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# Byron and 'the barbarous... middle age of man': Youth, Aging, and Midlife in Don Juan

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BYRON AND 'THE BARBAROUS... MIDDLE AGE OF MAN':  
YOUTH, AGING, AND MIDLIFE IN *DON JUAN*

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A Thesis

Presented to

the Faculty of Arts and Humanities

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In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

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by

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March 2010

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## ABSTRACT

For Byron, the knowledge that he would one day have to become old was always on his mind. By the time Byron had relocated to the Continent, the idea had become something of an obsession. Thirty had always been Byron's turning point, the age at which youth would have to end and he would have to become an old man. Upon finally reaching that age, Byron found himself in a place much like Dante's *selva oscura*—dark, confusing, fearful, but with no other way left to go. There are allusions to this opening scene throughout *Don Juan*. It is in that work, begun in 1818, the year he turned thirty, that Byron plays out his journey through midlife on the page and truly confronts what it means to transition from youth to age. The composition of *Don Juan* took place over five years in two distinct periods: Cantos I-V from July 1818 to November 1820, and Cantos VI-XVII from April 1822 to May 1823, with an intervening sixteen-month hiatus. In the early cantos (I-V), Juan is a means through which Byron can revisit and reevaluate his youth; through Juan Byron can indulge nostalgia for his youth and mourn its passing. The later cantos (VI-XVII), however, reflect a change in Byron. They show an increase in digression and Byron's intrusion into the narrative. As he makes his way through his midlife crisis, the task of reliving his youth through Juan loses importance and the plot takes on a supporting role. As early as Canto VII Byron begins to speak of transcendence (VII.1-2) and by Canto X has decided that he is ready to embark on that journey (X.4), as Juan seems poised to follow Aurora into the heavens, as Dante made it through Purgatory

to follow Beatrice to God. By the time Byron reaches thirty-five he appears to be well on his way out of the crisis and into mature adulthood; Juan, the manifestation of his lost youth, is on the verge of manhood himself, whether it be achieved through marriage in English society or the philosophical influence of Aurora.

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## Introduction

For Byron, the knowledge that he would one day have to become old was always on his mind (Schroeder). As Higashinaka notes, by the time Byron had relocated to the Continent, the idea had become something of an obsession. Apparent in comments made in his letters and journals, even at twenty-eight Byron was consistently aware of his appearance and particular as to his age, and he embraced the frivolity of the Italian Carnival in the spirit that life is short (48-49). In a letter written early in 1818, having turned thirty that January, Byron explained that age is “the barrier of any real or fierce delight in the passions” (50). Thirty had always been Byron’s turning point, the age at which youth would have to end and he would have to become an old man. In a letter written late in 1819, he says, “At thirty I feel there is no more to look forward to”; indeed his friends had noticed a decline in his attention to appearance and he had given up the variety of the Carnival days for a single, steady lover (50-53). Having finally reached that dark age that had long loomed before him, he considered the worthwhile aspects of life over and turned instead to a period of nostalgia and regret that he had not lived a more productive life (54).

This tendency to greet one’s thirties with feelings of regret, depression, and nostalgia is not rare. Today it is known as midlife, often accompanied by a midlife crisis. It was first “discovered” in 1965 by Elliott Jaques when he noticed a high occurrence of crisis manifested in the works of great creative men in their thirties, men such as Bach,

Rossini, Racine, Ben Jonson, Donatello, Goethe, and Michelangelo. These crises appeared as either a commencement of great creative work, a sharp change in quality and content of creative work, or a clear cessation of creative work sometimes accompanied by death. Indeed, Jaques noted a rise in death rate among creative men in their thirties (502).

With this observation made, Jaques goes on to describe how the creative output of such men can change during midlife, that is, what creativity is like before and after the crisis. For the young adult, he says, creativity is intense and spontaneous; when it first appears on the page it is in its final form. For the mature adult, however, if creativity continues, the experience of midlife tempers the creative impulsiveness. It becomes what he calls “sculpted creativity,” requiring much time between the initial rush of creativity and the finished product. Though there may still be sudden bursts of creativity, what results is still far from completion (Jaques 503). Further evidence of a midlife event can be found in a change in creative content toward tragic and philosophic themes, contemplative pessimism, and reflective conservatism (Jaques 504). The mature adult has come to accept death in a personal way and to admit the existence of hate in each person. As Jaques puts it:

...the explicit recognition of these two features, and the bringing of them into focus, is the quintessence of successful weathering of the mid-life crisis and the achievement of mature adulthood.

It is when death and human destructiveness—that is to say, both death and the death instinct—are taken into account, that the quality and content of creativity change to the tragic, reflective, and philosophical. (505)

One of Jaques’ best examples of the journey of midlife manifested in creative work is Dante’s *Divine Comedy*. He cites the opening lines as an especially vivid psychological description of what it is to reach the midlife crisis:

In the middle of the journey of our life, I came to myself within a dark wood where the straight way was lost. Ah, how hard it is to tell of that wood, savage and harsh and dense, the thought of which renews my fear. So bitter is it that death is hardly more. (qtd. in Jaques 505)

Upon turning thirty Byron had found himself in a place much like Dante's *selva oscura*—dark, confusing, fearful, but with no other way left to go. There are allusions to this opening scene throughout *Don Juan*, and even the poem's epigraph—"Difficile est proprie communia dicere"—echoes Dante's difficulty in telling his tale. Though the tragic and philosophic themes indicative of midlife had been appearing in Byron's poems for a few years, it is *Don Juan*, begun in 1818, the year he turned thirty, that Byron truly confronts what it means to transition from youth to age. The composition of *Don Juan* took place over five years in two distinct periods: Cantos I-V from July 1818 to November 1820, and Cantos VI-XVII from April 1822 to May 1823, with an intervening sixteen-month hiatus.

In the early cantos (I-V), Juan is a means through which Byron can revisit and reevaluate his youth; through Juan Byron can indulge nostalgia for his youth and mourn its passing.<sup>1</sup> Canto V concludes with Juan in Gulbeyaz's chamber, the image of a youth

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<sup>1</sup> The idea that memory could keep the past alive runs throughout his poetry, from "Remind Me Not, Remind Me Not" (1808) to "The Dream" (1816), in which Byron revisits his failed love for Mary Ann Chaworth. The power and influence of the past (especially when paired with imagination) strengthens after his separation and are perhaps best described in the Fourth Canto of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*:

The Beings of Mind are not of clay:  
Essentially immortal, they create  
And multiply in us a brighter ray  
And more beloved existence: that which Fate  
Prohibits to dull life in this our state  
Of mortal bondage, by these Spirits supplied,  
First exiles, then replaces what we hate;  
Watering the heart whose early flowers have died,  
And with a fresher growth replenishing the void. (IV.5)

See also Hazard Adams, 111-117, for an argument that the narrator is Byron and that the function of the poem is to create a picture of the narrator. Kim Ian Michasiw also suggests that Byron and the narrator are

stubborn in the face of change: “He stood like Atlas, with a world of words/ About his ears, and nathless would not bend” (V.104.1-2). He proclaims that love is greater than power and “our hearts are still our own” (V.127.8). Jaques notes that often midlife is met with a compulsive attempt to remain young and to prove their enduring youth (511).

The later cantos (VI-XVII), however, reflect a change in Byron. Over the course of his retreat from Juan, he seems to have grown into his midlife a bit, beginning Canto VI with a digression on regret and disappointment (VI.1-20), acknowledging some of the powerlessness of man. Cantos VI through XVI are completed in rapid succession in just fourteen months, and they feature further digressions on a wide range of philosophical topics. These later cantos show an increase in digression and Byron’s intrusion into the narrative. As he makes his way through his midlife crisis, the task of reliving his youth through Juan loses importance and the plot takes on a supporting role. As Leslie Marchand puts it, “he used the digressions less and less to enhance the narrative, and they tended to steal the show. He was more inclined to use the narrative as an excuse for the digressions” (35); the narrative was “a mere peg” for his philosophical reflections (38). He speaks pointedly on the role of hate in the old, replacing the idealistic love of the young (XIII.6), and of the lure that death has for the living (XIV.3-6), explicitly addressing the two issues Jaques says must be addressed. As early as Canto VII Byron begins to speak of transcendence (VII.1-2) and by Canto X has decided that he is ready to embark on that journey (X.4), as Juan seems poised to follow Aurora into the heavens, as Dante made it through Purgatory to follow Beatrice to God. In terms of Jaques, by the time Byron reaches thirty-five he appears to be well on his way out of the crisis and into

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one in the same, especially that “in beginning *Don Juan*, Byron addresses the problem of his own identity

mature adulthood; Juan, the manifestation of his lost youth, is on the verge of manhood himself, whether it be achieved through marriage in English society or the philosophical influence of Aurora. After a short start on Canto XVII, Byron leaves the project untouched for the twelve months before his death while he shifts his focus to his Greek interests. He has gotten Aurora onto the page, he has begun to outline his path to transcendence, so he is free now to begin the slow sculpting process. Whether these later cantos were only the initial creative rush of mature adulthood waiting to be sculpted or a sign that Byron's creative impulse had changed or ceased is unclear, but this second long pause in productivity seems to be indicative of a change in Byron of some sort.

*Don Juan*, then, is Byron's *Divine Comedy*—it is the manifestation of his own midlife crisis. Taking his subject matter from a legend to which Byron was already often compared, and was already popular on the European stage (see Haslett), Byron used the character of Don Juan to stand for himself in this reevaluation of his youth. However, as much as Byron borrows in subject matter from the Don Juan legend, he borrows in theme from Dante. Perhaps it is there that we should look for clues as to Juan's (and Byron's) unmet future.

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as author more directly than he has hitherto" (35).

### Prelude: Byron Approaches Thirty

As early as 1816, a darker mood and thoughts of lost youth and impending age can be seen in Byron's poetry.<sup>2</sup> He had been severed from the two women he loved, Augusta Leigh his sister and Annabella nee Milbanke his wife, and left his country and home behind him. He also during that time met Shelley and became reacquainted with the Wordsworthian theme of nature as love and source of one's humanity (Eisler 526). Though earlier poems had praised memory as a way of preserving the past, with his poem "The Dream," the past becomes indicative of the future. Dreams, Byron says, are real in the realm of sleep; they "become/ A portion of ourselves as of our time,/ And look like heralds of Eternity" (9-11).<sup>3</sup> These dreams, that here are "Spirits of the past" (12), become "Sibyls of the future" (13); they "shake us with the vision that's gone by,/ The dread of vanished shadows" (16-17). The past becomes something to haunt him and, perhaps worse, something to determine his future. As he goes on to relive in brief his love

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<sup>2</sup> Jean-Paul Forster notices a change in Byron's narrative poems dating to 1814, when Byron was yet twenty-six. The most affected was the portrayal of the Byronic hero: where before he was aloof and apart from the world, he became self-conscious and prone to suffering. J. Wain sees a shift in Byron's poetry in 1816, moving from romantic to satiric poetry, brought about by the revelation of his own personal scandals, making it impossible to continue the mystery of a Byronic hero. Wain, however, does not think Byron capable of revealing his true self on the page: "What man could ever present his real personality, with all its doubts, its inward hesitations, ambiguities, and contradictions, in such a way as to make *dramatic* sense of it?" (159). He also argues that Byron lacked the self-confidence to reveal his mind even to himself. I would suggest that the use of digression, as distinct from the dramatic narrative, serves as a way to "make sense" of one's "real personality," and that crises of self-confidence are apparent in *Don Juan*, but Byron reveals his mind regardless.

<sup>3</sup> With the exception of *Don Juan*, all Byron poems are quoted from *The Poetical Works of Lord Byron*, ed. E.H. Coleridge.

of Mary Ann Chaworth and his unhappy marriage with Annabella, his protagonist, the Boy, becomes a man:

The Boy was sprung to manhood...  
...He was girt  
With strange and dusky aspects; he was not  
Himself like what he had been. (106, 108-110)

The Boy becomes a Wanderer; youth is lost, home is lost, identity is lost. Age is a restless, unsettled thing, marked by exile, but unable to escape the past. The Wanderer, though, will one day be able to use his pain to better ends:

Pain was mixed  
In all which was sewed up to him, until,  
Like to the Pontic monarch of old days,  
He fed on poisons, and they had no power,  
But were a kind of nutriment, he lived  
Through that which had been death to many men,  
And made him friends of mountains: with the stars  
And the quick Spirit of the Universe  
He held his dialogues; and they did teach  
To him the magic of their mysteries;  
To him the book of Night was opened wide,  
And voices from the deep abyss revealed  
A marvel and a secret—Be it so. (189-201)

In these lines, the transcendence of the Aurora Borealis of *Don Juan* is foreshadowed, conversation with the stars and the universe, but it is here connected with pain, not the revelation of Love and Glory, and so the transcendence possible in age is steeped in darkness comes from the abyss. Still too tied to his past and fear for the future, Byron is only barely on the path that will take him to the Aurora Borealis, dawn, light, and the heavens.

The next step on this path is *Manfred*, written from September 1816 to April 1817, as Byron inches closer to the watershed birthday. Manfred, too, is a character

plagued by a painful past and afraid of what it means for his future: “The future, till the past be gulfed in darkness,/ Is not of my search” (I.i.6-7). It is the pain of his past that has made him old before his time:

To be thus—  
Grey-haired with anguish, like these blasted pines,  
Wrecks of a single winter, barkless, branchless,  
A blighted trunk upon a cursed root,  
Which but supplies a feeling to Decay—  
And to be thus, eternally but thus,  
Having been otherwise! Now furrowed o’er  
With wrinkles, ploughed by moments, not by years  
And hours, all tortured into ages – hours  
Which I outlive! (I.ii.65-74)

Age is not the result of time alone, but by how one has led his life. Like Manfred, Byron has loved as he “should not love” (II.i.27) with Augusta; he carries his own “cursed root” in his lame foot; his current life and trails are even bleaker in contrast to the youth, fame, and freedom he has known. And like Manfred, he desires a peace with his past before he dies. Manfred is a man of magic, communing with nature and learning its secrets, preferring its company to that of man. But rather than transcend into the knowledge available to him, he clings to his past love and wants forgetfulness or forgiveness from she whom he wronged. He is chided by the Witch of the Alps: “thou dost forgo/ The gifts of our great knowledge, and shrink’st back/ To recreant mortality—Away!” (II.ii.24-26). He takes his power instead to the underworld, again seeking answers from the abyss, with “the dwellers of the dark abodes,/ The many evil and unheavenly spirits/ Which walk the valley of the Shade of Death” (III.i.34-39). Though his departed lover does not forgive him, he finds peace in the knowledge that he will soon die (III.i.16), and declares that even Hell would be better than the guilt and despair he lives with (III.i.66-78). In this

play, however, there is an alternative to abandoning oneself to a Hell created by one's past. The Abbot tries to save Manfred, to show him the path to true salvation, by telling him with time will come hope,

which shall look up  
With calm assurance to that blessed place,  
Which all who seek may win, whatever be  
Their earthly errors, so they be atoned. (III.i.80-83)

Though in the character of Manfred Byron rejects this Christian, holy option, he is at least aware of another way, of a future that looks up instead of down to the abyss.

The last major work before taking up *Don Juan*, the Fourth Canto of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* closes the book on Byron's wandering, idealistic youth.<sup>4</sup> It marks a transition between the works immediately following his separation and exile and *Don Juan*. Where Manfred saw no end to his pain except through forgetting or death, Byron now knows suffering, whether for good or ill, is not eternal:

All suffering doth destroy, or is destroyed,  
Even by the sufferer – and, in each event,  
Ends: – Some, with hope replenished and rebuoyed,  
Return to whence they came – with like intent,  
And weave their web again; some, bowed and bent,  
Wax gray and ghastly, withering ere their time,  
And perish with the reed on which they leant;  
Some seek devotion – toil – war – good or crime,  
According as their souls were formed to sink or climb. (IV.22)

He also introduces the image of setting sail onto the endless ocean. At this point, however, as Byron yet only approaches the start of midlife, it is a journey not to seek a better view of the stars but to escape the shore and its troubles:

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<sup>4</sup> In the dedicatory letter, Byron admits to dropping the Childe Harold persona: "there will be found less of the pilgrim than in any of the preceding [cantos], and that little slightly, if at all, separated from the author speaking in his own person. The fact is, that I had become weary of drawing a line which every one seemed

...other days come back on me  
With recollected music, though the tone  
Is changed and solemn, like the cloudy groan  
Of dying thunder on the distant wind;  
Yet, could I seat me by this ivied stone  
Till I had bodied, forth the heated mind,  
Forms from the floating wreck which Ruin leaves behind;

And from the planks, far shattered o'er the rocks,  
Built me a little bark of hope, once more  
To battle with the Ocean and the shocks  
Of the loud breakers, and the ceaseless roar  
Which rushes on the solitary shore  
Where all lies foundered that was ever dear:  
But could I gather from the wave-worn store  
Enough for my rude boat, – where should I steer?  
There woos no home, nor hope, nor life, save what is here. (IV.104-105)

In a few years, the boat will set out on an ocean of eternity, undaunted, seeking a view of the stars above, but now the ocean is something to battle. The journey is only an escape from failure, a journey of hope barely scraped together, perhaps not even sufficient, and born of the ruins of solemn memory. It has no direction or purpose. The future of the pilgrim, the Boy of “The Dream” is still to be a Wanderer.

In this canto, the pain of his past is determined to be the result of the follies of youth. The “young affections” are waste and profit nothing, creating, “though tempting to the eyes,/ Flowers whose wild odours breathe but agonies,/ And trees whose gums are poison;” they lead one to “some celestial fruit forbidden to our wants” (IV.120). The grown are left with unfulfilled dreams and desires, “the unreached Paradise of our despair” (IV.122.7). Love, its frenzy and its raving, is for the young, and its cure, though bitter, is to see the truth of reality—“yet still it binds—/ The fatal spell, and still it draws us on” (IV.123.5-6). Already Byron sees the differences between the young and the old,

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determined not to perceive.” A trend somewhat clear in his recent works, and fairly evident in *Don Juan*,

especially in terms of one's relationship with love, but still the end of youth is death and despair:

We wither from our youth, we gasp away –  
Sick – sick; unfound the boon – unslaked the thirst,  
Though to the last, in verge of our decay,  
Some phantom lures, such as we sought at first –  
But all too late, – so we are double curst. (IV.124.1-5)

And still, as for the Boy turned Wanderer and for Manfred, the future lies in darkness:

But where is he, the Pilgrim of my Song,  
The Being who upheld it through the past?  
Methinks he cometh late and tarries long.  
He is no more – these breathings are his last –  
His wanderings done – his visions ebbing fast,  
And he himself as nothing: – if he was  
Aught but a phantasy, and could be classed  
With forms which live and suffer – let that pass –  
His shadow fades away into Destruction's mass,

Which gathers shadow – substance – life, and all  
That we inherit in its mortal shroud –  
And spreads the dim and universal pall  
Through which all things grow phantoms; and the cloud  
Between us sinks and all which ever glowed,  
Till Glory's self is twilight, and displays  
A melancholy halo scarce allowed  
To hover on the verge of darkness – rays  
Sadder than saddest night, for they distract the gaze,

And send us prying into the abyss...  
(IV.164-166)

By the end of the pilgrimage, having compared youth to age and seen in the decline of Venice the loss of youth's potential, Byron sees midlife (and Dante's woods) before him. Lost, both in place and identity, he embraces the solitary state of nature in which he finds himself:

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Byron here sheds completely all poetic persona and admits that the protagonist's voice is also his own.

There is a pleasure in the pathless woods,  
There is a rapture on the lonely shore,  
There is society, where none intrudes,  
By the deep Sea, and Music in its roar:  
I love not Man the less, but Nature more,  
From these are interviews, in which I steal  
From all I may be, or have been before,  
To mingle with the Universe, and feel  
What I can ne'er express – yet can not all conceal. (IV.178)

There is something redeeming in connecting with nature, as the Wanderer and Manfred knew, but it is through the past *and* the future, not the past alone, that answers are found.

The Ocean, once a battle and an escape, is realized a universal and eternal force, something that has created him and has the power to destroy him, that is beyond the limitations of mortality. And youth is something that *must* fade:

...it is fit  
The spell should break of this protracted dream...  
...what is writ, is writ –  
Would it were worthier! but I am no now  
That which I have been – and my visions flit  
Less palpably before me – and the glow  
Which in my Spirit dwelt is fluttering, faint, and low. (IV.185)

### The Early Cantos: Youth and Age

Byron had felt the burden of age even as a very young man. Preparing to leave Harrow at seventeen (in 1805), he recorded “one of the deadliest and heaviest feelings of my life to feel that I was no longer a boy” (qtd. in Eisler 85). Nearing twenty-one, he was depressed by his impending coming-of-age, but was prepared to be what society and politics expected of a man (Eisler 162-163). At twenty-three, returning to England from Greece, he declared it time for a change, the first reason for which was “At twenty three the best of life is over and its bitters double” (qtd. in Eisler 282). At twenty-nine, witnessing an execution in Rome, he found his emotions hardened (Eisler 567). But still youth persists. Also in Rome, he resisted sitting for a bust, wanting to avoid a “creeping death-in-life,” and returning to Venice he still needed to maintain a lover (if not several). On the eve of his thirtieth birthday, he embraced Carnival and all its pleasures with a new urgency: “I shall make what I can of the remainder of my youth – & confess – that like Augustus – I would rather die *standing*” (qtd. in Eisler 588).

And yet, in the spring of 1818, Byron began to feel the full weight of age upon him. Lady Melbourne, who had indulged him and allowed him to prolong his youth, died in April, and Allegra, his daughter by Claire Claremont and the only one of his children to which he could have access, was to be under his care (Eisler 592). In July 1818, he began both *Don Juan*, an examination of youth in all its glory and the process of aging,

and his Memoirs, another attempt to reclaim and preserve the youth he had lost. Age was indeed upon him, old before his time:

...he looked forty. His face had become pale, bloated and sallow. He had grown very fat, his shoulders broad and round, and the knuckles of his hands were lost in fat. (qtd. in Eisler 602)

His hairline had begun to recede, and what hair he had he let grow too long. And Newstead Abbey, his ancestral home, had just been sold. *Don Juan* would be a way to hold on to his youth: the Dedication returned him to the youthful ambitions of *English Bards*, and sixteen-year-old Juan brought him back to a time when his passions spoke louder than dull common sense. These early cantos would become something of a battleground between youth and the age that destroys it.

In *Don Juan*, youth and age are two distinct and opposing periods of life. Youth is characterized by a sense of invincibility, freshness and newness, a tendency to color things as more lovely than they really are, a sense of egocentrism, and ambition, passion, and rhyme. Age is characterized as youth's opposite, but the details differ according to Byron's denial or acceptance of his own age. In the early cantos, age is characterized by a loss of ambition and hope, regret, nostalgia, and a focus on the unavoidable loss of the pleasures of youth. In the later cantos, age is marked by the knowledge of one's own weaknesses and mortality and by a righted and realistic view of the world.

From the beginning, Byron uses Juan and his youth to show just how unready he is to accept age and how bitter age had made him. In the last line of the poem's first stanza, Byron describes Juan as "sent to the devil somewhat ere his time;" age, Juan's most certain destination, comes too quickly, and Byron is not ready to be old. In

describing Juan's burgeoning affair with Julia, he frequently undermines the innocent depictions of young love by bringing them into reality (I. 88-89).

The first and longest digression on youth comes at the end of Canto I (stanzas 213-220). From the beginning, the narrator declares the age of thirty to be the year in which a man becomes middle-aged and begins the aging process. In an unused draft of stanza 213, the narrator contemplates wearing a style of wig fashionable in the previous century, thereby emphasizing his feeling of being old-fashioned and obsolete by embracing an outmoded fashion. Yet Byron changes the lines to have the narrator speak of dyeing his grey hair, indicating a preference for hiding the age rather than exaggerating it, a preference for clinging to the youth slipping away. The narrator admits to feeling old beyond his years, that he has "squandered [his] whole summer while 'twas May" (213.5), and that he has "spent" his life (213.7). As far as he is concerned, he is done living. Youth is life; age is death, or at least not life compared to that had in youth. Here, youth is a rebellious and critical spirit, ready to take on the world with impunity. In youth, the soul is invincible; nothing can conquer it. In age, however, one is struck with the revelation that he is mortal, that the soul is not, in fact, invincible.

The narrator bemoans his fate: "No more—no more—oh never more on me..." (214.1), repeating this lamentation twice more in the following stanzas. He speaks of "the freshness of the heart" found only in youth, the freshness "like dew," new and of the morning, gracing the green plants full of life (214.2), enabling the young to see things as lovely and draw from them "emotions beautiful and new" (4). Youth is about newness and the beauty that newness casts. But youth is more about the heart. He informs the heart that it was not created out of these beautiful things, but that it was the creator:

“Alas, ‘twas not in them, but in thy power/ To double even the sweetness of a flower” (7-8). That the heart creates is crucial, for the “lovely things we see” (3) are not quite so lovely in reality, but appear so only because they are filtered through a youthful heart.

In stanza 215, the narrator continues his lament to youth passed, but as he turns to focus more on the sorrows of age, he moves away from an egocentrism of first-person pronouns. The loss of egocentrism is a sign of mature adulthood (Kao 58-59), so in this subtle shift in pronoun use one can see the beginnings of Byron’s journey through midlife. This shift continues as he continues to speak to his heart. He defines it as that which was in youth his “whole world,” his “universe,” his “all in all” (215.2,3). Now, however, it is “a thing apart” (3). In his age, with an expanded worldview, he realizes there are other forces at work to influence him, that other things exist than his heart and the lovely images it produces. He bemoans the fact that the “the illusion’s gone forever” (5), yet in the same breath acknowledges that his focus on his heart was indeed an illusion and not reality. This realization is further proof that Byron has begun midlife, but that he has only just begun, as the loss of illusion is yet coupled with disillusionment (Symonds 199). As a consequence of doffing the rose-colored glasses, his heart has become “insensible” (6); whether that means it is imperceptible or it is unfeeling, its power for beautifying is nonetheless diminished. Having reached middle age, the narrator realizes that his heart has given way to his head, garnering in the place of romanticism “a deal of judgment” (7), as unexpected and improbable to youth as that characteristic is.

By stanza 216 he seems ready to accept middle age. He states definitively those things he “must” no longer do (4), as well as those he should commence. With youth gone, “[his] days of love are over” (1), for love is the realm of the young. In midlife, with

his expanded and righted worldview, he can no longer be taken in by a gullibility, a readiness to believe. He has lost his naivety and must not seek to retrieve it nor artificially create it. He declares, "I must not lead the life I did do" (4). And yet, though he seems willing to accept the changes of midlife, he does so grudgingly. He does not say "cannot" or "do no longer want to" but "must not," as if to say he has no choice in the matter. At this point, age is still something forced upon the unwilling, something at heart still resisted.

Stanzas 217 to 220 portray a narrator trying to rationalize the aging process, putting youth and its beliefs in a harsh negative light. Youthful ambition has become an ineffectual idol, supplanted by sorrow and pleasure, the gods of his old age against which he has no power. He says that he has declared to himself the truth: "Time is, Time was, Time's past" (6). To complete the allusion to *Friar Bacon*, he would have replied to himself "My life, my fame, my glory, all are past...the turrets of thy hope are ruin'd down." His chance for fame and glory has passed; at thirty he has reached the point of no return and must settle in to what he has already become. In this jaded state, youth becomes defined as "a chymic treasure" (6), during which one wastes his life obsessing with passion and rhyme. All this work, this idealism turns out to be for naught, as this chymic treasure turns out not to be gold after all; "the illusion's gone forever" (215.5). In 218 and 219, he reassures himself. After all, he asks, what is fame and hope? They are both empty and to no real end. Fame, he says, is "to have, when the original is dust, A name, a wretched picture, and worst bust" (218.7-8). He tries to make the loss of fame and hope easier to bear, thus soothing the bitterness at realizing that his youth and all that it entails are gone. In 220, he comforts himself with the thought that everyone is mortal,

no one's youth stays, and in a last pitch for peace, that one should be thankful for what he has.

In Canto II, written after having been thirty for nearly a year, Byron speaks pointedly on the fact of age only twice; he does not linger on the topic in this canto but instead abruptly changes the subject having made his comment. In stanza 4, approaching thirty-one, he repeats that age is inevitable and something to accept: "the world must turn upon its axis,/ And all mankind turn with it...and as the veering wind shifts, shift our sails... A little breath, love, wine, ambition, fame,/ Fighting, devotion, dust – perhaps a name" (4.1-2,4,7-8). Much later in the canto, in the midst of describing the true and youthful love of Juan and Haidée, he declares that he has had his share of passions, but no more; they are "nought to me/ But dreams of what has been, no more to be" (166.7-8).

The early steps toward a successful journey through midlife are present, but they are yet misdirected. Age is defined by the physical pleasures that are lost, not by what is possible. He is still the man of Annabella's observation: "It is unhappily your disposition to consider what you *have* as worthless – what you have *lost* as invaluable" (qtd. in Eisler 490). In Canto VII Byron will realize the true nature and value of Love and Glory, and in Canto X he will see age in terms of its privileges, wisdom and transcendence. After the first two cantos, Byron still has a long way to go.

In the interval between composing Cantos II and III, Byron fell in love with Countess Teresa Guiccioli. Until now, Byron had enjoyed the various sexual opportunities of Venice, indulging in three Carnival seasons, keeping two mistresses, and arranging several one-night rendezvous. But now, older, his youthful passions sated, he is ready for a steadier love affair. "For the first time," Eisler notes, "Byron felt – and acted



The introduction of Lambro in Canto III provides opportunities for comment on age and nostalgia: elderly slaves purchased by Lambro are thrown overboard as useless (16.1-4), nostalgia and homesickness are strengthened by being “induced to roam” (21) and are harder to overcome than death (51). The canto also features the poem “Isle of Greece,” a meditation on the loss of heroism at home and the seeking of it elsewhere. But perhaps most important to Byron’s experience of midlife at this time is the description of twilight as the love between Juan and Haidée approaches its end. Stanzas 101-103 speak of Ave Maria; it is the first New Testament Christian imagery since the beginning of the Haidée episode, which features natural or, if religious, Old Testament Eden imagery. It signals an impending loss of Eden and entry into a more modern or “real” world. These stanzas also shift the narrator’s praise from sunrise, the purview of Haidée, sister of the dawn (II.142), to twilight, the end of day, the beginning of night and death. Twilight is the “heavenliest hour of heaven” (101.8), but it belongs to Mary, the Latin, High Church Ave Maria. Haidée’s innocence is sunrise and her “marriage” to Juan and the loss of that particular innocence is sunset, but this is to be the last sunset, the end of their innocent love, as Christian imagery comes to reclaim the sunset hour from Juan and Haidée, to take payment for their sin. Now twilight, though pious, is still as death:

While swung the deep bell in the distant tower,  
Or the faint dying day-hymn stole aloft,  
And not a breath crept through the rosy air,  
And yet the forest leaves seemed stirred with prayer. (III.102.5-8)

As Byron continues to describe twilight, he borrows a description from Dante’s *Purgatory* and it becomes representative of Byron’s own sense of loss.

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Which shuns that reef so horrible and bare;  
Nor raise my voice – for who would heed my wail?

Soft hour, which wakes the wish and melts the heart  
Of those who sail the seas on the first day  
When they from their sweet friends are torn apart,  
Or fills with love the pilgrim on his way  
As the far bell of vesper makes him start,  
Seeming to weep the dying day's decay.  
Is this a fancy which our reason scorns?  
Ah, surely nothing dies but something mourns. (III.108)

This twilight marks not only the death of the innocent, idyllic, Edenic love of Juan and Haidée, but also Byron's awareness of the death of his own innocent youth. In alluding to *Purgatory*, he seems to have moved a bit along his own midlife journey. His rage and resistance towards age have been tempered by nostalgia and by an immersion in the beauties of young love, by the presence of something sacred in the mourning of a passing beauty.

In Canto IV, Byron opens with an image of a falling Pegasus as he looks at the effect his new midlife is having on his creative talent. In stanza 2, time brings all things to their level, but as the river of youth widens to an ocean, one can ponder emotions that youth does not know. However, just as emotions widen, fancy and imagination age. Flights of fancy no longer fly, but such lethargy is a fact of life, a sign of the general slowing down of age. Pegasus here stumbles because Byron is beginning to feel his age, not just see it thrust upon him. His work, the realm where he is trying to relive and cling to his youth, is suffering because of it. He is haunted by it, "the sad truth which hovers o'er my desk" (3.7) Age turns the romantic into the burlesque (3.8); it takes the feeling most dependent on youthful fancy and imagination, most susceptible to the sobriety of age, most important to Byron's sustained relationship to Juan, and cheapens it.

After this reflection on age and failing fancy, Byron returns to the poem with a meditation on youth eternal, as compared with the prospect of growing old (stanzas 8-12). In these stanzas, Byron begins to address death and the death instinct directly, something Jaques says is requisite to making it through midlife successfully. He makes the connection between wanting to die and the strength of the desire to live, that those who long for death but do not seek it have the strongest principle of life (11), and observes that death for the young is a blessing, that they would die before being emptied of their youthful essence (12).

Canto V is the last of his early cantos, before his 16-month hiatus from the poem, and though it ends with a Juan defiant before the Sultana, it also introduces Johnson, an old man of thirty who serves, for a time, as guide for the young Juan. Physically, he resembles Byron himself, and so he may represent what Byron thinks his “old” self should be (stanzas 10-21). Johnson is resolved, full of *sang-froid*, showing but a “blunt compassion” for Juan’s plight (12.4-6). Byron might have envy and nostalgia for youth, but Johnson shows there should be no pity. He is stoic, having learned from the varied fortunes of life, though not quite hardened to real sorrow. These are the characteristics of a man:

‘You take things coolly, sir,’ said Juan. ‘Why,’  
Replied the other, ‘what can a man do?’ (V.21.1-2)

All experience, Byron says, yields knowledge when put into perspective. One should make the best of things. Practicality is preferred over emotion and control over defeat. Though fortune favors the young, she turns; the old get used to it and do not lament her loss.

The appearance of Johnson and his definition of a man after midlife prompts Byron to examine himself. He tells the story of the Commandant dying in the street and his reaction to it:

‘Can this be death? Then what is life or death?  
Speak!’ but he spoke now. ‘Wake!’ but still he slept. (V.36.1-2)

After Johnson proclaims his self-control by virtue of recognizing fortune’s control over him, Byron laments that he has no control over himself or nature. Neither could the Commandant, commander of thousands of men, control his own fate. It is futile to think that one can control circumstance, and though Byron approaches that realization, he has not yet reached the acquiescence of Johnson. And so, because he can make no sense of death or its power (38-39), he leaves Juan for a time, stubborn and sure in the power of himself and of love to overcome those who would control him, proclaiming “our hearts are still our own” (127.8).

### The Later Cantos: The Journey of Midlife

In July 1821, Byron promised Teresa to stop work on *Don Juan*. He had not worked on it since November the year before and would not return to it for another nine months. His journey toward midlife, however, continued. In the summer of 1820 Byron had become hypersensitive about his age and included in a letter to Annabella “we are no longer young,” but his relationship with Teresa was maturing and he became interested in Italian political action (Eisler 669-672). Shelley visited Byron in the spring of 1821 and found him a new man, living “a life of totally the reverse of that which he had led at Venice,” likely, to Shelley, a result of his more or less permanent attachment with Teresa (Eisler 679). He paid more dutiful attention to his finances, and he followed a healthy diet (Eisler 689, 694). He continued to write, examining relationships from his past<sup>6</sup> and continuing to explore the nature of transcendent knowledge. From the Wanderer and dark nature, to Manfred and dark supernatural powers, to Childe Harold and the dark blue Ocean, Byron returns to the darker side of revelation with *Cain*. In *Cain*, Byron adopts another protagonist despairing of his life, seeking truth in dark places. Locked out of Paradise, he lingers near the gates at twilight, gazing on his lost “inheritance.” Though he has the inclination to look above—

And then I turned my weary eyes from off  
Our native and forbidden Paradise,

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<sup>6</sup> *The Two Foscari* examines a tragic father/son relationship; *Sardanapalus* finds a man caught between two women, one to inspire ambition (Lady Oxford) and one to forgive his failings as a husband.

Up to the lights above us, in the azure,  
Which are so beautiful... (I.i.278-281)

—he cannot find knowledge in the stars, distracted by the feeling he has been cheated out of Eden. So, he follows Lucifer into “the abyss of space” and its darkness, void of stars, but still with the aura of twilight:

‘Tis a fearful light!  
No sun – no moon – no lights innumerable –  
The very blue of the empurpled night  
Fades to a dreary twilight. (II.i.176-180)

It is also the twilight with which Lucifer shines (compared to the sunshine of God’s angels) (I.i.509-519), and it is the twilight that marked the passing of Haidée’s idyllic paradise. Twilight has become an evil omen, and it is in this twilight that Cain learns of death. It is only in death, Lucifer tells him, that he can find the “*highest* knowledge” (II.ii.164), that only the spirit can comprehend and see immortality. Different from these other protagonists, however, this knowledge from the abyss does not give Cain any solace, but only exacerbates his sense of loss and anger, leading him to a life of exile and wandering desolation. His sister-bride Adah alone stays with him and has any hope to save him.

Byron, according to what he knows and has learned of youth and age, is entering well into midlife, but the journey is far from over. Returning to *Don Juan* in April 1822 at thirty-four, he opens Canto VI with an allusion to *Julius Caesar*:

‘There is a tide in the affairs of men  
Which taken at the flood’ – you know the rest. ...  
But no doubt everything is for the best,  
Of which the surest sign is in the end;  
When things are at the worst they sometimes mend. (VI.1.1-2,6-8)

The original passage reads:

There is a tide in the affairs of men,  
Which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune;  
Omitted, all the voyage of their life  
Is bound in shallows and in miseries. (*Julius Caesar* IV.iii.216-19)

He goes on to talk about Caesar dying for love and of his own experience of love in youth as constituting his whole world. Byron is regretting the missed opportunities of his past and his youth, perhaps a chance at love that he let slip away, but rather than be bitter as in the early cantos and focus on those shallows and miseries, he is hopeful that even if the best is lost, at least not all is lost. The hope is not secure, as by stanza 20 he speaks of the “vile” and persistent sorrows of everyday disappointments, but nevertheless Byron shows that he has matured since last he saw *Don Juan*, that he is beginning to look forward and he no longer sees age as so harsh a sentence.

The rest of the canto puts Juan in a position of identity confusion. While the significance of gender in this identity confusion will not be discussed here, the issue of identity is central to the midlife. As one matures, he relies less on others for a sense of identity and confirmation and becomes more self-reliant (Tamir 76), and a strong sense of self becomes very important. Where the young are judged according to their actions or positions, the mature are judged by who they are, an intrinsic rather than a market value (Kao 159). This kind of development is not clear in the Juanna episode, but the presence of such a strong identity crisis of any kind suggests yet another way in which Byron is progressing through maturity. Byron also includes in this canto “the moral of this composition”: that the heaviest hearts belong to those whose woes are caused by their headlong passions (VI.87.5-8), that too strong passions only cause sorrow. These “headlong passions” are felt by the young and are much subdued by middle age. Could

Byron's moral, then, be that the old are better off for no longer having to contend with these passions and their sorrows?

Byron intimated in Canto VI that he had come far in the previous months to a serene acceptance of midlife and what it entails. In opening Canto VII he almost declares it. It is in the opening of this canto that Byron begins to look to the heavens and to the transcendence that marks maturity.

Oh Love! Oh Glory! What are ye who fly  
Around us ever, rarely to alight?  
There's not a meteor in the polar sky  
Of such transcendent and more fleeting flight.  
Chill and chained to cold earth we lift on high  
Our eyes in search of either lovely light.  
A thousand and a thousand colours they  
Assume, then leave us on our freezing way.

And such as they are, such my present tale is,  
A nondescript and ever varying rhyme,  
A versified aurora borealis,  
Which flashes o'er a waste and icy clime. (VII.1.1-2.4)

In the early cantos, Byron was disillusioned with love, thinking it was forever beyond his reach. Now, however, it is no longer thought of as something that consumes the young but something that transcends human experience. It is still forever and truly beyond his reach, but he now has a better understanding of what it is. It was not long since that Byron had employed the Wordsworthian view of a benevolent and identifiable nature. It gave depth to his confusion in the conclusion to *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*. And though the grasp at youth that surfaced in the Dedication blasted Wordsworth as he did when young, it is the depth of *Childe Harold* that he accesses here. This particular image of heavenly transcendence, of being the domain of Love and Glory, had been on Byron's mind, though, from the beginning of his hiatus after the early cantos. On January 29,

1821, not long after his thirty-third birthday, Byron writes the following passage in his journal:

Why there is gentleness in Dante beyond all gentleness, when he is tender. It is true that, treating of the Christian Hades, or Hell, there is not much scope or site for gentleness – but who *but* Dante could have introduced any “gentleness” at all into *Hell*? Is there any in Milton’s? No – and Dante’s Heaven is all love, and glory, and majesty. (qtd. in Stevens 359)

Even then he was beginning to see the possibilities for good in his own experience of the hell of middle age, and the view of Dante’s Heaven that gave him hope stayed with him. In “Stanzas Written on the Road between Florence and Pisa,” composed in November 1821, the Love and Glory that will define the transcendent Aurora Borealis also appear, inspired by Teresa:

*There* chiefly I sought thee, *there* only I found thee;  
Her Glance was the best of the rays that surround thee,  
When it sparkled o’er aught that was bright in my story,  
I knew it was Love, and I felt it was Glory. (13-16)

The image also redefines the symbolism of Aurora. In Canto II it was Aurora the dawn, sister to Haidée and emblem of young innocence. Here it becomes the Aurora Borealis, cold and distant but bright, inspiring, the light of heavenly wisdom. Byron turns his focus upward to higher things and higher themes. Here is the philosophical content that Jaques saw in the mature creative man. But the passage also speaks of Glory. The early cantos dealt with love as experienced by the young and it is now here redefined, but it will be the upcoming cantos (VII and VIII) that will use the battle of Ismail to look at glory in terms of human experience, in contrast to the celestial image here. And rather than defend it as he did human love, he can look at glory (and war) with the eyes of an old man, without the naïve optimism inherent in the young.

Byron continues such honesty in Canto IX, especially in being honest with himself about his own confusion. While the young are sure, infallible, and invincible, it is a sign of a mature adult to allow for contradiction and personal imperfection (Tamir 76, Jaques 513). In stanzas 10-15, he looks at death, admitting that he does not know which is better, to be or not to be. In stanza 17 he asserts that man can *know* nothing. In stanza 41 he confides that he does not know where the poem will take him, he does not know where his future lies. Also in Canto IX he begins to harshly belittle the human experience of love. While Juan entertains Catherine in St. Petersburg, love becomes vanity, selfish, insanity, heathenish to call it the center of the universe (IX.73). It is a fever “which precedes the languid rout/ Of our sensations!” (75.6-7). Love is based on perception and love fades as perception gives way to reality, especially in Byron’s *Aurora Borealis*, philosophical reality.<sup>7</sup> The later cantos thus far show a kind of progression in Byron’s disillusionment with love: from headlong passions causing sorrow, to Love’s reality as being unattainable, to two cantos of bloody war, to Catherine and her mockery of Cupid (IX.44-45). By the end of Canto IX, Byron has embraced the value of keeping a cool head amid feelings of love:

We have just lit on a ‘heaven-kissing hill’,  
 So lofty that I feel my brain turn round,  
 And all my fancies whirling like a mill,  
 Which is a signal to my nerves and brain  
 To take a quiet ride in some green lane. (IX.85.4-8)

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<sup>7</sup> Though Byron now declares it heathenish to make love the center of the universe, he said in Canto VI that it is a part of youth, not just philosophers, to make one’s love one’s whole world. However, between writing Cantos VI and IX, he experienced in quick succession the deaths of his daughter Allegra and of Shelley, both of which could explain this seemingly new bitterness toward love and occupation with death. He had failed Allegra as a father, and she the only child of his he would know. Shelley’s death he met unfiltered, witnessing his exhumation and cremation, coming face-to-face with mortal decay (Eisler 704-708).

He has given up the connection to the heart so mourned in Canto I, favoring the rational nerves and brain, valuing reality over imagination and fancy. He has become the old man he so feared and despised in Canto I, but he is making good progress through his midlife journey, and for the mature adult, things feared when young are not feared after experiencing them (Symonds 199). He has come to see the value in a mature outlook.

The beginning of Canto X sees Byron renewed after the bitter attack on love. He speaks of Newton and the apple and of uplifting man after the Fall using such means as sent him falling in the first place, of being thus able to lift him if not to Heaven than to the heavens. He is speaking of transcendence. Hazard Adams, in his *Contexts of Poetry*, describes the “literary cosmos” in terms of space, circular, typified by a quest, and time, cyclical, typified by the passage of one’s life. Each is also classified by two extremes: innocence (Eden) and experience (Nature). These extremes are those of all human life: one begins in innocence, endures a fall, travels through experience, then seeks to rise again, beginning a “quest for the new paradise made desirable by the knowledge gained in experience” (Adams 192). In this canto Byron is ready to begin that quest:

In the wind’s eye I have sailed and sail, but for  
The stars, I own my telescope is dim.  
But at the least I have shunned the common shore,  
And leaving land far out of sight, would skim  
The ocean of eternity. The roar  
Of breakers has not daunted my slight, trim,  
But still seaworthy skiff, and she may float  
Where ships have foundered, as doth many a boat. (X.4)

He has sailed through experience, through the winds of life, and acknowledges that the stars, the aurora borealis of Love and Glory, are still a bit beyond him, but he is ready to break out of the common fate of man and seek eternity, transcendence, wisdom. He is

humble in the face of this task, but is yet confident in his abilities. When, two stanzas later, lines on Juan's youth return him to thoughts of age, Byron seems more serene on the subject of lost youth. This is the first major digression on youth and age since Canto I, and the tone is markedly different. He admits that the old, now with a withered heart, "palsied fancy," and dimmed scope of vision, will of course think fondly upon their youth and seek to cough no more (X.6). But, he goes on, as many tears and sighs as the newly aged might shed for their youth, time lessens the pang of loss, as the Arno's banks recede in the winter. Grief does not last so long as one might think, and new causes for joy are found (X.7). Sometimes, he continues, the coughs of age appear before the sighs of midlife depart (X.8.1-2).

Such might be the case for Byron, for though he is prepared to break from the common shore, he is still in midlife and grappling with its consequences. Only a few stanzas later in Canto X he returns to that *selva oscura* that was Dante's entry into the midlife crisis. It is a period described as horrid, hateful, and rude; an equinox and a halfway house past which drive "life's sad post-horses o'er the dreary frontier of age" (27.7). The wise travelers, he says, do not stop at this station, but take a path around it, only giving a single tear to the youth they leave behind them. Not all travelers, though, are wise. Though Byron describes midlife as a hut "whence wise travelers drive with circumspection" (27.6), an unused draft describes it as a hut "where we travellers bait with dim reflection." He originally includes himself in the scene (we travellers) and treats midlife as a time to wallow in reflection, but for the final version he chooses instead to focus on the path of the wise (of whom he is not yet a part), who can quickly move on from this place and but briefly mourn for their past youth and dreary future. Byron soon

grows weary of describing this dismal state, no longer desiring to reflect, or even think. The thought of youth and aging, however, will not leave him. It clings to him “as a whelp clings to its teat,” as “kelp holds by the rock,” and as “a lover’s kiss drains its first draught of lips” (28.3-7). He yet sustains the memories of youth as if he birthed them. Thoughts of the innocent passion of first love have not quite left him, the image of kelp on a rock evoking the seaside Haidee scene and the blurring of innocence and maturity. Byron, in having the thought of youth cling to him, is yet hovering between mature and innocent, old and young. He is still battling with the hold that such an “obscure” middle age has on him.

### Juan in London: Seeking a New Paradise

There are three principles of maturation: differentiation, in which analytical thinking is in the foreground; integration, which focuses on unity, harmony, and balance; and transcendence, during which egocentrism and self-objectification are shed. In other words, transcendence “makes us aware of the ideal, the excellent, the perfect, and the divine” (Kao 58-59). Paradise is symbolic of that transcendence, of a symbiosis of the human and divine, it “represents what we aspire to regain, namely, the unity, oneness, and cohesiveness with the source of our beginning” (Kao 69). However, a strong sense of self must still endure; a oneness that does not allow for the development of a new selfhood is not a Paradise, but a Hell (Kao 71). Adams seems to concur with this path, that it is the quest of human experience to seek to eventually return to a Paradise made richer by experience, but adds that to get there one must first journey through Hell. As Byron pursues his path toward transcendence, Juan his avatar is facing the critical turning point in his own story. According to the Don Juan legend, he is relegated to Hell, but according to Byron’s other inspiration, he will find his Beatrice and will be led to Heaven. By the end of Canto X, London is on the horizon.

As Juan approaches London, nostalgia for his home infects Byron once again. Though it takes its bitter toll (78.8), Byron’s now mature worldview can see London for the hellish, false paradise that it is:

Juan was now borne,  
Just as day began to wane and darken,  
O'er the high hill which looks with pride or scorn  
Towards the great city. (X.80.2-5)

For London, Juan is “born” again (if you will) into a sunset, into age, which looks with pride or scorn. This “great city” is London, but it could also be Heaven, or Hell. As the description continues, however, it becomes clear that Juan’s descent into London will be his descent into Hell. It boasts a “volcano... which well beseemed/ The ‘devil’s drawing room’” (81.2-4); it is populated by butchers and bullies and is smoky, dirty, dusky (81-82); and even religion is wild and lost, a “wilderness of steeples” (82.5). Continuing in Canto XI, London is “that vale of good and ill” (8.3) where streets “ferment” (8.4). It has that “busy hum/ Of cities, that boils over with their scum” (8.7-8). To all of this Juan is oblivious. He sees London as a place of wonder, greatness, freedom, resurrection, good laws, good prices (9-10). It is a place where “none lay/ Traps for the traveller; every highway’s clear” (10.5-6). As if to prove Juan’s naivety and Byron’s accurate assessment of the city, the very next line introduces the highwaymen. Whatever London be, it is not a place for the idealistic.

Upon entering London, Byron takes us past places with undeserved and false titles such as “grove” and “pleasant” (21); Juan travels “through ‘Rows’ most modestly called ‘Paradise’,/ Which Eve might quit without much sacrifice” (21.7-8). That is to say, London is not an Eden. An unused version of those lines reads “Through Rows called ‘Paradise’ by way of showing/ Good Christians that to which they are all going.” Given the other “not as it seems” statements in these stanzas, and the way in which these lines are corrected, Byron’s probable intent in the original was either to belittle the beauty of

heaven or insinuate that these “good Christians” are not really going to Heaven. That London is Hell for this Don Juan is clear; it is a “mighty Babylon” (23.2).

At the commencement of the next canto (XII), Byron is nearly thirty-five. He has worked his way through four years of midlife, but still is not at peace with it:

Of all the barbarous Middle Ages, that  
Which is the most barbarous is the middle age  
Of man. It is – I really scarce know what;  
But when we hover between fool and sage  
And don't know justly what we would be at,  
A period something like a printed page,  
Black letter upon foolscap, while our hair  
Grows grizzled and we are not what we were,

Too old for youth, too young at thirty-five  
To herd with boys or hoard with good threescore.  
I wonder people should be left alive,  
But since they are, that epoch is a bore.  
Love lingers still, although 'twere late to wive,  
And as for other love, the illusion's o'er;  
And money, that most pure imagination,  
Gleams only through the dawn of its creation. (XII.1-2)

In this passage is shown the identity crisis typical to midlife. Byron is yet trying to identify with a group rather than looking to himself for his identity. In the last few months he has had visits from old friends, too brief, and only leaving him somber remembering the past and what could have been (Eisler 712-713). His house was full of dependents, and he began to feel isolated from Teresa, keeping separate rooms; he no longer experienced intense feeling (Eisler 714-718). Filtered through *Don Juan*, he is frustrated and confused as to how to go, though he might have an idea of where. And yet, despite the frustration and confusion, he is neither resistant nor afraid. He can look at his plight with a realistic and clear eye and take it for what it's worth. In a 1963 article, G. Steffan claimed that Byron's fault as a poet was the result of immaturity (qtd. in Easterlin

35), typified by his intruding and confused digressions. But the presence of this digressive narrative voice, the voice of Byron himself in the poem, is the integrated self of Romantic poetic theory. It is the only way in which one can see the author maturing to a unified, aware self while the poem progresses toward integrated themes, plot, etc. Byron's voice in the poem is not self-absorption (which would be immature) but self-awareness, and the inconsistency and confusion he sees in himself is reflected in the inconsistency and confusion he sees in others (Easterlin). Joseph agrees; Byron's presence in the poem gives the reader a sense of emotional reality (32). In this way he can give Juan (and his readers) a warning: "Thou art no novice in the headlong chase/ Of early life, but this is a new land,/ Which foreigners can never understand" (23.6-8).

In Canto I, Byron announced "in canto twelfth I mean to show/ The very place where wicked people go" (I.207.7-8). And now, in Canto XII, he announces that he is finally nearing the beginning of his poem, everything previous being a prelude. The subject of his poem, Juan, immersed in the rules of English society, is to take a wife. London is the door to Hell and, if English society is the place where wicked people go, then a "match" for Juan (especially based on societal standards or false love) would be Hell itself. Canto XIII begins the poem proper, and in the poem remaining we are introduced to Adeline, representing a proper English lady, and Aurora, that Beatrice of the Aurora Borealis who can show Juan the way to transcendent philosophy, Love, and Glory.

Canto XIII, as it happens, is a very appropriate place in which to begin the poem. Byron has finally turned thirty-five, has apparently turned the corner out of midlife, and is thus well-prepared to guide Juan toward the proper destination. Indeed, one of the signs

of maturity is the transformation “from a naïve beginner to an expert capable of guiding others” (Tamir 74); while the young is developing ways to be in the world, the mature adult had distilled those methods into a few essential ideas (Tamir 77). He begins his post-assessment of midlife in stanza 4:

And after that serene and somewhat dull  
Epoch, that awkward corner tuned for days  
More quiet, when our moon’s no more at full,  
We may presume to criticize or praise,  
Because indifference begins to lull  
Our passions and we walk in wisdom’s ways;  
Also because the figure and the face  
Hint that ‘tis time to give the younger place. (XIII.4)

Upon turning thirty, Byron entered middle age, eventually making it to that serene, somewhat dull, awkward corner (that halfway house, that barbarous middle age). Upon turning thirty-five, he’s beginning to wane out of midlife into a quieter mode of life, Age. With age comes wisdom, passions become indifferent, criticisms are accurate for not being ruled by emotion. He has been able to discern the heart of the matter—“And therefore shall my lay soar high and solemn,/ As an old temple dwindled to a column” (XIII.1.7-8)—separating the truth from the fancy, separating himself from the common crowd. He continues:

I know that some would fain postpone this era,  
Reluctant as all placemen to resign  
Their post, but theirs is merely a chimera,  
For they have passed life’s equinoctical line. (XIII.5.1-4)

At thirty-five he has matured out of middle age and can look back at those still there. Likewise, he does not need to relive his youth through Juan any longer, so Juan is free to grow up himself.

In Canto XIII Byron introduces Lady Adeline Amundeville. She is described as proper in her conduct, but also cold, a bottle of champagne frozen over with but a small glassful of liquid remaining, though it is potent (37). She is one of the “cold people” (38.7) who “are a Northwest Passage/ Unto the glowing India of the soul” (39.1-2). However, though she possesses a “a hidden nectar under a cold presence” (38.3), the path to that nectar is as uncertain as the Passage itself. Byron often used a metaphor of climate, with warm climates representing Southern vitality and expression and cold climates the inhibition and repression of England (Wood 19). Cold is associated with the brutality of Ismail and the oppression of Petersburg (Wood 23). But perhaps most importantly, Lady Adeline is described as “the fair most fatal that Juan ever met” (12.3). Destiny and passion have caught them in their net (12.5), and though at the beginning of their friendship she was not in love with him (XIV.91), Byron himself does not know what will become of them: “It is not clear that Adeline and Juan/ Will fall, but if they do, ‘twill be their ruin” (XIV.99.7-8).

### Aurora Raby: Prefigured and Realized

Canto XIV goes on to describe the English society in which Juan finds himself, and in Canto XV, Byron introduces Aurora Raby. Attempting to save Juan from the grasp of the Duchess of Fitz-Fulke, Adeline recommends that he marry (could this be why she is “the fair most fatal”). In cataloging the eligible ladies in the party, Juan discovers Aurora Raby standing out above the rest:

...there was  
Indeed a certain fair and fairy one  
Of the best class and better than her class,  
Aurora Raby, a young star who shone  
O'er life, too sweet an image for such glass,  
A lovely being, scarcely formed or moulded,  
A rose with all its sweetest leaves yet folded. (XV.43.2-8)

Many have speculated as to the biographical inspiration for Aurora (see Ashton) as a way to divine her role in the poem and its unwritten future, and though several possibilities are given, none are necessary. There is enough symbolism in her name itself for her role to be evident in the context of the poem. More than a reincarnation of Haidée or an attempt at roman a clef (Ashton 117, 119), she is the Aurora Borealis of Love and Glory made flesh. She is “a young star who shone o'er life,” embodying purity and innocence, an unspoiled rose, too perfect to be of Earth.

Early in years and yet more infantine  
In figure, she had something of sublime  
In eyes which sadly shone, as seraphs' shine.  
All youth but with an aspect beyond time,  
Radiant and grave, as pitying man's decline,

Mournful, but mournful of another's crime,  
She looked as if she sat by Eden's door  
And grieved for those who could return no more. (XV.45)

She is transcendent of man and earth, placed among the highest orders of angels, the Seraphs who love most and the Cherubim who know most (*Cain* I.i.421). Aurora is not meant to marry Juan; she is above marriage and mere human love. She will be to Juan what Beatrice was to Dante. The role of women in salvation had developed throughout Byron's poems after the separation. From 1816, his love for both Augusta and Annabella evolved from guilt, pain, and loss to a way to purge and purify him. Aurora Raby is a conflation of Annabella and Augusta, idealized into a divine Beatrice role. Though communication with both of them had lessened considerably since the separation, in July 1823 his wife was still enough on Byron's mind for him to ask his visitor Lady Blessington to arrange for a portrait of Annabella to be sent to him.

In *Manfred*, the protagonist is haunted by guilt over the death of his lover, whom he should not have loved. In this respect, Astarte represents Augusta, but she is Annabella as well:

She had the same lone thoughts and wanderings,  
The quest of hidden knowledge, and a mind  
To comprehend the Universe: nor these  
Alone, but with them gentler powers than mine,  
Pity, and smiles, and tears – which I had not;  
And tenderness – but that I had for her;  
Humility – and that I never had.  
Her faults were mine – her virtues were her own –  
I loved her, and destroyed her! (II.ii.109-117)

Her death and the despair it caused sends Manfred into a desert,

Barren and cold, on which the wild waves break,  
But nothing rests, save carcasses and wrecks,  
Rocks, and the salt surf weeds of bitterness. (II.i.56-58)

This depiction of loss and despair will be used again in Haidée's dream, prophetic of the destruction of her paradise. So soon after the separation, love is destructive, but it is only through Astarte that Manfred can find any peace.

Written between *Manfred* and the Fourth Canto of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, "The Lament of Tasso" describes another inspirational woman, Leonora, as a kind of Aurora:

Thou wert to me a crystal-girded shrine,  
Worshipped at holy distance, and around,  
Hallowed and meekly kissed the saintly ground. (129-131)

In these early years after the separation from both Annabella and Augusta, Byron writes of men who have lost the women they have loved. These men, Manfred and Tasso, have lost Astarte and Leonora, with no hope or means to return to them, and their memories of these women idealize them. They become divinities worthy of and able to bestow salvation, for the loves of these men were forbidden and the cause of their pain, and only the women can forgive them.

As Byron progresses through midlife, he becomes less attached to the past, as he accepts and embraces his future. As a result, his love for Augusta becomes sanctioned in Cain and Adah, and Annabella becomes a perfect being. And as he comes to see the answers of age come not from the abyss but from the heavens, through Beatrice, through the redeeming love of a woman, these idealized versions of Augusta and Annabella merge with the Aurora Borealis to become Juan's Aurora Raby.

During their courtship, Annabella is described as intelligent, bookish, and religious. She misinterprets Byron, seeing disdainful morality in his refusing the waltz; he sees her as deep but placid, too perfect (Eisler 353-374). He describes her as his "Fair

Philosopher,” saying “we are two parallel lines prolonged to infinity side by side but never to meet” (qtd. in Eisler 373-374). Annabella would be for Byron, as his wife, his passage into Heaven, her virtue and purity interceding on his behalf (Eisler 437): “I will get to heaven by the hem of your garments” (qtd. in Eisler 473). The description of Aurora and her interaction with Juan is almost identical.

Juan is on the verge of Hell, being told that marriage will be his salvation. But marriage is not Juan’s path to transcendence; it is the Hell of a false London society. For Juan to rediscover his Eden, he should look for the angel guarding its gate. Juan’s path to Heaven is Aurora’s influence on him and her grace. This precarious position of Juan’s is shown clearly in the first dinner scene; he is seated between the representatives of his two possible paths, Adeline and Aurora, “like a good ship entangled among ice” (XV.77.7). He is traveling that Northwest Passage to the heart of one of these ladies, either Adeline the frozen bottle of champagne or Aurora the distant heavenly star. In terms of that blueprint to transcendence given in Canto VII (VII.1-2), Adeline becomes the image of humanity, “chill and chained” (1.5). She of the Northwest Passage is on a “freezing way” (1.8), living in a nigh eternal English winter, “a waste and icy clime” (2.4). Aurora, though, is the Aurora Borealis “around us ever, rarely to alight” (1.2), above the earth, better than her class, beyond time. Though Aurora is at first indifferent to Juan, she soon begins to warm to him, somehow drawn to him as he is to her. Byron hints that though Aurora prefers books and wisdom to looks and coquetry, she is still young and may falter (85), but for himself she is still the passage out of midlife:

Between two worlds life hovers like a star  
‘Twixt night and morn upon the horizon’s verge. (XV.99.1-2)

Aurora is that star, the star of dawn, the star of midlife, marking the path through age.

How little do we know that which we are!  
How less what we may be! The eternal surge  
Of time and tide rolls on and bears afar  
Our bubbles. As the old burst, new emerge,  
Lashed from the foam of ages; while the graves  
Of empires heave but like some passing waves. (XV.99.3-8)

In this one stanza, all of the key images of Byron's journey are represented: the star of the guiding heavens, the confusion of identity in the world, the tide not "taken at the flood," the ocean of eternity. For Byron, it seems, the exercise is done. He has taken this poem from thirty to thirty-five and discovered the safe way from the Inferno to Paradise, embracing his shortcomings along the way. All that remains is to see Juan to the end of his journey.

Canto XVI opens by showing the effect Aurora has had on Juan. He lies in bed restless, perplexed, compromised, thinking of Aurora's eyes (12). This is no ordinary Juan love affair. He sighs to the moon, keeper of men's secrets (13.6), and continues in pensive contemplation. During his restless wanderings, he encounters the monk ghost, "the thing of air/ Or earth beneath or heaven or t'other place" (23.1-2). In this state, Juan is in a place where the boundaries between Heaven and Earth (and Hell), ethereal and terrestrial, spiritual and corporeal are blurred. Now would be the time for Juan to reach up to that Aurora Borealis while it is in reach. The next day, visibly shaken, Juan attracts the attention of the three ladies of concern (Adeline, Fitz-Fulke, and Aurora), Aurora surveying him. The descriptions of her transcendence continue:

The worlds beyond this world's perplexing waste  
Had more of her existence, for in her  
There was a depth of feeling to embrace  
Thoughts, boundless, deep, but silent too as space. (XVI.48.5-8)

Byron asserts that Aurora is key to this time and place of burred boundaries, being boundless herself. At that night's dinner, she alone of the three ladies pays Juan any attention (95, 100). A kind of bond between them is forming; their perceived attempts at flirtation are clumsy and as yet ineffectual, but the philosophical effect she has on him is clear:

And certainly Aurora had renewed  
In him some feelings he had lately lost  
Or hardened, feelings which, perhaps ideal,  
Are so divine that I must deem them real.

The love of higher things and better days,  
The unbounded hope and heavenly ignorance  
Of what is called the world and the world's ways,  
The moments when we gather from a glance  
More joy than from all future pride or praise,  
Which kindle manhood, but can ne'er entrance  
The heart in an existence of its own,  
Of which another's bosom is the zone. (XV.107.5-108)

In short, Aurora is the path by which Juan can achieve his second Paradise, his second youthful innocence. His reaction to Aurora is much like his romance with Julia, when his feelings were on par with the great unknowns of metaphysics and science, finding her among the cosmos (I.90-92); when his thoughts were like to true wisdom, longings sublime, and aspirations high (I.93.1-2); when he thought it possible for goddesses to come down to men (I.94.3-4). Unfortunately, the path to that second Paradise, as Byron knows, is a labyrinth, and the door to Hell has not yet been crossed. As Juan begins another restless night, a second ghost (Fitz-Fulke arrived to seduce a new lover) creaks open Juan's bedroom door, at which point Byron proclaims "Lasciate ogni speranza voi che entrate!"—Abandon every hope ye who enter here. At once Juan is faced with the

gates of Dante's Hell and the visit from the Stone Guest that is the fate of his legendary predecessor (Haslett 108-109).<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> A.B. England sees this scene as emblematic of Juan's quest for deliberate action seen throughout the poem. He says that "Byron shows a continuous interest in how his hero tentatively progresses to the point at which, in a testing locale, he is able to act deliberately in the attempt to discover at least some limited degree of truth" (62). It could very well be that the outcome of this scene, left ambiguous in the unfinished Canto XVII, would show how Juan's deliberate action relates to his journey to the second Paradise.

## Conclusion

The process of midlife is not an easy or an welcome one. One reaches a point in life when not only is he struck by the prospect of an immediate and immanent future, but also sees that future as black, uncertain, yet final. It is a process of “groping toward authenticity,” of “seeing the dark first, disassembling ourselves, then glimpsing the light, and gathering our parts into a renewal” (Sheehy 243). Even if one chooses to begin this process, to reexamine all of his thoughts and feelings, to create a new and true identity, he soon encounters his own resistance to the change (Sheehy 248). He will go through periods of cynicism and disenchantment; he will see the failures and defects of his early life (Tamir 74). But in the process of disassembling that narrow identity created for the sake of society, one sees that “that narrow, innocent self is indeed dying, must die, in order to make room for the fully expanded self who will take in all our parts” (Sheehy 250). He will see himself from within instead of without and will attain a heightened self-confidence and intellect (Tamir 75, 77). It is only through this painful destruction and reconstruction can one prepare for “the grandest expansion” (Sheehy 250).

Byron undertook this task through creativity and fantasy, using the Don Juan legend and *The Divine Comedy* as a template and a foundation for which his own life would provide material to fill in the gaps, in which his midlife problems and conflicts could be acted out, tested on the page (Symonds 191-192). For Michael Cooke, *Don Juan* is constructed in a pattern of repetition, reflection, and variation, indicative of the

Romantic practice of looking for pattern in random incidents, “to go over, and over and over, some material that we cannot let go, and to go into, and even further into the possibilities of that material, which becomes at once... fixation and source of revelation” (290), all of which seems to support the idea of the poem as psychological testing ground. It seemed to have worked, emerging from the poem in May 1823 apparently through his midlife crisis and ready to finally give his energies to the Greek cause.

Though he left the poem officially unfinished at his death (according to Jaques’ theories, it might never have been finished), there is enough of Byron’s journey through midlife recorded in *Don Juan*’s pages to serve as a sufficient guide for others finding themselves in such a place. Indeed, the fragmentariness of the poem underscores its approach to transcendence, as the Romantic period saw fragmentariness as indicative of the unfinishable nature of poetry and thus the only way for one to approach infinity (Cooke 285-286); this is not the infinity of the poem itself but of the pursuit whatever object the poem embodies (Cooke 298). It might be possible to complete the journey through midlife, but the journey to transcendence for which it prepares one is never-ending. According to Peter Manning, Byron might not have wanted it to end. Manning sees *Don Juan* not as beginning, middle, end but as “all middle” (221). The midlife crisis of Dante is for Byron “a particularly anomalous stage in which meaningful choice seems impossible” (Manning 222). He rebels against a fixed identity, stiffened by virtue of his age, by imbuing multiple meanings into his text, ensuring that the poem at least will be ensured of “inexhaustible vitality” (Manning 222). Byron would not have wanted to reach a clear, finite end, and thus is his vision of transcendence almost defined by indeterminacy. As Charles Kao puts it, “Identity crisis is like a tidal wave; when the

upheaval is over, everything becomes crystal clear, and all unpure elements are washed away” (221). For Byron, the end result was clear, as indeterminate as it was. He had weathered that tidal wave, finally content to be a bubble carried on the tide.

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