence all detraction)
That he's a genius, and that sacred name
Excludes all ground of obloquy and shame.

III.

His lordship's genius I shall not say much on
 At present, for on that we all agree ;
 The argument which here I briefly touch on,
 Will clearly prove the moral tendency
 Of this divine and exquisite production ;
 Or, at the least, his *ipse dixit* he
 Would find enough for our complete conviction,
 But for some instances of contradiction.

IV.

I'll only mention two, which yet, I fear,
 Will his veracity too much disparage ;
 But do not censure him, until you hear
 What I shall urge to palliate this miscarriage :
 The first, perhaps, may somewhat odd appear,
 'Tis on the subject of the bard's own marriage :
 " I never married," he observes ;^b—but who
 Would think him bachelor and husband too ?

V.

The one he must be, from the above quotation ;
 If not the other, then I wonder why
 Philosophy, when combating temptation,
 Should whisper, " Think of every sacred tie !"
 Had he been wifeless, he on this occasion,
 Had surely made a different reply ;
 But thus to her memento he replied,
 " I will my dear Philosophy,"—and sigh'd.

VI.

'Tis therefore possible, it seems, to be
 Both these at once, and widower in addition !
 This by the following extract you will see,
 In which our author makes his deposition :
 " My days of love are o'er—no more with me
 The charms of maid or wife can find admission,
 As once they did." I quote from memory, merely,
 And yet I know I'm quite correct, or nearly.

VII.

This threefold statement hints a curious fact,
 If accurate—and I could almost vouch it :
 But I'll not from our author's truth detract
 So much as to suppose one person doubts it ;
 Yet even if he were not quite exact,
 But made an awkward blunder at the outset,
 'Twas probably an inadvertent slip—
 Such sometimes will escape the pen or lip.

VIII.

Then as to that which " men call gallantry,"
 " 'Tis all the fault of that indecent sun."—
 Yet how, you'll ask, does this remark agree
 With what he says a little further on ;—
 " The moon does these things for us?" This may be
 A contradiction ; but we all must own,
 The truth, at any rate, his lay inspires
 When he exclaims that " Poets are such liars !"

IX.

This phrase from one, a poet by profession,
 Appears a strange acknowledgment to make,
 And certainly betrays great indiscretion ;
 Yet still it would be most unfair to take
 Advantage of a person's own confession,
 Especially when character's at stake :
 I therefore (do you show the like civility)
 Regard it as a proof of his humility.

X.

That virtuous examples are not needed,
 None in their senses will presume to say ;
 Since moral precepts are pass'd by unheeded,
 In this our naughty world from day to day,
 The truth of my remark, then, but conceded,
 How great the benefit which mortals may
 Derive from so exemplary a piece
 Of self-exposure, in a bard like this !

XI.

However this may be, our judgment should
 Be form'd with candour and impartiality :
 Himself he has not always understood ;
 So that some parts possess that useful quality,
 The obscure—but 'twould be vulgar, low, and rude,
 On this sole ground to accuse of immorality,
 A work whose eloquence so much surpasses,
 That those it charms not must have ears like—asses'.

XII.

'Come hither, Juan, let me see your face :
 None can deny that you're a lovely boy ;
 The winning smile, the sweet attractive grace,
 That fill the gazer with delight and joy,
 Are yours, no doubt, and far exceed my praise :
 Yet still my rapture suffers some alloy,
 Because—your inclinations are so evil,
 Your very author gives you to the devil.^a

XIII.

Not that I censure either him or you,
 The poem, as I said, is strictly "moral,"
 And as we find, 'tis "actually true,"
 With truth 'twould surely be absurd to quarrel :
 If some find fault, we know that's nothing new ;
 Envy would blast Apollo's crown of laurel :
 And—oh, poor lad ! some angry at what you did,
 Forget those errors could not be eluded.

XIV.

Instead of blame, a case like this demands
 Our deepest pity and commiseration :
 A hero when he's in a poet's hands,
 Must be content with whate'er situation
 The bard assigns him. If he nobly stands
 His ground, or basely falls before temptation,
 'Tis but as he's compelled by circumstances,
 Adjusted for him, as the tale advances.

XV.

'Tis said, the ancient Canaanitish nations,
 With sound of timbrels made their children pass
 Through fire to Moloch, whom with such oblations
 They sought to appease, when public mischief was,
 What heart can be unmoved with such relations?
 Who pities not these helpless children's case?
 Yet if we should contemplate that of Juan
 In the same light, no doubt 'twould be the true one.

XVI.

For only think—at one time we perceive him
 A charming boy, to whom the muse had given
 Such virtues, that a saint you might believe him;
 “He seem'd, at least, in the right road to heaven,”
 But soon the scene shifts, and those virtues leave him,
 To be, alas! through gulfs of lewdness driven;
 Till destiny completes his direful fall,
 And “endless showers of hell fire” expiate all.

XVII.

A sketch of Juan's life I've given you here,
 His doom is mention'd by anticipation;
 For though he has not finish'd his career,
 We've several hints about its termination.
 “Poetic justice” will in this appear—
 Or, truth to say, poetic reprobation!
 For ere his life begins, the poem shews,
 In the first stanza, its predestined close.

XVIII.

If censure must lie somewhere then, don't throw it
 On him, nor rigidly his errors seize on :
 I'd have you think, too, ere you blame the poet, [son,
 That for this course there may have been some rea-
 I don't know what, but he will let us know it
 (If nought prevent him) at some future season :
 You must have patience then—remember that—
 And if you won't, I'll *make* you,—so that's flat.

XIX.

I wish to use civility, but I'm
 Compell'd to language that may seem unpleasant :
 These things will all be specified in time,
 Although “ postponed discreetly for the present ;”
 'Twas only that I would prevent a crime,
 That I thought proper just to give you this hint ;
 For *certainly*, 'twere a crime, and one most heinous,
 To treat with disrespect so great a genius.

XX.

His genius here again comes in our way,
 In truth, 'tis hard to keep it out of sight :
 Though theme more pleasing ne'er inspired my lay,
 To do it justice I'm unable quite.
 O Bard immortal ! grant one heavenly ray,
 To guide my muse in her adventurous flight :
 For since she spurns each intellectual fetter,
 And plumes her wings to soar, I'll even let her.