

## Lord Byron: *Don Juan*, part 1

### I. Introduction

- A. “Canto” means a part or division of a poem (literally “I sing” in Italian)
- B. *Don Juan* is a rambling, episodic adventure tale, a *picaresque* adventure. (*Picaresque* comes from the word *picaro*, which means hero.)
- C. A mock heroic epic
- D. Sixteen cantos were published in five years before Byron’s death
- E. A seventeenth canto remained unfinished at his death
- F. Strong narrator’s voice: over two thousand occurrences of “I”
- G. This “I” both is and is not Byron
- H. Speaker comments on the narrative, the genre, contemporary literature, poets, and issues.

### II. Poetic Form and Rhyming

- A. Italian verse form *ottava rima*
- B. Eight line stanza
- C. Interlocking rhyme *abababcc*, with a couplet at the end
- D. Closing couplets usually contain most pointed satire
- E. Byron juxtaposes unusual and bizarre rhymes, for comic effect
- F. Rhymes reveal why “Juan” is Anglicized to “Juan” [jew-un] (rhymes with “new one” or “true one”)
- G. Byron’s *Don Juan* is a parody of the Byronic hero

### III. Dedication

- A. Seventeen stanzas of 136 lines in all
- B. Not published until 1832, after Byron’s death
- C. Attacks on Robert Southey
- D. Byron was enraged by Poet Laureate Robert Southey’s slanders
  - 1. “Satanic school of poetry”
  - 2. “League of incest”
- E. Dedication’s most vicious attacks (often sexual) are on Southey
- F. Also pokes fun at Wordsworth and Coleridge and some contemporary political figures

### IV. Canto One (part one)

- A. 222 eight-line stanzas, for a total of 1776 lines
- B. Searches for a hero in first few stanzas
- C. Don Juan was a popular literary subject (such as the Mozart opera, *Don Giovanni*)
  - 1. Typical ending depicts womanizing Don Juan carried off to hell
  - 2. Byron promises to do this later, but never finishes the story
- D. Don Juan’s birth and parentage
  - 1. Father, Don Jose, is pure Spanish blood (Hidalgo)
  - 2. He’s had some lovers
  - 3. His mother
  - 4. “A learned lady” (but ironic)
  - 5. Their marriage is bitter and highly dysfunctional: “Wishing each other, not divorced, but dead”
  - 6. May be based on Byron’s own marriage to Lady Byron
- E. Father’s death leaves Juan as sole heir